

GET YOUR CARB INTAKE CORRECT IF YOU WANT TO RUN WELL!

My 1972 MGB has always run very well, until I took it out on a dry day this February when it was idling roughly and hesitating when accelerating. More worryingly I could also smell what seemed like hot plastic! – was the wiring loom about to catch fire? When I got back home, I was relieved to find the hot plastic smell was just a supermarket plastic bag, which had got itself wrapped around the front exhaust downpipe, where it had melted and become a congealed mess.

The poor running was more difficult to track down. I tried all the usual checks, such as compression pressures, power at ignition coil, oil in dashpots etc.) to no avail, so decided to take the distributor out to check it (having first set No 1 piston at TDC).

The previous owner had fitted the distributor with an Accuspark electronic Hall effect module in place of points and condenser. I didn't believe that this electronic module was the cause of my trouble because I understand that normally they either work fine, or fail completely. They are relatively cheap (less than £30) so I carry a spare in the glovebox. The rest of the distributor looked as if it had seen better days, and it was probably original to the car, and so more than 40yrs old, so I decided to get an exchange reconditioned one from MGOC. This reconditioned unit was slightly more expensive than the cost of a new Chinese Lucas distributor, but I wanted to stay with original equipment where possible.

The reconditioned distributor came with points and condenser fitted, so I swapped these for the Accuspark module before I installed it. I had a bit of trouble fitting the new distributor into the drive socket on the side of the engine. It wouldn't go in far enough to seat properly, and I was beginning to wonder if they'd sent me the wrong distributor, or if the shaft was oversize. By chance I rotated the distributor through 180 degrees and it dropped in nicely, although now the timing was now out.

On examining the new distributor and comparing it with my old one, which fortunately I had not yet sent off in exchange, I found that the offset key on the new driveshaft was 180 out of phase compared to the old one. I believe some classic British cars had the key in this arrangement, so this reconditioned distributor, although it was the correct model, probably came off something other than an MG. I managed to take off the end fitting after drifting out the locating pin, and turn it through 180degrees, so the key was now on the correct side and distributor now fitted, with the timing correct.

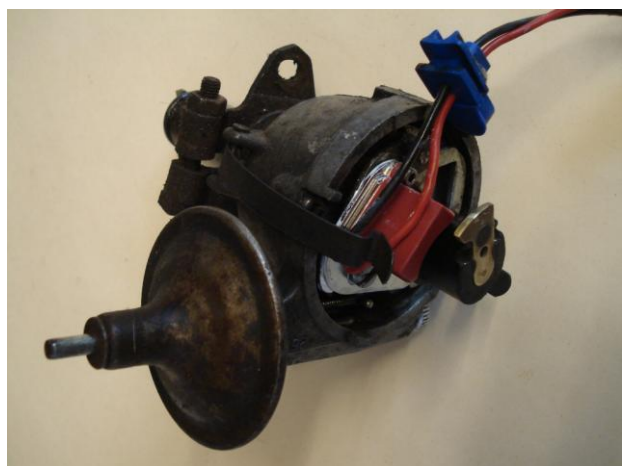


Fig 1. Original distributor with Accuspark module fitted

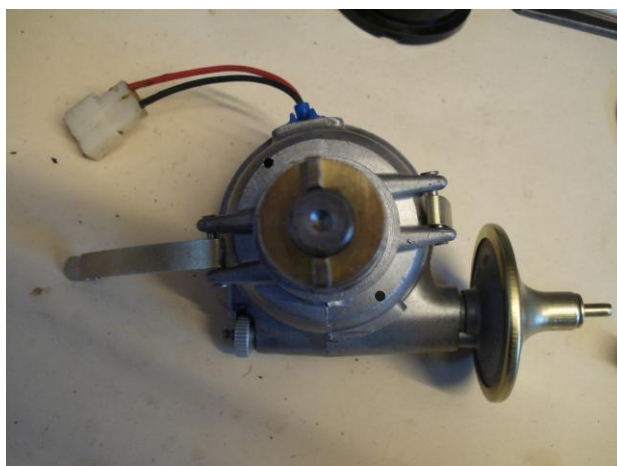


Fig 2. Base of new distributor showing offset drive key

My next job was to fit new spark plugs. Although the old ones looked in good shape I found that three were Champions and one was an NGK, which was a bit odd.

Next I decided to strip the carburettors to check if they were OK. The outsides were pretty grubby, but internally they were very clean and it looked as if new jets, jet housings, floats and float valves had been fitted recently by the previous owner. Never the less I cleaned the carbs internally and externally (incidentally, I found that Toolstation's carb cleaner is much cheaper than most suppliers).

One problem I did find was wear in the throttle shafts, where they go through the carburettor bodies. There was detectable play in the shafts when they were moved up and down by hand. I understand that this can cause air leaks into the carbs along the shafts, making setting a consistent idle difficult. When they were taken out of the carbs I found that there was a wear groove at the end of each shaft. The usual two options when this happens are either to fit oversize throttle shafts after drilling out and reaming the carb bodies, or to use new standard size shafts and fit bushes in the carb bodies, which also need reaming to size.

I was considering these two options when I came across some throttle shafts on e bay, which were new SU Burlen manganese bronze replacement shafts which had been modified to include a small O ring at each end (see photo). It is claimed these O rings will accommodate small amounts of wear in the carb bodies without the need for drilling and reaming. I thought they were worth a try, although I had, and still have, some concerns about the lifespan of the O rings. These were not alleviated when the new spindles came with spare O rings, suggesting they may only have a limited life! So far I've done a couple of hundred miles without problem, but I'll let you know how what they are like after a few thousand miles.



Fig 3. Old throttle shaft and new one with O rings

I fitted the new throttle shafts, put the carbs back on the car and then set the timing with a strobe light, balanced the carbs, and set the mixtures with a Gunson's Colourtune. I was relieved to find that the car now ran perfectly. By the way, am I unique in finding that using the lifting pins on the carb bodies to set the mixture is very subjective? – I think you are supposed to notice a change in engine speed when lifting the pins by about 1/32 inch, but I can't really tell much difference until I lift them so much that the engine starts to stall.

In conclusion, I'm not sure if it was the new distributor, the new spark plugs, or the new throttle shafts that cured the poor running, but I'm happy anyway!

PS Following my rant a few months ago about the pathetic windscreen wipers on my B, Jim Graham suggested taking the rubber blades out of Poundland replacement wiper blades and fitting them to my original Tex stainless steel wiper arms. The Poundland blades are, not surprisingly, only a £1! As such I suppose they make them a bit thinner to save material, but this also makes them more flexible so they seem to follow the profile of the windscreen better. It is a bit of a fiddle to dismantle the blades, cut the rubbers down to length, and fit them to the Tex arms, but the result has been a dramatic improvement in performance. So, a combination of Rain X, Poundland blades, and a single wipe switch has made life much more bearable – thanks Jim!

Kevin Prosser