

Enjoying

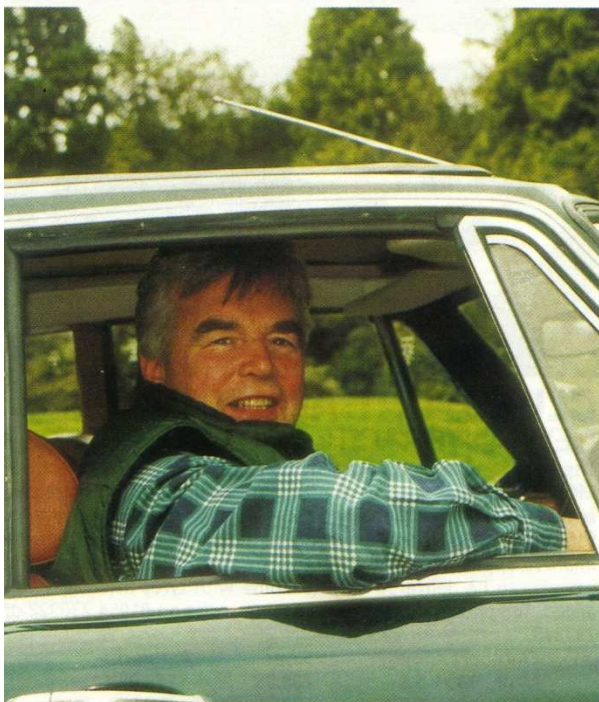


September 2000



Costello V8

Members often phone the MG Owners' Club for advice but occasionally they call us to inform us about something in the classic car world that has really impressed them. Michael Pearce called to tell us what an excellent 'classic car restoration course' he was attending at 'The College of North West London'. His satisfaction with the course was down to the considerable help they had given him with the rebuild of his Costello BGT V8.



Michael Pearce at the wheel of his Costello V8 GT

How it all began

Michael first saw what he took to be an unusual green BGT with a 'For Sale' notice in the back window and he was intrigued by the bonnet bulge and the V8 badge on the tailgate. When he mentioned the car to his son, it was Richard who first became interested and surfing the internet provided some more background information, identifying the car as a Costello; a V8 conversion on the MGB built by Ken Costello in the early 1970s.

The Costello was revealed as being a rather special and unique model and Michael decided he would like to own this example. Michael made various attempts to purchase the car; but the owner was a very busy local businessman who proved to be somewhat elusive and negotiations were protracted and complex. However, before parting with his money Michael took the precaution of having the Costello inspected by Andy Roberts, his local MG specialist. The concise but complete inspection report pointed out the condition of the car extremely accurately and included an assessment of the necessary restoration work that was to prove equally well judged. Knowing the full extent of the work ahead of him and after agreeing an appropriate figure, at long last Michael became the owner for BKR 741K. Michael then obtained a Heritage certificate from BMIHT and also sent a £5 fee the DVLA who confirmed that the MG's first registered owner was Ken Costello.

Restoration begins

Although remarkably original and still looking reasonable on the surface the Costello needed considerable body restoration. It had corroded in all the usual vulnerable areas; inner sills, outer sills, the boot floor needed to be replaced as well as the doors, front wings, and an offside rear wing. Inspired by their video Michael entrusted the body repair to Motorspeed of Chichester. While the Costello was in their workshops Michael visited to inspect the work in progress. As is so often the case, the full extent of the corrosion damage was not revealed until the outer panels had been removed and the sills exposed; even part of the step



sill and floor pan had to be replaced. Along with the body repairs Motorspeed also had to fit a new petrol tank.

Once the Costello had been returned Michael decided that a full respray was the next logical step in its restoration but he wanted tackle as much of the work himself as possible. By this time Michael had discovered the 'Classic Car Restoration Course' at the College of North West London; he enrolled and began to acquire many of the necessary skills. The course is designed to ensure that students master all the basic restoration skills before they begin any work on their own vehicles. When they are ready to tackle their own classics the College has the facilities for them to carry out all types of car restoration work, including trimming.



Bonnet bulge and bigger wheels immediately invest the Costello BGT V8 with a more aggressive stance

Preparing the body

Michael's Costello V8 needed a complete respray and therefore most of the body had to be taken back to bare metal and although some power tools can be used this is predominately a hand finishing task. Once back to bare metal the surface imperfections have to be filled and in the case of the Costello the lead loading in the joint at the roof rear pillar had to be redone. The College provides expert help and guidance at every stage, the tutors monitor the progress of each student and are always on hand to see that jobs are carried out correctly and with due regard for all health and safety issues.

