



The V8 – an MG with effortless performance

Launched in August 1973, the V8 powered MGBGT combined the popular fixed head coupe body style with a powerful three and half litre light alloy V8 engine. The Rover powerplant ran with a reduced 8.25 to 1 compression ratio but an increased torque compared with the similar engines then used in the Rover saloons. The result transformed the MGBGT, creating a very nimble car with the luxury of multi-cylinder power. But within just a few weeks of the launch serious international political problems arose and the consequent economic difficulties hit sales of MGBGT V8s in a major way. Here Victor Smith reflects on those difficult conditions and the impact they had on the sales of an attractive new MG.

On the road the V8 has an effortless performance, accelerating rapidly in the higher gears between 50 and 70mph. One of the road tests in 1973 recorded 127 mph available in both direct and overdrive top gear. Hills just melt away and the torque gives the car an unfussy manner. The 0 to 60 time of 7.7 seconds is still, some 50 years later, a time many of today's sports saloons struggle to touch. Even when asked to work hard, the exhaust note retains its very pleasingly modest but purposeful burble, in keeping with the V8's understated manner.

The V8 engine, although from an [old Buick design](#) in the early fifties, contains hydraulic cam followers which give the V8 a quietness that complements the smooth power. Under the bonnet, the lightweight aluminium V8 engine is much bigger than the original four cylinder cast iron engine but is only just a little heavier when the engine ancillaries are included. Those lightweight benefits give good front to rear weight distribution and there is an appreciable increase in the power to weight ratio, even from the detuned 137 bhp V8 engine. The [comparative power to weight ratios](#) are MGBGT (79.1) and V8 (128.6) in bhp/ton.

A surprising feature of the V8 is the fuel economy. Even driven on the open road with a sense of fun, it is quite easy to achieve between 27 and 29 miles to the gallon and more. The overdrive unit gives the V8 long legs with around 28 mph per 1,000 rpm or 2,500 rpm at 70 mph. The convenient overdrive facility is available on top gear at the flick of a stalk switch on the steering column and on most of the earlier chrome bumpered cars it is available on third gear as well.

The V8 is however not without its poor features as some of the press reviews of the model in 1973 noted - excessive wind noise at speed and a choppy ride at slow speeds from the stiffer rear springs which were needed to cope with the higher power output. Keeping the V8 cooled in traffic with an undersized radiator needs an artificial gale from twin cooling fans. The gearbox has to be treated with care to avoid costly repairs, so most V8 enthusiasts develop a smooth style of driving using the V8 power and torque. There is

simply no need to race up and down the gearbox punching the additional power through to the road wheels.

At its launch in 1973, the V8 was welcomed as a powerful example of the MG marque from the Abingdon Plant but was generally regarded by the motoring press as arriving several years late in a popular but ageing bodyshell and suspension package, then over ten years old. Despite some downbeat press coverage the MGBGT V8 specification of servo assisted brakes, distinctive Dunlop composite wheels (light alloy centres with chromed steel rims), tinted glass, fine cord covered adjustable seats, head restraints, two speed wipers and an overdrive as standard made it a refined sports car in 1973 and good value at its launch price of £2,294. Three litre straight six rivals in the marketplace like the TVR 300M and Datsun 240Z were £170 to £400 more and if you felt a three litre V8 Triumph Stag convertible was a rival, then that was £324 more. Even where buyers were attracted by the MG heritage and specification and finish of the V8 there was an inevitable comparison with the reduced spec four cylinder MGBGT then on offer for only £1,575 – some 31% less.

Although a few of the early pre-production V8s were built in left-hand drive for the mainland European market, BL never made sufficient funds available for MG to clean up the engine and make the other conformity modifications necessary to get the car ready for the sale as a new MG in the USA. Surely that was a market that would have welcomed an MG with a big V8 engine derived from their Buick V8!



Stocks of V8s had been delivered from Abingdon to many dealers around the UK in time for the launch of the new MGBGT V8 at the [Motor Show](#) at Earls Court in August 1973, but within the following few weeks serious problems arose in the Middle East with consequent economic and fuel supply difficulties in many countries which hit sales of MGBGT V8s in the UK in such a damaging way. So what were those difficult political and economic conditions?

Political problems and economic difficulties hit MGBGT V8 sales soon after the launch at the Earls Court Motor Show 1973

With growing tensions in the Middle East, on 6th October 1973 Egypt and Syria invaded Israel which began the [Yom Kippur War](#) which lasted until a ceasefire was imposed cooperatively on 25th October 1973 to officially end the war. But there then followed the ["1973 oil crisis"](#) in October 1973 when the members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), led by Saudi Arabia, proclaimed an [oil embargo](#) restricting their oil supplies. Initially it was targeted at nations that had supported Israel during the Yom Kippur War like Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, the USA and the UK, but was later extended further. By the end of the embargo in March 1974, the price of crude oil had

risen nearly 300%, from US\$3 per barrel to nearly US\$12 per barrel globally with US prices significantly higher.

The combination of consequential fuel shortages and much higher petrol prices at filling stations had dramatic effects on the British economy, producing an energy crisis and growing domestic inflation. The UK Government considered a range of measures to reduce the use of oil by ten per cent, including rationing petrol and reducing speed limits. At the end of 1973, the UK Government announced a [state of emergency](#) and decided on a three-day week in certain industries. In 1974, the Government considered further measures for reducing the domestic use of oil. Inflation in the UK increased to nearly 15 % in 1974 and on to over 27 % in 1975.

