

Old Cars vs. New (What is the world coming to?)

It is the middle of winter in New England and not many opportunities to drive the MGA, but since we have had so little snow so far there have been times that one could get out and drive. It has even been warm enough to have the top down (for those who are a bit more hearty). One of the things that comes to mind though is the differences between the simple machines of the past that we know and love and the complex automobiles of today. Not only has the cost of the cars skyrocketed, but the cost of parts and repair services as well. Granted, if you go to one of the various vendors available out there for new parts, they can get pricey, but many of the used parts are still reasonable and serviceable. This past Fall when I was in Stowe, I had some problems that turned out to be the carburetor and there was a contributing issue with the distributor. The carb turned out to be a missing screw and the distributor was as a result of me cobbling something together without thinking about all the consequences, but I was able to buy a complete distributor with the points, condenser, cap and rotor of \$90 and that solved those issues! The screw for the carburetor was probably \$2.50, but it was the labor to diagnose the problem that cost most of the money (still cheap for what it was). Now, I have a 2004 Ford pickup and when it had 20K miles on it there was a problem where it did not want to run well when cold, but ran fine once it warmed up. It turns out that it required two oxygen sensors and three coils (there is a coil for each spark plug). Fortunately it was all covered under warranty, but the parts were about \$80 per part. Of course the MGA has no oxygen sensors to go bad and only one coil (that you can buy for about \$24 new). Remember Larry Mazaway's problem with his MGA coil at Stowe? (He had a fancy new expensive coil that turned out to be defective and was able to throw in his old used coil to get home). I have had other problems with modern cars as well that have been very expensive to fix. I had to replace the alternator on my Range Rover and that was \$350 for the part, but I can buy a generator for the MGA for \$80! I had to replace the starter on my Range Rover and that was \$350 for the part, but I was able to have the starter on my MGA repaired for \$35. Then there was the fuel pump for my Range Rover. That was \$450 (the type that goes into the gas tank), but the fuel pump on the MGA is \$70 (for the aftermarket solid state kind that you can buy at any auto parts store). The fuel pump on my Land Rover Series II was only \$35!

I have had similar experiences with my other old cars that are American made. I have a 1966 Ford Mustang that needed a water pump, alternator, radiator, and fuel pump (what do you expect for a car that is 45 years old?) and each of these was under \$100! The brakes on the old cars were inexpensive as well, A set of 4 brake shoes or a set of 4 brake pads is only about \$30. A master cylinder can be rebuilt for about \$20. But these new cars with ABS! The sensors are costly and the ABS controller is a nightmare! Also, it seems every time you need brake work you have to replace all the rotors as well as the calipers! With the MGA we were happy with a padded dash pad and two point seat

belts, but now cars have steering wheel and dash mounted air bags as well as side impact air bags along with their various sensors. I have heard that it costs \$400 for the steering wheel air bag to be replaced and that many cars, once the air bags are deployed the car is considered "totaled" by the insurance company.

A friend of mine was talking the other day about needing new tires on her new car. It only has 35K miles on it, but the tread is worn down. Most new cars these days have "performance" tires from the factory which can cost \$150 to \$250 per tire and only last half as long as a tire with a higher wear rating. My 2004 Ford Truck with 55K miles on it still has the original tires with plenty of wear left. I know that the MGA tires (I have radials on mine) are getting harder to find in the 4.5" X 15" size. There are vendors who specialize in these sizes at a pretty reasonable price, but often you can't get these at a regular tire shop. It is also getting more difficult to find a tire shop who will handle wire wheels and tubes!

The MGA does not have any electrical or mechanical issues to deal with for raising and lowering the roof (I have had to rebuild the hydraulics on an old Galaxy 500 convertible). There are no electric door locks or electric windows to go haywire (I had a car that the electric door locks were intermittent and they would lock themselves at various times but never unlock themselves - this was not one of those stupid features which lock the doors when the car exceeds 5 MPH!) Also, I remember paying \$300 for the electric motor and regulator on my car when the driver's side window would not go up or down. I bought a new regulator for the Mustang and that was only \$30 and I installed it myself. I had to replace the Range Rover heater blower motor and the whole dashboard had to be removed - a \$1000 job, but the MGA can have the motor replaced from under the bonnet and the part is about \$70.

No one is going to crawl underneath and cut out the catalytic converter for the salvage value while you are parked in a shopping mall parking lot! You will never be locked out of your car and if the battery dies, you can crank start or push start the car. I know Dick Fabrizio was able to drive his car home from Stowe when he had a weak battery. I have had to drive a couple hundred miles on just the battery when the generator of my MGA went bad, but it got me to the place where I could get another generator and I was able to install it right there in the parking lot! I have been able to replace the points on the side of the road in South Dakota and keep going or walk to a nearby NAPA store and get a replacement fuel pump and replace it by the side of the road. It is not that the MGAs and other cars are more prone to breakdowns, it is that since we enjoy these cars but they are old, there are bound to be problems from time to time unless you completely go through all the systems and ensure they are "fresh".

So, to conclude this story, I just want to say that the MGA and many of our

other old cars that we love to drive are a real bargain when it comes to repairs and are very simple systems which don't require a computer to diagnose. Enjoy driving your MGAs and other old cars. I am looking forward to a great driving year in 2012!

Safety Fast!

Jack Horner
President, Bay State MGA Club