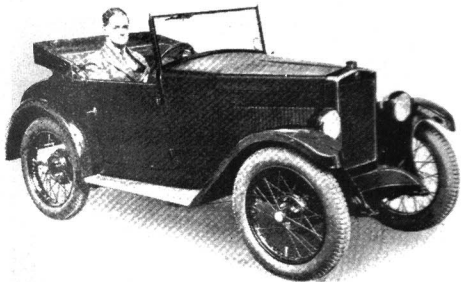
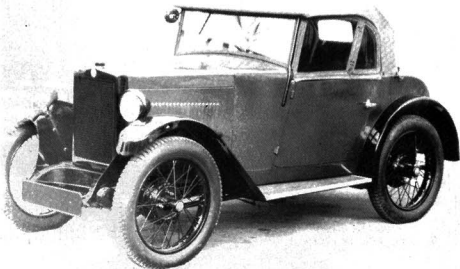
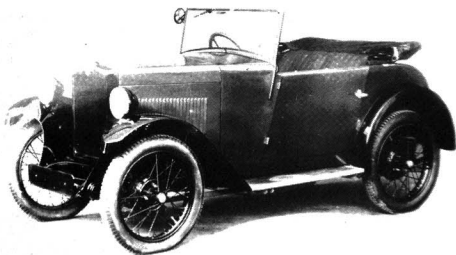


# JO.764 – A MYSTERY WITH SOME OF THE ANSWERS

By Harry Edwards



*The first photograph of the S.V. Minor prototype taken on the 9th December 1930 with Sir William Morris at the wheel. At this stage the round Lucas mirror and the blank number plates have not been fitted. The headlamps also appear to have been changed later.*



*Morris publicity photographs of the new £100 S.V. Morris Minor, taken of the prototype on 18th December 1930 before being fitted with 'JO.764' number plates.*

On display at a Devon Farm museum called The Milky Way can be seen what would appear to be a 1932 model Morris Minor Two Seater. In itself this is not a startling revelation, that is until the knowledgeable visitor notes the late 1930 Oxford registration number 'JO.764'. Even more surprising is that JO.764 was issued to Morris Motors Ltd and used on the first pre-production prototype of the £100 side valve Morris Minor and featured in contemporary Road Tests of the new model for the 1931 season. A curiosity that required a little further research, with the following results.

The prototype of the side valve Minor was built during December 1930 and the first production model was road tested during the first week in January 1931. Various contemporary motoring magazines published details of the new £100 Two-seater using photographs which were no doubt of this early, unregistered, prototype. An early public view of the s.v. Minor was a surprise appearance at a New Year party held for Stewart & Arden employees where, on the stroke of midnight, they wheeled onto the ballroom floor a gleaming new grey finished two-seater. Perhaps 'gleaming' is the wrong word to describe the new model where all the external bright parts, except the door handles, were paint finished in black.

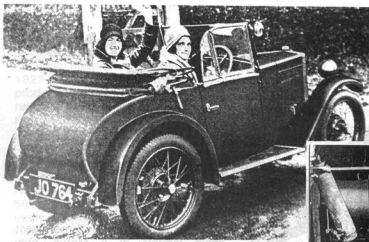
By January 1931 announcements of the new Morris Minor were being accompanied by press photographs showing the car with the Oxfordshire JO.764 registration number, issued to Morris Motors Ltd., Cowley, on the 11th December 1930. Subsequently the car was featured in Morris publicity films. Whether the application for the number by the makers had originally been intended for another Morris model or, having got the number, someone at Cowley decided to use it on the s.v. Minor Two-seater we will never know. Suffice to say that the original registration numbers file held at the Oxfordshire Archives in County Hall, New Road, show the vehicle allocated JO.764 to be a Minor Saloon finished in blue. We may never know the answer to that one.

It is known that once the publicity died down the vehicle was retained at Cowley as an Experimental Model for a few months. It was customary for Morris to waste nothing and this Minor was no exception, by the 7th July 1931 it was rebuilt in part to the later 1932 specification and allocated the late 1931 production chassis number SV.5334, and sold as a second-hand model, still registered as JO.764.

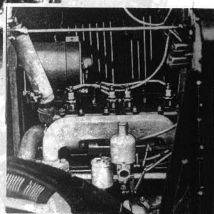
The answers we know, unfortunately, pose further questions. Was JO.764 used by the Experimental Dept. when working on a pre-production model for the 1932 season? As it survives today it has 1932 style Magna wire wheels and a chromium plated version of the rectangular radiator shell simulating the 1932 version by the addition of a professionally added vertical strip but because of its origins it is devoid of the fluted decoration below the badge. The badge itself is the earlier round type and the car retains its gravity feed petrol tank.

The Morris Motors Ltd. identification plate carries, as would be expected, 'Type,MM8', the later chassis number 'SV.5334', and an engine number 'u.747.A'. However the log book still carries what was presumably the chassis number given by Morris Motors Ltd in late 1930 as 'KX.111230' and engine number 'B3'. It is known that Morris used the prefix 'EX' to chassis used by the Experiment Dept. and as the surviving log book is a continuation book it is more than likely a misprint was made when the later copy of the book was issued. Consider that number again. 'EX.111230' is the date that JO.764 was first registered, 11th December 1930!

Of the car's history after it was sold by Morris Motors Ltd secondhand in July 1931, nothing is known. Was it sold to a Morris employee? Certain parts now to be found on JO.764 have obviously been added or substituted in later years, for example the Armstrong hydraulic shock-absorbers which were not available in 1931, curious ventilators on the scuttle sides, and larger headlamps (probably Morris Eight type) in conjunction with a tie bar between the front wings. In 1966 the Minor Two-seater belonged to two separate owners in Exeter before going to the present owner. (The writer acknowledges assistance given by Anders Ditlev Clausager, Archivist, British Motor Industry Heritage Trust).



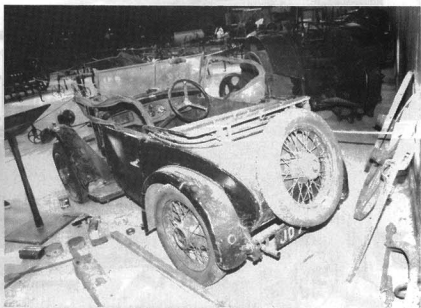
The prototype S.V. Minor with its newly acquired number plates.



Side Valve engine of the Minor showing the curious positioning of the bottom water inlet hose—suggesting the use of a radiator from the O.H.V. Minor which has the hose connection on the near-side.



'Interested locals in Abingdon market square' said the photograph caption—but was the car superimposed?



Today 'JO.764' joins farm machinery on display at Downland Farm Museum 'The Milky Way' at Bideford in Devon. (Photo: W.J. Roberts)

'JO.764' showing the curious up-dated radiator shell. (Photo: W.J. Roberts)

