

MiTo Electric Power Steering

It's always difficult to tackle a subject like this without either scare-mongering or underplaying an issue. But I don't want to avoid the issue as I do think it is an important one. But like all things, it needs to be considered in context and, as with many things on Alfa Romeos, battery care and maintenance plays an important role.

So what is the issue? At the one extreme, you may hear reports of the MiTo steering failing whilst at speed, jeopardising the safety of those on board. At the other, you may hear of steering groan when parking or manoeuvring at low speed which people often ignore as an Alfa feature.

But let's get to the basics first. The MiTo, unlike its stable



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-mate the Punto, has a unique and technically quite advanced Electric Power Steering (EPS) system. Unlike a traditional hydraulic system, the EPS reduces the amount of effort needed to steer the MiTo by using a power steering control module to control the power steering motor to move the steering gear. The control module uses sensors to monitor the steering torque, vehicle speed and rotation to determine the amount of assistance needed. All very clever use of electronics.

But there are fundamentally two flaws. Firstly, the EPS needs a strong current from the battery to function correctly. And by now, most of our batteries (unless recently replaced) will be getting a little long in the tooth, and we all know that a poor performing battery in a MiTo can lead to lots of electronic problems and warning lights. The second issue is that the entire EPS is basically in one sealed unit, so if an individual sensor fails it is almost impossible for the home or DIY mechanic to fix it.

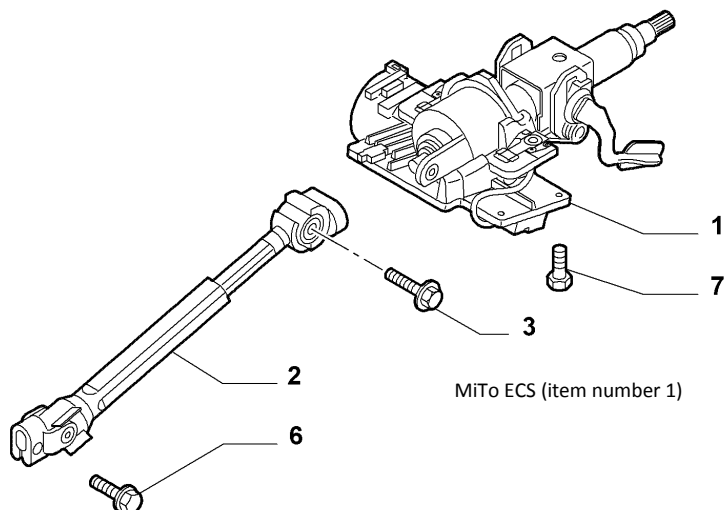
Couple this with scary stories on the internet of MiTo steering failures, and you can understand why people are quite rightly concerned about the EPS fitted to the MiTo.

The Vauxhall Corsa, which shares a lot of the components with the MiTo as part of the collaboration with GM on the Small Platform, has an almost identical

EPS to that used in the MiTo. Some years ago, Vauxhall issued a recall for some 3,000 Corsa and Adam cars manufactured between February and September 2014 for a steering issue. The seriousness of this recall has been referred to by the internet people as an example of why Alfa Romeo should have issued a recall for the MiTo EPS, but the two are completely unrelated. The Vauxhall recall was due to a manufacturing failure in a specific part, not the EPS as such. And bear in mind

that there are thousands of MiTos on the road and many more Vauxhall Corsas, so the MiTo EPS failure is not only greatly exaggerated but also, in 9 out of ten cases, related to a battery in poor condition.

None of this is intended to down-play the very scary nature of power steering failing on any car at speed. It happened to me a long time ago with a hydraulic system (not in an Alfa), and the best way to describe the sensation is like having a tyre blowout



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on a motorway. And if your power steering fails (or if you have a blowout) on the move, the advice is the same: keep calm, keep both hands on the steering wheel, do not slam your brakes on but gradually reduce speed by dropping through the gears and steering slowly until you find a safe place to come to a controlled, gradual stop (e.g. a hard shoulder).

However, before you panic-sell your MiTo, know that it is extremely unlikely that your EPS will fail when on the move. The system has a self-test and failure capability, so if you get a power steering failure warning light on your dash, treat it seriously.

As the EPS is one unit, any failure in the motor, the ECU or

one of the sensors will be difficult to diagnose, but you will typically see the first signs at very low speed such as when you are parking or manoeuvring, with symptoms normally being intermittent heavy steering in one or both directions. It is extremely, *extremely* unlikely that the EPS will fail whilst you are driving at speed without some early warning signs. There are virtually no reports of failures without having first seen a power steering failure warning light. So if your steering feels different or harder to use at slow speeds and you have a power steering failure warning light, do not use your MiTo until it is professionally diagnosed.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, power steering issues are a direct result of a poor condition battery. If your MiTo is

over 3 or 4 years old and still on the original battery, replace it now with a good quality new battery, and consider replacing your battery every couple of years. There are numerous areas of the MiTo electronics that depend on a strong battery, so replacing it will reduce any erroneous warnings.

In the event that you are one of the unlucky ones and your ECS (or any component within it) fails, there are options. Of course, your Alfa Romeo dealer can replace the EPS, but this will cost several hundred pounds. But a search of the internet for "Alfa MiTo EPS Repair" will show you some well-regarded Companies such as BBA-Reman in Kent, ACS Power Steering in Tamworth, Western Power Steering in Bristol and Power Steering Services in London (and

several others) who will replace or refurbish your EPS for around £300 or less, most offering a lifetime guarantee.

Like many things with the MiTo, there are stories and there are truths and there are areas in between. Don't lie awake worrying if your steering will fail. There are a thousand electronic parts that could fail in any car with a range of serious consequences. Just maintain your battery and treat any warning lights or strange differences in steering operation seriously - don't just ignore it.

And if you are concerned, book your MiTo in with your dealer or Alfa specialist for diagnostics. Chances are, you'll just need a new battery. But always check other possibilities too, especially if your battery is new.

