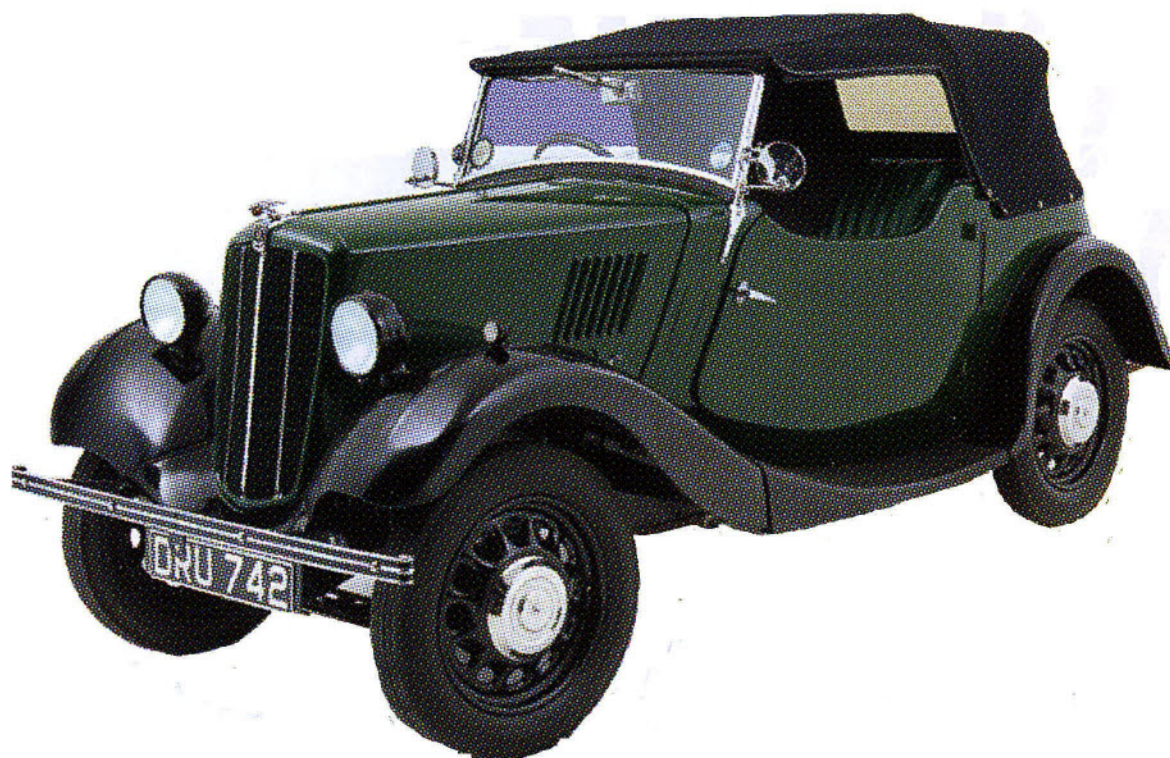


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# practical CLASSICS

SEPTEMBER 2006

HOW TO BUY  
A PERFECT  
MORRIS 8





# Choosing an Eight

Think pre-War classics are fragile? Think again. This durable Thirties' best-seller puts some modern machinery to shame

## MORRIS EIGHT: 1934-1948

**J**UST LOOK AT these pictures and say you don't want a Morris Eight. Is this the cutest car ever built or what? But don't think the Eight is all looks and no substance, because even if you've never driven a pre-War car, you'll have to make very few adjustments to adapt to this friendly Morris.

The best-selling car of the Thirties, the Eight was Morris's retort to the Ford Model Y and Austin Seven, which it comprehensively outsold. It's not hard to see why when you look at the car's build quality as well as its breadth and depth of abilities.

Despite the Eight being an economy car, Morris did not hold

back on its specification – it was better finished than any rivals.

The first Eight, known as the Pre-Series, arrived in 1934 and was followed by the barely changed Series I just a year later. The Series II, as shown here, made its debut in 1937 with a fresh grille and Easiclean wheels in place of the previous wire items.

The final incarnation, the Series E, appeared in 1938. Looking much more up to date than the earlier cars, this later model is very rare in pre-war form – most were built between 1946 and 1948, after which it was replaced by the Morris Minor.

