

## **Tech Tip: Opel GT Paint & Body (Part #1: Choices)**

Opel GT owners (and future GT owners) all agree:  
They had to see an Opel GT, to want it.

### **Once they saw a nice Opel GT, they all wanted to own it**

From there, owners recognized they had a cool car and a timeless classic, but many got stuck at just promising themselves that they would restore it “someday.”

We want all Opel GT owners to share this journey and the rewards, of fulfilling their visions for this beautiful vehicle, with their choice of color and options, as their desires see fit.



(Above Illustration, by GT Designer Erhard Schnell)

## **Making Your Commitment**

Motivations can vary. Some find “quiet garage time” a sanctuary from work and domestic issues. Others do it for the kids. Some fix a GT up, to allow the car to be seen as it was meant to be seen (so many parked GT’s survived these 30+ years, because so few had the heart to depart from a car with such contagious charm). Other GT owners have been encouraged by results of initial mechanical repairs, and feel empowered and ambitious to take on greater tasks. In more advanced cases of “Opelitis,” it’s not unprecedented that several so-so backyard “donor” cars are combined to make up one very nice GT.

It’s a checklist and a challenge. An important first step, is evaluating realistically, whether you have a suitable restoration candidate GT or need to search for another restorable GT. Deciding whether to strictly retain the original body contours and color scheme, or which modifications to adopt and install, is the next step. Another is performing an inventory of parts necessary or desired, to be acquired, replaced, or improved. Stockpiling needed parts, setting aside a budget, planning a realistic (and seasonable) time schedule for the work, locating trustworthy paint/body professionals, disassembling and paint-prep, then transporting and ultimately re-assembling the GT, are all part of this process.

Good news is, there are more new replacement parts available now for the GT than there were over 20 years ago. Ebay-consigned offerings from various garage-stored collections and amateur Opel junkyards, have also freed up a lot of common used parts (and even some of the most obscure Opel accessories are reappearing online, for sale once again). But beyond various tech tips, online advice & service manuals, there hasn’t been an overall guide written for GT paint and body restoration. OMC has always presented nice GT’s on display at club events like the annual picnics, and it seems like a good time for some of the hard-won lessons that went into these endeavors, to themselves be featured here.

The results, ultimately, are very rewarding. Although quality GT restorations do appreciate faster than less ambitious projects, it’s best to think of the process as an investment for yourself. A beautiful GT is something you can possess, take pride in, and view again and again (typically at a cost of thousands of dollars less than other vintage sports cars — and certainly for less than the most comparable new roadsters). Driver’s of restored GT’s already know, just driving down the road or stopping at a filling station, provokes all manner of neck-craning, looks, waves, and impromptu conversation.

It’s also a tribute to the original design accomplishment of the GT. You can observe the way light reflections glow on a fresh coat of wax, cascading to shadows sweeping off a sensuously curvy fender, wrapping with the chiseled crease of a silvery chromed bumper, as testimony to the inspiration of automotive artists who let imagination sculpt their passions. The details; Pivoting hideaway headlights, real & functional hood louvers, standout taillights, are even more ingenious. At the peak of the muscle-car era, the Opel GT won Style Auto’s prestigious “best styled production car” award in 1969. We don’t see anything new on the road approaching classic GT’s, and modern restrictions mean we probably won’t again.



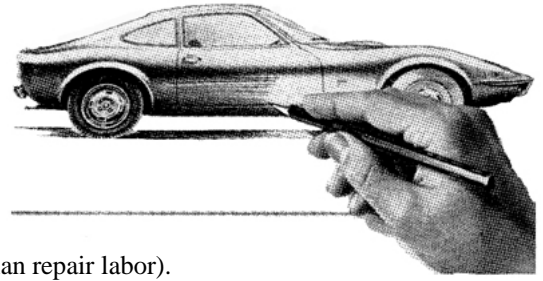
## Paint Prep “Top 10” Checklist:

Following these notes, will help you make the most of your investment

### **(1) Inspect and Evaluate Condition of your GT**

As you do this, make notes on xerox of car “body diagram” (on a following page). Scrutinize typical GT rust areas (behind the wheels, below the floor pan and inside the rocker panels). Also use a magnet to locate where “bondo” body-filler was used (where a magnet doesn’t “stick”), and also note missing or misadjusted parts.

When there’s a choice, also consider acquiring a better GT body (if one costs less than repair labor).



