



# Through the looking glass

There's more to Peter Jones of MGFMania than rear glass panels, as we discover when we find out how to fit his new big brake kit and test drive his own MGF VVC.

Words and photography: Rob Hawkins



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t doesn't really get going until you hit 6000rpm,' encourages Peter Jones of MGFMania as he calmly sits in the passenger seat, allowing me to drive the MGF VVC that he's owned for six and a half years. The standard engine is sufficiently lively with some 143bhp at the flywheel, but this one has a handfull of extra horses to play with and quickly makes me realise that my 137bhp Mk2 MX-5 is slow by comparison! I've always been a fan of the K-series, believing it to be a livelier and freer revving engine than many other equivalent twin cams. Peter's VVC doesn't disappoint, and even the replacement mild steel exhaust system provides an occasional bark and growl for extra entertainment. Plus, he has chopped two inches off the height of the gear stick and fitted Mike Satur's bell crank kit, so gear changes have a shorter throw and a sportier feel to them.

What's equally impressive is the car's handling. Aside from fitting lowering knuckles but maintaining the recommended pressure in the Hydragas system, Peter swears by four wheel tracking and insists on using a Hunter system, which allows an F to be aligned to the Trophy specification. As we head along an uneven and twisty country lane, the MGF is a pleasure to drive. It doesn't pitch as much as I would expect from such a short wheelbase car and the suspension soaks up all the undulations without hesitation, transferring none of it to the steering or bodyshell. It quickly makes me realise that there's something lacking with my own MGF, which seems harsh by comparison despite having new dampers, the correct pressure in the Hydragas and new tyres.

Whilst the performance and handling of Peter's MGF have impressed me, the one aspect I'm supposed to be assessing is the brakes. He's recently launched a big brake conversion for the MGF and TF, which includes 280mm diameter vented front discs and 280mm solid rears (standard brake discs are 240mm in diameter), increasing the swept area by 25%. Peter recommends using Mintex brake pads with the bigger discs, although he finds that many customers source their own.

Peter's own car has grooved and dimple drilled vented discs at the front and his larger solid discs at the rear, which



are all equipped with Mintex pads. The purpose of the grooves and dimples on the front discs is to remove brake dust and help dissipate heat. Dimples are regarded as being less likely to fracture when compared to a hole in a disc.

These larger brake discs can be fitted with all 15 and 16in diameter wheels (or larger), although some of the early six spoke MGF wheels require a 5mm spacer, which Peter can supply. So are the brakes any better than standard? Well, in theory the larger surface area should provide a greater amount of braking effort. It's difficult to tell on a country lane test drive, and without a back-to-back comparison there's no hard evidence. However, they reassuringly scrub off speed, aided by the competent suspension set up. Peter has had more time to get to grips with these brakes, and as we approach a tight bend, he recalls the speed he can hit before late braking. Certainly if you have found the limit of the standard brakes on your MGF or TF and are confident they are in good working order, then upgrading to larger discs may help (see our step

**Above left: Peter Jones of MGFMania is best known for his glass rear panels.**

**Above: MG-Rover wood trim kit transforms the interior. Gear lever has been shortened by two inches to reduce the throw.**

**Below: Colour coordinated interior includes custom purple and grey leather seats with MG-Rover wood trim.**



# MGFMANIA BIG BRAKE KIT



by step guide overleaf to find out how to fit them).

MGF Mania is probably better known for its rear glass conversions that can be fitted to the TF and MGF's soft top. To date over 4500 of these have been sold, and Peter has often attended an MG show with a boot full of glass, only to leave at the end of the day without them and with several more orders to post out. However, it's not just glass that he can help with. There seems to be nothing he doesn't know about these hoods, whether it's a replacement zip, a weatherproof strip or the difference between the zips on early and later hoods. Consequently, he's developed a range of repair kits and I left with a pair of elastic and Velcro straps that ensure the hood frame always retracts and doesn't get jammed, plus a new zip for the top of my plastic rear screen as the current one doesn't work.

## EXPORTED

Returning now to Peter's own MGF, this was originally exported to Japan in 1996, but returned to the UK in July 2004. He bought it just over four years later with roughly 32,000 miles on the clock that still displayed kilometres. Needless to say, his first purchase was a set of UK clocks from MGFnTF Bitz. The decision to buy an MGF was based on the purchase of 644 glass rear screens which were destined for the LE500 cars. Peter admits he would have liked a VVC Steptronic, but that was never manufactured, so the car seen here was the best specified MGF he could find, offering ABS, variable valve timing and air conditioning, plus of course that low mileage.

During 2009 he started experimenting with larger brakes, fitting 304mm diameter discs behind 11-spoke wheels, but realised the car's standard 15in wheels couldn't be refitted. Fortunately, he bought an MGF Abingdon for its lightweight 16in wheels, but noticed the Abingdon's handling improved when fitted with 15in wheels. When the Abingdon wheels with 215/40x16 tyres front and rear made his MGF VVC twitchier, he reverted to the standard 15in VVC wheels, which meant removing the 304mm discs and AP calipers and fitting 280mm front brakes, matching the 280mm rears he had developed.

'After fitting lowering knuckles, setting the ride height to 335mm and adjusting the wheel alignment to the



**Left:** Expensive from an MG dealer at around £40 but only £5 from MGFMania, this weather strip cures many a water leak, squeak and whistle.