There's little to choose between the

Series I and the Series II, with 221,500 of them built across all derivatives.

Less cute but more usable is the Series E, 120,434 examples of which were produced. There's a choice of two seats or four, and either open bodywork (tourer) or closed (saloon) – except for post-War Series Es which were saloons only. To make up for the fact that there was no tourer, Morris offered a full-length sunroof and badged the car the Sliding Head.

Whichever Eight you go for, you'll love it – as long as you don't mind being transported to a world where the pace of life is rather slower than you're used to.



### BODYWORK

The Eight's construction is primitive, using a separate chassis and at least some timber. By the time the Series E appeared, the wood was restricted to the floorboards only – but earlier cars have a lot more timber.

While repairs to rotten timber is a job for a specialist, chassis rot is easy to fix with basic welding and fabricating skills. With any type of Eight you'll need to be on the lookout for rot because after so many years there's a good chance there will be problems somewhere.

The ladder frame chassis is simple to repair, but you must still check it thoroughly for corrosion.

**'Despite being an economy car, Morris did not hold back on specification'**



PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM WOOD  
WORDS: RICHARD DREDGE



# 'Whichever model you go for, you'll love it. You'll be transported back to a slower pace of life'

Have a look at every part of it, making sure it hasn't been crudely bodged then skimmed over with a thick layer of underseal. The key areas to check are the main side members, which are made of C-section steel with the upright part of the section on the inside.

Whichever generation of Eight you're inspecting, you'll need to check the rear wheelarches closely as well as the door bottoms, because they're tricky to put right.

While the Series E featured steel door shells, those of earlier cars are ash-framed, which creates an added complication if you're not able to repair timber. It's the same with the rear wheelarches, which were strengthened by ash framing on pre-Series E models.

On Series I and II cars you'll have to check behind and underneath the running boards as well as where they meet the rear wings. While you're at it, look at the brackets that support the front wings. They often corrode, taking the wings with them.

Tourers were constructed around an ash frame, and while the timber can rot badly, it's quite likely

that problems will be localised.

On the Series E, the most important areas to check are the sills, which are usually the first to go. There are no replacement panels available, but fabricating them yourself shouldn't pose much of a problem as they're not complicated. You also need to check the bulkhead is intact, because once water gets into the timber it'll just dissolve.

If you're looking at a saloon, you must ensure the roof isn't leaking. This is especially likely on a Sliding Head edition, particularly if the sunroof's drain holes have been allowed to get blocked. Once a car with a sunroof has started to rot, it's touch and go whether or not it's

worth saving, because repairs are so complicated.

## ENGINES

All versions of the Eight were fitted with a 918cc side-valve engine, which didn't change significantly between the Series I and II cars. However, the Series E was equipped with different pistons and a revised cylinder head to increase the compression ratio (from 5.8:1 to either 6.5:1 or 6.7:1), raising the power output in the process.

From the introduction of the Series E there were shell bearings for the big ends, but before this everything was white-metalled. Despite

this, there's little difference in life expectancy between the various units – if mollycoddled, it's possible to get 45,000 miles between rebuilds.

With hard use this will fall to 30,000 miles – regular oil changes being the key to a long life. Oil swaps should be performed every 2000 miles, as there's no oil filter fitted. It's best to use a monograde lubricant without a detergent additive. Oils that contain detergents just keep any rubbish circulating around the engine, potentially wreaking havoc.

A good sign of a healthy engine is decent oil pressure. Expect to see 60psi on the dial when an early powerplant is cold. This should drop



**PRICE CHECK**  
MINT: £3500-£8000  
AVERAGE: £2000-£3500  
ROUGH: £500-£1200

## Which is which?

**AUG 1934:** Eight Pre-Series introduced, saloon or tourer, two or four seats.

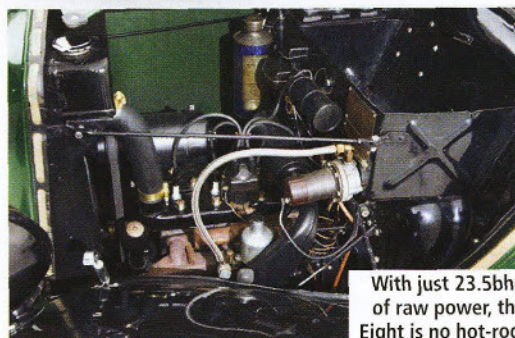
**JUNE 1935:** Series I launched with a wider choice of two-tone paint schemes for the saloons and stronger universal joints for the transmission.