### **(2) Do some research: Read through complete article**

Spend some time in particular, on subjects covered on the following page titled “paint prep considerations” (like selection of a paint color, aspects of GT body repairs, and “hands-on” paint preparation procedures). Also read “part 2” of this article (which has a part-by-part guide and related options, like doing the headliner and dashboard/heater, which require the same disassembly steps you’re already planning on doing like removal of glass & rubber for paint). Research old OMC Blitz articles on related subjects too.

### **(3) Make Your Choices: (Original GT Style or Modified? GT A/L or GT/J Exterior Mouldings?)**

Write your decisions on car diagrams and in a notebook, and place all papers and photos in a folder or binder (so nothing gets lost)

### **(4) Secure a comfortable and safe working environment**

Also plan how to trailer your car body to repair shop (s), and where to park (for a 30-day paint curing period and when you are doing part reassembly jobs)

### **(5) Acquire needed (new) parts, BEFORE you begin your paint job!**

#### Your checklist should consider or include:

- Front, Side and Rear Window Rubber Mouldings
- Chrome Insert and Chrome Corners (if GT A/L style exterior is chosen)
- Hood Bumpers and Door Top Bumpers
- Door Weatherstripping: External Body and Internal Door Rubber
- Door Handle Gasket Set, and Exterior Lens Gasket Set
- Grommet Sets for Emblems, and Side “Popout” windows (if on 1971-73 GT)
- Gas Tank Filler Neck Gasket, Body Emblems
- (Round) Floor Plugs and Rear Underbody Drain Boots
- Exterior Body Hardware (Chrome Bumpers, Mirrors, Lights, and other parts)

The reason for this, is that vendors produce critical Opel GT parts in batches, and you don’t want to have to wait for the next production run (if they are sold out) !

This list could also include critical body items like fiberglass body panels, and optional items like a new headliner, heater plate and dash cover (if you decide to combine projects).

### **(6) Acquire desired (used) parts**

This usually requires calls to Opel suppliers and searches on online sites like Ebay.

### **(7) Acquire needed materials and supplies**

Gather supply of gallon-size & sandwich-size plastic baggies, & boxes to safely store parts. Also consider special auto body abrasives, adhesives, masking tape, tools, and cleaners.

### **(8) Make a preliminary schedule**

Don’t promise anyone (or yourself) a specific completion date, as unplanned complications (like dealing with rust discoveries or broken bolts) can occur. Include time for outside service jobs (like re-chroming, headliner installation, or dash recovering work)

### **(9) Consult with body and paint shops, for prices and best times to bring car in**

Supply them your “body diagram” and notes, ask for their ideas, ask for a vial of “touch up” paint, and get estimates in writing.

### **(10) Important Additional Things (to do and to know)**

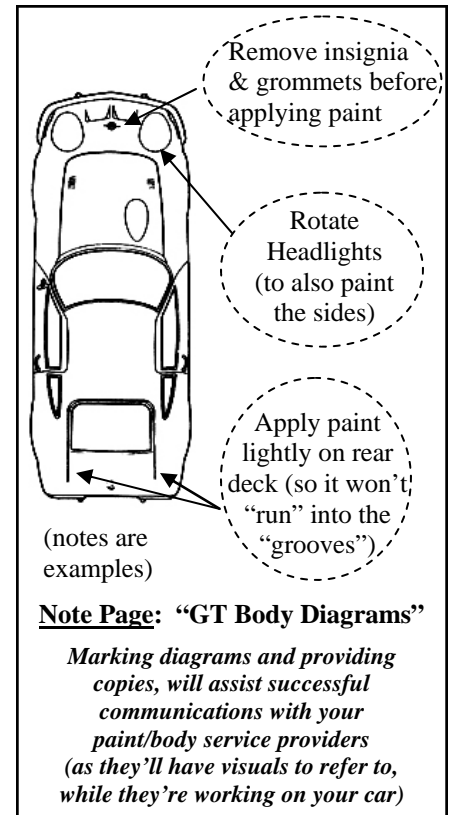
Run your gas tank low, then drain as much as gas out as is possible, before beginning prep work.

