

## Costello V8 Roadster – an imaginative development of an MGB

Ken Costello began supplying his conversions which squeezed a V8 into MGB roadster and GT shells from 1970. It was an imaginative development of the ageing MGB utilising his skills as both part-time racer and engineer, eventually converting over 200 MGBs in all. This stole a march on BLMC as it would be almost three years before MG had their MGBGTV8 ready. The early Mk-I cars have the distinctive Costello power bulge in the fiberglass bonnet. Here Lawrence Wood explains how he moved rapidly to acquire a beautiful example when it came up for sale in August 2007 on the V8 website and the pleasure of owning what is becoming a rare model.

BRG 5008 (GHN5202408) with black leather interior was first registered in June 1970 and sold by University Motors of London for £1,319 to a Mr Hodson-Mackenzie of London SW10. Just over a year later the owner had Costello Motor Engineering Ltd convert the Roadster from 1800cc 'factory' power to a 3500cc Rover V8 unit. In October 1971, the conversion by Ken's company cost £917; so almost doubling the cost of the original vehicle.

The car now sports a recorded mileage of 23,000 which has been covered since a new speedometer was fitted around 1991 when a bare metal rebuild was undertaken. The true total mileage is likely to be nearer 150,000. The car has now had just five proud and fastidious owners since 1976 and has clearly been well maintained throughout its life regardless of cost. Lawrence was hankering after a Roadster with V8 power for some time after enjoying owning a MGBGTV8 conversion. He had his eye on a Heritage-shelled rebuild car in West London and was almost ready to put down a deposit when he saw the

### How many were there and why that bulge?

Ken Costello never kept accurate figures of the number of V8 conversions he performed before Leyland joined in the fun. It is thought however that perhaps only as few as 14 V8 Roadsters were built in the MK-I guise – this required the large bonnet bulge to provide clearance for the two SU carburetors. Most surviving Costello conversions are of the MK-II format which did not require the bulge as different carburetion was used.



advert on the V8 website for a rare Costello V8 Roadster model, apparently in excellent condition. He moved quickly to purchase the car almost as soon as it was advertised. The enthusiasm from other bidders clearly showed how sought-after these Costello V8 models have become.

Accompanying the car was a full, two-inch thick file outlining a complete history including the original bill of sale from University Motors and an invoice for the Costello conversion itself. It was also featured in BBC2's "The Car's the Star" in the late 1990s with the then owner proudly photographed next to the motor, interviewed by an admiring Quentin Willson.

When Lawrence acquired the car it had been sitting idle for nearly a year so required a new starter motor, alternator and complete service by its new maintainers, Enginuity of West London. During the spring of 2007, Lawrence enjoyed a trouble-free road trip to France, surviving the Good Friday heat and stress of the Paris periferique, negotiating the cobbles of St Germain and effortlessly stretching the Costello's legs through the open vineyard roads of the Champagne region. This trip saw the car cover nearly 1,000 burbling torquey miles and drew many an admiring glance from envious moderns on the cross-channel ferry. Other memorable trips included the 2007 South Downs Run from Petersfield to Eastbourne, regular return drives from London to Dartmoor, and several exciting track days courtesy of the MGs-on-Track.

Sadly, in October 2007 the head gasket suffered a terminal failure whilst driving along the M4 towards London. With the engine block now warped beyond repair from the excessive overheating, there was no alternative

but to ditch this original Costello fitted power source and fit a new V8.

Enginuity provided many options, but Lawrence settled on a 4.6litre low-compression V8, built by Cosworth under license from Rover. Now still running in, this new unit provides just over 220bhp and nearly 300lb ft of torque. The ton comes up at only 3000 revs, and economy is surprisingly good for such a large displacement.

Enginuity is better known for its specialism in TVRs and Triumphs, leading the mechanics to judge that the Costello now has a performance somewhere between a modern Chimaera and Griffith 400; quite frightening in a car with no airbags and 37-year old brakes!

The track days have proved very exciting with masses of lazy torque on tap. With the additional fitting of a Panhard rod and lowered rear springs, handling is twice what it was, so cornering with great confidence is now a reality. Other recent additions include a mohair roof, modern headlamps and CD player, so it not only sounds fabulous but has the looks too.

For more information see:

[www.mgcostello.com](http://www.mgcostello.com)

[www.v8register.com](http://www.v8register.com) .

