



Replacement Vitesse gearbox for an MGBGV8

Peter Berry relates his experience with Vitesse Global, the installation of their 5 speed Mazda gearbox, the after-sales service he received and his overall impressions with the new gearbox. After 118,000 miles the original gearbox in his early Factory V8 he has owned for 34 years of its 45 year life, the gearbox started making ominous sounds. All the gears would still engage without difficulty but a sound similar to a bunch of knitting needles rattling was clearly audible, coming up through the gearlever. Of course, nothing can be fully diagnosed without the removal of the gearbox and a partial dismantle. However, the experts around me drove the car and agreed that the end of the gearbox's life time was fast approaching.

So what to do?

The gearbox on the Factory MGBGV8 is a notoriously weak link as it received very little upgrade from the standard 1800 unit at the time the V8 went into production. Briefly my thought process went along these lines: Do I want to remove the 'box, dismantle it, find the problem, rebuild it (with no guarantee of sourcing all necessary parts, as they become increasingly difficult to find), reinstall it (oh yes, why wouldn't you overhaul the overdrive unit too, while it's out?) and replace the whole lot again, just to reinstate the weak link once more? Yes, it would be faithfully original still, warts and all! Or should I throw caution to the wind and investigate the fitting of the highly acclaimed Vitesse Mazda 5 speed 'box, which is a direct replacement without any modifications, assuming you discount recalibration of the speedometer.

Contacting Vitesse

I called Vitesse and was immediately impressed with their attitude and willingness

to explain everything in detail. It seems they really have thought of everything, as no stone has been left unturned in their research and development into making the Mazda 'box highly compatible with the MGB – both the 1800, or V8 powered models or even an MGA. They indicated they could do the job in two weeks' time so I booked it in. The 130 mile drive to Hinckley, near Leicester was completed without incident – but still with the knitting needle effect – and an AA Relay card in my pocket. Vitesse were very welcoming, serving up a coffee and taking me on a tour of their not inconsiderable facilities. They supply Caterham and Morgan with gearboxes at an industrial level. I was also offered a drive in their 4.0 litre MGBV8 demonstrator, and although I'd already committed to the conversion at this stage, their demonstrator only served to confirm what I already knew. I was convinced before I was into third gear! It really is that good.

What was the car like on collection?

Two weeks later the car was ready for collection. The outsourced speedo recalibration took the time, not the basic work of replacing the gearbox. So I collected the car and set off back down the M1 with the nicest gear change I had experienced in a long time. All went extremely well until the lower reaches of the M1 and the M25, when queues of traffic meant that progress was stop/start for several miles - typical M25 conditions. A knock was developing with the engine at idle. It sounded like part of the exhaust was fouling with the bodywork. I arrived home without incident, but still with the 'knock' when at rest and I called Vitesse the next day. They reassured me they would find the problem and fix it, so I sent them a short video with the bonnet up and the engine at idle. The noise was self-evident but not easily traceable, as all potential problem areas showed plenty of clearance between the exhaust and the bodywork.

Vitesse decided to send their engineer to my home to identify the cause and either fix it on the spot, or trailer the car back up to Hinckley, for further diagnosis. Now, many years ago, I fitted an engine stabiliser bar between the nearside inner wing and the engine. This was to prevent the common problem of the offside cast iron exhaust manifold knocking against the steering column under acceleration. This had been known to crack manifolds in some cases, so the fitting of the bar eliminated the problem. Some years later I fitted tubular manifolds for improved breathing, thus increasing the clearance issue considerably but the

stabiliser bar remained. Chris from Vitesse felt the problem was here and on removal of the bar, the knock was gone. The cause was friction between a small collar on the bar which passed through a hole on the inner wing. It was "squeaking" back and forth as the engine rocked slightly at idle. Amplification from the body panels resulted in the man with a thousand hammers! So problem solved and all was once again well. Vitesse even came along with a shorter gear leaver and fitted it as the original Mazda item was around 40mm too long. I cannot fault the after-sales service, it was exemplary.

So what is it like to drive?

I can only say it has transformed the car. The ratios are very similar to the original gearbox but with slightly improved spacing between second and third. The addition of a fifth gear (as opposed to overdrive on third and fourth, which is gone forever, which is a shame) is a joy and frankly, is far more intuitive with today's motoring. Some will decry this remark but personally I think it adds, rather than detracts to the character of the car.

The gear change is positive, without being clunky and the clutch feels very similar to the original item, so no change there. One nice touch is that the bleed nipple is at the end of a long hydraulic hose, which terminates in the engine bay, adjacent to the master cylinder. So no more grovelling under the car to bleed the clutch – not that I'm expecting to do that any time soon. Oil type is SAE 75W-90 and the capacity is 2.0L. The shift control case, which houses the gear lever and has its own separate oil bath, holds a further 290-330ml. And here's the best bit though; the service interval is 5 years or 62,500 miles (100,000 km) so it **really is a case of fit and forget**. Apart from the significant cost (the kit at £2,525 and installation at a reasonable £450, both plus VAT), the decision to fit this gearbox was a no-brainer. These cars are for driving and I've just future-proofed that experience by some margin.

Sold the original gearbox

I have since sold my old gearbox to a fellow V8 Register member for a nominal sum. He intends to rebuild it to replace the ailing box in his immaculate Factory V8. A further member is also in line to receive that old box to perform a similar operation on his car. How's that for sustainability!

Further information and fitting

instructions is on the Vitesse website at: <https://www.vitesse-ltd.com/>