Do NOT disassemble the front suspension, unless the drivetrain is in the car (you need engine weight to compress the GT spring)

- Organize your parts: Bag your parts with their original attaching hardware (and place identification notes in each bag)
- Keep unused “extra” parts secure (away from pets/kids) in sturdy boxes at home (so a shop can’t lose them), and mark the boxes
- Many GT parts are side-specific: Note their origin and mark them Driver’s/Left or Passenger/Right side when they’re removed
- Keep your old rubber after it’s removed, as you may want to reuse it on the car (if it’s parked outside before fresh paint is “cured”)
- Take digital photos, and make notes throughout the process (these really come in handy, during reassembly)

opelclub.com 1/09

Enjoy “energy drinks” while working, and be happy! (We learned these the hard way—You don’t have to repeat our mistakes!)



## Making Your Choice: Original GT Styles

Choices you make when you repaint an Opel, can be based on restoring a car to its original design, or how you can modify the car to “how you want to see it.”

Many GT's have been modified to non-original colors with non-original exterior body parts, as many owners over the years have rebuilt their GT's with available aftermarket parts or for personal liking and enjoyment.

Others have found or kept very original “survivor” GT's, and have decided to keep them that way. Benefits include some increased notoriety (from purists who appreciate Opel's factory design) and an ability to enter “concoors-correct” judging at car shows and museums.



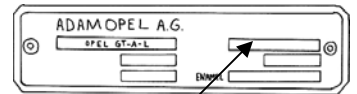
A Good place to view and compare colors and trim choices on actual GT's, is at one of the larger Opel events.



The starting point for deciding whether to restore a GT to an all-original look, is to determine what model year it is. Clues include the date mark/sticker on the side of the driver's side door (if it is an original door that hasn't been painted over), which should match the vehicle identification number (VIN code) on the plate under the hood.

Keep in mind that back in the late 1960's/early 1970's, that vehicle model years started with cars produced in August (so a September 1970 sticker appears on a 1971 model year GT).

There are also other clues, such as minor variations in some parts that were originally installed throughout production of the original GT. To learn these, you can refer to the “What Year Is It?” article from the OMC Blitz (which has been reprinted online, and is available for free, at OMC's website at <http://www.opelclub.com>)



### Exterior Part Changes: 1968-1970 Model Years

The VIN Code for these years starts with “94” or “93”\*

VIN codes for 1969 numbered from: 94-1535504

VIN codes for 1970 numbered from: 94-1888188

(Doors before September 1969 did not have a door sticker, but date stamps on the rear of the dash gauges can be checked for an approximate build date)

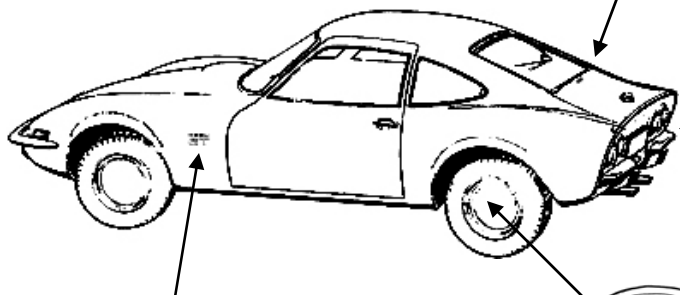
Early GT's had unique exterior emblem sets.

Belt-high on both front fenders, were a set of “Opel” badge plates with separate “G” and “T” letters.

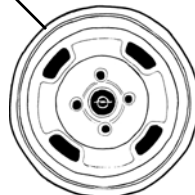
On the rear deck, just below the middle of the rear glass, sat a small square “GM” emblem.

\*VIN Code 93 = 1.1L engine GT

\*VIN Code 94 = 1.9L engine GT



opelclub.com 1/09



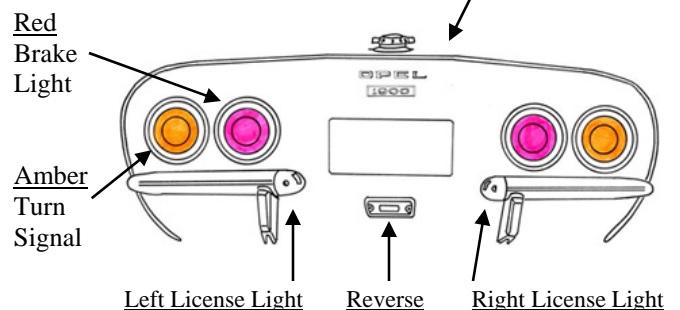
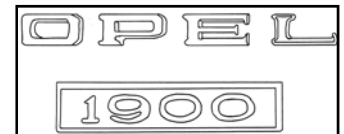
### Rear Panel: 1968-1970 Opel GT

Had a simple rear lens style:

One amber (orange) and one red, per side,  
The reverse/backup light was below the license plate.

