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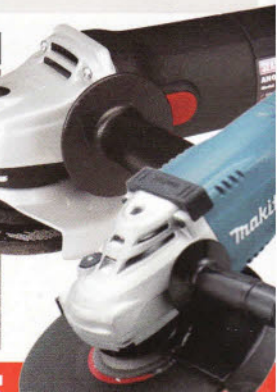


BUMP & GRIND — SEVEN OF THE BEST POWER TOOLS

# LIFE'S GREAT WITH AN EIGHT

Pre-war cars are usually seen as completely unsuited to modern traffic conditions, but there are exceptions – such as the Morris Eight

**Photos: Magic Car Pics**
(www.magiccarpics.co.uk)

Okay, so you wouldn't want to commute long distances every day in one, but if you're looking for something with great charm that you can use regularly, you'll have to make surprisingly few adjustments to adapt to the Morris Eight. 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 year after year. 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 didn't hold back on its specification, with the car being more nicely finished than any of its rivals.

The first Eight, known as the Pre-Series, arrived in 1934. Looking much like the car photographed here, it was followed up by the barely changed Series I just a year later. The Series II (as shown here) debuted 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 examples were built between 1946 and 1948, when it was replaced by the Minor.

There's little to choose between the Series I and the Series II, with 221,500 examples built across all derivatives. Less cute but more usable is the Series E, 120,434 examples of which were produced. Whichever one you go for, 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 only offered in saloon guise. However, to make up for the fact that there was no tourer, Morris offered a full-length sunroof and badged


## EVOLUTION

■ **8/1934:** Eight Pre-Series introduced, in saloon or tourer forms; each bodystyle offering a choice of two or four seats.

■ **6/1935:** Series I launched with a wider choice of two-tone paint schemes for the saloons and stronger universal joints for the transmission.

■ **9/1937:** 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).

■ **10/1938:** Series E announced, with more power, a four-speed gearbox, faired-in headlamps and a lack of running boards.

■ **10/1945:** Series E post-war production resumes with rubber bushes fitted at the back of the front and rear springs in place of the previous grease nipples.

■ **10/1948:** Eight is superseded by the Minor.

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.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

### Bodywork

The Eight's construction is primitive with 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. While repairs to rotten timber are a specialist job, chassis rot is easy to fix with basic welding and fabricating skills. Whichever type of Eight you're looking at, you 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. 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 analyse the rear wheelarches closely as well as the door bottoms because they're a tricky area 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.

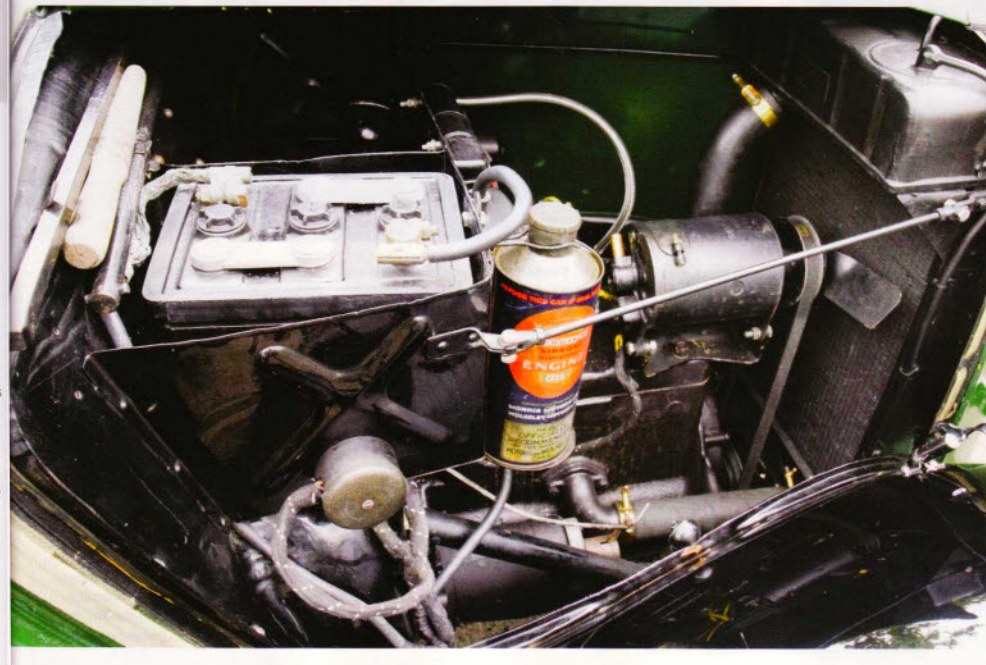
On Series I and II cars, you'll have to check behind and underneath the running boards as well as where they meet the rear wings. While you're at it, look at the brackets that support the front wings; they often corrode, taking the wings with them.

Tourers were constructed around an ash frame, and while the timber can rot badly, it's likely that any 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 that the bulkhead is intact, because once water gets into the timber it'll just dissolve. If you're looking at a saloon, you'll need to ensure that 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 involved.

