Radiator Hoses, Oil Issues Again! Nov 2012

I write this the evening we returned home from our fall tour. We all had a great time in Chattanooga. Before the trip was a different situation. I had a few come by the shop with minor problems. One that “learned” me something new was a split lower radiator hose on a 1979 MGB. These hoses have a small appendage “T” off the side designed to create leaks and they are very good at that. Some will say they should have had a new Kevlar hose, it was. It was put on the car last year and had less than 2,000 miles on it. So much for Kevlar. The problem was that the car was in south Ga. Where there were no lower MGB hoses around. And it went bad the day before they were leaving home to come to Atlanta for the tour. And it was the spare that had been in the trunk, like I suggest you carry. There was almost no way to get him a new hose but I remember seeing a special tape advertised for just this purpose. I went on line and found the tape. It is called “self-sealing silicone tape” and is sold in most auto part stores and hardware stores. It costs about $8.00 a roll and we all should carry it. He cleaned the hose, wrapped it like a sprained ankle with and ace bandage and the leak was stopped. It worked so well, that we could not peel it off when we replaced the hose. I want to thank Tom George for loaning us a new hose from his trunk. His replacement is on the way. Again, I say; if it is a unique item to your car and it has a history of going bad, carry a spare. And to complete that statement, when you use the spare, replace it! We have not gotten in our entire inventory but will make sure we have these hoses in stock.

Now I have to come up with something else to write about. Hmmmm! How about oil consumption; we have seen a lot of this lately and most are simple to cure. The most obvious consumption cause is leaks. To find where yours is, unless it is very visible, spend a few dollars at the quarter car wash and wash your engine top and bottom. On the drive home, you will create a new oil trail and should be able to see where it originates. If you have an MG, make sure you wash off behind the exhaust manifold to clean the side cover area. Oil travels from top downward, not upwards. And it travels from the front to the back. Follow the trail forward and upward and you should find the leak. On all of our cars, there are similar locations where they will leak. Valve covers are easy to spot. MGs and Healeys have rubber grommets that seal the studs that hold the covers down and these do get very hard and brittle. They break off underneath the cover and leave little bits of rubber on the valve train. Replace them the next time you have the valve cover off. Also make sure the bolts pull the cover down snuggly enough to seal the gasket to the head.

Triumphs use little paper washers under the nuts holding the cover down. These can be made from the left over gaskets we all have laying around. Cut the bolt holes out from the gaskets and they fit fine. I use two per stud. The valve cover, stock ones, is pretty thin stamped steel and should not be over tightened. To seal the gaskets to the covers, I use yellow 3m weather strip adhesive on the gasket to the cover and grease on the gasket to the head which allows me to reuse the gasket for several valve adjustments. Triumph engines can fool you a little on oil pan leaks from the front. They have an aluminum sealing block (ironic name) that is sealed to the block with little wood wedges. When you have a leak and it looks like the oil pan gasket it may not be. However, all can be fixed without pulling the engine. Some Triumph engines, TR250-6, GT6 and Spitfire, can even have the rear seal repaired without pulling the engine.

Side cover gaskets on the MGs and Healeys can also be installed with yellow 3m into the covers. On MGs, it is a pain to replace the side cover gaskets, so you should pull the carbs off to make it

easier. Front crank seals and pan gaskets are harder to repair but can be done without pulling most engines.

For most other old British cars, repairing rear crank seals is major surgery. The engine must come out and some machine work may be required. Luckily, our transmissions have a drain hole in the bell-housing to allow any oil leaking in it to leak out and let you know there is an oil leak. You should check and make sure your drain hole is not clogged by inserting a small pointed object like a little stick into the hole. MGBs have a little bent cotter pin, called a jiggle pin, to rattle around in the hole and keep it clear. A rear crank seal leak should not harm your clutch. The oil would have to accumulate in the bell-housing quite high before it reaches the clutch assembly.

While on the subject of oil leaks, let's look at some of the causes. We all know about Gaskets -- once they get saturated with oil, it can be hard to get them to stop leaking as oil will wick out thru them and tightening them only squeezes them out of position. This action is one of the biggest causes of TR7 & 8 5 speed transmissions failures! Seals do get hard from age, heat, and chemicals in the engine. They sell oil treatments that claim to re-store seals but all they do is soften the rubber and this very seldom works. They contain chemicals that would dissolve the rubber in higher concentrations. Don't bother with them. It is a waste of time and money. Old, dirty oil can get between the seal and the shaft it is supposed to be sealing and act as a liquid cutting solution. The grit in the oil will cut/wear a groove in the shaft. This causes a reduction in pressure of the seal and a leak results.
Now, imagine if you would, an engine that has worn rings and gets a little blow-by. This causes internal pressure and forces oil out the loose seal. One thing that helps here is making sure all block vents are free and clear. This will help reduce internal pressure. Besides leaks, engines can lose oil thru consumption. Worn rings will use oil as will worn valve guides, stems and/or seals. These require a more intensive repair but you can diagnose your problem. Ride behind your car with someone else driving it and watch the exhaust pipe. If you see blue smoke, it is burning oil. If you see the smoke when they accelerate, it is rings and if you see the smoke when they back off like between shifts, it is valve related. The only thing that can be easily repaired here is valve guide seals, which our cars really do not have. The little "O" ring on the MGs and Healeys are not really valve guide seals. They are there to stop oil from running down the between valve stem and guide after you shut off the engine and they do a poor job of that. Using different types of oil will not stop oil consumption, nor will additives - nothing will. All cars will eventually lose oil as long as it is used for lubrication. When engines are made from ceramics and plastics, and oil is eliminated, then we will not have consumption problems. I always suggest that you consider the cost of repairs as opposed to the cost of the oil you could lose. You also need to keep in mind what would happen if you forget to check the oil level and let the engine run low. Most of the time, it is worth fixing the leaks such as valve cover and side covers. But, more intensive repairs may not be cost effective until something else goes wrong and makes the repairs worthy.

If your engine is running well and you are not fouling the plugs, then you could delay replacing the valves or guides until it does cause a problem. Just keep an eye on the oil level and use some kitty litter on the floor.

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