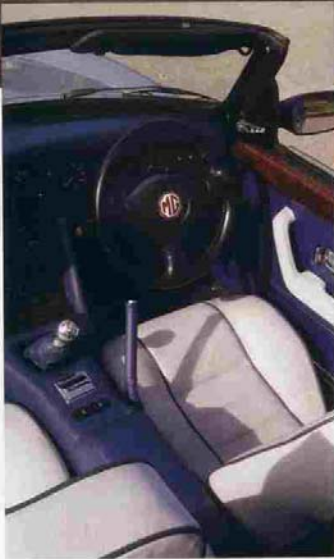


# Grey stuff



Words – David Sutherland  
Photographs – James Mann



**Not content with the standard colour scheme of his RV8, Mike Satur started again and ended up with a tasteful collection of greys and blues, inside and out**

For some reason, the companies that were British Leyland, Rover and so on rarely put much effort into the interior trim colours of their cars. Perhaps it was because they had much bigger problems to grapple with – like how to prevent the cars prematurely falling apart, or how to stop haemorrhaging vast amounts of cash.

The Range Rover came out in 1970, yet it was well over a decade before you could order it with anything other than tan-coloured seats, the cloth looking like it had come from the Rover SD1 roll. Now brown,

in all its shades, was a fashionable colour in the 1970s, but it could get a bit much. The Land Rover Discovery was launched in 1989, and it was some time before there was an alternative to its powder-blue trim.

It looked like things might be changing when, in the 1980s, the Rover-derived MG saloons came with seats and seatbelts that were so loud and red that some reckoned that the people who were designing the interiors were over-compensating for past reticence.

But it wouldn't last because, when in 1992, after a 12-year gap, the MGB resurfaced in the form of the RV8, it came



## Custom RV8

with just one colour scheme – and that was oh-so-tasteful magnolia, with matching carpets and seatbelts. It was as though the scarlet-mad 1980s hadn't happened.

It was nice to once more see a V8-powered factory MG, even if it was just a limited production run and rather too late in the day. The trim may have been all one colour, but it was as elaborate and over-fussy as the original MGB was stark and functional. Most moving things – handbrake, gearshift, door pulls – were surrounded by puffy vinyl, and the obvious attempt to give the MG a Jaguar aura saw chrome door pulls and burr elm for the fascia and door cappings.

Yorkshire-based Mike Satur, an MG specialist since the 1970s, joined in the collective sigh on seeing the RV8 unveiled. He knew he wanted one, but not with the standard interior nor, for that matter, in the green or red paintwork.

It was in 1996 that he finally got the chance to revamp an RV8 and put his personal touches to it. The car had been owned by a company director who had used it on a daily basis. It was in average condition, although Mike was interested to note from the paperwork that came with it that a new gearbox, back axle and hood had been fitted under warranty.

'It was a good usable car in sound mechanical condition that could be driven every day but the interior was showing signs of wear,' Satur recalls. 'So we decided that, rather than patch it up quickly, we might as well revamp it from scratch.'

