



The Surviving Morris Minor Fabric Saloons



Morris Motors publicity photo of a 1930 Minor Fabric Saloon (LAT 'Motor' Plate X502)

Survivors and conversions

Once again Minor enthusiast Mike Houston has been scouring registers and enthusiast club journals, together with other potential sources, for evidence of surviving Minor Fabric Saloons.

Along with the open Tourer model, the Minor Fabric Saloon was officially launched at the October 1928 London Motor Show, although news of its existence had been officially leaked in early June of that year. Morris Motors released a number of images to the motoring press of William Morris sitting in, and standing alongside a prototype Saloon, while early news of the car's specification caused much excitement both in the motoring and national press. The reason for the excitement was that at last the world famous and all-pervading Austin Seven was to have a serious competitor, albeit very belatedly.

The first cars began to find homes in the autumn of 1928 and the model became a best seller during the course of 1929. In the late summer of that year Morris Motors announced the introduction of a steel panelled saloon car to be called the Morris Minor Coachbuilt Saloon employing pressed steel body panels to skin the car while its body frame remained of wooden construction. At launch the Coachbuilt Saloon was priced a full £9 higher than the Fabric skinned model although by the following year the gap had lowered to just £5. After the launch of the S.V. range of cars in the spring of 1931, sales of the original OHC Fabric Saloon fell to a trickle while the newly launched S.V. Fabric Saloon fared little better, despite it being a huge £21 cheaper than the £135 OHC variant.

Time has not been kind to Minor Fabric Saloons with comparatively few cars surviving. Although the 1929 season cars sold in relatively large numbers the following list proves that few are known to have survived. 1930 Fabric Saloons seem to have fared better although only marginally so. By 1931 Fabric skinned cars had become extremely unfashionable, with manufacturers rapidly dropping these models from their ranges. By 1932 they had all but disappeared. Perhaps this explains why not a solitary S.V. Fabric Saloon is known to have survived as the model was simply launched too late and fell-foul of changing public taste. A further reason for their scarcity today lies in the lack of durability of the car's outer surface. While the fabric skins of these cars remained unscathed they were watertight and comfortable. However, once the skin had been damaged and not repaired speedily the integrity of the body suffered as a result of dampness, which played havoc with the car's timber frame. Contemporary reports also mention birds pecking at the fabric to get at the soft felt underlay beneath, which eventually would not have helped survival rates.

So it was with this history in mind that Mike embarked upon his quest to record the details of the known survivors. Unlike the Semi-Sports Survivors list Mike had compiled earlier in 2012, this new listing doesn't record a single replica Fabric Saloon. A strange phenomenon considering that all pre-July 1931 OHC Morris Minors are highly sought after here in the U.K. by members of the Vintage Sports Car Club. These potential buyers deem the Minor Fabric Saloon a far more desirable option than its steel bodied erstwhile nemesis, but as yet, no one has decided to build such a car. I wonder why? **Editor's Note:** Of the 25 original Fabric Saloon survivors, almost a fifth of them have spent a considerable period of time in museums which has undoubtedly helped to bolster the shockingly low number of survivors.



SK 1508 built in December 1928 with chassis no. 1243 (Image A. Gamble 2012)