The Costello presented one or two little extra challenges, potentially the most difficult of

which was the double skinned fibreglass bonnet. The special bulging bonnet is designed to cover the standard Rover V8 mid-mounted carburettors and air cleaner assembly. This is not just an ordinary steel or alloy MGB bonnet with an add-on bulge but a complete fibreglass moulding comprising a full outer skin and inner frame bonded together.

Stripping paint from fibreglass is a risky business, if you use too much chemical stripper you can easily soften the gel coat and damage the surface. Therefore an orbital sander was lightly used and then the bonnet was carefully finished by hand. The bonnet was sprayed with a special two-pack high build primer. For safety and also for environmental

reasons this can only be done in a special spray booth with the appropriate breathing gear for the painter; here again is another area where the College can provide all the necessary expertise and facilities.

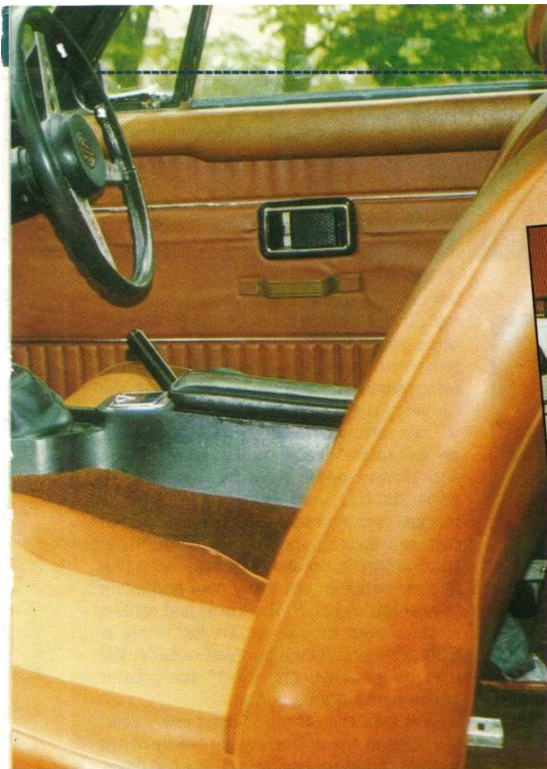
Once all the bodywork was prepared it was thoroughly masked-up before painting. The spraying was to be carried out by Dave, one of the full time paint course students. This was to be his final job before leaving college to take up employment with a Rover dealership. While the Costello was being sprayed one of the supervisors, Alfred Trotman kept an eye on Dave's progress. On completion of the paintwork a careful inspection is made for any imperfections. Before all the chrome trim and fittings

can be refitted, compounding and final polishing is carried out so that no damage is done to any chrome surfaces.

Originality

Next task was to retrim the interior with new carpets and seat covers. Michael has kept to original specification as far as possible, his only departure was fitting MGOC Oasis 15inch alloy wheels. The original Costellos either retained their standard Rostyle wheels or were fitted with Dunlop wheels with steel rims and alloy centres, very similar in design to those later used for the factory BGT V8. The 15inch Oasis alloys look very good on the Costello, filling the wheel arches and giving it a little extra height as well as more positive stance on the

The College of North West London



Standard interior refurbished by Michael



'The Car's the Star' an open evening at the College of North West London the patriotic BGT was restored by a student who sold it on completion in order to embark on a Midget restoration

The College can teach you all the skills needed to restore your classic car. You don't need to have any prior knowledge, just enthusiasm. You will be given hands-on experience with tools and equipment in purpose built workshops. The skills you can acquire include welding, the fabrication of body panels, using body filler, lead loading, metal finishing, rectifying corrosion, hammer and dolly techniques, trim

and painting. The College of North West London offers everything you need to complete a total restoration of your classic car to a professional standard.