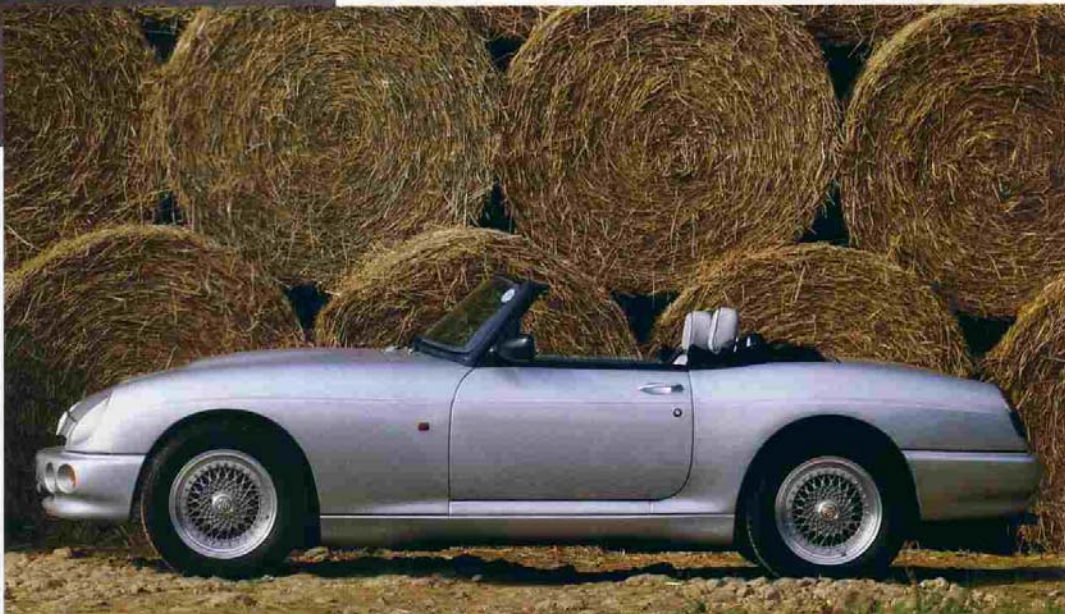
With his Mike Satur Automotive



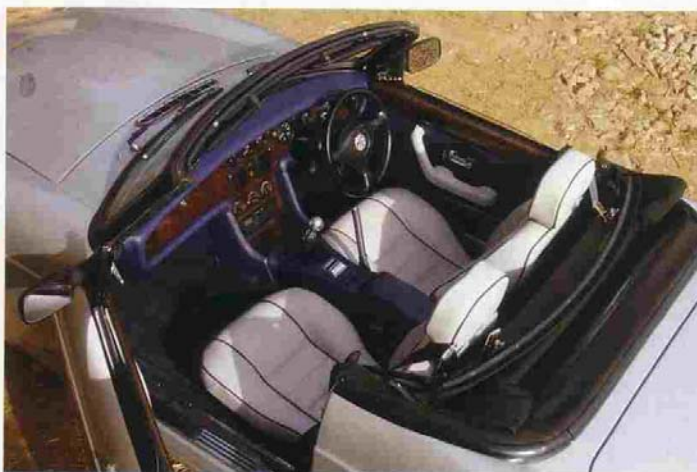
business having spent many years retrimming MGs of all kinds, he had a clear idea of what he wanted to achieve. 'I wanted to do something a bit different, rather than reproduce what had been done at the factory, and I didn't want it to shout at you,' he explains.

For starters, all the trim was going to be leather. When the car came out of the factory, only the seats, gearknob and cubby box lid were hide. Mike decided on a Germanic look – eye-catching yet still tasteful and still sporty. Thus a light-grey BMW colour was chosen for the seats, while the rest of the trim was in a rich Bridge of Weir blue, with the exception of the door pull/arm rests which, matching the seats, would contrast nicely with the door trims. New carpeting in a deep blue pure wool was fitted; this was in one-piece, and not in several sections as is often the case with replacement MGB carpeting.

Choosing the colour was one thing but, if Mike was going to end up with something that was a genuine improvement, the craftsmanship and general attention to







*Pale blue and grey leather makes a refreshing – and very smart – change from the all-over magnolia that all RV8s were originally trimmed with*

detail would have to be second to none. And he's certainly achieved an extremely classy look. The areas you notice immediately are the fascia shroud panel and the bottom of the fascia where it meets the transmission tunnel. The finish is absolutely beautiful. Perfectly stitched, the console has a chunky, somewhat Aston Martin quality about it.

Satur knew that the new leather wouldn't be shown to its full effect unless he did something about the wood trim. The original burr elm is too light and it tends to fade; I think they were trying to copy the XJS,' he says. The solution was to strip the wood, stain it to a darker, walnut shade, and then refinish it with a blue tint in the lacquer. At the same time, Mike decided he didn't like the way that the oddment storage area between the gearshift and the bottom of the fascia matched the rest of the vinyl, so he replaced it with a matching veneered panel.

The manual window winders were replaced by electric items. 'I can't understand why they put manual windows in a £25,000 car,' he remarks. The motors and switches were from an aftermarket kit for an MGB GT, and the switches are integrated neatly into the transmission tunnel, just behind the ashtray.

Perhaps the larger chromed gearknob doesn't go too well with the rest of the cabin but, with the RV8 being hurriedly brought out of hibernation for our visit, this was something Mike rigged up so it could be driven. And it does give the gearshift a much more solid feel than the standard RV8 knob. Incidentally, the MG logo on top is part of a tiepin.

The one thing Mike didn't do was change the instrument faces, something that would have made a big difference to the overall style, given that the back dials

could be from any specialist British sports car of that period. With hindsight, he would have changed the dials to a cream-colour, and/or fitted chrome bezels.

When the RV8 came into the workshop, Satur planned to overhaul the bodywork and respray it. So, prior to the cabin retrim, the car was stripped, the underside of the body given a protective paint, and the box sections injected with plenty of rust-inhibiting wax.