#### Rear Emblems

These featured separate “O” “P” “E” “L” letters and a “1900” plate\*\*



\*\* “1900 plate” did not appear on the (rare) 1.1L engine GT's

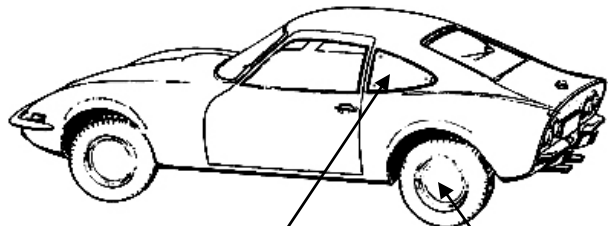
### Original Wheel: 1968-1970

Early GT's had 13” wheels with a “4 rectangular hole” pattern. Painted in “argent” (silver) color, these were dressed up with a chrome trim ring and a chrome center cap.

### Exterior Part Changes: 1971-1972 Model Years

The VIN Code for these years starts with "77"  
VIN codes for 1971 numbered from: 77-2265862  
VIN codes for 1972 numbered from: 77-2560567  
(All drivers-side doors for these years originally had a month/year date sticker, which ran to December 1972)

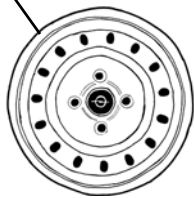
There were no side fender emblems and no rear "GM" emblem, but there were noticeable hardware changes for the opening "popout" side quarter windows.



opelclub.com 1/09

### Popout Window Hardware

Visible is a pair of black-painted retainer nuts, and a chromed rear retainer nut



### Original Wheel: 1971-1972

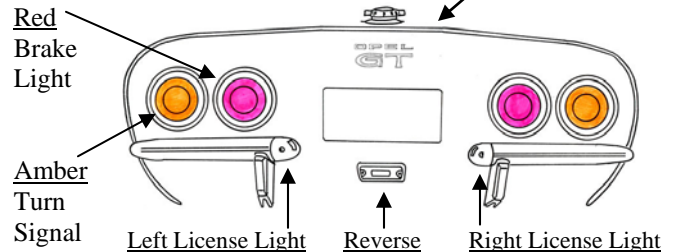
Later GT's had 13" wheels with a "15 round hole" pattern. Painted in "argent/silver" color, these also shared the same chrome trim ring and chrome center cap as was used on the earlier models. (These wheels appear the same as some Rallye Kadetts and Rallye Mantas, but because their offset is different, check for a "GT" mark on the wheel to be sure it's correct).

### Rear Panel: 1971-1972 Opel GT

Used same lenses as 1968-1970 GTs

### Rear Emblems

These featured separate "O" "P" "E" "L" letters with "G" "T" letters



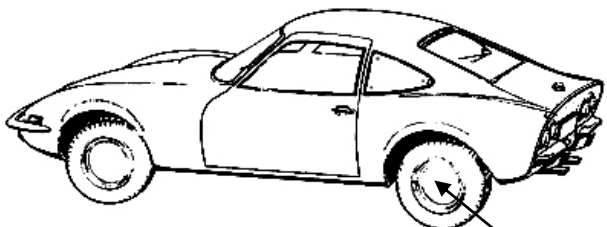
### Side and Rear Emblem Mounting Notes:

If you want to remount original emblems it's best to try to locate existing emblem mount holes (often, they're just filled in with bondo, as many owners just left them off the car - to let people guess what it was !). If they're on the car, use a small, thin spatula to carefully lift them off. Replacement grommets are available.

### Exterior Part Changes: 1973 Model Year

The VIN Code for these years starts with "OY0"  
VIN Codes for 1973 numbered from: OYO7NC-2944586  
(All drivers-side doors for this year originally had a month/year date sticker, which was considered to start Jan 1st, 1973)

There were no side fender emblems and no rear "GM", but the "popout windows" continued through this model year.



### Original Wheel: 1973

Later GT's had 13" wheels with a "star" pattern and a small center cap.  
(These wheels appear the same as later 1973-74 Mantas, but because their offset is different check for a "GT" mark to be sure it's correct).