**Middle left:** New big disc kit from MGFMania is 280mm in diameter, making them 40mm larger than standard discs.



**Left:** MGFMania sells a range of repair kits for MGF hoods.

**Right:** Tight fitting Mk2 hood is equipped with one of MGFMania's rear glass screens.



Trophy specification – a menu option within the Hunter alignment system – the handling was transformed,’ he says. ‘Having reverted from the 304mm AP front set up, I am convinced that 280mm discs all round gives the MGF superior handling and braking.’

## HEAD GASKET

Two days before photographing Peter’s MGF, he decided to renew the head gasket as he hadn’t needed to change it since owning the car and suspected some coolant loss. Upon removing the cylinder head, he was amazed to find the original plastic locating dowels and a standard single layer head gasket that didn’t have any signs of failure! Not wanting to take any chances, steel locating dowels and a multi-layered gasket were fitted.

Since buying the MGF, Peter has clocked up an additional 27,000 mainly trouble-free miles – a leaking radiator and a split hose were flagged in good time by the LoLarm coolant level sensor. He’s fitted one of his glass rear screens of course and added an assortment of chrome and stainless steel items to the interior and exterior, including an original MG Rover stainless steel boot rack.

I left MGFMania feeling inspired, for several reasons. Peter’s mildly modified MGF VVC made me realise that these cars can be set up to handle well, but at the same time provide a superior ride quality. What was equally uplifting was meeting someone who’s involved in the business of selling MG parts who still has a passion for these cars. This is what gives MGs their credibility and following.

**n See overleaf for fitting instructions**

**Below left: Healthy VVC engine produced a respectable 143bhp on a dyno in 2013, but has since been fitted with a dual inlet TF 160 air box with a Pipercross filter, so Peter estimates there’s now around 150bhp.**

**Below: Peter sells these Velcro and elastic straps by the bucket load for £12 a pair to anyone with a hood that won’t fold down smoothly.**



## Costs and Contacts

**MGFMania**

**Tel:** 01565 740288

**Website:**

[www.mgfmania.com](http://www.mgfmania.com)

Rear glass screen supplied for £185 or fitted from £225

Front 280mm vented discs: £200 plain or £250 with dimples and grooves

Rear 280mm solid discs: £175 plain or £225 with dimples and grooves

Mintex front or rear brake pads: £20 a set

## Technical Specification

**Make and model:**

MGF VVC

**Year:** 1996

**Engine:** 1.8-litre K-series with VVC mechanism, TF 160 induction system with Pipercross air filter, 52mm alloy throttle body, standard exhaust manifold and stainless steel system

**Gearbox:** Five speed PG1 manual

**Brakes:** Dual circuit servo-assisted system with ABS, 280mm diameter front/rear vented/solid discs with Mintex brake pads

**Suspension:** Hydragas set at 335mm ride height from ground to top of wheel arch. Standard shock absorbers and anti-roll bars. Rubber bushed suspension components. MGF Trophy wheel alignment

**Wheels and tyres:** Standard 15in VVC wheels with Toyo T1R Tyres, 185/55x15 front tyres and 205/50x15 rear tyres

**Interior:** Custom purple/grey interior with heated leather seats. MG-Rover wood trim kit and a ZT walnut/leather gear knob shortened by two inches

**Exterior:** Mk1 shell painted in original Amaranth colour. Mk2 hood with MGF Mania heated glass rear screen. MG-Rover stainless steel grilles with chromed side vents and hood catches

**Performance:**

Estimated 150bhp

# How to fit MGF Mania's 280mm brake discs



**1.** Raise a front corner of the vehicle using a trolley jack carefully positioned under the jacking point, lower it onto an axle stand underneath the front subframe, then remove the road wheel.



**2.** Undo the two 12mm slider bolts, then lever off the caliper and suspend it out of the way. Be very careful not to over stretch or strain the brake flexi-hose - support it so the weight does not hang on the hose.



**3.** Remove the old brake pads, then undo the 15 or 16mm caliper carrier bolts. Be warned - these will be tight. Remove the caliper carrier, clean it thoroughly and check the slider bolts are free.



**4.** Undo any retaining screws for the brake disc. These can be seized, so hit them with a hammer and impact screwdriver to help shock and release them. They may need drilling out if they are damaged.



**5.** With any retaining screws removed, try to remove the brake disc. This can be difficult. If it's stuck, you should use a puller, even though many people resort to a lump hammer (wear goggles if you do).



**6.** After removing the brake disc, clean the mating surface of the hub against which the old disc sat. This surface needs to be thoroughly clean to ensure the new disc sits flush and rotates true.



**7.** An anodised aluminium bracket needs to be fitted to make room for the larger discs. Two 10mm allen key headed bolts are supplied in the kit, which must be fitted with thread lock and tightened to 85Nm.



**8.** The new vented brake disc can now be fitted onto the hub. The original disc retaining screws are not required and the brake disc will remain secure once the wheel bolts have been fitted.



**9.** The caliper carrier can now be refitted and secured with new 10mm allen key bolts. Apply a smear of thread lock to them before fitting, then tighten them with a torque wrench to 85Nm.



**10.** New brake pads must be fitted with the new discs - do not reuse the old brake pads. Apply a smear of copper grease to the top and bottom edges of the pads (not the braking surface) before fitting them.



**11.** With new, thicker brake pads fitted, it may not be possible to refit the caliper, so retract its piston - you can carefully use a large pair of water pump pliers. Once refitted, hand tighten the two slider bolts.



**12.** Fitting larger discs to the rear brakes is similar to the fronts. The only difference concerns retracting the caliper's piston, where a wind-back tool is required to turn the piston instead of pushing it in.