

ERECTING THE HOOD

One of the most daunting tasks a new MGA owner can face is the yearly ritual of erecting the hood or, as we say on this side of the Atlantic, "putting up the top". The MGA top is legendary, and one automotive magazine even went so far as to praise a new sports car as having "the worst top we've seen since the last time we drove an MGA!" Statements like this can mislead the new owner into thinking the MGA hood is difficult to erect. Actually, the MGA has a well designed hood which can easily be erected in a single weekend. Like most automotive projects, experience makes the job easier and some MGA clubs stage annual "erect the hood" events where members help each other with this task. Prizes are offered for side events such as the longest distance for hurling the sidescreens or the most creative oaths. Although the assistance of fellow enthusiasts makes the job go easier, and a circus wagon full of acrobats and strong men makes it a snap, the job can be done by one person, even a novice, if the following procedure is followed.

The first step is to get a beer and read the section of the workshop manual on erecting the hood. This will provide no useful information whatsoever, but British manuals are always entertaining and you can spend hours afterwards speculating about which part of your car is the "backlight", the "tonneau", etc. (My favorite section of the MGA manual is the description of the "anti-dazzle device", but that has nothing to do with erecting the hood.) The real benefit of this step is that the beer will help dull the pain of the pinched fingers and scraped knuckles that follow. Teetotalers can achieve a similar numbness by breathing into a paper bag until woozy. It's also a good idea to consult a thesaurus and learn some new expletives, as you'll quickly exhaust your existing stock.

The next step is to locate the hood. This is not as easy as it sounds, as the MGA hood is well concealed when it's stowed. (I've met a few owners who didn't even realize their car *had* a top.) Remove the tonneau cover, tilt the seats forward, and peer into the dark recess behind the seats. If your car is in "pristine" condition, there will be a leatherette valence with pockets for the sidescreens behind the seats. In rare instances, there may even be sidescreens in these pockets, although sidescreens are more commonly found rattling about in the boot, where they can get scratched more efficiently, or languishing in a dark corner of the garage, where they're safe from the rain. If your car has the valence, unfasten the "lift-the-dot" fasteners along the

sides of the valence and fold the valence over the top of the metal tonneau. (That's the body panel just behind the seats.) There is an old established ritual among MGA owners which requires the valence be left loose until the third time it falls in your face while you're wrestling with the hood, then it is secured with a heavy object and a few curses. Owners with no sense of tradition may prefer to put a weight on it immediately and skip the curses.

With the sidescreens and the valence out of the way, the hood is plainly visible to anyone who bends double behind the seats with an electric torch. There it is, lurking just above the battery compartment. (The location of the batteries is something else a new owner doesn't know about, and doesn't want to believe when you show him.) Grasp the hood firmly in the middle and pull it forward until it clears the tonneau. If it binds, jiggle it gently. When that fails, shake it the way a terrier shakes a rat. The MGA hood bows are of a unique, "double jointed" design as shown in Figure 1. This allows the bows to fold double upon themselves, so the hood can drop down and swing under the tonneau for storage. Theoretically, it also allows the hood to swing back out and snap into an upright position.

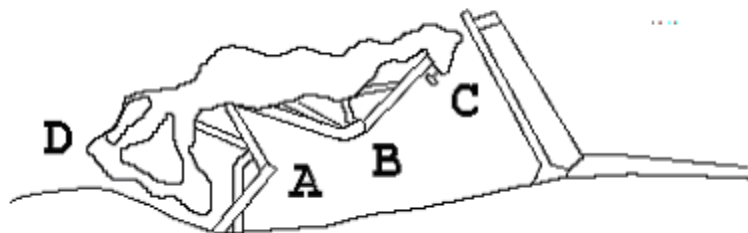


Figure 1: MGA Hood, Semi-Erect

(As close to Fully Erect as I ever got it.)

After swinging the hood clear of the tonneau, raise it to its full upright position and press joint "A" toward the rear of the car until it locks. This can be done while standing on either the driver's or the passenger's side. In either case, there is an identical joint on the opposite side

which also needs to be locked into place. Walk to the other side of the car and lock that upright. This will generally dislodge the side you started on, so walk back to that side and re-lock the upright. Naturally this will dislodge the other side. Even experienced MGA owners can while away several hours in the garage, walking from side to side locking the uprights. Eventually the bows will tire of this game, and both uprights will stay locked at the same time. Now extend the header rail into its full forward position and lock it into place by pressing upwards on joint "B". Of course, this may unlock one or both of the uprights, allowing the owner to repeat that portion of the procedure. Since there is an identical joint "B" on the other side, it is easy to see why an MGA provides more entertainment for the price than any other sports car available today.

