

minor matters

By Paul Harris

Day out at Southsea with Mother and Grandparents — and the Morris AAA 485 — in 1950. (Photo Paul Harris).

If I live to be a hundred, which in view of my weakness for adjusting ailing internal combustion engines in closed garages is extremely unlikely, my lasting memory of any motor vehicle will be the first encounter I had with a Morris Minor at the (?) tender age of 16. I was no stranger to elderly Morris cars, having been brought up with the family "Ten-Four" and I knew most of its contemporary models but for some inexplicable reason until the morning of 27th December 1962 the Minor was only a name in the faded sales catalogue which was one of my most treasured possessions.

Heavy snow had fallen during the night of 26th December 1962 and the common rear access our house shared with others in the road was well and truly blocked with over a foot of snow. A couple of cars that had managed to start in the icy conditions only slithered back into their stables when confronted with the conditions on the gentle slope leading to the approach road; disgruntled, their owners retired to finish the rest of the Christmas booze. However the new occupant of a house at the end of the road was marching cheerfully down to his garage armed with only a jug of hot water and obviously plenty of confidence. It was not many seconds before a rich burble filled the air which was instantly recognisable as a pre-war Morris of some description. Without faltering a miniature square box emerged from the garage and proceeded to reverse down the drive through the hitherto unconquered snow much to the amazement of a steadily increasing crowd of neighbours gathering to see the fun. There wasn't any. The 1929 Morris Minor fabric saloon (MY 1435) pulled out onto the main road and drove away as if it was midsummer. That did it! There was no doubt in the mind of Harris junior what his first car was going to be!

Winter melted into spring and my newly acquired Raleigh Moped spent much of its running in period touring local scrapyards looking for the car of my dreams. Scrapyards at that time were still a delight to the enthusiast, most of the vehicles in them were pre-war and as the days of stacking and crushing hadn't arrived it was possible to spend many enjoyable hours wandering round to choose a suitable subject for resuscitation. If I had had the space and money a clean 1928 Austin 12/4 could have been mine for £50 whilst a one-owner Morris Twenty-Oxford of 1934 in perfect running order was available for £15 but sadly I couldn't track down a vintage Minor. However it was in Harold Goodey's yard at Twyford that I discovered DG 7729. Looking distinctly sorry for herself DG 7729 was a 1934 Morris Minor de-luxe saloon and she was sitting between a magnificent Voisin tourer and a very dilapidated Morris Family Eight with the OHC engine. Ignoring the lack of a few small items such as wheels and the large chunks of metal missing from the cylinder head after the "big-freeze DG 7729 was in remarkably good condition. The black coachwork was original and although extremely dirty responded well to a polish with a clean handkerchief. The interior was equally sound, the sunroof

worked and when I discovered the original handbook wrapped carefully in brown paper in the door pocket I decided that this was the car for me. After much haggling I reached an agreement with Mr. Goodey that provided I could find the missing parts from other cars in his yard and he gave me the logbook I would pay him £10 for the vehicle. This was the enjoyable bit! A good set of wheels and tyres were removed from the family Eight and fitted to DG with the aid of a jack found in the tool box of a "Y" type Ford. A cylinder head was removed from the remains of a 1932 two-seater Minor that had obviously argued with something a little larger and come off worst and a battery with a fair bit of life left in it removed from an early Austin Seven completed the bill. I fitted the cylinder head with the fairly comprehensive tool kit I had amassed to keep the wretched moped running, poured some water in the radiator, checked that petrol and oil were present (they were) and with some misgivings pressed the starter. It went first time! Oil pressure was good and if there had been a little more of the exhaust system left it would have sounded quite nice as well. A couple more visits to the yard tied up the loose ends, and it was time for the journey home. The details of this are best left unrecorded but car and driver made the seven mile journey without a hitch which was perhaps just as well! A few weeks of cleaning and painting followed and the car passed its M.O.T. a few days before my seventeenth birthday. She was christened "Bambi" after a bottle of well known plonk was cracked over the radiator which only succeeded in snapping off a Calormeter wing and then proceeded to give me many thousands of happy and troublefree miles motoring, living on a diet of Castrol XXL and regular doses of Holts "Piston Seal" which only seemed to change the colour of the exhaust smoke, never to stop it! Bambi was eventually sold to make way for the family "Ten-Four" I had by now inherited and the last I saw of her was in 1969 parked in a front garden in a Reading suburb.

