Restoration and conversion to a V8 Roadster

Peter Nixon has some photos of the work-in-progress on his MGB V8 Roadster project finished in Pageant Blue which he completed in November 2023. Peter reflects on his project:

Rust problems: “Anyone contemplating a restoration of a MGB rust bucket needs to be aware of the myriad of rust problems you cannot see until you start to do the work”.

New panels: “Getting the new panels is not a problem, we are well supplied by the likes of MGOC, MGBHive, Rimmers, Moss Europe, Brown & Gammons but I was surprised how hard it was to find the imperial socket and spanner sets”.

Essential equipment: “There is one almost inescapable requirement to make life easier when doing a full restoration and that is a car **rotisserie** or **“body roller”**. I borrowed one from fellow member Mike Macartney and had a copy of it made at the local iron shop at Teesside. Including the cost of the steel materials and the cutting, welding & drilling works it came out at less than £100! From my experience also essential is an engine stand, a 14 cfm air compressor and its various tools and attachments - and an imperial socket & spanner set is necessary”.

Have you tried to buy imperial spanner and socket sets recently? I tried B&Q, ToolFix, Toolstore, B&M - and the Internet had some sets that looked OK but from experience they are rather poor quality - but in the end it was a local one man business in a small back street tool store that was able to supply imperial sets at affordable prices”.

Unfortunately, the photos of the rust bucket I bought off eBay and some of my earlier work in progress photos were on my previous laptop that devoured its hard drive!

See earlier reports on Peter’s project on the “Rebuilds” section on the V8 website.

Peter says “I had a Factory MGBGTV8 and made the mistake of selling it – I thought about converting our 1976 MGB Roadster to V8 power but my wife said ‘NO’. So in January 2017, I bought a rolling rust- bucket rubber bumper MGB Roadster off eBay - no engine no gearbox, no MOT - with the intention to rebuild it convert it to chrome bumper, and install a Rover V8 engine and five speed gearbox. I mounted the Roadster on a rotisserie, stripped it down to a bare shell, cutting off the badly corroded panels, had it bead blasted to remove the remaining rust and patchy paint. I then had it painted in acid etch paint to stop it rusting again whilst it was rebuilt.

The MGB front wings were in surprisingly good order under multiple layers of under-seal, but I replaced them with new chrome bumper wings as the intention was to do a chrome bumper conversion. Other new panels fitted include both rear half wings, scuttle, passenger and driver floors, boot floor corners, both inner and outer sills, front and rear valances - and an MGBGTV8

dashboard with instruments that a Tyne-Tees member had available. I replaced the doors with American model MGB doors with internal side impact bracing.

A Rover SD1 3500 V8 MOT failure was bought off eBay to get the engine, bell-housing and five speed gearbox, and the rest was sold to a vehicle breaker. The V8 engine was rebored, the crank re-ground, fitted with 9.75 :1 CR Vitesse pistons, Oselli gas flowed cylinder heads, new water pump, new oil pump and remote filter set-up, a Range Rover camshaft, new timing gears and chain, tubular headers, large bore exhaust and silencer. The original SD1 carbs were remounted on a specially modified Range Rover inlet manifold and tubular plenum, courtesy of a Tyne-Tees member, with an MGB GTV8 air-box. The whole engine looks very much like the Factory MGBGTV8 set-up but it breathes better being bigger bore.

The MGB tunnel under the radio console was modified for the taller SD1 gearbox, and the V8 engine, bell-housing and five speed gearbox installed with an MGBGTV8 differential and a shortened prop-shaft. I added a new V8 radiator, new V8 wiring harness, new brake lines and hoses, and new fuel lines. A pair of Austin Princess four pot callipers (off eBay) were fitted, with new vented discs and a new servo. Up-rated lowered front springs were installed. New headlights and new backing shells were fitted. The original bonnet and boot lid were re-used. Due to the tubular headers fouling the inner wings, the engine was raised a couple of centimetres, this meant a small bonnet bulge was needed; this I preferred to bashing back the inner wings.

The car passed its MOT. I replaced the 14'' factory Rostyles with John Brown Minator eight spoke 15'' x 5.5'' alloys and new tyres - and fitted an original factory hood with a Michelotti folding frame courtesy of another Tyne-Tees member, to make the Roadster more usable in the winter.

The Clive Wheatley big bore exhaust gives it a throaty roar and the acceleration is really quick. We had a minor problem with the brakes sticking on but that was solved by adjusting the rod between the new servo and the new master cylinder.

Chilly Winter weather in Cleveland in Northeast England

MGB Roadster with MGBGTV8 dashboard. (2604)

MGBGTV8 dashboard instruments

What is the result?

So far the car has completed only 250 miles but I am well satisfied with the end result. One day I will put it on a rolling road to have the carburation tuned and get a HP reading at the wheels.

Maybe another year of running it and my coming up to 80 years old, I may then decide to sell it on. Maybe it will be time to start thinking of the laidback sedate comfort of the Volvo XC70 rather that the exhilaration of an MGB that blows off racy “hot hatches”!

Modified Range Rover inlet manifold, 10mm machined off and 10mm plate welded on to mount the tubular plenum. (1644)

Inlet manifold & plenum with the Rover SD1 carburettors and MGB GT V8 airbox. (2360)

MGB Roadster front converted to chrome bumpers. (2589)

MGB Roadster with new servo and new master cylinder. (2589)

MGB Roadster with MGB GT V8 washer bottle. (2593)

MGB Roadster engine bay ready for engine to be installed. (2588)

MGB Roadster bodyshell back from the paint shop, finished in Pageant Blue (0512)

New rear half wing welded into place. (2315)

Lining up the new rear half wing and door prior to welding in the wing. (2314)

Front left side prior to fitting the new front chrome wing, the rotisserie makes it so much easier to do the welding by being able to turn the body to the best access position. (2313)

Liberal doses of cavity wax were applied into each box section after the welding up was completed, using an extension tube on the aerosol can, some engine oil was also sprayed in with temporary plugs in the drain holes as the body was rotated 360 degrees. (2282)

Bonnet, new rear half wing & door on prior to fitting the new front wing to ensure the chrome strip line and door fit were good. (2312)

Stripped car body on the rotisserie - the rear wings were cut at the swage line for new rear half wings to be fitted, the joins are hidden behind the chrome strip. (2281)

Indication of the extent of the rot in the outer sills, fortunately apart from surface rust on the side member behind the sill there was nothing much to do except bead blast off the rust, paint with acid etch and then weld on the new sills. (2279)

The state of the shroud panel on the rust bucket, the state of the shroud panel was the reason for its replacement with a new panel suitable for new chrome bumper front wings. (1106)

The state of the reinforcement panel behind the front wing on the rust bucket. (1091)

What you find on a rust bucket when you remove the front wings, the bubbling paintwork tells you there is a problem behind the shroud panel which was well past recovery. (1088)

Engine bay not a pretty sight, that is why the body was bead blasted to clean it up. (1086)