### Mechanicals

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, with 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 in. Oils that contain detergents just keep any rubbish circulating around the engine, potentially wreaking havoc in the process.

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 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 just 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 don't expect it to remain oil-tight for long. Once an engine has lost compression to the degree that it needs a ▸



## VALUES

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 around £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.

## SPECIFICATIONS

| MORRIS EIGHT SERIES I SALOON | |
|---|---|
| Engine | 918cc/4-cyl |
| Power (bhp/rpm) | 23.5/3900 |
| Torque (lb ft@rpm) | n/a |
| Top speed | 58mph |
| 0-50mph | 41.9 sec |
| Consumption | 40mpg |
| Gearbox | 3-speed manual |
| Length | 11ft 10in (3.61m) |
| Width | 4ft 6in (1.37m) |
| Weight | 1595lb (725kg) |

| MORRIS EIGHT SERIES II TOURER | |
|---|---|
| Engine | 918cc/4-cyl |
| Power (bhp/rpm) | 23.5/3900 |
| Torque (lb ft@rpm) | n/a |
| Top speed | 58mph |
| 0-50mph | 41.9 sec |
| Consumption | 40mpg |
| Gearbox | 3-speed manual |
| Length | 11ft 10in (3.61m) |
| Width | 4ft 6in (1.37m) |
| Weight | 1485lb (675kg) |

| MORRIS EIGHT SERIES E | |
|---|---|
| Engine | 918cc/4-cyl |
| Power (bhp/rpm) | 30/4400 |
| Torque (lb ft@rpm) | n/a |
| Top speed | 65mph |
| 0-50mph | 34.9 sec |
| Consumption | 40mpg |
| Gearbox | 4-speed manual |
| Length | 12ft 0in (3.66m) |
| Width | 4ft 8in (1.42m) |
| Weight | 1735lb (787kg) |

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 one of the earlier units.

The Series E was fitted with a four-speed manual gearbox, with earlier cars featuring one ratio less. Although the units are reasonably strong, they eventually wear out. There aren't any new parts available to rebuild these units, which is why owners tend to source a replacement unit 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 then 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 around £35 each. A worn clutch is nothing to worry about as it uses the same parts as an early Morris 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 even 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 to go round.

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 though, through the clubs or at a decent autojumble.

As you'd expect, 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. Similarly, 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 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 it becomes stepped, while the shackle plate holes become oval – at this point the holes 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 available at £70 each.

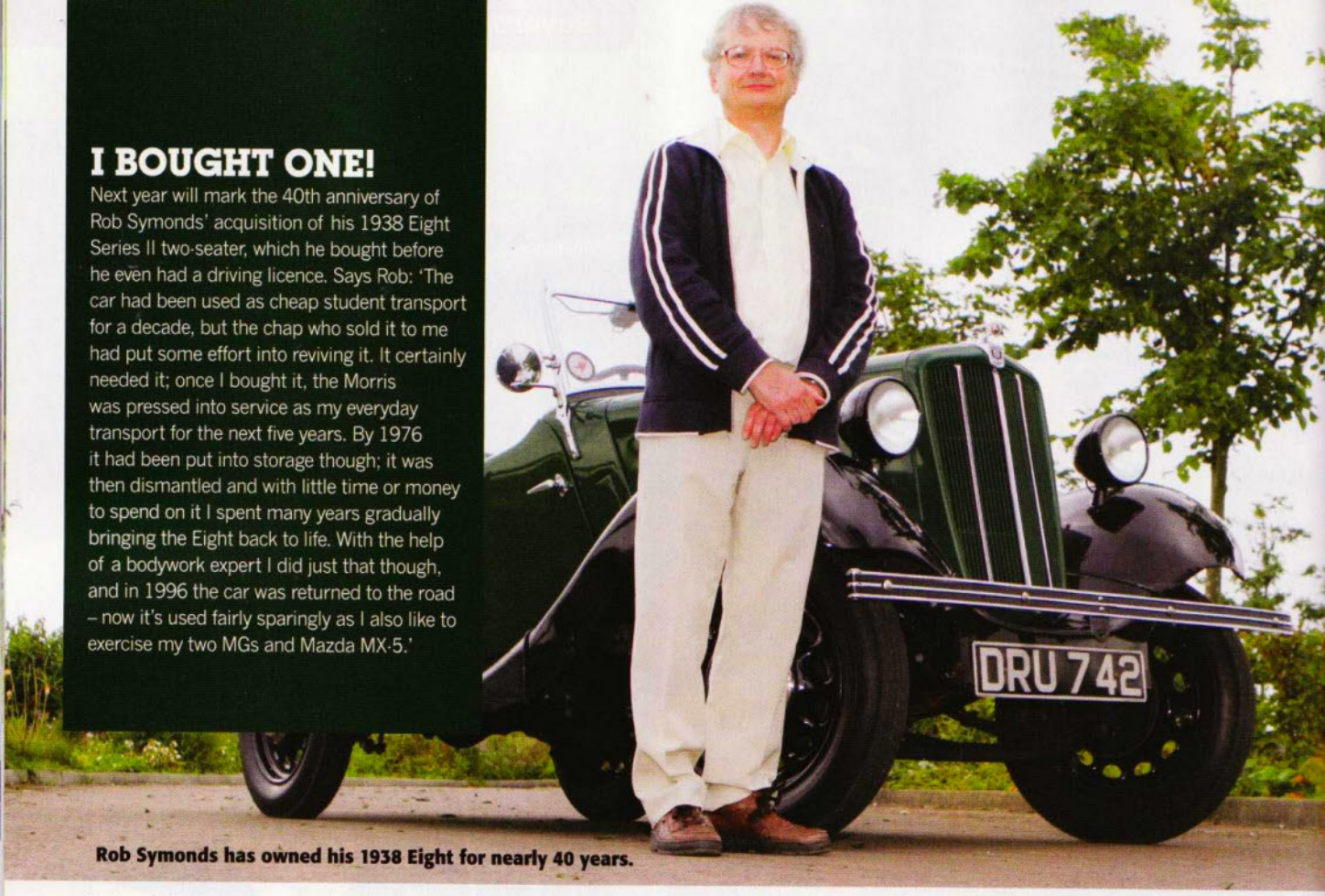
There are king pins at the heart of the front suspension, and these changed in design over the years. Pre-Series and early Series I cars have a less durable design with bronze bushes, while later models featured rolled bushes; all cars should have been greased every 500 miles. Whichever type is fitted 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.