1933 model Morris Ten (registered September 1932) "KX 9192" with Paul's mother at the wheel. This car was sold in 1946 and last seen in 1960. The background is Bucklebury Common, Berkshire. (Photo: Paul Harris).



During the mid-1960's One could pick up virtually any Morris of the early thirties for a nominal sum and I had my share — many were 10/4's bought for breaking to provide a bank of spares for my saloon AAA 485. I did however keep two of these cars for a while and do hope they are still around, as they provided me with many miles of "hack transport." One was a very early "Ten" Special Coupe, RD 3784 registered on 15th September 1932 and carrying a very low chassis number. Its original owner assured me that the car was on the Morris car at the 1932 Olympia show — he may well have been correct, but I never found any evidence to support this statement. The second "hack" was a 1935 10/4 Saloon BTW 653 bought for breaking owing to a dodgy big-end. I had actually started dismantling when a friend called round to see the new purchase and persuaded me BTW was too good for breaking. She was therefore put back together, engine repaired and after a good polish served me faithfully from 1967-70 as a daily car and towing hack.

During 1968 I spotted by chance an advert. in Exchange & Mart for a restored 1929 Morris Minor bodyshell. I purchased this thinking OHC Minor mechanics were plentiful — they were not! After a lot of searching I purchased the remains of a 1931 S.V. Saloon with the intention of converting this to the OHC models specification i.e. bumpers, correct engine and instruments etc. etc. However I got so fed up trying to buy an OHC engine that when the offer of a complete 1934 two-seater came up I advertised my saloon body and bits for sale and bought the two-seater. The first caller for the saloon said he didn't want it — too much work! But he did mention he had a 1930 Morris van in his barn that he wished to dispose of and also mentioned that it had an OHC engine. At this my ears pricked up and I arranged to see the vehicle the following night. A wet and misty November evening is arguably not the best time to view a restoration project and the sight that met my eyes in the dimly lit barn surprised even me. The vehicle had been an OHC saloon but the rear panel of the body had been removed and a van rear crudely fastened on the opened luggage carrier. The whole thing had then been painted a matt grey, radiator and all, used as a delivery vehicle until 1961 and then pushed into the barn. The remarkable thing was however that nothing at all was missing, the engine was free and the vendor only wanted £20. In ten minutes flat DF 9053 was coupled up to BTW 653, lights were fixed and the unlikely convoy made its way home. The S.V. Minor Tourer project was put on one side and with a restored bodyshell waiting there followed a winter of hard work and by May 1969 DF 9053 was standing in the drive M.O.T.'d and taxed. As any owner of an OHC Minor will tell you she was a superb performer and despite an unhealthy appetite for white-metal in the big-end department gave me an enormous amount of pleasure that summer. However by the winter engine troubles and the forthcoming purchase of a business forced the sale of

Paul Harris' Grandparents beside their 1935 Ten-Four. Almost 80 years of age when this photograph was taken, Paul's Grandfather (Mr. A. C. Baker) was a pioneer motorist who learned to drive in Hyde Park, London, in 1898 — later becoming chauffeur to Lord Hastings, circa 1903, driving Daimler and Napier cars, to name two. (Photo: P. Harris).



A young Paul Harris in 1958 with Grandmother and "AAA 485." (Photo: P. Harris).

DF 9053 to a local dealer and I have not seen her since. I do hope she has a good home.

I didn't get involved with Morris Minors again until 1974 when following the purchase of a S.V. "Family" car and by the spring OW 4224 was roadworthy. Although we had a lot of fun with her she lacked the performance of her predecessor and when the chance arose she was changed for another 1930 OHC Saloon that had not seen the road since 1947. Having a little more time now and better garage facilities I hope to keep this one, and to date the restoration is progressing well — MY 3508 should be on the road again early in 1979 — I hope.

P.S. I would be delighted if the present owners of any of the above vehicles would care to contact me with news.

"My first car" DG 7729, a 1934 season Morris Minor Saloon, photographed in July 1963. (Photo: P. Harris)



Summer 1933. "My Mother and Grandparents with the 1928 Cowley — sold in 1935 in favour of a Morris Ten KX 9129." (Photo: P. Harris).