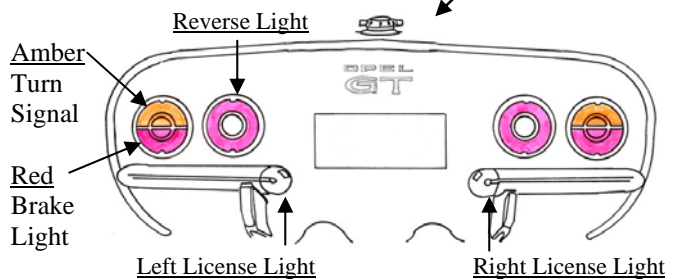


### Rear Panel: 1973 Opel GT

Used same rear emblems as the 1971-1972 GT

### Rear Lights

A "split" amber (orange) and red lens (combined turn signal/brake), and a red lens with a white center (for a reverse light).

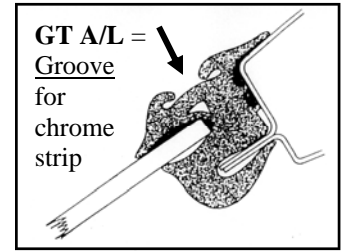


The round rear lights were the same as used on the Opel Manta models (but mounting screws were substituted on the GT, for the Manta's mount bolts).

## Original Exterior Rubber: "GT A/L" Style

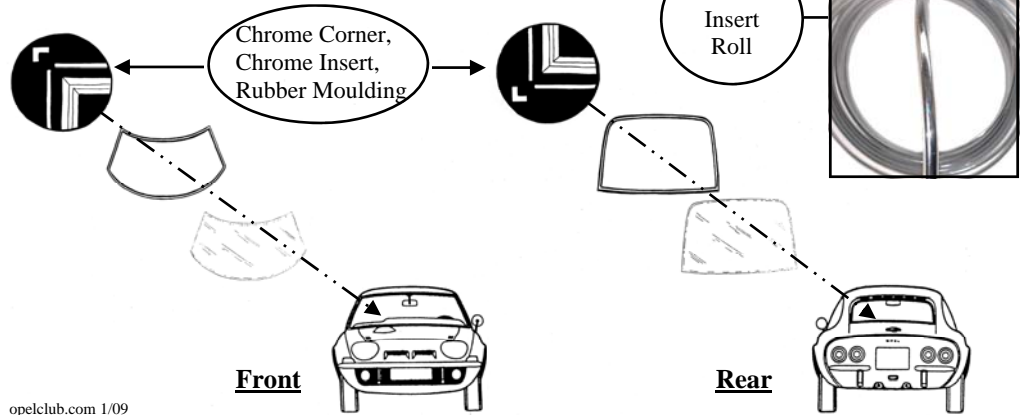
The GT A/L "Style" trim choice, is the look of the original US 1968-1973 Opel GT trim ("GT" meant model, "A" meant the first model series, "L" meant full "Luxus" trim)

The main feature in the front windshield and rear window rubber gaskets, is that the surface has a groove in the middle, designed for the installation of a plastic-coated chrome metal locking strip. This strip is not just decorative but is also functional, as it helps hold the window rubber strips in place. Polished aluminum corners finish the trim look. This was done as a design feature, to accent other chrome on the exterior of the Opel GT, including the chrome strips around the doors and quarter windows, as well as the front and rear bumpers (and other exterior hardware like the rear license lenses and gas cap).



### GT A/L Parts

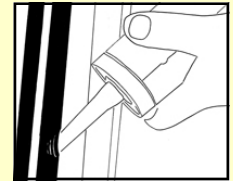
- Front Windshield Moulding
- Rear Window Moulding
- 2 Side Window Mouldings (select "fixed" 1968-70 GT's, or "popout" opening 1971-73 GT's)
- Roll of Chrome Moulding Insert
- 4 Chrome Corners (or reuse yours)
- Chrome Insert Tool (below, recommended)



opelclub.com 1/09

### Mounting Notes (Windshield & Rear Window Mouldings):

If you are repainting a GT with the same exterior color, you can use tape to carefully mask the existing rubber. If you are replacing rubber, do NOT try to pry out the windshield glass - it will crack! (Cut away the rubber instead). When installing new rubber, refer to and follow instructions (that come with replacement window moulding parts) Use a non-hardening sealer to seal rubber (do NOT use silicone). Use WD-40 to help install chrome strip insert.