Until the Series II arrived in 1937, the Eight was equipped with wire wheels; later cars featured cast iron wheels with rounded spokes, which carry the Easiclean tag. The wheels are interchangeable between the various models, but cars tend to be kept standard.

Unusually for a 1930s economy car, the Eight was fitted with hydraulic brakes all round, and the system is generally reliable, although you have to check for axle oil ▸

## I BOUGHT ONE!

Next year will mark the 40th anniversary of Rob Symonds' acquisition of his 1938 Eight Series II two-seater, which he bought before he even had a driving licence. Says Rob: 'The car had been used as cheap student transport for a decade, but the chap who sold it to me had put some effort into reviving it. It certainly needed it; once I bought it, the Morris was pressed into service as my everyday transport for the next five years. By 1976 it had been put into storage though; it was then dismantled and with little time or money to spend on it I spent many years gradually bringing the Eight back to life. With the help of a bodywork expert I did just that though, and in 1996 the car was returned to the road – now it's used fairly sparingly as I also like to exercise my two MGs and Mazda MX-5.'




**Rob Symonds has owned his 1938 Eight for nearly 40 years.**

having leaked onto 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 as it doesn't leak so readily.

The braking system is simple too, so it's easy to keep in fine fettle – just check for fluid leaks from the various pipes and unions. All the different generations of Eight were fitted with the same braking system and everything is available to overhaul it – with the exception of slave and master cylinders. However, cylinders can be sleeved in stainless steel, so ultimately there's no problem. Rubber kits are available, though, as they're common to several other 1930s and 1940s cars.

### Electrics and trim

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 (see specialists list).

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

### Worthwhile upgrades

If there's one area of modifying from which the early Eights can really benefit, it's with the gearbox. The early three-speed transmissions don't really have enough ratios to make best use of the sidevalve engine's rather meagre power, which is why some owners fit the later Series E four-speed transmission. It goes in without any problems, but the propshaft needs to be modified to make it fit.

The shock absorbers of the Series I and II cars are also rather ineffective, which is why some owners prefer to fit the lever arm dampers of the Series E – or some go the whole hog and fit telescopic units. Either way, various mounting brackets need to be made up to allow the modifications, but the job is an easy one.

The six-volt electrical system can also cause problems, but it's usually because of a poor engine earth. A direct earth between engine and battery is the neatest solution, but some owners convert to 12 volts – a move which isn't necessary, as long as the rest of the system is in good condition. ■

## FACTFILE

**BOOKS**

- *The Morris Eight Information Manual* by Harry Edwards. ISBN X-13-0000018

**CLUBS**

- The Morris Register, 0207 383 0467, www.morrisregister.co.uk

**WEBSITES**

- www.rwscars.net

**SPECIALISTS**

- Bernard Bryant (electrical parts), Worcs. 01299 269 305 www.classic-spares-electrical.com
- Cooke Group, Leicester. 0116 288 1234
- MoClub, Wigan. 01942 498 816
- Morris 8 Parts Centre, Middlesex. 0208 573 7008
- Tony Etheridge (tyres), Herts. 01923 231 699
- Wyvern Auto Supplies, Shropshire. 01691 772 661
- Yesterday's Components, Essex. 01277 840 697

**RUNNING ON UNLEADED**

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

**THANKS TO**

Rob Symonds, owner of the car pictured and Midlands secretary of the Morris Register