

## Checking Out an Opel GT – Part 1

By Charles Goin

Looking for your first Opel GT? While becoming rarer, it is not the lack of available GTs on the market that makes finding a good one difficult.

Production of the Opel GT was a bit over 100,000 units from 1968-1973, with the exception of early 1.1 and some color combinations, and the European-only GT/J. Unlike a lot of imports of the era, Opel was sold coast to coast in every town with a Buick dealer. So there are a lot hidden everywhere.

We all here understand your new found love for the GT. ( We call it Opelitis ) but lets just make sure you know what you're getting and that you're paying a fair price and getting a good car to start with. You can save a lot by walking away from a bad deal.

Before you go out to buy, ask yourself. What are you wanting? What is your budget? How much do you want to put into it? What is your skill level?

Don't discount an old abandoned pulled apart project as not being a good car to start from, because if your plan is to build the car yourself, then you will be rebuilding the motor, maybe adding a 5 speed. So an abandoned project could actually be a better car to start from than a barely running GT with a cheap paint job hiding all the defects and costing three times as much.

As I mentioned, what kind of GT are you looking for and skill level matter a lot. That said, no matter what your plans

or budget is, the body is the most important thing to consider. Don't get wowed by a pretty paint job, as often rust lurks underneath, especially if the trim and windows are not installed well, and the interior is old and tired, the lenses and chrome faded.

A project like the GT in the photo below, with a boxes of parts, can go for as little as \$1,000, but if the floors are rotted, and nose caved in isn't worth \$500, no windshield and worth less than \$0. Yet with a cheap coat of paint, a GT that barely runs, has old tired brakes, wiring issues ( that you won't find out about till you get home), etc. can be on the market now for \$5,000 or more. Recently a GT I wouldn't have given \$5,000 for sold for \$11,000 and I actually felt sorry for whomever bought it. So knowing what you want can save you a lot. Especially if you want a turnkey car and not a project.

MANY GTs, including some I have seen sell for \$4,000 or more have fist sized holes under floor mats and along the rocker panel. It is easy to spend over \$1,000 if you get someone else to patch the floors. If you do it, expect to spend a LOT of time with a welder. So, looking at the floors is a first place to look.

This is an easy way to tell how good of condition the body of the GT is in overall. Be it online or in person. If it has rust, then you have your answer on the rest of the car. If it HAD rust and it was repaired poorly you KNOW there is a LOT of bondo in the body. But if they fixed the body with proper metal patches, and the work is good here, where they can hide it, you can trust the rest of the body if it had repairs done at the same time were probably done well. That said, if they shortcut repairing the floor and rockers, you can be sure they performed short cuts in other places.



Do you buy it, or take a pass?

You would be surprised how many GTs that look pretty on the outside (especially if it was recently painted) hide a lot of rust. So always pull up the carpet. It's easy to do and often is loose. If the owner won't let you or won't send you good pictures then... walk... away.

Also ask for pictures of the floor boards from underneath. That can tell you if they had major patches or not as well. Also like I mentioned above it will tell you the kind of work that was performed.



Next the front end and rear strip. These items are both critical and can be seen in pictures if you know where to look and what to ask for. Little things make a big difference.

In the case of the front end, the bumper gives a lot away, as do the emblems or the lack thereof. In image 1 you can see dimples in the bumper and even cracks from where the car was in an accident.

Bumpers missing the front bumper guards are also an indication of damage. Flat out missing them is a sign of someone that really didn't put their best effort into the repair. The bumpers often are bent back and when they are, they get some standard deformities, like the flat bulge in the center. The fact that the Opel blitz emblem above the nostrils is missing and the hole filled in is a clear sign bodywork was done. Sometimes it's a preference thing, but more often than not it's because of damage to the nose. As you can see in image 2 above not only does the car have the factory emblem, there is a subtle ridge that ends just above it. That ridge is often gone on a car with front end damage as it was smoothed over during the repair. Often the hood will nick the paint at the center as well when it's lifted. That's because the hinge tends to rust and this can cause the hood hinge to break and flop around. This is harder to see in pictures, but if you are personally looking at the car it is easy to notice. When the hood is up, is it solid and does it wiggle left to right? Repair of the hinge can be tricky, so it is good to check that out as well. See if the seller can video

opening and closing the hood from the driver side.

The rear trim strip and the "OPEL GT" badge, shown in images 3 and 4, are rarely missing due to someone taking it off because they didn't like the look. It is often missing because the car was hit in the rear or there was rust in the rear quarter. I have seen cars where the bottom of the strip was missing and bondo used to patch over it, while the upper piece stayed. Often it's just removed and after the repair the whole area is smoothed over with bondo. As you can see here the definition is muted by lack of the strip and excess body filler.

Obviously other than these specific GT items, other areas to look over are the wheel arches, the rear inner fender of the wheels, the battery tray and belly pan are all typical places to look for rust and poor repair.

As smooth as the body of the GT is, things like the tops of the fenders, the rear strip, the front nostrils, etc. (images 2 and 4) all have should a crisp sharp look to them. So any place on a GT that looks too round or muted is probably hiding something.

# Checking Out an Opel GT – Part 2

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Ok, so you have looked over the shell and its looks good, and the rust isn't too bad. So now what else should you look at? Mechanical items you ask? (Engine, suspension, brakes, etc.) Believe it or not the last reason you should buy an Opel GT is because it runs. If you're planning on restoring the GT, just assume you will go down that rabbit hole, so how good it runs now is inconsequential. For now you look at other Opel GT specific items ones that are hard to replace, or expensive to repair or both.