**SEPT 1937:** Series II brings with it Easiclean wheels in place of the previous wire units, a painted radiator cowl and no two-tone paint options for the bodyshell (the wings were always black).

**OCT 1938:** Series E announced, with more power, a four-speed gearbox, faired-in headlamps and no running boards.

**OCT 1945:** Series E post-war production resumes. Rubber bushes fitted to front and rear springs in place of previous grease nipples.

**OCT 1948:** Morris Eight is replaced by the Morris Minor.



With just 23.5bhp of raw power, the Eight is no hot-rod.



You have to live with an upright seating position.



# BUYER Morris Eight Buying Guide

to around 30psi when cruising and up to temperature, although many owners reckon 20psi on the clock is more than enough for the powerplant to keep soldiering on. Expect oil around the engine bay; it's just the timing cover oil seal failing to live up to its name. Renewing it is easy enough, but it is unlikely to remain oil-tight for very long.

Once an engine has lost compression to the degree that it needs a rebuild, there'll be plenty of oil smoke being thrown out of the exhaust as soon as you accelerate. It's cheaper to revive a Series E unit than the earlier ones

because of the shell bearings that are fitted. Expect to pay £700 for a complete rebuild of one of the later engines and £1100 to resuscitate an earlier unit.

## TRANSMISSION

The Series E was fitted with a four-speed manual gearbox. Earlier cars had one ratio less. Although the units are reasonably strong, they eventually wear out. There aren't any new parts available to rebuild these, which

is why owners tend to source a replacement that's less worn, and fit that instead.

By the time gear teeth have been damaged it's time to replace the unit wholesale. But if it's just a question of the synchromesh having worn out you're better off getting the hang of double declutching.

Although none of the gearboxes were equipped with synchromesh on first gear, the Series E's synchro rings are stronger and less likely to give problems. When it comes to trying to source a decent used gearbox, it's possible to fit a Series E unit to an earlier car. Expect to pay no more than £50 for a usable second-hand transmission.

The fabric discs which were fitted in place of universal joints on pre-Series cars have to be made specially and aren't as cheap as Hardy-Spicer couplings at about £35 each.

A worn clutch is nothing to worry about as it uses the same parts as an early Minor.

What's more of a problem is if the back axle needs major attention, which it may well do because the half-shafts are prone to breaking. Some owners carry a spare unit with them. With the right tools it's possible to swap them over by the roadside. Although replacement shafts aren't available new, there's no shortage

of decent used ones. The crownwheel and pinions can also suffer from chipped teeth – and you'll be doing well to find any new replacement parts.

You shouldn't have to look too hard to find serviceable used components through the clubs or at one of the bigger autojumbles.

## STEERING & SUSPENSION

As you'd expect from a car of this age, the Eight's front wheels are steered by a box rather than a rack. It's a cam-and-peg system and it's reasonably effective, but once problems occur it can be tricky putting things right.

New parts aren't available, and while the pegs can be turned through 90 degrees to present a fresh surface to the worm, this can only be done three times before you have to find a new box. Bearings are no longer available and they have to be made specially, which is why it's imperative that you check for tight spots or excessive play.

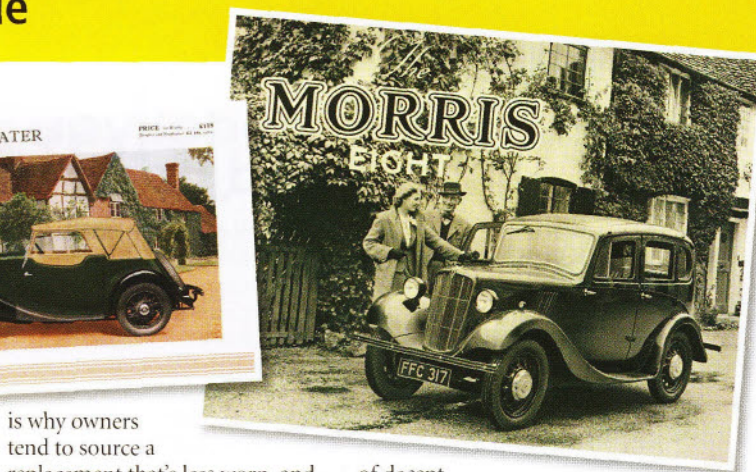
The suspension system couldn't be much simpler, and while



