

Many people have heard of the major issues with the M32 gearbox on the Alfa MiTo, but few know whether they may be affected and generally people don't know what to look out for. This is particularly worrying when looking to buy a second-hand MiTo, but equally if you already own a MiTo and you hear the stories of expensive repairs or gearbox failures and you are just counting the days until your car suffers from the problem.

So let's start with which cars might be affected. The 6-speed M32 gearbox is used in many Vauxhall cars including the Astra, Corsa, Insignia, Vectra and Zafira. But it was also used in some versions of the Alfa 147, 159, Brera and MiTo. But only two versions of the MiTo have the M32: the 155 bhp Tjet, and the early 1.6 JTD diesels. So if you have a 1.4 non-155, a MultiAir, a TwinAir or a 1.3 diesel you are in the clear.

But if you own or are looking to buy a 155 Tjet or a 1.6 diesel, this might be worth knowing.

Let's start with the less expensive issue first. It is quite common for the gears to feel sloppy or stiff when trying to engage gears, like you are fighting to move the gearstick through treacle. This is rarely a problem with the gearbox but is most likely the linkage between the gearbox and the gearstick, so will need new linkage cables. This is not an expensive fix but well worth the cost to make for a much improved driving experience.

The more serious problems broadly break down into 5 issues:

1. Whining in 5th/6th gear, often resulting in a
2. Haunted gearstick.
3. Constant whine from 20mph.
4. Crunching of gears, normally leading to
5. Loss of gears.



Whining in 5th/6th Gear

It is common that people experience a progressively loud whining noise, normally in 6th gear but sometimes in 5th and 6th gear. If you turn up the stereo the problem can be lived with, but in fact this is a very serious issue that can result in catastrophic failure of the entire gearbox.

The issue is caused by wear on the 5th/6th output shaft bearing, and this bearing supports a whole shaft of gears which, if not fixed, can result in complete collapse of the bearing destroying all the internals of the gearbox and, in the worst case, result in metal exploding through the gearbox end casing.

Haunted Gearstick

When I say "haunted gearstick", what I actually mean is the gearstick quite literally moving of it's own accord when in 1st or 5th gears. It is a sight to see, but is a sure sign of the first issue of wear on the 5th/6th output shaft bearing. If you think

about the position of the gearstick in 1st and 5th (both upwards) the issue manifests itself by the gearstick moving down by itself. This is because both gears share the same shaft. It can be seen to a lesser extent in other gears, but only because engine movement is transferring through the gear linkage.

Constant Whine from 20mph

This is less common and is sometimes mistakenly diagnosed

as a wheel bearing issue. The problem is a failed bearing but because that bearing will spin with the output shaft, the whining can still be heard with the clutch depressed, so people think it is a wheel bearing issue.

Crunching Gears, leading to Loss of Gears

This issue can be hastened by a worn clutch, and is common in 2nd, 3rd and 4th gears. Initially you will experience the occa-



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sional crunch when selecting a gear, but quite soon the crunching becomes constant. After a while, this develops to gears popping out of gear or not engaging at all. By the time this happens, the teeth on the gear are so worn there is not enough to maintain contact.

Avoidance and repair

As with most things on the MiTo (or any car), regular and correct maintenance and servicing is key. The cost of replacing your gearbox oil by a specialist with the correct type of oil can be as much as £100, so is often overlooked by owners if there are no adverse symptoms. The 155 Tjet and the 1.6 diesel are also exactly the type of cars that can be driven heavily, so regular clutch replacement should be considered too (along with good driving practice!). Checking and replacing the gearbox oil at correct intervals along with always maintaining the clutch are important. But inherent weaknesses in the early M32 gearbox does mean that you may still be unlucky.

Depending on the nature of the symptoms, repairing or rebuilding your gearbox is normally possible, and the costs very much depend on what has failed or has worn. But you need to bear in mind there is significant labour required to remove the clutch and gearbox before diagnosis can even be done.

Several specialists can quote relatively fixed prices for replacement bearing and gear kits, including all the seals and labour. But until your gearbox is removed, inspected and diagnosed you cannot expect anyone to give you an accurate quote at the outset.

Typical prices start in the region of £350, rising up through to £800-£900 depending on which components need replacing. There are also spe-

cialists that can supply and fit an already fully reconditioned unit for around the £900 mark, so this could be something to consider to avoid spending £600 now and risk having another £600 bill a few months down the line when additional components wear. But remember, if you're having your gearbox rebuilt and refitted you should also have a new clutch and flywheel fitted, so your total bill could quite easily be into four figures.

The alternative, of course, is to source a second-hand gearbox from a reputable supplier who can demonstrate the history and mileage of the donor vehicle. If it is unclear which exact vehicle the gearbox was sourced from and what mileage and history that vehicle had, walk away. You could spend hundreds on a used gearbox and the labour to install it only to find it has the same or worse issues as your original.

As with all issues on the MiTo,



you only tend to hear the stories of those that go wrong. Most are perfectly fine with good servicing and decent driving. But if any of the symptoms in this article appear on your 155 or 1.6 diesel, make sure you tackle them immediately.

The M32 gearbox is one area of your MiTo that, when caught early, could mean the difference be-

tween a £300 bill and one for £1,500.

And if you are considering buying a 155 or a 1.6 diesel, be sure to have a thorough test drive and ensure none of the symptoms described here are present. If they, either walk away or use it as a very strong negotiating point to reduce the price to cover your likely costs.

