BUYING AN MGB

KEY CHECKPOINTS:

Body
It is not uncommon to replace or fill rusting outer panels to hide serious internal structural rust. An MGB expert familiar with the exact location of all the original body seams and panel joins can quickly identify a patch-up job as it will often cover the original seams.

Anyone serious about selling an MGB will make sure that all the shutlines and fit of bonnet, boot and doors are flush and even. While they were never perfect when new, they were not noticeably bad so assume major body alignment problems until proven otherwise if any of these panels stick out or fit unevenly. Look for sagging doors that have to be lifted onto the latch to close.

The area around the headlight cowls and grille is particularly complex to fix and if it looks wrong, it can cost a fortune to rectify. Check all gaps between wheels and bodywork to make sure body is true and square.

There are two six-volt batteries in cradles behind the seats which rot out and cause them to fall onto the road. Check that both batteries are equivalent age and condition.

Check hood and frame very carefully especially rear plastic window. Check side window seals and felt channels. Really loose cars can crack windscreens. Some MGB scuttle shake is normal but on tired cars it can so bad that the doors, dash and seats all move in a different direction. There is no easy way of fixing this except to strip or replace the body.

Waterlogged cabin can hide serious floor rust and rotten trim which are costly to repair. Rusty floors must be cut out and replaced, not patched or filled, as they add to the car's strength. Look for sun damaged trim. Check all dials and switches.

Worn pedal box and steering column bushes can make car feel old and tired with slop in major controls. Allow for replacement if steering wheel and pedals can be moved sideways.

There are no less than three styles of tail lights, two locations for front light units, several dash designs, several seat patterns and three grille styles for a chrome bumper car. Make sure that they all match up for that model. The original steering wheel with its wire spokes can crack and is expensive to replace but critical to originality. They never came with a wood rimmed steering wheel although the later MGB L had a cheaper but sportier steering wheel.

There are two ways to convert a US MGB. Bash the existing structure to fit the steering on the opposite side or install the correct structural and steering parts.

Engine
Early three-bearing engine is smoother but develops serious crankshaft rumble when worn which means an explosion is imminent. Some oil leaks can dictate a major bottom end overhaul. Low oil pressure, piston slap and oil smoke can indicate excessive wear. Engine is

closely related to Austin 1800 unit but best to keep the original by overhauling it before it breaks.

Lack of modern filter and variable fuel mixture dictate oil changes up to three times more frequent than a modern car or else risk accelerated engine wear. Special oil is also required for wider tolerances in older engines.

Twin SUs need routine overhaul and cleaning but easy to tune. Popular single Weber conversion must be jetted correctly. If engine needs overhaul consider full balance and blueprint and cylinder-head conversion for unleaded fuel. Soft valve seats must have an additive and most will require premium unleaded fuel to avoid pinging. Engine mounts and stays are critical if surrounding parts including exhaust are to remain undamaged. Does it sound crisp and fruity? If not, you will miss out on the MGB's most endearing quality.

Transmission and running gear
Early non-synchro first gear is often chipped as you must be stationary to engage it. Noisy bearings and metal floating around the gearbox can soon destroy it. Second gear synchro is often worn and will crunch thanks to drivers who treat it like a modern gearbox. Overdrive must switch in and out cleanly as fixing the electrics can be fiddly.

Clunking driveshaft can do plenty of damage unless fixed. Listen for rear axle clunks and whines to indicate worn diff and bearings.

Worn wire wheel splines will clunk badly under brakes or power. Splines are easily but not cheaply replaced but dismantling and re-lacing the spokes to replace worn wheel centres is costly and fiddly. Loctite and shimming metals can hide dud wheel centres and splines so it can be worth removing each wheel. Worn splines can allow the wheel to keep turning under brakes before it falls off.

Brakes
In the days before back-up brake circuits were required, a fluid leak anywhere in the MGB brake system can spell problems. The slightest hint of brake fluid loss or spongy pedal must be traced immediately. Consider a retro-fit tandem master cylinder with dual circuits on an earlier car.

Suspension
Primitive suspension requires ongoing shot of grease in multiple points but even then a blocked grease nipple can starve the parts of vital lubricant. Light steering and clunk-free ride depends on freshly lubricated king pins and bushes. Lower wishbone spring pans can be distorted or fatigue cracked.

Old lever-arm dampers can leak and stop working if internal seals are worn. Specialists can overhaul them. Modern damper conversions are common but must be done professionally. Rear leaf springs and shackles require routine re-bushing, re-setting and de-rusting so the leaves can slide easily.

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