



**By Mike Taylor**

The four GTs lined up outside the MG Car Club's Kimber House HQ – the club very kindly hosted our get-together.

In their road test of the MGB GT in March 1966, Autocar said: „One of the „hits“ of last year’s London Show, the new MGB GT coupe, makes friends right away through its good looks and the exceptional practicality of its body.“ Remarkably, almost 50 years on since the car was first unveiled to the public in October 1965, the GT in all its guises still records outstanding levels of admiration and affection. It is a design that has truly stood the test of time, but what makes the GT so special? We brought together four GTs – a B, a C, a V8 and an RV8 – for comparison. (OK, we know this latter version was not a production vehicle, but the soft-top car was, so it was good to gain a glimpse of what an RV8 coupé off the production line might have felt like.)

Let’s begin by introducing our four GT owners. First we have Neil Hyert, owner of the 1974 Damask Red MGB GT 1.8 fitted with a period Webasto sun roof. The only concession to its age is that the interior has been expertly re-trimmed in black leather. Under the bonnet

there is a wonderful patina, which suggests the car is used, yet well cared for.

Next we have Colin Butcher, owner of the remarkably presented 1968 MGC GT finished in Metallic Champagne. In complete contrast to Neil’s B, Colin had only recently purchased the car. It had undergone an extensive restoration back in 1990, which had kept close to its original specification, so he was still coming to terms with its characteristics and foibles on the day of our shoot.

Third in our line-up is Victor Smith, a member of the V8 Register of the MG Car Club whose knowledge of the marque and model is legendary. Like Neil’s car, Victor’s Harvest Gold MGB GT V8 (built in December 1973 and registered in June 1974) is a good example of an MG that is used and enjoyed, not trailered polished and exhibited.

The fourth member of our select little group is Peter Kuruber, owner of the RV8 GT. Peter traveled up all the way from Somerset to be with us at the MG Car Club HQ in Abingdon. Despite its vibrant Viper Blue metallic paint coachwork and subtle body kit, the car still remains remarkably understated and it is giving nothing away to say that it found immediate favour with all who saw it.

For insurance reasons we had to fall short of owners actually test driving each other's car, relying instead on their huge experience to gain a good appreciation by riding as passenger. In fact, we needn't have worried for all four owners were able to grasp an in-depth feeling for – and measure of the cars, certainly more than sufficient to record their thoughts in detail on our suitably prepared feedback sheets.

Legend has it that even before the MGB Roadster was launched onto an appreciative market in 1962, plans were afoot to introduce the car as a coupé version first. If true, that would have been a clear indication of the way John Thornley and Syd Enever viewed the B, its monocoque bodyshell, its generous cockpit and its attraction to a broader customer base. In the event, public demand for an MGA rag top replacement won the day and the MGB Roadster emerged as the first of the range. The primary differences between the drophed B and the GT (apart that is from the roof and lifting tailgate, of course) is the windscreen design, its height being taller on the closed car. Indeed, a forerunner to the BGT was the Berlinette by Jacques Coune, a Belgian coachbuilder, and significantly the first of these was commissioned by the MD of Nuffield's Press Department. The different windscreen treatment on the Berlinette was clearly defined, and perhaps influenced Pininfarina when they designed the GT for MG.

The MGC GT came in 1967 with its 3-litre straight six cylinder engine and torsion bar front suspension. It gave this version of the car a burly character at a time when cars were becoming lighter and more nimble, creating caustic comments from the motoring press and the competition cognoscenti alike. Some assumed it would be a direct replacement for the Austin Healy 3000, but clearly it wasn't. Was this fair criticism? We let our team members be the best judges of that.

The buying public had to wait until 1973 before a factory VS-engined GT hit the market running, its lazily tuned engine giving the car a dual personality – fast and furious or relaxed and laid back depending on how the driver attacked the throttle pedal. That said, there was even less in the way of exterior body decor and details to identify the V8 model as something more than its lesser engined (and cheaper) BGT sibling than there had been for the MGC.