Applying Sealer

### Option: "European" ("GT/J") Design

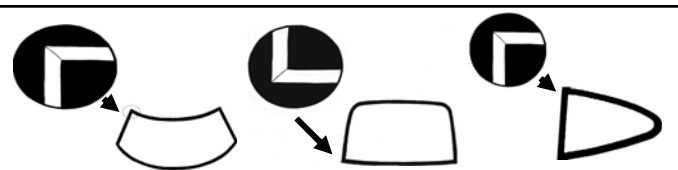
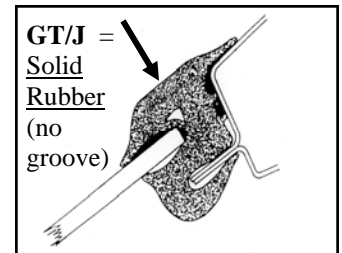
This GT/J "Style", is based on the Europe-only 1971-1973 Opel GT/J Trim option. ("GT" was the model, and "J" represented the economy "Junior" trim option)

The main difference in the front windshield and rear window rubber gaskets, is that the surface is solid rubber with no groove in the middle. There are also GT/J style quarter window gaskets, for "fixed" non-opening 1968-70 side quarter windows, (or you can use the GT A/L style for 1971-73 GT's and paint the chrome black to match). Another option, is use of a black plastic window insert.

This option works best as a design choice, or when the vehicle is to be parked outdoors for extended amounts of time. It is also an option, when some of the other original chrome trim on the vehicle has faded or is missing (exposed to intense sunlight, the original trim can fade quickly).

When a GT/J style is custom-installed, additional choices include painting chrome strips around the doors and 1971-73 quarter windows black to match, as well as painting or powder-coating the front and rear bumpers (and other exterior hardware like the door mirror, rear license lenses and gas cap) black.

Other original GT/J features, require parts installed in Europe-only Opel GT's: Amp/oil warning lights (instead of gauges), dash switch operation of headlights, rubber floor mats (instead of carpets), and adding side stripe decals.



### GT/J Parts

- Front Windshield Rubber Moulding
- Rear Window Rubber Moulding
- 2 Side Window Rubber Mouldings ("fixed" 1968-70 GT's)



## Paint Prep Considerations

### **(1) Color Selection:**

It's a matter of "individual preference" as well as intention.

Are you repainting a GT in an original color for show-quality concours judging and resale value, or changing color for your own personal enjoyment of the vehicle?

A GT's original color is identified by the color code found on the firewall VIN plate. Original US-export Opels received enamel paint, with mixtures by Dupont & Ditzler.



**A typical GT: You can do better!**

Non-original colors, run the gamut of the rainbow. Considerations include your typical driving weather (dark colors draw interior heat from the sun), viewing impressions (light colors make a GT look larger, dark colors make it appear smaller), risk factors (red cars are said to receive more attention from traffic officers), and your GT's body condition (light colors like white are more forgiving to repairs, while very dark colors like black reveal every imperfection).

A process for deciding what color you want, can include: Looking at other Opels, to seek out what you like (in photos and in person at Opel club events); Looking at other car models (it's said, if a color looks good on a BMW or a Porsche, it will look better on a GT); & Looking at paint chip books (online at [autocolibrary.com](http://autocolibrary.com), or at a local auto paint shop). Also understand that computer screen and even paint books aren't entirely accurate color reproductions, and other factors (age of a paint sample, time of day, indoor vs. outdoor lighting, direct sunlight or shadows, how paint will fade) will all affect your perception of the look of a color. You've found it, when you like the color you see, on a car on the street.

Other factors affecting paint include changes in the mixtures, and color differences between manufacturers. You can choose among tougher urethane enamels, apply multiple stages of a lacquer and/or a clear coat, or adopt other formulas.

### **(2) Body Repair:**

You may consult articles & books devoted to just this subject (on amazon.com the library, or stores like Borders), and talk to experienced professionals to learn more. In general, however, you should inspect your vehicle; Where cosmetic work is needed, consider options like available replacement panels (such as a fiberglass belly pan, nose panel or taillight panel). Damaged wheel openings can be masked with available fiberglass wheel flares. Rusted out floor panels can be replaced, by welding in generic reproduction sheet metal pieces (which are now remanufactured for the classic VW Beetle).



