



The drive for an V8 Roadster

My wife, Rene and I have owned an MGB 1800 now for five years, following on from a Norton Atlas that we had owned for twenty years. We greatly enjoyed the MG, using it for all our motoring holidays in France the Isle of Man and the UK. It was after Rene bought me Roger Williams's book 'How to give your MGB V8 power' I began to dream about such a conversion. I had already fitted a stage 2 OSELLI engine and one of Mr Hoyle's excellent front suspensions to the 1800, as well as many other minor modifications, so I was ready to move on.

Roger Williams's advice, to build a V8 using a Heritage shell made sense to me, so I began to investigate that option by visiting British Motor Heritage at Witney. A 'fag packet' estimate revealed very high costs and as I had just started to build my new workshop, which was bound to go over budget, I knew I would have to go for the alternative of purchasing a car that had already converted.

So the new car specification materialised as follows: a Heritage shell, tax exempt, a 3.5 engine with EFI, 5 speed gearbox for

reliability (although I do like the overdrive box very much), alloy wheels, up rated brakes, rubber bumper cross member and V8 dashboard. My thoughts on bodywork colours were Red, Old English White or British Racing Green, in order of preference

I started to browse the V8 Register website and other sites on the web, thinking that with such a 'limiting' specification it would take sometime to find the right car but as I was fully occupied on the workshop, time was not a concern. Then it happened – a Flame Red 3.5 V8 with EFI, Rover gearbox, up rated brakes built on a Heritage shell some years ago appeared on my computer screen. The seller invited potential purchasers to request the full specification. No harm in asking for the full specification!

Of course, as we all know, it just gets more interesting. The specification revealed many sensible modifications to the suspension, brake hoses, electrics and cooling and more importantly a dedication to an accurate and thorough servicing regime. Finally, I realised, this

is the car whose engine bay is featured on the front cover of the very book I have been reading on and off for the past two years. It was the car built by Roger Williams for his own use!

So by this stage I was definitely on the hook, however, I now had two problems – first I was still fully committed to finishing my workshop and second the car was in Edinburgh and we live in Somerset some 460 miles distant. More emails complete with detailed photographs followed and it soon became apparent that we would be travelling to Edinburgh to view this V8 Roadster.

The first plan was to drive up in the family euro-box complete with overalls and equipment necessary to inspect the car, plus tools and spares which I would store in the boot of the MG if we struck a deal. These would be necessary for the long drive home, because part 2 of the plan was to fly back to Scotland about a week later with the cash, complete the deal and drive the V8 home.

My wife, Rene had a better idea . . . don't they always! We would hire a car, with the option of one way, draw a building society cheque for a major part of the asking price backed up with cash to take care of the negotiations. Finally we had to book a bed and breakfast place to stay. By this time, of course, we had established a good communication with the owner of the car, Alistair Laing, and he was in agreement with the proposal for potential payment.

Our local 'Thrifty' car and van rental provided a Ford Mondeo at a very reasonable rate with unlimited mileage and the option to leave the car in Edinburgh. A B&B was booked in Moffat as an overnight stop for our return. So 3.15hrs on Wednesday 5th September saw us joining the M5 at junction 25 heading north with a boot loaded with tools, spares, overalls, food and an overnight bag. Not too full, however, that we would not be able to get it all into the MGB if we were successful.

After two stops and no hold-ups, seven hours later we were at our destination and we finally met Alistair after a couple of 'missed' mobile calls. I was allowed as much time as I wanted to inspect the car without an anxious owner present

pointing out all the 'good features'. This was necessary for me and most appreciated. The car was generally OK but a little unwell with a noticeable miss-fire up to 2,000 rpm. The thought of driving this little lot home for more than 460 miles did not fill me with great optimism.

Our negotiations in the garden over afternoon tea with Alistair and Maisie the spaniel, resulted in a favourable conclusion with Alistair providing a solution to my concern in getting the car home without breaking down. He promised £200 if we broke down, this was the difference we were negotiating. That was the 'clincher' and I found myself the new owner of DUV 153 J and 460 miles from home!

A quick and efficient telephone call to the classic car insurance provider to get the car added to my existing policy, with breakdown cover! We returned the Ford to Thrifty in Edinburgh and were soon shaking hands with Alistair and saying good bye to Maisie.

Despite having a sick car we could not leave Edinburgh without visiting the Forth Bridges so we did. But on returning to the A702 bound for Moffat, we were caught up in the rush hour traffic and the air temperature was still up in the high teens if not twenties. Heeding Alistair's advice to switch on the cooling fans early, we had no problems whatsoever, the temperature hardly rising above normal. A tribute to the highly efficient extra long radiator fitted by Roger Williams.



We stopped at the service area, aptly named 'Abington' Strathclyde, on the M74 to brim the tank. Alistair had, very kindly, filled the tank before the sale. I intended to conduct an accurate fuel check on the journey home, despite the miss-fire. After a short run down the motorway, where I discovered the miss-fire would disappear above 2,000 rpm, we reached Moffat and our rest for the night. Neither of us could believe we had been on the go for over 15 hours with just a short nap in the motorway services a picnic at 9am and tea with Alistair and Maisie. If this is what

owning a MG V8 at 62 does for you, I wish I had bought one years ago!

The bed and breakfast in Moffat, the Queensberry House run by Paul and Denise Johnston, provided a much needed rest and most importantly a hearty full Scottish breakfast. To top it all, Paul an MG enthusiast and one time owner of a MGB and MGF, gave us a pair of MG embossed mats which the V8 is now proudly sporting.

We planned to leave Moffat at about 10am, so assuming no breakdowns we should then be in the dreaded bottlenecks around Manchester and Birmingham at about lunchtime when most of the drivers would be off the road. This would then get us through Bristol before the evening rush hour. All went smoothly to plan with first stop at Killington Lake Services near Kendal for fuel. I had had one eye on the temperature gauge the other on the fuel gauge, steering with my nose, until we were able to top-up with 19 litres. I was greatly relieved for I was expecting horrendous fuel consumption. Thus reassured we continued on past Manchester, Stafford and Birmingham without a hold up but in company of a lot of traffic, but it was all moving. I was trying to keep above 2,500 rpm to avoid the miss-fire and below 3,000 rpm to avoid excessive speed.

The next stop was on the M5 at Frankley where we took on 21 litres. Here I was amused to note three salesmen types exiting their modern euro-box, after parking next to us, in an obvious state of discomfort with stiff backs and legs. Rene and I had suffered none of this, is it because we are 15 years older? After the break at the services we cruised on with greater confidence. I allowed myself a couple of bursts after Bristol, just to get the feel of V8 performance. We were not disappointed.

After brimming the tank in Taunton we arrived home a precisely 5.00pm satisfied, relieved and very tired. The car performed far better than I had anticipated, returning a very satisfying 28 mpg, using no oil and maintaining normal water temperature. We completed the whole journey in dry conditions so the hood was down all the way – SPLENDID. I believe this is a

very special motor car. Many thanks to Alistair Laing and Maisie.

The miss-fire was later traced to a failing ignition coil after several emails to Roger Williams, so now all is now. As for the workshop, well it is nearly finished! Ralph Coulson

Footnote Queensberry House, Moffat



As a footnote to this tale, I should add that, if you are in the Scottish Borders and looking for overnight accommodation and hosts interested in classic cars and MGs, we strongly recommend Queensberry House in Moffat. Paul and Denise Johnston are very understanding over my 'borrowing' the room key. I think we will return there very soon with the V8 Roadster. You can contact the Queensberry House on 01683 220 538.

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