

# MGB Convertible Top Replacement

*(Reprinted from the Sports Car Chronicle – Christmas, 2006)*

The instructions outlined below are for any 71-80 MGB. Earlier cars with pack away top frames are a little different.

Top installation should be done on a warm day, when the temperature is at least 60 degrees F.

## ***Proceed as follows:***

Unlatch the top at the windshield frame. Pull back the top about half way down. Grasp the header rail seal. You may need to pry it out of its retaining channel with a small slot screwdriver. After you have one end started, you will simply be able to give it a yank and the entire seal will pull out. This will expose the rivet heads that secure the seal retainer and convertible top to the header rail (the front bar).

Drill out the rivets. If you are planning to reuse the Aluminum retaining strip, drill carefully so as not to damage it. Be careful not to drill into the header rail itself - you don't want oversized rivet holes! Remove the retaining strip and pull the top material off of the header rail. This will take a little pulling since the top was probably glued to the rail with contact cement.

Undo the side snaps behind the doors. Grasp the rear flap of the top and pull it back sharply. This will allow the steel retaining bar in the back of the top to slide out of the chrome 'tear drop' retainers on top of the body. Undo any snaps inside the car, which may be securing the top to any of the top frame bows.

The convertible top may now be lifted off the frame and off of the car. Slide the steel bar out of its pocket in the old top.

## ***Prior to installing a new top, the frame assembly must be checked.***

The convertible top frame is mounted on the car body with 6 countersunk screws, 3 on each side. Constant flexing and movement of the top often cause these screws to strip. If in doubt, order 6 new ones and install them. If the threads in the 'B Posts' of the body are stripped, weld new nuts or threaded plates in. This is difficult but necessary if you want your top to raise & lower smoothly. This is one job that might be better entrusted to professional body technicians.

Check all pivots and hardware on the top frame. Any broken or missing parts should be replaced. If the frame is heavily rusted have it sandblasted and painted. Check the frame for damage. If it is bent or has other serious damage, new ones are available.

## ***Installing Your New Top***

Carefully slide the steel bar (salvaged from the old top) into the pocket in the rear of the new top. Lay your new top over the top frame on the car. Be careful not to scratch the new windows!

Push the tongue fasteners on the side flaps into their mating fasteners on top of the body (just behind the doors on each side). Slide the rear of the top forward to engage the rear bar into the 'tear drop' shaped retainers at the back. Press the snaps down onto the body studs behind the doors.

You must now centre the front edge of the top on the header rail. This job must be done accurately and with patience. Raise the top frame into its fully up position, that is, with the header rail at the windshield frame-but do not latch the fasteners. Carefully centre the top on the header rail. You must ensure that equal amounts of top material extend over each door window. Tops are cut rather exactly and don't have any extra material!

You must also pull the top tight from front to back. Pull it tight enough only to remove wrinkles or low spots. Do not make it taught! A top that is tight during installation will be impossibly tight after it ages!

When you are satisfied with the fit, mark the underside of the top with chalk or a light coloured marking pen. Peel back the top a foot or so. Using a brush, spread an even coating of contact cement over the top surface of the header rail. Apply a similar coating onto the lower front surface of the convertible top. Be sure to coat the top only in front of the chalk line. You don't want to see contact cement on your new top. Allow the cement to tack dry. This should take only about 5 minutes.

Starting at the centre, carefully press the top down onto the header rail. Use the chalk mark previously made for this. Work out any air bubbles with your hands.

It is now time to 'test' the fit of your top. Fold the exposed front edge of the top down under the header rail. Put the top into its fully erected position and fasten the toggle clamps, which secure it to the windshield frame. Check that there are no low spots or wrinkles.

The back window should be reasonably straight and flat. Most importantly, check that the extreme outer edges of the header rail are covered with top material. This is where most problems occur. If one edge of the header rail is exposed, you can be sure that water will leak in at the front of the door window on the same side.

If necessary the top can still be repositioned. To make adjustments unfasten the toggle clamps. The top can now be carefully peeled off of the header rail. If the contact cement has dried too much you may want to recoat the top and header rail after having made your adjustments. Reinstall the top on the header rail and fasten the toggle clamps.