**"Extreme" Body Repair**

Because the GT is a vintage 1960's all-steel body, you need to treat all rust before applying paint. Look carefully for rust even in obscure areas (like the lower windshield and lower side window grooves). Minor surface rust areas can be ground down with an abrasive and treated with POR-15 or similar chemicals. Routine work behind the rear wheels, can be done with generic metal bent to fit. When rust is extensive, although you can replace metal panels, we advise you to reconsider idea of complete restoration. Either get a better GT body, or just do a "get by with" job and enjoy the car

Dealing with "bondo" (body filler) is another matter. Use a magnet to locate bondo (where the magnet won't "stick").

Generally it's a good idea to remove old body filler down to the old metal, then treat any underlying rust. Ask your auto paint store or body shop in advance to identify combinations of bondo and primer (that are compatible with the paint type you'll use), then reapply a fresh coat of bondo, so the new paint won't "crack" during the drying process or from exposure to sunlight in the future.

### **(3) Hands-On Paint Prep:**

It's a daunting project, as there are numerous details once you get serious. Small tricks like careful part disassembly and masking (covered in part #2 of this article) can make the difference between a show-winner, and a pretty job filled with small regrets. (If you're just doing a "quickie" re-spray job but also plan to replace the rubber, you can just trim the edges of old rubber around the windows -- to expose the metal without getting paint dust in the car).

Careful surface preparation will help paint to adhere to the GT's delicate curves, and you can also save shop labor expenses if you do this yourself at home. Paint stripping can be done by various methods. Most common medium used for paint stripping is sandpaper. This is easier with a dual-action orbital sander, which can throw up fine dust (wear a respirator) and "wander" into areas you don't want sanded (like fragile metal trim). To be more precise, you can do "block sanding" by hand. Either way, this can get messy, so it's necessary to secure a large drop cloth or tarp where you are working. It's also an aerobic experience, so you should plan to take some time and many rest breaks.

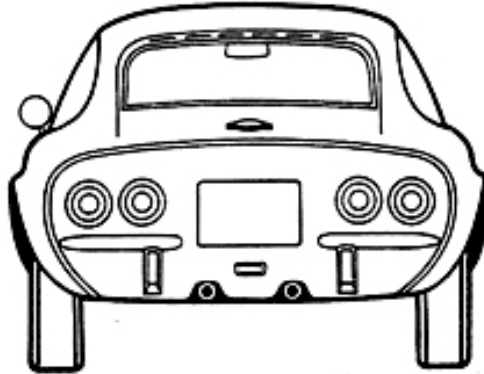
It's suggested to sand in stages, using 100, then 150, then 200 or 220 grit (which leaves lots of loose sand!). Use 60 grit on rust. Sand down only to the original factory primer, which is a tough rust-protectant layer that helps "grab" any new paint that's applied. Going down to the metal requires a new layer of primer, which also has to be sanded prior to paint application. (Sand- or media- blasting can leave residue, and chemical strips and dips work nice but can be expensive).

Whichever method you use, clean the body exterior thoroughly, let dry, then mask off areas on the body with tape (like stickers, remaining trim, etc.). All this careful preparation allows you better control of the result (as most body shop workers aren't meticulous when working on a GT -- their income is from collision repair jobs reimbursed by insurance).