- Windshield
- Headlights
- Door windows and the regulators
- Exterior Door and rear window trim
- Interior bits and pieces.

## Windshield

First the easy one, the windshield. Some parts cars can be worth \$500 even if they are part of a rusted shell with no redeeming qualities, if it has a mint condition windshield that shows no wiper marks, tree sap damage, smoking in the corners, cracks, chips or rock damage. It can also make a \$5,000 car worth \$3,000. Why? Finding a like-new windshield is hit or miss ( Depends on the month or year if they are in stock.. ), the quality of the windshields is often suspect when it comes to fit and finish, seeing as they are an old copy of a copy of a copy. So yeah, check out the windshield really, really, carefully.

## Headlights

Second., the headlights. Ah, the favorite part of a Opel GT for some, when they work well, and the bane of the existence of many an Opel GT owner when they don't. If they do not work, be guaranteed, you will be the one to figure out how to fix them. That, or your deep pockets, because unless you live near a fellow Opel guru, chances of finding a shop to fix them that knows what they are doing, and won't charge you an arm and a leg, are well, not good.

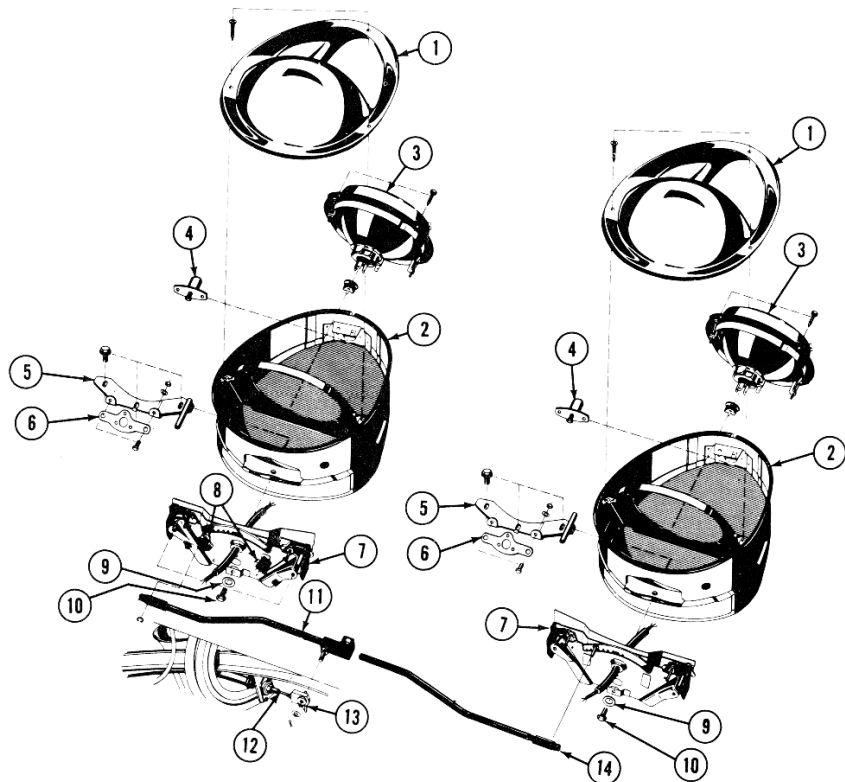
What should the headlights do? The simple answer is flip over, lock in place and turn on. But it may not be that easy, and may even be impossible, because either they have rusted, been broken, or the cable may have come loose or rusted internally. They are mighty complex. See the illustration below.

In order of magnitude:

- The light won't turn on the flipped open. This is a relatively easy to fix electrical problem.
- They flip over but won't lock. That's trickier and it could be simply in need of adjustment or the mechanism inside the light.
- They will rock left and right but not flip over. That's when you get into it could be anything from an adjustment, to broken bits and/or cable
- They are stiff as a rock and won't move. That's when it gets fun. Anything could and probably is rusted, from the arm that flips the headlights, to the cable, to the pivots....

## Door Windows

Like the windshield this is self explanatory, but the parts are harder to get, expensive, and a pain to ship. There should be 3/16" thin trim strips around the door, on the edge of



The headlight control mechanism for an Opel GT.





This odometer has not flipped, has not passed 99,999 miles. The one in the top right has. The tell tale sign is the numbers are not centered vertically in the opening.

the door and around the rear side window. Check to make sure they are there, are not bent, etc.

Simply the door regulator is almost as big a pain in the butt as the headlights, but not quite. It is a cable and pulley system and prone to rusting and jamming up.. So see how easy you can roll up and down the windows condition of the glass, and smoothly it does it.

## Interior Bits and Pieces

Last but not least are the interior bits and such. Starting with the dash panel, which might have still have the stock radio or been butchered for aftermarket radio, are the gauges and switches in good shape and complete? Are the gauges centered in the dash like they are supposed to be? If they are its real obvious, but if not often the supports in back are broken.

The real thing to look for is the mileage. Our odometers

only go to 99,999, and far too often I have seen owners claiming a car claiming is a low mileage survivor, when it is anything but.

The photo above lets you see the difference. The odometer displaying 42,845 miles is correct, it has not flipped. The odometer showing 28,137 many more miles has. Notice anything? One of the numbers, the 2, is not properly aligned vertically. It's up just a little and showing part of the number below it. Flip this odometer again and the alignment error is even more pronounced.

What else is there? Well, obviously there are the mechanicals: motor, suspension, drivetrain, etc. but I will save that for a later day. As I already mentioned, that's the easy stuff to fix or get fixed by someone else.