Once all the bows have been locked into place, carefully position the header rail so the hole on the underside near wing-bolt "C" is directly over the post on top of the windscreen. Check to make certain the wing-bolt is slacked off enough to make room for the windscreen post. This is generally done by unscrewing the bolt a few turns, allowing it to drop on the floor and bounce under the seat. It can then be retrieved with a yardstick and reinserted to its correct position in the header rail. Press the header rail firmly against the windscreen to ensure a good seal. This can best be done by placing both hands on top of the header and pressing down until your feet rise six inches off the floor. Experienced owners can judge the six inch rise by feel, novices may wish to have an assistant check their rise against a calibrated spacer. With your free hand, reach inside the car and tighten the wing-bolt "C" until fully seated against the windscreen post. Readers who are particularly astute at arithmetic may wonder where this free hand came from, as both hands were previously engaged pressing down on the header rail. Generally, the free hand comes from a wife, a son, a friend, or a passing pedestrian who can be induced to stop laughing long enough to lend a hand. Failing that, agile owners can sometimes balance their weight on a single forearm placed lengthwise along the header rail, freeing their other hand to tighten the wing-bolt. Whichever procedure is used, it should then be repeated on the other side.

Once both wing-bolts are secure, walk to the rear of the car and swear softly. Then unfasten the wing-bolts, lift the header rail free of the windscreen posts, and hook the metal bar "D" at the rear of the hood into the two retainers on the tonneau. It will generally be necessary to give the hood a sharp tug rearward to position the bar over the retainers, a procedure which also serves to unlock both uprights and let the hood crash to the floor of the vehicle. When all

the uprights have again been locked into place and the metal bar secured to the retainers, it is time to once again press the header rail against the windscreen and tighten the wing-bolts.

Now that the hood is securely fastened at the front and rear, it only remains to secure the edges to the "lift-the-dot" studs and the turn button on each side. This is a little like saying that once Napoleon conquered Germany, it only remained for him to march on Moscow. No matter how little time has passed since you last erected the hood, you will discover that either the hood has shrunk or the car has grown since the last fitting. As long as your fingers have the sensitivity of a safecracker's and the strength of vise-grips, the hood can eventually be stretched over the lift-the-dot fasteners. One turn button can generally be fastened without too much difficulty. The other will bend back your thumbnail and be declared not worth the effort to fasten. (Or words to that effect.)

This completes the task of erecting the hood. If the weather *really* turns frosty you may want to consider mounting the side curtains, but that is the subject of another article. In the spring, of course, you will need to go through the ritual of "stowing the hood." The manual says that stowing the hood is the reverse of erecting it, but of course the manual is optimistic about a great many things. As you struggle to cram the hood back into the recess behind the seats without scratching the window (or at least, without rendering it totally opaque), you may find yourself wondering why you bothered to put the bloody thing up in the first place. And indeed, that is a very valid question. Even back in the days when MGAs were routinely driven year round, many owners abandoned the idea of putting up the top. That's how the stereotype of the sports car driver began -- a hardy soul in a cloth cap who grins as he drives top down through a five county frogchoker, describing it only as "a bit dampish". The truth is, he wasn't grinning because it was that much fun to drive in the rain. He was grinning because the misery of feeling rainwater infiltrate his BVDs was peanuts compared to the misery of putting up the top. My personal experience has been that winters in upstate New York occasionally require the hood, but anything northern Indiana threw at me could be weathered with a sneer of contempt. Now that the average MGA spends winters as "hibernation heaven" for wayward rodents, erecting the hood makes about as much sense as changing the air in your tires. Sure you'll get caught in a few sprinkles, an occasional thunderstorm, and a hurricane here and there, but that's what the cloth cap is for. Your wife will say you look like a geek, but what does she know? That lady

in the Volvo probably had her mouth hanging open because she was amazed at how rakish you looked! And anyway, it could be worse. You could be erecting the hood!

*For more stories about MGAs and other British sports cars,
read “[Flaming Floorboards](#),” available from [Amazon](#) and [Barnes & Noble](#).*