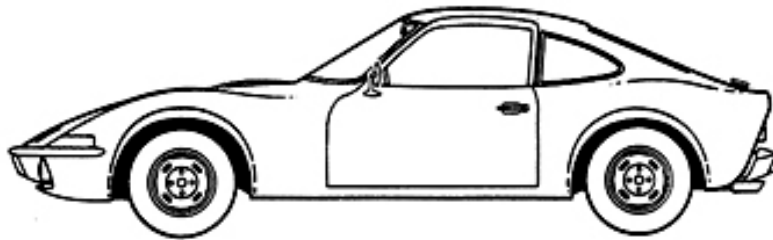
**Front**



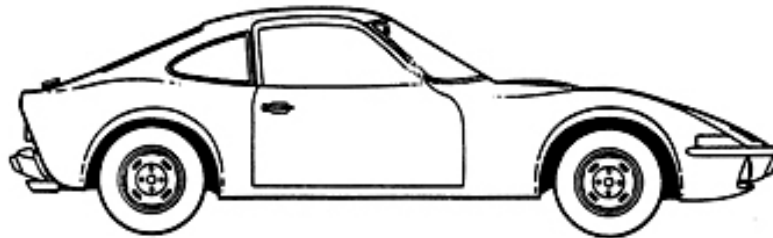
**Rear**



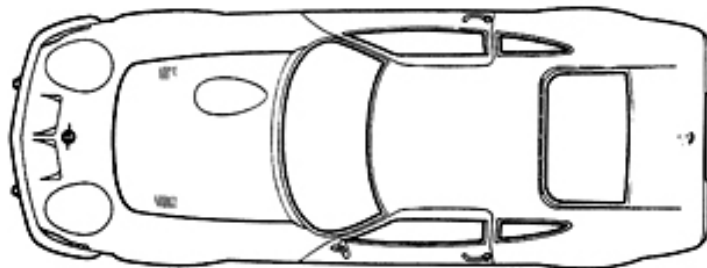
**Driver's Side**



**Passenger Side**



**Overall/Top View**



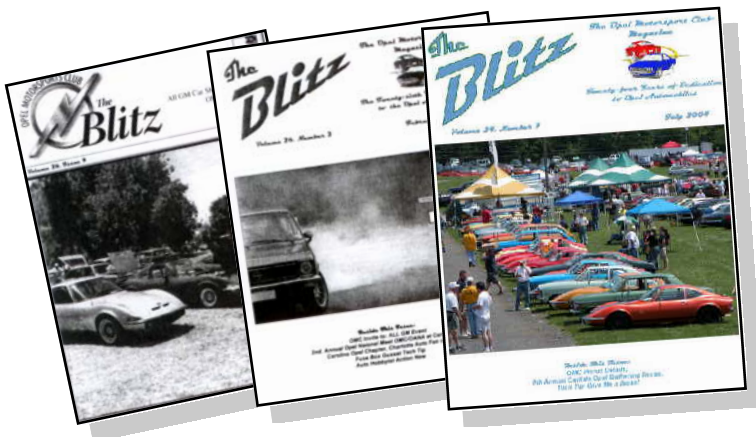
# OPEL MOTORSPORTS CLUB

OMC is an independent US-based auto club, that specializes in German-made 1968-1975 Opels.

OMC was founded in 1980 by Opel enthusiasts who wanted to share information and promote their marque in motorsports. A newsletter was established to promote Opel events, report Opel-related news, provide technical tips, discuss vehicle upgrades, and give members a free place to advertise.

New “Full Memberships” receive:

A year of bi-monthly print issues of OMC newsletter “The Blitz,” a roster of club members, an OMC decal and a window emblem. Members can also participate in local OMC chapter activities, held all over the USA.



## **OMC Newsletters: “THE BLITZ”**

(Print version black/white; Online in color)



## **OMC Activities & Annual Meeting**

Opel Motorsport Club is the longest-established Opel club in the U.S.A. Members travel great distances to attend the OMC Annual Meeting, a mid-Summer gathering and display of classic and restored Opels. Benefits of membership also include information from other Opel owners on the maintenance and improvement of their Opel(s), and the ability to contact fellow members on their common interests.

Opel Motorsport Club funds help maintain our website (with helpful Opel information) at: [www.opelclub.com](http://www.opelclub.com)

OMC’s peer-reviewed technical information helps owners avoid common and costly errors on Opel repair jobs! OMC is officially recognized by the Opel factory of Russelsheim, Germany, and OMC “SOLO II” racing activities are also sanctioned by the SCCA (Sports Car Club of America) for racing nationwide in the USA.

“Full” U.S. Membership: \$45.00 (Includes bi-monthly b/w print issues of The Blitz, postage & benefits listed above)

“Online-Only” Member: \$20.00 (Includes downloadable Acrobat .pdf version of The Blitz, for home color printing)



**To Join:** Send your name & address, with check/money order payable to “Opel Motorsports Club” by mail to:  
**OMC Treasurer, 3824 Franklin Street, La Crescenta CA 91214-1607**

OR: Send \$47 for Full US Membership or \$22 for Online Membership,  
via PayPal to: [JoinOMC@opelclub.com](mailto:JoinOMC@opelclub.com)

(International Members: Please Add \$10. for Full Membership, to cover additional postage costs)

