



Concerns with MOT exemption

From May 2018 vehicles more than 40 years old will be eligible for exemption from the annual MOT test. However many classic car enthusiasts feel continuing to have an MOT test or a voluntary inspection by an experienced MOT tester will be a useful check to ensure their car is roadworthy and safe. The rolling classic car MOT exemption (meaning all cars will become eligible for exemption when they hit 40 years old) is optional - you can still take your car for an MOT test even if it doesn't require it. Any test will report on the condition of the car at the date of the inspection, so continuing care and maintenance will be necessary until the next test or inspection to meet both the legal requirements and conditions in your motor insurance cover to maintain your car in a roadworthy condition. Here Nic Houslip highlights some of the areas of concern an owner of an MOT exempt car might miss without the benefit of an annual MOT test or inspection.

Oh good, no more MOT tests!

On the face of it, many people may be thinking "Oh Good, if my car is exempt from MOT testing there will be no need to take my car in for the nasty MOT test any more". Many non-technical owners might imagine the tester to be a disgruntled garage mechanic who is intent on making your car fail its MOT test, either by pointing out things that don't seem to be important to you, or stabbing at the underside with spike to make holes in the body or chassis.

Well in fact, that is just what he is doing. He is tasked to find things that you cannot see or detect that might contribute to an accident and the possibility of personal injury in the coming year. Certainly, you cannot see the excessive wear in the ball joints in the steering or suspension, nor could you know when that ball joint might break because it has weakened through excessive wear. A track rod end that comes adrift at high speed produces very unpredictable handling. The brackets that attach the steering rack to the crossmember on MGBs are known to be under high stress and the more so if the car has been upgraded to V8 power, had wider tyres fitted or has a power steering upgrade installed. Not an uncommon sight these days. Faults like this develop very quickly under a sudden stressful situation and a detached steering rack means that you simply cannot steer. A fully loaded Scania artic lorry and trailer coming the other way cannot avoid you because of its huge inertia, so the result might well be an MG buried in a huge Scania radiator grille.

Do you know when your flexible brake hoses were last changed?

They are made of nylon and canvas cords and rubber. Like all rubber products they age quietly in an unseen and not easy to get at location. They may work perfectly normally in everyday motoring, resisting the 800 to 1,100 PSI pressure that might be applied as you run gently up to a red traffic light, but what if a small child or an elderly pedestrian suddenly appears in front of you? Instinct is going to make you brake as hard as you can, which may put as much as 1,400 PSI on the hose, which through age was perhaps likely to fail at 1,300 PSI. Now you have no brakes and your reaction may be to wrench the wheel and try to avoid the child, which now breaks the steering rack bracket from the crossmember and bingo you are heading toward the Scania! That's a double whammy for you and probably a coffin afterwards, if not a long spell in hospital. An MOT tester is trained to check these ball joints and the brake hoses and spot deterioration concerns in good time.

Dual circuit brakes

And now I hear someone say, but my car has dual circuit brakes - so it might have, but are you prepared for the extra pedal travel that is involved should one of the circuits fail? Do you have time to get to grips with it? As aeroplane pilots often say, things go wrong very quickly; but they get better very, very, slowly.

Rust weakening key parts and the structure

Now let's think about something which is quite difficult to see, the **rust around a rear spring mounting**. The rust will slowly attack the steel and over time weaken it. There may be enough loss of strength so that hitting a big pothole could cause the spring to become detached. It may just make the steering unpredictable, but if it allows the axle to shift out of line it may make the car unstable. My B V8 Roadster was fitted with lowered rear springs and the handling afterwards was appalling, until I discovered that it had been fitted with one spring for a Roadster and one for a MGBGT. The suppliers had shipped one incorrectly labelled. They were only too willing to correct the situation at no cost. It "torque steered" badly, going right when accelerating and left when decelerating, which was great if it steered the way you wanted to go. A broken spring hanger might well produce the same effect.

MOT inspection checklist

The list of the things an MOT covers is long as the inspection is intended to identify serious concerns and thereby keep unsafe vehicles off the road. Those vehicles may be a danger to another road user or a pedestrian, or even to you as the driver and any passenger. The MOT test fee is a small price to pay for peace of mind - it ranges from £30 to £54. My local MOT guy tests on average eight cars a day, meaning that within a week he will have seen more cars than you have probably ever owned and in a month more cars than you will ever be likely to drive.

But there are other considerations; imagine the situation where you have been granted Vehicle of Historic Interest (VHI) status for your car and it is now exempt from the requirement of an annual MOT. You are a careful owner and do your best to keep your car well maintained (not just polished), but you fail to notice the **tiny amount of hydraulic fluid that has leaked out of a rear wheel brake cylinder**. This manifests itself as small oily lines on the inside of the rear tyre which are not easy to see. The MOT tester is aware of this possibility and has a bright light to help him see it.

Another situation might be that one of the **front disc brake pads is quite worn** while the other on that wheel isn't as badly worn. The usual cause is that one cylinder has seized, and you are not getting



Broken drop link on the front suspension

the correct braking effort. In both these cases a sudden, unexpected heavy brake application may cause the car to swerve, hitting a pedestrian - or that dreaded Scania.

Key policy condition with motor insurance cover is you are required to maintain your car in roadworthy condition

Motor insurance policies include conditions requiring the policyholder to maintain their car in a roadworthy condition. If, following a major claim, an assessor acting for the insurer should find evidence during his inspection of the vehicle that it has not been maintained in a roadworthy condition, the insurer may limit the payout to the minimum third party liabilities that may be payable. The benefits of any comprehensive cover may be denied and possibly the insurer might also seek the recovery of the third party payout from the policyholder. Even if you decided to fight them on this matter, your legal fees to fight an insurer are going to be huge, probably much more than your house is worth, and if you lose your family members also lose.

Inspection reports are a valuable part of the vehicle history file

Let's move forward to 2023, your cherished MG has given you good service, and as you seek a quieter time in the later stages of retirement. Under pressure from your wife encouraging you to sell the car so you can both go on a nice cruise in warmer climes, you look up the prices of the model on the V8 Register website and in magazines. Armed with that information you advertise the car for sale and a buyer comes along, maybe a dealer, who is quite interested. All proceeds very well until the buyer asks, do you have service and MOT history? Yes, you say, I maintain the car myself, and it's registered as MOT exempt as a VHI. Now the buyer may have a pretty jaundiced view of how some garages might maintain a vehicle and give you the benefit of the doubt, but he isn't going to be very impressed that the car has no recent MOT history. Does he trust you? About as much as you probably trust used car dealers, which means that he will foresee the sharp intake of breath by his mechanic when they get the car up on their ramp and notice a few items that desperately need attention.

How is that going to affect the price he is going to offer you? Your car may be a concours condition car and mechanically perfect, but can he afford to trust you? My opinion, as an engineer (not necessarily automotive) is that the £30 to £50 MOT fee is a small price to pay and the hassle with taking it to an MOT tester to take it and get it done is not that great – and in any case you've been doing it for years anyway.

Think carefully over the real benefits of a voluntary test

The MOT test report highlights real concerns that need attention and where you have a clear report it gives you a pretty good idea that your car isn't going to kill or injure you. So even if your car is granted VHI status and an MOT is not required, think carefully over the real benefits that a voluntary MOT test or an inspection of your car carried out by an experienced tester can provide, not least their ability to spot safety concerns that an enthusiast might miss with serious safety consequences.

Check the MOT history of a vehicle since 2005. [GOV.UK](https://gov.uk)

DVSA MOT inspection checklist. [Download a copy](#)