Always check the fit after making adjustments.

AFTER you are satisfied that the fit is correct, the header rail retaining strip and seal can be installed. If the header rail retaining strip is corroded, bent, or otherwise damaged, get a new one. It is very soft aluminum and gets bent easily. Position the retainer on the underside of the header rail, where it belongs. Use an awl or other sharp instrument to poke holes through the new top corresponding to the holes in the retainer strip and the header rail. **WARNING:** Do not poke holes right through to the other side and damage your new top. Using a standard pop-rivet gun, rivet the retainer onto the header rail. This serves to fasten the retaining strip to the header rail and also 'locks' the top in place.

All that now remains is to slide a new header rail seal into the retaining strip. The seal is soft sponge rubber. It should always be replaced during top installation. After a few years it becomes compressed and no longer provides an effective seal for the top. It is probably easiest to force the seal into its retainer with a small slot screwdriver. Trim any excess seal protruding from either end with a sharp knife.

Unlatch the top and open it part way. Using a sharp knife, **CAREFULLY** trim the excess material from the underside of the header rail. Fasten any snaps inside car, which retain the top to the frame bows.

Installation is now complete!

### ***Care of your new Convertible Top***

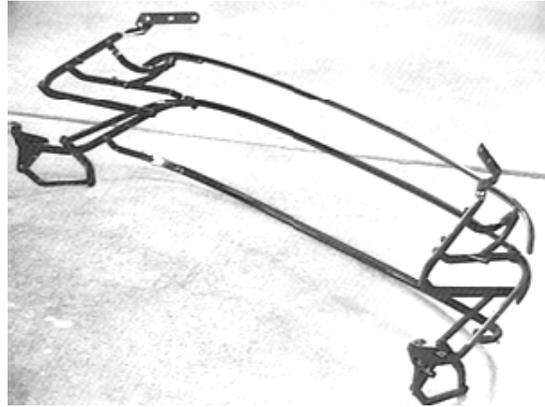
With proper care, an MGB convertible top can be expected to last 5-8 years before significant deterioration occurs. Chemical pollution and industrial fallout do ruin convertible top windows.

Washing your top regularly will help extend its life. Use mild soap when washing a top - never use any abrasive cleaners! Convertible top windows are soft plastic and are very susceptible to scratches. Never wipe the windows dry! When washing the top and its windows, have copious amounts of clean water running on them while scrubbing or wiping. Don't forget to wash the inside of the windows. This is often neglected. Always allow the top to dry thoroughly before lowering it.

Do not raise or lower the top when cold. To maximize top life it is recommended that it only be raised or lowered when the temperature is 60 degrees F, or more. Lowering the top during cold weather is an excellent way to crack the vinyl! Don't forget to unfasten those side snaps when lowering the top. Forgetting this will put undo stress on the seams of your top, shortening its life.

### **MGB Convertible Top Frame**

A lot of problems associated with MGB tops are caused by a worn out frame. The top frame is a steel framework, made up of long thin steel "bows" as well as pivot brackets that support the whole assembly just behind the seats. Numerous problems can occur: Pivot points (where the frame is hinged on each side) can become rusted and seized. Trying to force a top down with rusted pivots can actually break the frame. Similarly, forcing a top down that doesn't want to move will often bend one or more of the steel bows. A bent or broken frame will put undo stresses on the vinyl and stitching of your top. Eventually the top will tear or the stitching will pull out. In either case a new top will be needed. While it is possible to repair some top frames, it is generally not recommended.



Please note that a new top frame DOES NOT include the header rail. Your existing header rail can be easily installed onto the new frame. The header rail is secured to front of the top frame with six screws, three on either side. Frame fits any 1971 – 1980 MGB.

*The above article originally appeared in the Christmas 2006 edition of The Sports Car Chronicle and is reprinted here with the kind permission of Obsolete Automotive, 142 Kendall St., Point Edward, Ontario. Please check with Obsolete Automotive for any parts referenced in the article. Their customer service number is 1-519-337-3232 or toll free, 1-800-265-7437.*