

# Guide to buying a classic MG

## Checklist 2 - Inspecting a classic MG for sale

When looking at a classic MG offered for sale that is over 15, 35 or even 50 years old or more it is essential you check the car thoroughly for any faults or damage. If the car is attractive then you may feel a more thorough inspection by a capable and experienced MG specialist or professional vehicle inspector is necessary to ensure that problems you might easily have missed are identified. There are a number of well established MG specialists who offer vehicle inspection services and advice on purchasing classic MGs. At least with a clear knowledge of any problems that their inspection might reveal, often rust in structural sections or body panels, you will then be able to assess the likely cost of any refurbishments that would be necessary to get the car up to the standard you would wish to have. You will need to consider those costs when negotiating the purchase price of the car.

You can see details of vehicle inspectors known to the Club at [www.buyinganmg.com/inspections.htm](http://www.buyinganmg.com/inspections.htm)

Never inspect a car in the dark or in the rain as you will easily miss faults. Always visit a private seller at their home address and make sure they do in fact live there. Visit a trader at their business premises so you can judge the style and quality of their operations and check they really do trade there. Do not arrange to meet a seller at a motorway service station, lay-by or any other address other than the one where they live or trade from. Check the seller's address is the same as the one listed on the V5C document and check the V5C has not been illegally amended. You can check the validity of a registration certificate prior to purchasing a car, just visit [www.v8register.net/subpages/dvlavehiclesearch.htm](http://www.v8register.net/subpages/dvlavehiclesearch.htm) or call the DVLA hotline on 0870 241 1878. Take the original advert with you, plus the notes you made during your initial telephone conversation with the seller. This will enable you to check details like mileage and road tax are the same as you were told during that call.

### Inspecting the outside of the car

- **Take a walk around the car to get a feel for the car as a whole.** If you are able to do this without the distraction of the seller that can be an advantage.
- **Start the engine from cold.** Starting problems and exhaust smoke are easier to spot when an engine is started from cold. Most sellers will have prepared the car for your visit which will often include running up the engine. So check to see if the radiator or the bonnet area over the radiator is warm. If it has been run recently before your arrival then you may have to wait until it has cooled to make your cold start checks.
- **Kneel down in front of each front wheel and look down the side of the car.** See if there is any distortion in the body panels and that the front wheels are directly in front of the rear wheels. If they are not then it could mean the chassis or structure of the bodyshell is slightly twisted or misaligned from an earlier crash and not corrected by any straightening to the chassis legs or other parts.
- **Check the panel gaps.** The gaps between the panels should be even. It is worth running a finger along each gap to feel for any variance in the gap along its length. Any unevenness may result from poor fitting of replacement panels during a refurbishment or rebuild, or as a consequence of a crash and subsequent repairs.
- **Check the paint finish on each body panel.** Any overspray on rubber window seals or windscreen rubbers will alert you that the car has had a respray at some stage and the need to enquire why, when and who carried out the work. Check also the inside of chrome bumpers for any overspray and for any overspray on the underseal under the car or in the wheel arches. Look at the paint finish on the body panels for ripples or any orange peel effects.
- **Check how the road wheels look in the wheel arches.** With an MGB and its variants, replacement front or rear springs can result in a change to the ride height – in some cases even variances between sides of the car as the quality of some replacement springs is not impressive at all! On some Register websites you will see samples of side views of their models in original form which will be a useful guide to how the wheels should look in the wheel arches.
- **Check the shock absorber rebound** with a very firm downward pressure and release on each corner of the car. The wing should go down and upon release, rebound once as the damping controls any repetitive bounce. If it bounces then it may well mean the shock absorbers are getting tired and would need replacing or refurbishing. If you have a duster in your pocket that can be placed on the paintwork of a well polished car to avoid your sweaty hand marks, that will be seen as a thoughtful measure by the seller.
- **Check for rust.** Examine the structural areas closely – the chassis or sills – as corrosion damaging the structural integrity is usually within the steel sections so in the early stages show limited signs externally. Beware of chrome or stainless steel oversills as they can cover some ugly sights! There is a briefing with examples of hidden horrors on an MGB as an excellent short video with a clear presentation from Dave Parker of the Mechspec MG Centre – it's available online via the link below and well worth viewing before you make your vehicle inspection:  
[www.buyinganmg.com/mgb/buyersguidevideoclipmechspec.htm](http://www.buyinganmg.com/mgb/buyersguidevideoclipmechspec.htm)

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Consult the key areas of corrosion noted in the individual model briefings in the “How to buy an . . . ?” series for the key areas of concern for corrosion – for example for an MGB the dogleg seams in front of the windscreen and behind the rear side windows together with the lower area at the front of the rear wings and the wheel arch lips must be checked.

