

Classic Chrome

MGs are meant to be driven but if you drive them in winter, you will need to clean the road salt off the bodywork and in particular from the chrome and bright work. Chromium plating provides an attractive and durable finish to mild steel and plays a vital part in the visual appeal of a classic MG. In the 1950s and 60s most cars were embellished with more than their fair share of chrome. Many a Sunday morning was spent creating and buffing up bumpers, hub caps, window frames, wing mirrors, door handles, side strips, fuel caps and in the case of an MG even carefully cleaning every slat of the chrome grille. In the 70s chrome started to disappear as an embellishment and was replaced shiny plastic, stainless steel, or even by black paint on the cheaper cars. While the 80s saw the introduction of color-coded plastic bumpers and the disappearance of bright work on car exteriors except perhaps for their badges.

Over the years all chrome plated surfaces will deteriorate and all chrome is vulnerable to surface rust discoloration but it is amazing how with just a little effort even a quite rusty chrome part can be cleaned and restored back to its original gleaming condition. Chrome can be cleaned with ordinary car shampoo and then wax polished but when rust discoloration has taken hold or the surface is badly corroded then a specialist chrome cleaner will be necessary. One of the best chrome cleaners on the market is 'Solvol Autochrome' which is mildly abrasive and is capable of removing layers of corrosion that appear to be quite extensive and permanent. Serious damage has only been done when the chrome surface has actually broken through or become so severely pitted by rust that the finish is beyond saving. Nowadays, few modern cars have any chrome work at all and as a result many younger owners have little experience of the extra level of care necessary to keep their bright work looking bright. Chrome needs regular cleaning and also the protection of polishing with a quality wax polish. Some people even apply Waxoyl to their chrome work, bumpers and hubcaps. Applied sparingly and then carefully polished Waxoyl can form a protective on the bright work.

All that Glitters— *Needs Cleaning*

Bumpers

The Midget, MGA/B/C and the MG saloons of the 50s and 60s from the Magnette to the MG 1100/1300 series all had handsome chrome bumpers. Rust will form on these bumpers especially after driving the car on our salt strewn winter roads. A wash with warm water and car shampoo will usually get rid of surface rust but the more persistent corrosion will need the application of chrome cleaner and some hard rubbing to restore the shine. Once chrome is restored it is a good idea to wax polish it just as frequently as you would the rest of the body

Chrome Wire Wheels

Wire wheels can be painted silver or chrome plated. Chrome wires are an absolute pain to keep in tip top condition but they look so stunning that most owners believe that it's well worth the extra effort to preserve them at their best. The combination of the delicate chrome surface and hot highly corrosive brake dust can rapidly bring on the need to clean wire wheels. It is always best to wash the wires first with a warm car shampoo solution using a specifically designed soft bristle brush which can be bought for the purpose. This can



be done with the wheels on the car but to make a really effective job it is better to remove them. Taking wires off to clean them is well worth the extra trouble, especially with the front wheels because they get so much exposure to brake dust on the inside of the rims. The new 'Greenstuff' brake pads are dust-free and as a consequence these are real God send to the owners of cars with chrome wire wheels.

Chrome Wheel Nuts

Where the wheel brace makes contact with chrome wheel nuts it is inevitable that some damage will occur, even though the greatest possible care is taken when tightening or loosening the nuts. Despite this, chrome nuts will clean up quite well with just a little attention. The only way to completely avoid this problem of edge damage is to fit stainless steel wheel nuts, these will still need to be cleaned but they will not betray corner damage in the same way as a chrome plated nut. Similarly the winged and hexagonal centre lock wire wheel spinners are chrome plated and these too



can be easily damaged on their edges by over-enthusiastic hammering, always use a suitable soft wire wheel hammer and avoid unnecessary force.

Chrome Wheel Trims

These need to be kept clean and polished just as frequently as



the car. Occasionally it is worth removing wheel trim completely to thoroughly clean the underside, as salt and brake dust will get behind the rim and corrode it on the inside. If you have these trims fitted to your MG and drive it throughout the extremes of winter it would be seriously worth considering the removal of the trims while the roads are being regularly salted.

Replacement

When the chrome plating finally loses its battle with rust then you can decide to either replace the component or have it re-chromed. Re-chroming is much more expensive than replacement but if originality is important you may consider the additional cost to be worthwhile.

Prevention

Prevention is better than cure and the best approach to preserve the chrome on your MG is to keep the plated components clean, dry and in particular to avoid any exposure to corrosive road salt. Never leave your classic car dirty and unwashed for weeks at a time in a poorly ventilated garage, especially if it has been used on winter roads. Such treatment is a sure way to bring about rapid deterioration of bodywork and all the shiny bits. Always be prepared to spend some time cleaning your MG regularly and then apply some wax polish before you put it away and your classic will continue to sparkle and shine for many years to come.

Do You Have a Chrome Cleaning Tip?

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Solvo Autochrome is available in North America.

Maybe you have a tip for cleaning chrome. In researching this subject I found ideas as diverse as the scouring with 0000 gauge wire wool to polishing with crumpled aluminum foil lubricated with Coca-Cola. I have also been told that the spoke holes in the hubs of new or thoroughly cleaned wheels can be sealed with silicone bathroom caulk in order to prevent wheel bearing grease from oozing through them.

Perhaps a club member can recommend a re-chroming company; environmental regulations have greatly increased the cost of handling and disposing of plating chemicals and re-chroming facilities are now fewer and harder to find.

Editor