Finally we have the RV8, which is an altogether different car. The product of MG Rover and built between 1993 and 1995 with more power and greater luxury than any B before it, the RV8 drophead spoke to a more mature market whose demands for sports car style, performance, handling and comfort had been nurtured by soft tops from Japan and there was never any serious intention of making a GT version. The car featured here is one man's interpretation based on a 1972 BGT bodyshell and a crash damaged RV8 to provide the necessary upgrade parts, the conversion being undertaken for Philip Jones and carried out in 1998-2000 to a very high standard.

# MGBGTV8



V8 engine gives loady of torque for effortless performance.

Moving on the Victor's V8, Neil says the Dunlop alloy/steel composite wheels give the car a more purposeful appearance, its V8 badges being the only other way to distinguish it from the 1.8 version. Colin was equally complimentary about the car's looks, while Peter says that the BGT shape is „near enough perfect with its subtle V8 badgin“, while the special wheels only enhance the appearance.

On the move Neil says he thinks the V8 feels very like an MGB, certainly the quietest



Victor Smith is a stalwart of the MGCC's V8 Register.

of all the cars with a slightly more dampened feel to the suspension. Peter was just as generous, remarking that the V8 burble is evident, but not intrusive. „The seats are supportive, while the dashboard has not been spoiled by upgrading to a veneer finish“, he adds.



Inside the cabin, only the engine note gives the game away.

Looking under the bonnet, Neil acknowledges that the V8 makes it a tight fit, though he compliments the use of space for its installation. However, as we might expect, Peter (the other V8 owner) says that on this model access is reasonably easy for maintenance. Neil concluded by noting that the B V8 was an ideal long distance GT with ample power and comfort. „It is a good looking car“, remarks Colin, while Peter says this model has all the best features of the BGT – power, torque and comfort – that combine to make it a pleasure to ride in.



One of the few signs to differentiate V8s from less powerful Bs.



## RV8GT



MG went all out with the interior styling of the RV8, and Peter's Car has taken this level of luxury one step further.

The complete the quartet we turn to Peter Kuruber's Viper Blue car. Says Neil: „Considering this is a special build, the RV8 works well as a GT. Again the larger wheels and bonnet vents all combine to give the car a purposeful look“. Colin was equally impressed by the quality of the conversion. Victor says the combination of the BGT and RV8 styling seem natural and pleasing on the eye. As for ride quality, Neil reckons that this car feels the smallest of the four with its larger dashboard treatment and centre console, adding: „The seats feel narrower compared to the B and V8.“ Colin added that the car had a „typical GT ride quality,“ while Victor assessed the exhaust note to be more noisy than is comfortable, yet adding that „comfortable“ is the way to describe the ride. Under the bonnet Neil says the installation had been well executed, but with little free space for access. In contrast Colin suggested it was an easy V8 engine to work on, while Victor thinks the layout is „much more cramped than the other GTs, but servicing should be no more demanding than a standard RV8.“

Overall, despite hours in the passenger seats our four owners declared themselves to have had an enjoyable and revealing day. In truth, however, when we first envisaged the notion of comparing the four GTs we thought the RV8 would win hands down, but it didn't quite happen like that.



The V8 came with plenty more to pack into the engine bay by the time the RV8 arrived, but MG-Rover did a very neat job of squeezing it all in.

Also, we were a little worried that testing cars by riding as a passenger would not provide the incisive comments we were looking for. We needn't have worried as although there was inevitably less feedback on the driving experience, it allowed our testers to reflect more on the overall ride and aesthetics of each car.

From our day together there was no outright winner, each car displaying its own strong positive and negative characteristics. In fact, often it was the off-the-cuff comments made during lunch that struck home, and one recurring theme from all the owners was that the lines of the GT are both classic and timeless. There were some surprises too, our team looking with renewed relish at the MGB GTV8, its elegance and the way it

performed finding ready compliments. But if we thought the original B – with the least powerful engine of the four and basic levels of trim and suspension – would be outclassed, we were wrong. And that is a huge tribute to Syd Enever and his team at Abingdon.



Without a shadow of doubt, Peter Curuber had the most striking car of the four in his Viper Blue RV8/BGT combo.



We would like to thank Neil Hyett, Colin Butcher, Victor Smith and Peter Kuruber from bringing their cars to Abingdon, and the MG Car Club ([www.mgcarclub.co.uk](http://www.mgcarclub.co.uk)) for their kind hospitality.