

Courtesy light upgrade on an MGBGT V8



One issue that some enthusiasts may find a little frustrating with the Factory V8 compared to a modern car is the lack of sufficient courtesy lighting. Whilst it obviously isn't an issue during the day, the somewhat feeble amount of light emitted from the lamp mounted on the radio console below the dash can make using the car at night difficult if you need to read maps or find things in the car. Here Jonathan Moulds describes a very worthwhile improvement at little cost which is relatively easy to carry out.

There is a simple solution to the problem in the form of LED type flexible strip lights with an adhesive backing. These can be sourced relatively cheaply on the internet or from your local electronics store and fixed to the underdash cross brace and wired neatly into the MG's original wiring harness. The current consumption of LEDs is very small so the extra battery drain is insignificant.

To fit the strip lights the centre console must be removed by taking out the four chrome screws around the gear lever (noting from which of the four positions the shortest of the four screws was affixed) and by also removing the single screw at the rear of the inside of the centre console pocket. Also you may find it more convenient to unscrew the gear knob and its lock nut. The entire assembly must now be slid back around an inch, lifted over the gear lever and set aside. At this point you must also remove the L shaped brace for the glove box as this will impede the fitment of the passenger side strip light later on.

The lower dash assembly must now be withdrawn to access the wiring behind the courtesy lamp. To do this, there are four chrome screws on the sides of the lower

dash panel which must be removed. It may also be necessary to remove the front fascia of the radio (where fitted) to allow the lower dash panel to slide forward exposing the wiring harness.

You can now mock up the LED strip light by holding it against the 1 inch square box section brace that runs behind the dashboard and taking an approximate measurement you will need to extend the wiring for the strip lights. An appropriate length of wire can be soldered onto the positive and negative wires on the strip lights and Lucas type bullet connectors soldered onto the ends. LED strip lights must be connected up with the correct polarity in order to function. If they are connected up incorrectly they will not illuminate.

Look for the purple wire feeding the back of the courtesy light. There will be a single inline type connector fitted between it and the main dash harness. The single inline connector must be replaced with a four way type connector. The courtesy light can then be reconnected to the main harness and the positive wire from the LED lights connected into the remaining two connectors. The earth side of the LED strip lights must be connected to the same connector as the earth lead from the courtesy light. This earth lead is the one interrupted by the courtesy light switches. You will need to either exchange the four way connector for a 6 way connector or, run a short lead from the remaining space in the original four point connector block to another four point connector block. The strip lights are now wired up such that they will now illuminate both when the doors are opened and also when the switch is activated on top of the courtesy light.

Fitting the LED strip lights is a simple case of peeling off the plastic backing and pressing them firmly to the underside of the 1 inch box section brace which runs across the width of the car. The dash can then be reassembled in reverse order as above.

For the installation on my V8 (Flamenco 2538) I chose to use two 15 bulb LED strip lights as they are approximately 30cm in length which is just about right for each side under the dash. I also chose to use green strip lights to compliment the backlighting of the instrument dials. However, there is of course a wide selection of choices. White or yellow light would be just as effective.



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Above: lights fitted to the nearside box section cross brace above the legwell

The total cost of the modification was less than £5 which includes buying a small stock of connector blocks and bullet connectors to keep as useful spares. I bought my strip lights from an eBay auction and noted the advert suggests that the service life of the strip lights is in the region of 50,000 hours so, unlike the festoon bulb in the middle of the radio console. So it is unlikely the strip lights will ever need replacing.



Above: lights fitted to the offside box section cross brace above the legwell