Specs	Series I saloon	Series II tourer	Series E
ENGINE	918cc/4-cyl/SV	918cc/4-cyl/SV	918cc/4-cyl/SV
POWER	23.5bhp@3900rpm	23.5bhp@3900rpm	30bhp@4400rpm
TORQUE	N/A	N/A	N/A
GEARBOX	3-spd manual	3-spd manual	4-spd manual
TOP SPEED	58mph	58mph	65mph
0-50mph	41.9sec	41.9sec	34.9sec
MPG	40	40	40
LENGTH	11ft 10in (3.61m)	11ft 10in (3.61m)	12ft 0in (3.66m)
WIDTH	4ft 6in (1.37m)	4ft 6in (1.37m)	4ft 8in (1.42m)
WEIGHT	1595lb (725kg)	1485lb (675kg)	1735lb (787kg)

## SPOT THE GROT

1. The underside needs close inspection, especially the chassis, behind the running boards or sills.
2. If there's masses of play in the steering box, only so much adjustment is possible before a decent used unit has to be found.
3. There are various wear points in the front suspension, particularly the kingpins. Look for greasing.





**'Very few new parts are made...'**



**'...but you can get used components through the clubs'**

it's pretty crude, it also works surprisingly well.

There are semi-elliptic springs all round, and the shackle pins at each end of these will eventually wear to the point where they become stepped, while the shackle plate holes become oval.

The holes will have to be welded up and redrilled. The suspension also incorporates lever arm dampers which will eventually spring a leak – so

look for signs of fluid escaping. Replacements are readily available and cost £70 each.

There are kingpins at the heart of the front suspension, and these changed in design over the years. Pre-Series and early Series I cars have a less durable design with bronze bushes, while later models featured rolled bushes.

All cars should have been greased every 500 miles. Whichever type is fitted you'll

need to check for excessive vertical and horizontal play, ideally with a crowbar. If replacements are needed you should expect to pay £65-85 per side for the parts to put everything right.