- **Check the tyres for age, the pattern of tyre wear and any damage.** A guide to checking the sidewall markings to determine the age of the tyre is available via this link [www.v8register.net/subpages/tyresidewallmarkings1.htm](http://www.v8register.net/subpages/tyresidewallmarkings1.htm) Examine each tyre carefully for nicks and gouges on both the outside and inside walls and note any uneven wear across the tread which could indicate the tracking needs adjustment or possibly suspension damage. Check the tread depth – minimum is 1.6mm across the whole of the tread. Also check the spare tyre.
- **Jack the front of the car up and check for play in the front suspension.** Listen for any noises or sense any movement from the kingpins and wheel bearings. To some extent you will be able to judge the seller's interest in maintaining his car if he (or she) can produce a trolley jack at this stage of the inspection.
- **Check the front suspension grease nipples for signs of recent greasing.** Classic cars need the suspension greasing at least once a year and traces of clean grease should be evident where it has been extruded during the pressure greasing process with a grease gun.
- **Check for oil leaks from the sump and gearbox** whilst you have the car raised for the last two checks.
- **Check the floor panels and boot.** Lift the floor mats and check for dampness, rust and any distortion. Check the panels for signs of any repair work – welding, patching or replacement.

## Inspecting inside the car

Many of the key wear areas within the car are likely to have been replaced over the life of the car – the floor mats, gearknob, rubber pedal covers, foam seat squabs and possibly the seat covers. Your inspection of the interior will provide a good indication of the level of care the present and any earlier owners have taken over using and maintaining the car.

- **Examine the dashboard and instruments.** Check the dashboard is free of damage and is firmly fixed. Spotting signs of tampering that may have been to wind back the mileometer is not easy so your better bet is to check the mileage using the mileages recorded on MOT certificates and service invoices.
- **Check all the switches work** including the heated rear window and air conditioning on later MGs. With a car that has been laid up over the winter months you can sometimes find the HRW light does not come on when the switch is turned on – clicking the switch on and off six or seven times can clear the contacts. Check the HRW in the rear screen is operating over the whole of the heated area because some of the elements may have failed. With AC systems it is essential they are run at least monthly and recharged when necessary to function satisfactorily. It is surprising how some owners are unaware of the need for regular use as AC repair costs can be expensive. So check the AC system and take account of the costs of remedying any malfunction when considering the price you will be prepared to pay for the car.
- **Examine the seats.** Are they clean and is there any localised wear? With leather seats are there signs they have been regularly treated with a conditioner to maintain the lustre and avoid chaffing or worse cracks. Regular care of leather seats is an indication of an owner's approach to maintaining the car.
- **Check the windscreen** for chips and whether a replacement might be required. You will need to find a specialist auto glass fitter who knows how to remove and refit the windscreen trims, not a task to be left to the inexperienced with classic MG models.
- **Check the seat belts work correctly.** As this is a check during the annual MOT test, if the car has a current MOT test certificate you should expect the belts to recoil correctly, lock up when tugged and be free of serious wear. If the belts do not work correctly or are unacceptably worn, this should be a warning sign as they should have been checked.
- **Check for any modifications to the dashboard or interior.** A brief check is worthwhile for any additional or modified instruments, large speakers fitted to door panels and non-period radios or hi-fi kit. The car may be fitted with useful modifications – for example a cooling fan override switch, an overdrive on warning lamp or an immobiliser. Some insurers require Thatcham rated immobilisers as a condition of cover, particularly if the car is not garaged overnight.
- **Check any air conditioning system does work** because left unused for extended periods can result in malfunctions requiring costly maintenance.

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## Inspecting the engine bay

- **Review the engine bay generally.** A car maintained with care by an enthusiast will usually be clean and free of road grime and dust if only because it is far easier working in a clean engine bay. If the engine bay is a mess then it suggests either a lack of interest or time in underbonnet maintenance or the car is driven in all weathers or that it might be kept outside for extended periods.
- **Check the engine oil.** Remove the dipstick, wipe it on a cloth or a sheet of kitchen paper and replace it. Then check the oil level on the dipstick markings is correct and check the colour of the oil. It should be a golden brown – dirty black oil is not a good sign. Look inside the oil filler cap to check if there are any mayonnaise-like deposits which will be an indication of a damaged head gasket which can be costly to remedy.
- **Check the condition of the rubber cooling hoses.** Aged hoses can burst at unexpected times, so it is worth checking with the seller when they were last changed including any hoses in difficult locations – like the “Z shaped” hose under the carburetors near the bulkhead on an MGBGTV8! Routine replacement of the whole set of rubber hoses is a wise maintenance routine.
- **Check there is oil in the dashpots of SU carburetors.** This simple maintenance routine makes an MG so much more pleasant to drive so you would expect a car owned by an enthusiast to see the dashpots are topped up regularly.
- **Check the tension of the fan belt.** This is more a reflex test as you probe the engine bay – and also check the condition of the belt too.

## Inspecting any extras or additional items included in the sale

- **Examine any hardtop** and enquire if there is a bespoke stand in which the hardtop can be stored when not fitted to the car to avoid damage to the edges of the hardtop?
- **Clarify the position with any distinctive number plate** – is it offered as part of the sale or by separate negotiation?
- **Examine any period radio** and check if it is working.
- **Check the tax disc** to ensure the period of unexpired road tax or VED agrees with the text of the advert. If a car has been advertised for some time, the description in the advert or sale particulars “complete with 12 months road tax and a new MOT” may no longer be true.