

## Why Won't My MGA Start and Run?

Jim Guyot, a longtime BSMGAC member has an MGA 1500 which had leaking carburetor jets. He bought a set of "Super Dry" jet assemblies from Moss Motors and installed them. The carbs are not leaking anymore, but he could get the car to start but not stay running at idle. He asked me for some help, so, on Friday, October 9, 2026 I drove up to Haverhill, MA with some tools to help him out. I first suspected that the jet seats were not adjusted correctly or that the jets were sticking down when the choke was removed and it was running too rich. So, the first thing I did was to push up on the bottom of the jet seat and yes, it was stuck down just a tiny bit. Now I removed the dashpot and checked the depth of the needle seat per Don Tremblay's method with a dial caliper. I found that the needle seat was at about .034". Don recommends to start at .070" which is about 12 flats for the adjusting nut. I adjusted both carbs to .074" (the MGA likes to run a little rich with today's fuels). As I recall, Don says that each flat is .060", so, that would be .072" which is about right!

Now, the "moment of truth", will it start and run? Jim pulled out the choke and tried to start it, but it refused to start. I then suspected that there may be an issue with the ignition from sitting, so, I removed the distributor cap and it looked OK on the contacts. I cleaned the rotor tip and checked the point gap. The point gap was too small, so, I filed the points and re-gapped the points. I noticed a lot of movement of the plate that holds the points while I was adjusting them and found that the vacuum advance rod was not connected to the plate! Thus the timing was moving all over the place. So, I reconnected the vacuum advance and put a little grease on the cam for the points and also put a couple drops of oil in the top of the shaft under the rotor to keep it lubricated so that the mechanical advance could do its thing.

Jim got back in the car and tried to start it. It started up! I had to adjust the fast idle screw to keep it running, but it stayed running, but sadly, not running smoothly. Jim had an ancient timing light from his dad that had the same shape and type of plastic as one of those old Sunbeam hair cut tools! But, I hooked it up and checked the timing (unfortunately the timing marks are of the original kind under the front of the engine, so, I had to lay on the ground to check it. It was way too far advanced! So, we shut it down and I loosened the 1/4" clamp (7/16" wrench) for the distributor and was able to get it to move. I adjusted it to 10 degrees Before Top Dead Center (modern fuels like a little more advance) and we started it up again. (An aside: the timing should be properly adjusted by disconnecting the vacuum advance and running the engine at about 3200 RPM and adjust the timing to 32 degrees BTDC, but we can do that later).

Now the engine was running, but still not well and there was a lot of clattering going on under the rocker cover. We shut her down again. I decided to check the valve clearance and removed the cover. I use the "Rule of Nine" method for checking the valve clearance. This means looking for the valve that is open all the way and then checking the clearance (valve lash) of the valve that is closed. So, if number 2 valve is open measure number 7, and so on. What I noticed though was that more than one valve looked partway down. Usually there will be one down all the way and another starting down, but in this case there were 4 valves partway open (down). I went through the valves that were moving properly but found numbers 4 and 5 sticking down. I was able to pop them back up but number 5 was very stiff to pull up and number 4 still would consistently stick as well. This is what was causing all the clattering - the push rods were just rattling around in their slots and being bounced around by the cam as there was not tension on them! So, the head needs to come off and at least a light valve job (cleaning the valve stems and lapping the valve seats and replacing the valve guide seals) needs to be done. This is more than I was prepared to do that day, so, Jim will see about getting it done in the spring of next year.

Another thing I noticed while fiddling with the distributor was that there was a drip of antifreeze on the top of the vacuum advance which tells me the heater valve is leaking, so, needs to be replaced. Also I noticed antifreeze weeping from the center freeze (welch) plug in the block, so, this will also need to be addressed in the spring. Jim says that his MGA has had not attention for about 3 years, so, let this be a lesson to the wise to drive your cars as often as you can to keep everything moving as it should! Sorry Jim, I just had to say it! Jim and I did have a good time other just hanging out working on his car. It is always good to get together with other club members. We also took a look at the brakes on his MGB as he had replaced the master cylinder and was having trouble bleeding the brakes. Normally one starts bleeding at the left rear of an MG (the bleeder farthest from the MC, but in this case he was not getting anything out, so, suspected the rear flexible brake hose. We bled the front calipers and these worked fine, so, he has some brakes for moving the car around, but the rear hose is definitely clogged (probably original to the car (as 1979 or '80). Because of the way the bracket holds the pipes I think we are going to have to cut the flex line close to the bracket and use a socket as there is just not enough room to operate a wrench or crow's foot on the flex line end. This also will have to wait until next year.

Thus ends this story of troubleshooting several problems on two MGs. All these are easily resolved, but they will take quite a bit of time (at least for the MGA) and that will have to wait until next year when Jim and Ellie return from Florida. Have a safe trip, enjoy Florida, and see you next year!