#### **WHEELS & BRAKES**

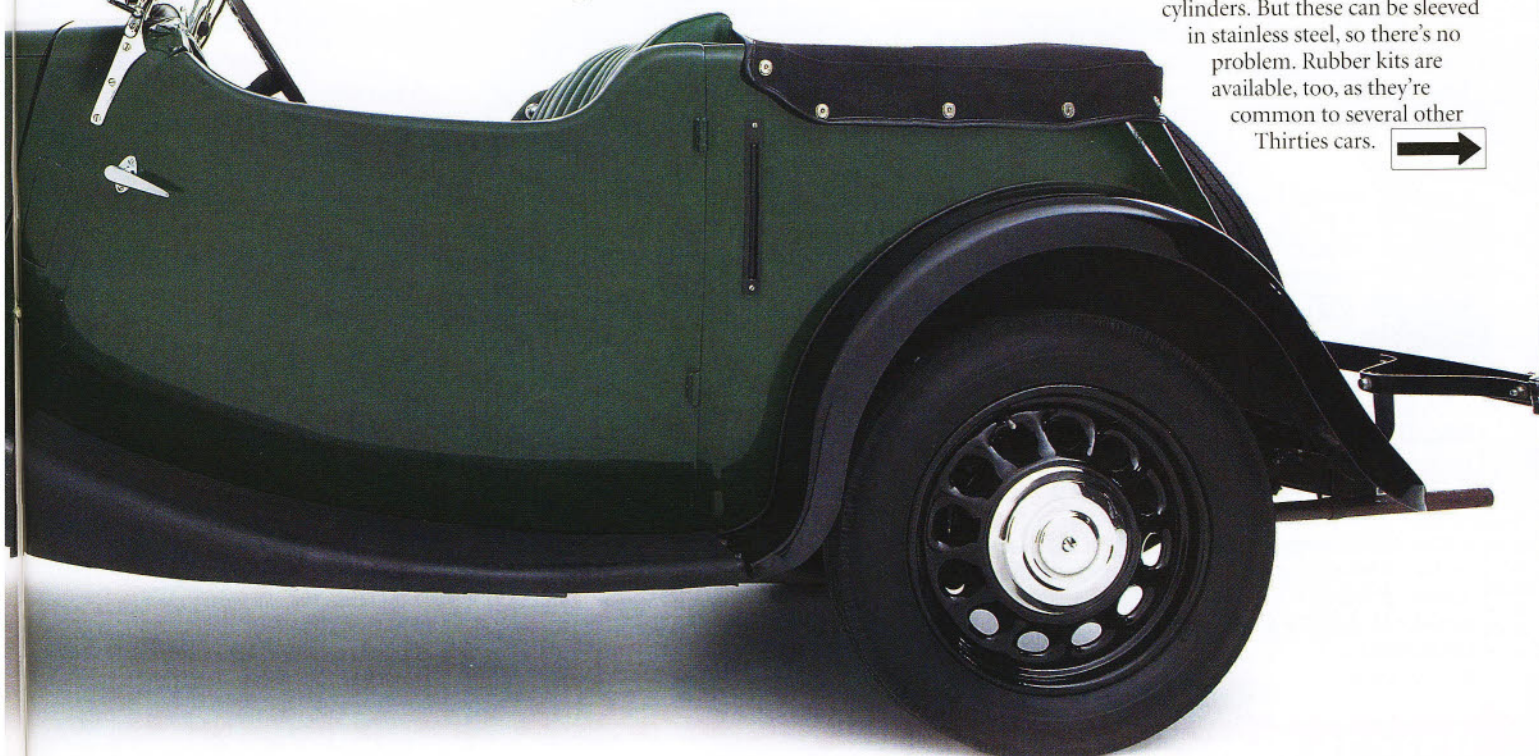
Until the Series II arrived in 1937, the Eight was equipped with wire wheels; later cars featured cast-iron wheels with rounded spokes. These carry the Facislean tag and are interchangeable between the various models.

Unusually for a Thirties economy car, the Eight was fitted with hydraulic brakes all round,

and the system is generally reliable. You do have to check for axle oil having leaked on to the rear linings. The secret is to glue the cork axle seals into place, run the diff below the maximum level and ensure SAE 140 is used – it doesn't leak so readily.

The braking system is simple too, so it's fairly easy to keep in fine fettle. You just need to check for fluid leaks from the various pipes and unions.

All the different generations of Eights were fitted with the same braking system and everything is available to overhaul it – with the exception of slave and master cylinders. But these can be sleeved in stainless steel, so there's no problem. Rubber kits are available, too, as they're common to several other Thirties cars. →





# BUYER Morris Eight

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## TRIM

There's little in the way of exterior brightwork on the Eight, and the interior is simply trimmed. However, you'll need to check that the seats and panels aren't split or torn because nobody is currently offering any replacement trim. On the plus side, any competent trimmer will be able to sort out a tired Eight's cabin.

## ELECTRICS

It's hard to be confused by an Eight's wiring diagram because it's so featureless. There's a Lucas six-volt system installed in all models and by now any car you look at will probably have had a new loom fitted – and possibly a 12-volt

conversion. Everything is available to revive an Eight's electrical system, although you might have to do some hunting to find a decent specialist for some parts – Bernard Bryant is your best bet.

## VERDICT

It's easy to dismiss the Eight as just another impractical pre-war car. The fact is that, while it may not be cut out for everyday use, the Eight is much more practical – and far less fragile – than you might think.

All the models have charm, but it's the

Series E that's the most usable with its slightly higher cruising speed and extra gear ratio.

The key to keeping any classic going is decent parts availability and reliable technical support. The Eight has both of these, with the excellent Morris Register and its members able to help with just about anything.

There are some great parts suppliers who know their stuff and keep almost everything you're ever likely to need. But the best bit is the pricing; even the nicest Eights are eminently affordable – you just need to wait until one comes up for sale.

You'll find the wait is worth your while.