How did MGBGTV8 sales go following the launch?

That combination of the shortage of oil and rising petrol prices in the UK created serious economic pressures that certainly made large engined cars look an uneconomic choice. As stocks of V8s were dispatched from the MG Plant at Abingdon to distributors around the UK, inflation picked up too with rising retail prices depressing the marketplace. So many V8s were stuck in showrooms for many months before they were sold. Often V8 owners have seen the period between the date of the production and the date of the first registration of their car was unusually lengthy. Our research shows it rose from about 7 weeks in September 1973 to almost 18 weeks in 1976. [See our analysis](#)

MGBGTV8 list prices increased

With rising inflation in the UK, the list prices of new MGBGTV8s began rising rapidly - during 1974 a V8 rose by just over 20% to £2,800 and by autumn 1975 another 20% to £3,372. In October 1974 the rubber bumpered V8s began to be dispatched from Abingdon but by July 1976 it was all over. Sadly production at Abingdon had ended except for a very few vehicles that rolled out over the next few months with the facelift bodysell and "deckchair" seats.

Faced with those difficult economic conditions and then the closure of the MG Plant in 1976, the number of V8s produced was relatively modest - officially reported as 2,591 of which some 1,862 (72%) were chrome bumper cars. That was less than a third of the combined output of the earlier three litre MGC and MGC GT models.

Market for MGBGTV8s in recent years

Despite the relative rarity of a V8 powered MG, over the years it has generally remained an undiscovered classic sports car because for many people there appears so little to distinguish the MGBGTV8 from a standard four cylinder MGBGT. The reality is quite different - it is not until you first drive a V8 that you realise what a total transformation V8 power provides.

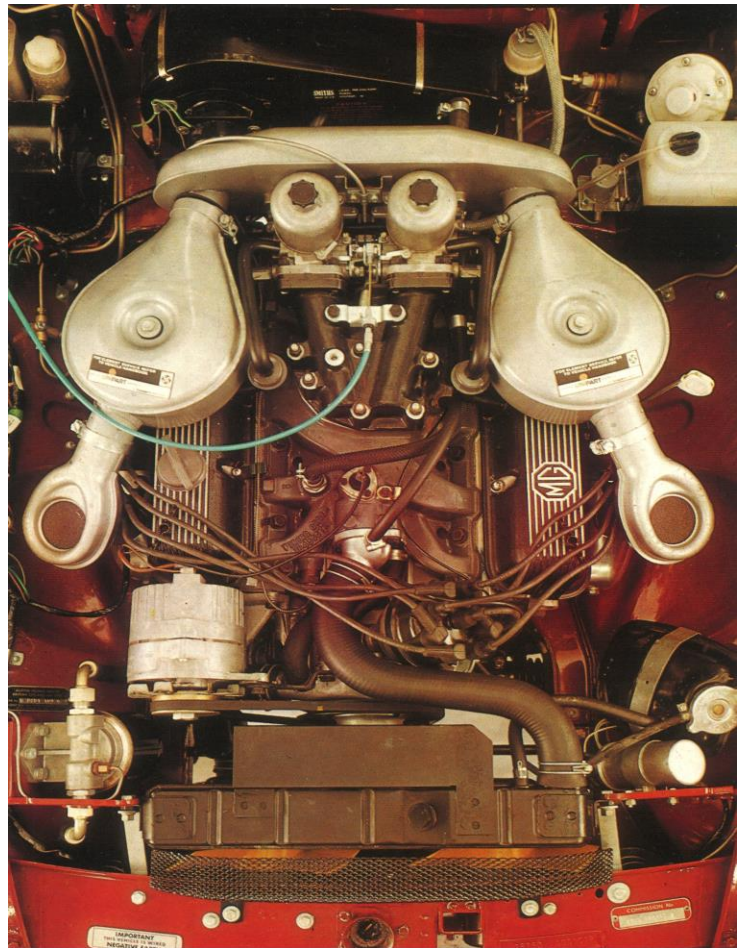
Prices of V8s remained fairly steady with modest growth for many years until around 2010 when in the period to 2017 they rose by [around 117%](#). Since then they have generally flatlined with a very modest growth of prices for chrome bumper models and interestingly a growing interest in rubber bumpered V8s which had tended to be less popular for many years.

It seems two factors may have been at play in the rise from 2010 to 2017. First a high proportion of owners have had their V8s for many years with relatively modest numbers coming up for sale each year and second, a growing demand from buyers, often enthusiasts in the 50 plus age group, who were keen to own the MG they wished they had when younger. Fortunately over the last decade the MGBGTV8 did not become a significant part of the classic car market where "chequebook investors" have been active looking for "alternative investments" with better returns during what was a lengthy period with very low interest rates. So other than the price

rise seen in 2010 to 2017, [MGBGTV8 prices](#) have not risen wildly since then like some other classic sports cars popular with investors. The V8s that have come up for sale over the last few years have attracted increasing interest from a new wave of classic car enthusiasts who recognise what exceptional value the MGBGTV8 is in every sense.



MGBGTV8 (Citron 0798) on display up on a ramp at the Motor Show at Earls Court for the launch in August 1973 along with another (Aconite 0799) on the MG stand nearby.



MGBGTV8 engine bay (Marketing Brochure, Pub 3023)