

MG RV8 Impressions

by Rick Astley

Last September, Anne and I stayed a night at my old friend Nic Houslip's home in Solihull, just south-east of Birmingham, England's nearest equivalent to Motor City.

Nic owns a variety of vehicles, and while I wasn't about to take a ride on his 1963 BSA Rocket Gold Star, we all decided that it was appropriate to go to dinner in style in his 1990 Bentley Turbo-R. It was certainly a smooth and quiet ride, but Nic does admit that it can make a rather disturbing noise; that's a sucking sound as it very rapidly empties its fuel tank if you decide to push your foot down.

The car I wanted to drive, however, was his MG RV8. The RV8, you'll remember, was an updated version of the MGB released in 1992. It really is an MGB, but being powered by a 190 bhp, 3.9 liter, fuel injected version of the aluminum block Rover V8, derived from the early '60s Buick/Olds engine, it can accelerate from 0-60 mph in under 6 seconds. There are other updates of course. The body was restyled with new panels, with only the boot lid and doors remaining from the original. It also has a smart walnut fascia, luxurious upholstery, and a 3.31:1 ratio limited-slip differential. Surprisingly some other things were little changed, including the rear brakes and suspension. I have an *impression* of the RV8, which is MGB V8 conversion with the original Buick engine, and I wanted to see how it compared to the real thing.



As soon as I started the car I noticed the noise; not that it was loud, but that it came from the back, whereas much of that in my car seems to emanate from inside. At first I thought that the RV8 had much better sound deadening under the bonnet, but that proved not to be the case, and I concluded it was probably due to the fact that my car is a GT, and so tends to contain and resonate the sound inside its closed cockpit.

At low speed, the steering was noticeably lighter than mine, which can be heavy because of the wider than standard tires. However, it turns out that Nic found the RV8 steering heavy too, so he's fitted a Peugeot power steering system procured from the MG Owners Club. It has an electric-motor driven oil pump, which consumes quite a bit of current, so Nic fitted an on/off switch, just in case for any reason he needs to conserve electrical power. With the system 'off' the steering was comparable to mine in heaviness, but the RV8's updated front suspension and steering geometry certainly improve the overall handling.



As we drove around Nic pointed out landmarks like the current Jaguar factory (originally constructed in WW2 to build Spitfires), the Land-Rover and Aston-Martin plants, the site of the infamous British-Leyland headquarters (now demolished), and lots of places where famous motorcycles were manufactured such as BSA and Royal-Enfield (both of which were originally gun makers), Triumph, Norton, Velocette and Ariel.

On the road the car's fuel-injected motor responded very smoothly, without the hesitation and flat spots I experience as I still try to get my car's 4-barrel carburetor set-up correctly. The RV8 is fast, but not as quick as Marc Weisman's Cougar engined car, which I drove more recently. The RV8 does, I was relieved to find, stop rather more rapidly than Marc's car!

Overall, the RV8 is certainly more refined than my V8 conversion, but at the same time, it isn't light-years better, and so when I returned back home I was happy to drive my own car with the satisfaction of knowing that I only needed to get a few things working a tad better, and I'd have car as good as the factory made some 25 years after mine left Abingdon.