

## **MGA Top Bows Variations Tech Article**

When I built my car in the late 1990s I took a frame I had and painted and installed it. I used a top I had from one of my project purchases new in the box, but the rear window had little dots on it, so, I recently decided to replace it. While replacing the top on my MGA last year I encountered a problem that I had not seen before. I have replaced quite a few MGA tops from various sources and they usually fit. I decided to go with a white top for my car to go with the Glacier Blue paint (I thought it looked kind of sharp). So, I ordered a top from Moss Motors - one that is made by Robbins Tops. I ordered Robbins Top model 2107 from Moss Motors and installed it not realizing I was going to encounter a problem. This top has a "listing" which is a pocket for the first bow behind the header rail. It was listed as a "1955-1960" top, so, since I had the earlier type bows, I thought it would fit. Well, it did go on, but the listing was too far back. I thought perhaps that I had not pulled the top far enough forward, but I could not possibly pull it tight enough for it to reach. Besides the fact that the first bow is welded to the frame, so, the listing could not be slipped on to it. The other problem I found is that the header rail is long enough that the weather edge did not come down over the edge of the side curtains the way it should. It turns out that I had Moss part 453-251 which matches the early 1500 BUT with the exception that the replacement header rail length is too long.

I looked at Barney Gaylord's website: <http://mgaguru.com> as well as information in the Original MGA book and on Moss Motors catalogue regarding types of top bows and header rails. In the web site article TT-107 and TT-107a there is some discussion about the header rails and I contributed my observations based on my MGA as well as several sets of top bows I took from parts cars. Robbins Tops replaced the top with a Model 2109 which they say is as original for 1955-1960 MGA 1500 and early 1600 without a listing. The on this top was also bad though because the header rails are all made to the late model length (about 41 1/2" to 42". As in TT-107a I think the only way to make the top fit is to trim the header rail down on the ends if using any earlier style top from Robbins Tops.

I restored a late style MGA 1600 frame and am getting ready to install it. After reading TT-107 I did some more research on header rails and tops. It turns out that Moss part number 453-250 is a better match to the later 1600 and MKII header rail because of its shape (not tapered toward the front and being inletted in the rear to cover the top of the header rail mounting bar on the frame. The big problem with the header rail is that the socket tab holes are parallel with the front of the rail instead of being angle as required. I think I am still going to have

to order a different top (Robbins Model 2177) in order to accommodate the wider header rail.

Here are the specifics of the various top bows I researched:

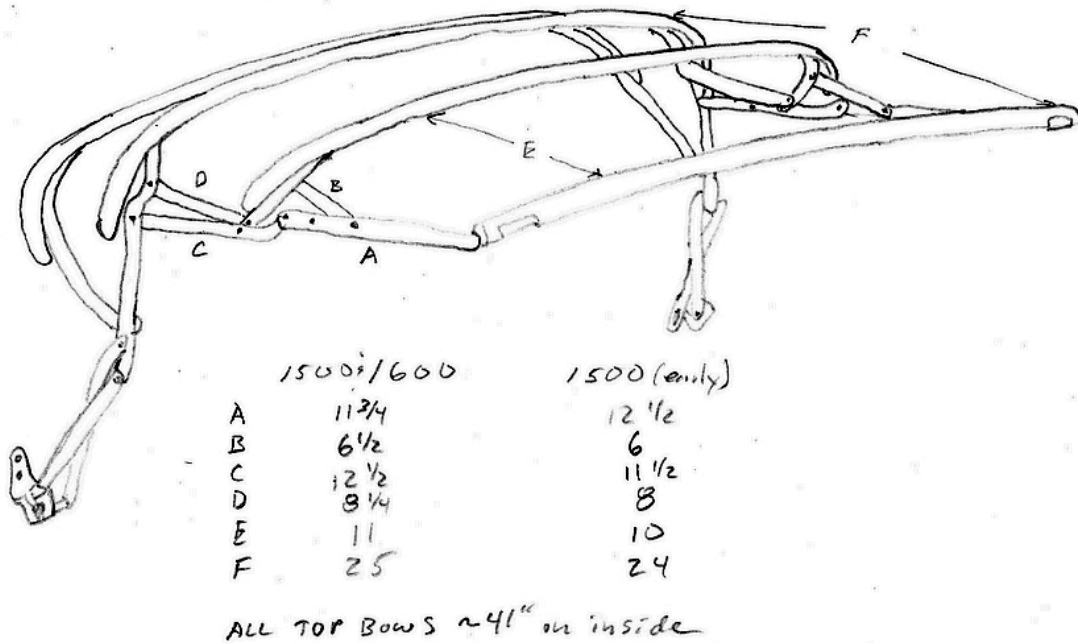
MGA 1500 (Early): Short slot in frame to mounting bracket, all top bows welded to frame including first top bow. No notches in front header rail mounting bar to accommodate windshield latch. 10" measurement from header rail mounting bar to first top bow. Header rail is tapered toward front and not inletted on the rear face to mount over header rail mounting bar.

MGA 1500: Short slot in frame to mounting bracket, all top bows welded to frame including first top bow. No notches in front header rail mounting bar to accommodate windshield latch. 11" measurement from header rail mounting bar to first top bow. Header rail is tapered toward front and not inletted on the rear face to mount over header rail mounting bar.

MGA 1600 (Early): Short slot in frame to mounting bracket and snaps installed on frame upright. All top bows welded to frame including first top bow. Notches in front header rail mounting bar to accommodate windshield latch. 11" measurement from header rail mounting bar to first top bow. Header rail is tapered toward front and inletted on the rear face to mount over header rail mounting bar.

MGA 1600 after (c) 78248 and MKII: Long slot in frame to mounting bracket and no snaps in uprights, all top bows welded to frame Except first top bow. Notches in front header rail mounting bar to accommodate windshield latch. 11" measurement from header rail mounting bar to first top bow. Header rail is squared toward front with slight rounding at top edge and inletted on the rear face to mount over header rail mounting bar.

Here is a drawing that also shows the measurements of the two major styles of top bows:



The critical measurement is from the header rail mounting bar to the first top bows and to the second top bows if the top has a listing in it. According to The Original MGA all the tops for the late MGA 1600 and MKII has this listing (in order to prevent the top from flapping at speed). But, I have not seen any cars recently with a listing; and a top with a listing will only fit the late model MGA 1600 top frame because the first header rail is not welded.

So, the moral of the story is to make sure you know what top bows you have when ordering a top and perhaps discussing with technical support of the supplier to ensure you order the right top for the top bows you have. Also, be aware of the header rail measurements and shape as this effects the fit of the top at the front. Read through the various articles on Barney Gaylord's web site. Not all the information is useful as it presents some work arounds that will make the top not be installed correctly. There are quite a few top suppliers out there, so, you will have to take this information with a grain of salt because who knows how each one will fit.

I hope this helps everyone when it comes time to replace the top on your MGA.

Safety Fast,

Jack Horner  
President, Bay State MGA Club