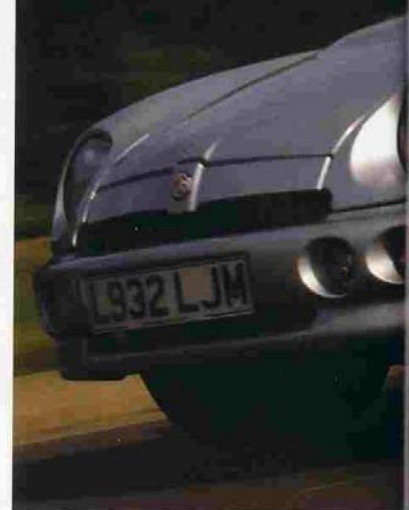
The body itself was left unmodified, apart from the aerial being removed because it 'didn't look right and it whistled', and the hole welded up and lead-loaded. The scruffy screen surround was bead-blasted, then finished in powder-coat black.

Mike couldn't wait to lose the original green paintwork, but what colour to choose? This, he says, was the hardest part of the project; after all, if you don't like the result it's a lot of work to fix. He settled on

*Standard RV8 V8 engine produces a healthy 190bhp and 234lb ft of torque. As any V8 owner will tell you, there's plenty of potential to squeeze much more power out of the unit if you so desire*



# Grey st



another Rover colour, Zircon Silver, because it had a slight trace of blue in it to match the seats.

The choice was a good one; the colour gives the curvy MG a striking look and arguably a sharper definition than red or green RV8s have. When the car is viewed from the side, with the hood down, the light grey headrests blend in nicely with the bodywork, as do the silver alloys. Once Mike does something about that still-beige tonneau cover, things will be even better.

His RV8 is standard in the engine department and so is a regular RV8 drive.





### MG RV8 in a nutshell

The RV8, unveiled in 1992 and put on sale the following year, was built by Rover's Special Projects team, based at Gaydon in Warwickshire. The body was essentially based on an MGB Heritage shell, but much modified. Under the bonnet lay an early 1990s' rendition of the Land Rover 3.9-litre V8. With fully mapped engine management and Lucas injection, Rover claimed 190bhp at 4750rpm and 234lb/ft at 3200rpm. That's seven and eight per cent more power and torque than the Range Rover of the time got from the same engine – and the RV8 was a little over half the weight of the Solihull 4x4.

Telescopic dampers replaced the original lever-arm items, but the MGB's faithful live axle remained, a switch to independent suspension clearly not cost-effective given the limited production. Neither was power-steering fitted.

The RV8 cost £25,440 new and was only built in right-hand drive, with a high proportion exported to Japan. Now some of these cars are reappearing in the UK.

But, having recently tried out a couple of V8 conversions for *MG World*, it seemed a good opportunity for me to see how the factory version compared.

Those who carry out MGB conversions mostly go with carburation, partly for simplicity and partly to keep the V8 sounding raw and sporty. The RV8, though, was built according to the emission requirements of the day, and in its catalysed, leaner running state could never be quite as characterful as one sucking through a wide-choked single carburettor or a pair of carbs. Nonetheless, the V8 does make some of the right noises, from the low-speed wobble to the slightly harsh roar over 4000rpm.

It has an enormous amount of grunt; Rover claimed a 0–60mph time of just under six seconds and, even if an *Autocar & Motor* magazine road test in 1993 recorded 6.9 seconds, it was still extremely quick.

But, as in all other Rover/Land Rover applications down the years, it's an engine that prefers to work at low to medium rather than at high revs. So the higher gears will do for most of the time, which is just as well because the gearchange isn't wonderful. Compared to the delightfully short and sharp four-speed shift of the MGB, the five-speed Rover 'box is slow, with third and fifth hard to find cleanly.


The steering isn't as heavy as some V8 conversions although, with just over three turns in the lock, it's fairly high geared –



but only at parking speeds does it feel laborious. And there's perhaps subliminal compensation in the lovely steering-wheel which, with its leather-bound rim and smart MG octagon, was probably the most stylish part of the original interior; it's not surprising that people doing V8 conversions often fit one.

The best way to enjoy the RV8 is to regard it as a relaxed tourer, not a TVR challenger. Rover only ever intended it as a sentimental throwback to celebrate the MGB's 30th birthday, a car for a few customers with a big bank account and an equally big feeling for MG roadsters. Without the then-recent start-up of Heritage shell production, the RV8 would never have happened. But it did, and helped keep the MG name warm prior to the launch of the MGE.

It could be argued that, even although RV8s are still not particularly sought-after at the moment, there will come a time

when they are, and to change from the standard trim is to dilute the car's potential classic status. In Mike Satur's case, however, I don't think that will be so because, although some originality has been lost, the changes are so obviously an improvement, particularly the interior. It's amazing what a bit of colour can do. 

*At the time of going to press, this RV8 was for sale at £17,500. For details of this, or to find out more about what Mike Satur Automotive can offer, call 01709 890555; email: [mikesatur@mikesatur.co.uk](mailto:mikesatur@mikesatur.co.uk); website: [www.mikesatur.co.uk](http://www.mikesatur.co.uk)*