



Triumph Owners Club

Triumph Spitfire Buyers Guide

Chassis and Body-work

The Spitfire uses a separate chassis which makes the car very simple to work on. As this chassis provides the backbone of the car, it is important that it is in good condition and free from accident damage.

Check the main chassis members where the suspension is attached for kinks, cracks and distortion which will be the result of crash damage. If you find this, the car is best avoided. Also check the main chassis rails around the differential a well known rust-trap. Check the two front outriggers that the bulkhead attaches to. If possible have a good poke around with a screwdriver, particularly where they are bolted on to the bulkhead. Chassis sections can be replaced but body corrosion here is difficult to repair properly without taking the body off. Have a look at the remainder of the chassis along the centre of the car as this is worth checking but hardly ever rusts badly.

A good initial guide to the overall condition of the car can be ascertained by the quality of the panel fit and alignment. The door gaps should be even and the door should sit squarely between the 'A' and 'B' posts. Check the condition and fit of the sills. Any weakness here or poor replacement due to MoT failure and the car can 'sag' here causing doors to jam or misalign. The sills provide the main structural rigidity for the tub on the Spitfire so the condition of these is critical to panel fit. Check also the inner sill and floor pan condition, most have commonly been replaced as these panels are available but be happy they have been done well. Check rear heel board condition (panel across floor behind seats) from underneath, these are prone to rust at the ends also check rear radius arm attachment points.

Other places to check are: windscreen pillar bottom area, outer wheel arches, rear inner wings and boot floor. Panel availability is reasonably good, with many repair sections now available.

Check all over for body filler, especially around the lips of the wheel arches, door bottoms and rear wing to sill/bottom of 'B' post.

Mechanical

The big advantage with checking the mechanical parts is that they are all easily accessible. Start the engine but don't rev it. Listen for initial crankshaft rumble which should only last for a few seconds until the oil pressure has built up. Also listen for tappet and timing chain rattle. There should be no excessive oil leaks but check the head gasket, sump gasket and the rocker cover gasket for any signs of leaks. Check the suspension by bouncing each corner and allowing it to spring up and back down once. More than one cycle indicates defective shock absorbers. Check that the brakes are not binding and that the handbrake is working efficiently. Check the steering column and rack for excessive movement by rocking the steering wheel up and down and check that there is no play between moving the steering wheel and the road wheels moving.

Road test

Make sure you are insured to drive the vehicle on the road!! Move off in first gear and listen for rear end knocks or clonks, which point to worn rear axle or propshaft universal joints. Increase speed and move up and down the gears, ensuring that all gears select correctly with minimum effort. If an overdrive gearbox is fitted, check that it engages and dis-engages correctly in third and fourth gears. Cruise at around 50 mph and gently lift off on the accelerator, listening for rear end noises. A regular knocking is likely to be a universal joint; a rumble is usually a differential problem. Still at 50 mph slip the clutch, build up the revs and re-engage the clutch; it should bite cleanly with no slip. Check for front wheel vibration and positivity of the steering. Vibration is usually caused by worn wheel bearings, a worn steering rack or incorrect wheel balance. On a straight road, apply the footbrake with increasing pressure. The car should stop evenly without pulling to one side. Check the temperature gauge for overheating problems.

The points mentioned here are some of the main things to look for, but remember all cars are different, so take each one on its merits.