

Rufus Gets A New Heater - Part 1.

Introduction:

I had decided that I didn't want an original MGB heater on Muffin my first TA. The main reason was that the large mounting hole for the heater is on a horizontal plane and I could see where inadequate sealing round the base had allowed vast amounts of water to enter the car. The second reason was that I thought it took up too much under-bonnet bulkhead space; third it immediately identified Muffin's MGB origins. I like my cars to be a bit mysterious! For that same reason Rufus will not have an aluminium rocker cover bearing the letters 'MG' either. Of course any MGB enthusiast would immediately identify his origins by the front suspension subframe, but as for the uninitiated..... A few weeks ago a bunch of schoolboys were walking on the other side of the road and one walked over and asked what type of car Emma was; I replied an NG TD. He shouted across to his mates and said I told you it was an 'MG'! Sometimes we hear what we want to hear!

On stripping out the interior of Rufus I was not impressed with the original heater, which is shown in the photo below.



Yes it's the original heater exactly as purchased.

Choosing a replacement heater:

With the decision made not to use the MGB heater my thoughts turned to a suitable alternative and in the back of my mind was an early (fifties?) self contained round-ish-shaped Smiths heater, the one with two semi-circular hot air outlet doors at the front. During visits to Beaulieu Auto-Jumble in 2021/2 the only ones I saw were typical Autojumble; e.g. they appeared to have shared boxes with assorted pointy objects on several occasions over many miles, in other words they were well worn and bearing their share of dents and rust. From memory the cheapest one was circa £70 without doors, a sum that was probably worth paying (in desperation) towards the end/completion of a restoration, but not at the beginning.

Postscript:

In the good old days (fifties and sixties) not many cars had heaters and my own memory is that the British car industry was shamed into fitting them by the arrival into the country of Japanese cars that had heaters and radios fitted as standard. Even early luxury cars, such as Jaguars and Rovers never had a purpose designed heater and the self contained Smiths heater was often fitted.

Note.

'Staffordshire Vehicle Components' sell suitable new heaters (including replicas of those early Smiths heaters) but you are looking at circa £325 to £580. You can also buy what is described as a Classic Mini Universal Heater Unit at £195 which is a metal box with a heater matrix and electric motor; a bit like a posh version of the one in the previous photo!

Following research (and acting on information supplied by David Woolgar) I decided to fit a Mini MK4 heater and started searching on Gumtree, eBay and Facebook Marketplace. Eventually I bought one via Facebook. Once I had the heater I could work out its position and where the heater pipes needed to pass through the bulkhead. With the position confirmed I made a couple of brackets out of aluminium unequal angle. These will be bolted to the vertical bulkhead above the transmission tunnel. Of course I will shorten the mounting studs when I refurbish the heater.

Heater fitment:

I learnt a long time ago that the easiest way to work inside the cockpit nose is to remove the body from the chassis and stand it on its nose on top of an old car tyre or blocks of wood, then lean inside it while standing mostly upright.



The easiest way to work inside the nose section.

With the body in this position I located the heater and noticed a problem. With the heater fitted the correct way up the heater hoses would encroach on the driver's footwell which is already fairly restricted. After consuming a mug of tea with my thinking cap on I had decided on a solution.

As Rufus will not have side-screens (just a soft top, windscreen and wind deflectors) I don't see any point, or need, to have windscreen demisters. All I need is recirculating heat directed to both foot-wells, which is either ON or Off. My solution was to mount the heater upside down. This would put the heater pipes on the passenger side, but it did reveal some potential problems.

1. The engraving on the heater control panel was upside down.
2. The main heater vent would direct hot air up behind the dashboard.
3. The windscreen de-mister outlets were directed towards the floor.

Another brew later and I had worked out the following solutions.

1. I will remove the heater control panel along with all its controls. A separate heater fan switch will be fitted in a remote location.
2. I will fit an aluminium blanking plate over the main heater vent.
3. The demister outlets will now provide heat to the foot-wells.

With the position of the heater and its orientation decided I made a couple of aluminium brackets which pick up on the original heater mountings and are secured to the front bulkhead.

For the rear mounting I used a piece of aluminium moulding which was bent to shape and fitted to the heater at one end and the vertical bulkhead at the other.



The Mini MK4 heater as purchased.



Aluminium brackets in position and control panel removed.



Heater installation.



Ditto.



The holes for the heater pipes are adjacent to the left hand body to chassis brace.

After drilling the securing holes the heater was removed for refurbishment.

Refurbishing the heater:

These Smiths type heaters are held together with self tapping screws so it's a relatively easy job to fully dismantle them for a proper refurbishment.

While it is apart I will secure the previously adjustable heater flap in a fixed position (so it only supplies heat to the heater demister outlets) and fit an aluminium plate over the main heater outlet which is now redundant. The front securing studs will be reduced to a length of 20mm.

When it is completely stripped the heater parts will be rubbed down, primed and painted in black topcoat before reassembly.

Summary:

After modification the heater will only work in recirculation mode. The only open vents from the heater are the original demister vents which will now blow hot air into the foot-wells. All the other vents will have been blocked off.

Some of the photos may look a bit weird, but remember that they were taken with the body standing on its nose and were then oriented to give the best view for this article.

From the photos it looks like access to the gearbox oil dipstick may be a little restricted, it is, but not enough to prevent access for oil level checks and gearbox filling during oil changes. "In fact easy easy-peasy for someone who can change the air filter on a Moto Guzzi Mille GT without taking the stop and tail light bulb out!"

To be continued.