

MINOR TOURERS: THE FIRST AND THE LAST - DIFFERENT, BUT HOW?

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Along with the Fabric Saloon, the Tourer model was there from the very beginning of the pre-war Morris Minor story and unlike the Fabric Saloon it was also there when production ceased in the late summer of 1934. Its durability was not a fluke and consistent showroom sales of this model ensured its longevity despite the ravages of the deep economic depression of the period.

In appearance the car had changed little throughout its six year production life, that is until its final season, when it was adorned with new wings and a totally new body shape; its final incarnation looking much more like the Morris Eight Tourer that succeeded it, than any of the earlier Minor Tourer models.

However under the skin significant changes had taken place during the course of the model's production run. The original overhead camshaft engine had been replaced in 1931 with the similar capacity (and cheaper to build) side valve unit.

The shock absorbers were changed three times during the life of the model, from the single acting Smiths and Armstrong units, to Armstrong fully hydraulic types. The brakes had also changed from cable operated to hydraulic while the gearbox had undergone a metamorphosis from a three speed crash box to a four speed synchromesh type, with a half-way house (optional) model in between! Other changes had taken place elsewhere. The dash layout had been 'modernised' and the scuttle fuel tank had been moved to the rear. The radiator surround saw the most changes with six, yes six different styles fitted to the Four Seat Tourer during this period. Like all other Minor models the wheels changed from the original small hub design to the Dunlop Magna type for the 1932 season while for 1934 the 19 inch rims were replaced by 18 inch items. Some things didn't change though, including the two piece front screen.

The writer has driven Minors from both ends of this time spectrum. The difference is startling. A well set up 1930 or earlier car is a delight to drive with light and sensitive steering. The brakes are predictable and effective, although braking on a bend can surprise the uninitiated. The gearbox is 'difficult' until the oil has warmed thoroughly but after that changing gear can be a very rewarding experience although vigilance is required when changing down if a 'crunch' is to be avoided.

Over confidence on the part of a driver who believes that mastery of the black art of double de-clutching has been achieved, is soon brought down to earth by a noisy clash of cogs immediately concentration levels slip by just one jot. The early cars are noisy, particularly when pulling hard in second gear. The straight cut gears can make quite a din and attract an unreasonable amount of attention when passing walkers and other poor uninitiated souls

(and horses!). The interior of an early car accelerating through the gears may sound like a rhapsody to those of us that love the car but an awful cacophony to those that don't. The gearbox is after all inside the cabin and the mechanical noise of the overhead camshaft and valve gear is just a couple of feet in front of the occupants. A V.S.C.C. luminary once famously referred to the car as the Morris Minor 'Overheard Camshaft' model. At 40-45 mph in top gear and on a good road surface the noise subsides and the car feels settled and

responsive. The engine noise is complemented by the sound of the carburettor inhaling vast quantities of air through its very small one inch diameter intake aperture. Somebody should set these sounds to music!

Driving a 1934 model Minor is a very different experience. Firstly the cabin is less spartan in appearance and has real leather covered seats! The side valve engine is also a lot quieter in operation than its predecessor

and the four speed gearbox is a little gem. Accelerating up through the gears is a fuss free exercise accompanied by a subdued and altogether softer exhaust note. Steering is also light, responsive and very predictable as is the handling around sharp bends. The suspension set up on the car driven by the writer was softer than on the early model but this did not seem to increase 'body roll' when cornering. The brakes were totally predictable and stopped the car very effectively and without fuss. At similar speeds to those achieved in the early car, very little noise was heard from under the bonnet with transmission and wind noise predominating. Driving this car was so fuss free that it was apparent that any capable driver could step straight from a car manufactured in the 21st century into the 1934 Minor Tourer without a requirement for further tuition. Well perhaps a little tuition would be required, as I had forgotten about the centrally positioned accelerator pedal. This was not re-positioned to the right of the brake pedal until the 1935 model year Morris Eights.

And that really sums it up. Over the six years of the car's development it had gradually moved away from its vintage car roots to become a much easier car to drive and to maintain. The changes that had occurred were not revolutionary when viewed singularly (some even say the change to the side valve engine was a retrograde step) but these changes gradually

improved and simplified the day to day driving experience. As the pre-war Minor grew up it began to lose some of its eccentricities and gained in return an aura of main stream respectability, which as a result continues to this day to offend the sensitivities of some!

NB: During this period Morris referred to the four-seat open Minor model as the 'Tourer' while the two seat open cars were described as 'two-seaters' in all Morris brochures and catalogues.



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