STOP

## Owner's view

Rob Symonds owns the Series II two-seater photographed – he's had it since 1969. After all these years Rob hasn't tired of it: 'I love driving the Eight, because you have to adjust your frame of mind so you're living life in the slow lane. But the car is amazingly usable as it's very tough – and that's despite keeping mine as original as possible,

right down to the semaphores rather than flashers. I won't ever part with it – I reckon I'll be buried in it!'

Having restored his example from a basket case, Rob follows Eight issues closely. He told us: 'It's the good examples everyone wants because of the high costs of restoration. But good survival rates means supply has just about kept up with demand. Values are steady.'



'All of the Eights have charm'

## NEED TO KNOW

### PRACTICAL CLASSIC?

As a toy, most definitely – although not for regular long-distance journeys. But it is very easy to maintain.

### THANKS TO

Rob Symonds, owner of the car photographed.

### HOTLINKS

- [http://members.lycos.co.uk/morris\\_garages/](http://members.lycos.co.uk/morris_garages/)
- <http://morris8cars.110mb.com>
- [www.rwscars.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.rwscars.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)

### WHAT ARE THEY LIKE TO DRIVE?

Sedate, but they feel surprisingly modern thanks to hydraulic brakes and (on later cars) a four-speed gearbox.

### WILL I FIT BEHIND THE WHEEL?

Yes, but seat adjustment on the two-seaters is a pain – you have to move the whole bench seat. There's not much width and it's a very upright seating position – while rear seat space is best described as very tight.

### WHAT KEY FAULTS SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

- Rotten chassis

- Worn engine
- Worn shackles
- Broken leaf springs
- Play in steering box

### WHAT SHOULD I PAY?

Series I and II cars are worth the same, with the Series E being less valuable. Open cars are more valuable than closed ones but there's no difference in prices between two- and four-seaters. That means a Series saloon is the cheapest of the lot at about £1800 for a reasonable runner, while an equivalent Series I or II tourer is more like £4000 – a mint example of the latter could cost up to £8000 from a dealer.

### WHAT WILL INSURANCE COST?

Comprehensive cover for a £5000 1937 Morris Eight Series II Tourer in Peterborough:

- £303 for 25-year-old, two years' no claims, clean licence, 5000 miles, second car, kept on driveway, club member.
- £89.25 for 42-year-old, full no claims, clean licence, 3000 miles,

second car, garaged, club member.

Quotes from Firebond (08704 440 556)

### WHO ARE THE SPECIALISTS?

- Bernard Bryant (electrical parts), Worcester (01299 269 305, [www.classic-spares-electrical.com](http://www.classic-spares-electrical.com))
- Cooke Group, Leicester (0116 2881234)
- MoClub, Wigan (01942 498816)
- Morris 8 Parts Centre, Middlesex, (0208 573 7008)
- Morris Parts, London (0208 9477247, [www.spares-group.co.uk](http://www.spares-group.co.uk))
- Tony Etheridge (tyres), Hertfordshire (01923 231699)
- Wyvern Auto Supplies, Shropshire (01691 772661)
- Yesterday's Components, Essex (01277 840697)

### WHAT ABOUT SPARES PRICES?

- Exhaust (stainless) £180
- Exhaust (mild) £100
- Wing (front) £220

- Wing (rear) £150
- Bumper (used) £25
- Dampers £70 exch
- Clutch kit £125
- Starter motor £30 exch

### ARE ANY PARTS HARD TO GET?

- Tourer windscreens
- Two-seater bench seats

### CAN THEY COPE WITH UNLEADED?

The jury is out so it's best to use an additive. Hardened valve seats can be fitted, but remember it's a side-valve engine so they go in the block rather than the head.

### WHERE ARE THE IDENTIFYING MARKS?

There's a chassis plate screwed to the nearside bulkhead.

### WHICH OWNERS' CLUB SHOULD I JOIN?

- The Morris Register (0207 383 0467, [www.morrisregister.co.uk](http://www.morrisregister.co.uk))

### WHICH ARE THE BEST BOOKS?

- The Morris Eight Information Manual by Harry Edwards (ISBN X-13-0000018).
- The Book of the Morris Eight & Morris Minor by Pitmans. Try eBay.

To search for other PC buying guides and to buy reprints, go to [www.practicalclassics.co.uk](http://www.practicalclassics.co.uk) and look under 'practical reference'