The Car's the Star

The College of North West London have recently held an open evening to launch their Vintage, Veteran and Classic Car Restoration Club which runs in conjunction with the restoration courses. Every student attending automatically becomes a member, which means that they have the opportunity to meet other students at events and outings, get discounts on tools and materials from selected suppliers and a free termly newsletter. The course is tailored to the individual needs of each student and the social aspect of working with like-minded enthusiasts greatly enhances the experience of car restoration. I was able to attend the open evening on Monday June 12 and I was extremely impressed with the extensive facilities and the quality of work on display. There was a wide spectrum of cars on view, from a 1909 Renault to more modern classic machinery including some MGs - Michael's Costello, Tony Bridgewater's MGB and Joseph Green's BGT (still under restoration). At the end of the evening an informal concours competition was held among the classics restored by students at the College; an incredibly well finished 1956 Rover 90 Saloon won first prize but among the runners up was Michael's Costello. To find out more about the courses at the College of North West London ring - 0208 208 5050.

Richard Ladds



Michael has fitted a set Oasis alloys to replace the original Rostyles



Tailgate badge gives away the secret behind this GT's rapid progress



Alfred Trotman with Ken Eaves who is in charge of the Classic Restoration Course



Jaguar XK120 typical of the exotic machinery under restoration

road. Incidentally, if anyone has a set of original type Costello wheels for sale Michael would like to hear from them.

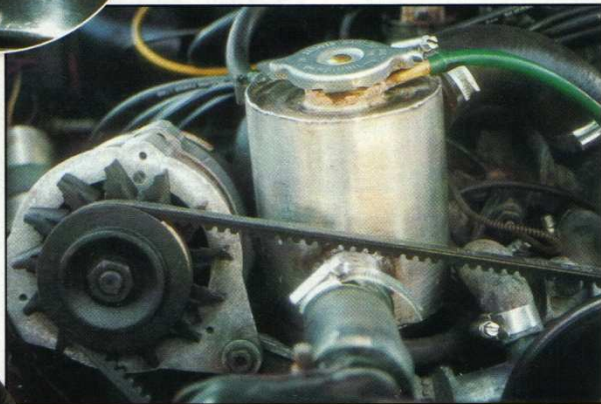
Under the bonnet everything is original but Michael has had to replace the special Costello engineering header tank. With the skills he has acquired at North West London College he fabricated a replacement tank in stainless steel and this is now fitted to the V8.

On the road

It is important to remember that the Costello was designed and developed by Ken Costello before Leyland put their own V8 on the market. Michael's Costello drives superbly and does not feel like a converted V8 special. On the road it behaves just like a well sorted MGB but with double the power. Using the standard overdrive gearbox means that the car retains its excellent positive gearchange and the ratios provide very brisk acceleration indeed. From behind the wheel it is difficult to accept that the car is thirty years old, it is a pleasure to savour the torque from the Rover V8 which seems to pull strongly in any gear. For me the special appeal of the car was the way in which retains all the virtues of the MGB, the feedback from the chassis, its direct steering and sure-footed handling combined with the smooth power delivery of the V8. This car feels to be extremely well engineered and fully developed. I can well understand why the Costello was such sensation when it first appeared and why even the management of British Leyland couldn't turn their backs when confronted with this V8 GT and just had to go ahead and copy the concept.

Rover V8 engine fitted to the standard B gearbox by a special adaptor plate. The rest of the B's specification remained unchanged apart from the final drive ratio which was raised from 3.909:1 to 3.07:1. Apart from the prominent bonnet bulge the Costello was also distinguished by a large mesh black aluminium front grille and sizeable V8 badge on the left-hand side of the tailgate.

Demand for the Costello was considerable, despite very little advertising, the reputation of the car was entirely established by the very favourable road tests and also by personal recommendations. Eventually Costello was producing two cars per week and it is estimated that around 200 conversions were carried out before BL introduced their own BGT V8. The success of the Costello had spurred them into action and they were able to build a V8 to sell at £1,925 which effectively stole the market away from Costello.



Michael made a replacement radiator header tank in stainless steel to match the original Costello steel design

A Brief History of Costello

The enterprising Ken Costello had his own engineering business in Farnborough, Kent, and he realised that there was definitely a market for a V8 MGB. So Costello set about producing a complete ready to drive V8 conversion of the MGB GT that was available in 1970 for a cost of £2,443 (the standard GT at the time cost £1,459). Costello's conversion was to be powered by the Buick based 150 bhp 3.5 litre



The main reason for the bulge is the original Rover mid mounted SUs with their substantial air cleaners

An example of Michael's handiwork. At the College each student has to be able to fabricate complex body sections and then cut and repair them



V8 fits in neatly under the special bulging bonnet



The fibreglass bonnet after repair and spraying with high build primer