Morris Minor Fabric Saloons 1928 – 1931

Worldwide Survivors List – compiled by Mike Houston

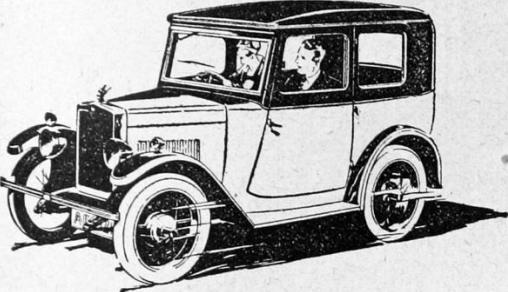
Local I.D. or registration	Chassis No.	Current owner	Notes
DO 7820	MM 463	Unknown	Last seen at M.R. rally 1980s
SK 1508	MM 1243	Norman Fisher	Ex Sword collection ex Tony Gamble
BR 7084	MM 2857		Ex Jim Dalton
	M 3066		In Germany
WL 6488*	M 3273	Paul Venboer	In Holland, now Semi-sports replica
545 LWP	M 3931	Mike Hewson	Ex Capt. McLeod (ex CL 7777 & DS 9618)
RA 7997	M 3988	Rodney Griffin	
TM 4531	M 4282	Richard Parker	
RX 4207	M 4322	John Hall	Kidderminster. Ex Bunn Collection
HJ 8848	M 6117	Robin Hiscocks	
UX 4741	M 6719	Simon North	
CP 7998	M 7190	John Miller	
TF 924*	M 7777	John McLoy	Now fitted 1934 Two-seater body
UR 3927*	M 8186	Geraint Owen	Now a special
MM 9063	M 11282	Albert Spence	Rebuilt Terry Hayward mid-sixties
TS 8472	M 11355	George Edward	
WL 7995	M 11455	Tom Dixon?	
UR 4313	M 11538	Neil Craddock	Ex Alan Jubb, Ex Bill Piggott
BF 5452*	M 12504		Ex Orchid Cars NZ re-import now steel bodied.
MY 1435	M 14097	David Carter	
VG 2007	M 14258	Halbe Tjepkema	Ex Lance Lodge now in Nederlands
MM 1928	M 14453	Jack Blyth	Christchurch, New Zealand
CP 8177	M 19686	Peter Baines	
KR 5670	M 24921	Ian Grace	Ex Olive Willatts non-standard body, USA
FH 7004	M 27047	Allan Napier	Ex John Purser
SV 9392*	M 28462		Ex Wesley Payne now steel bodied
MU 3485	M 32249		Ex Richard Sanders, Ex Bill Chambers
BF 4527	M 33466	Derek Hardman	Ex Tim Armitage (Was LG 6677)
VG 3815	M 34370	Peter Caldwell	In U.S.A.
*	Y407		Ex Holden bodied, now with Riley engine
<hr/>			
To be ratified			
DZ-31-PG		Morris Register member	
TE 8966		Myreton Motor Museum	
<hr/>			

Notes

- Those cars appearing here with an * adjacent to their local I.D. no longer carry a Fabric saloon body.
- There will be other ex-Fabric Saloon chassis frames, upon which will be mounted MG M Type replica bodies. If you have such a car please contact chris@prewarminor.com with the detail.
- If you can 'fill-in' any of the gaps appearing in the table above, please contact us.

February 12, 1929. The Motor 61

"Happiness made manifest in metal"



What
The Autocar
says of the
MORRIS MINOR

This and following comments are extracts from a critical report published recently.

" . . . not merely up to expectations . . . but exceeds them "

EASE OF CONTROL "Handling this car is most fascinating . . . the engine is so very willing, the steering is light."

ENGINE "is smooth all through its range . . . is full of fire and life . . . not only brisk in acceleration but with an entirely unexpected capacity to run dead slow in top gear . . ."

GEARS "are extraordinarily well chosen . . . on second gear the 'bite' of the engine and the acceleration are excellent."

SPEED "Its capacity for speed is remarkable . . . capable of 55 m.p.h. with one up and 52 or 53 m.p.h. with three up; on second gear it could do 40 to 42 m.p.h."

HILL CLIMBING "In respect of hill-climbing the performance is equally remarkable . . . will tackle most ordinary slopes on top, gradients of 1 in 10 order can be climbed on second gear at 30 to 32 m.p.h."

BRAKING ". . . with a load the car could easily be brought to rest coasting from 20 m.p.h. down a hill of 1 in 6½ without having to push over-hard on the pedal. No tendency to block any wheel."

SUSPENSION ". . . of all good points the most prominent is the springing. For a small car it is really excellent—no pitching . . . remarkably steady over bad surfaces."

Truly "a blithe little car."

Write for Catalogue and full particulars of Hire-Purchase Terms, etc., to Enquiries Dept. M. Cowley.

MORRIS MINOR TOURER £125	MORRIS MORRIS MOTORS (1926) LTD., COWLEY, OXFORD	MORRIS MINOR SALOON £135
------------------------------------	--	------------------------------------

Staunch and fire-resisting Motor Houses from £10 10s. *Triplex on any model at slight additional cost.* *Dunlop Tyres standard.*

BUY BRITISH AND BE PROUD OF IT

D.A. 235

The Index to Advertisers will be found on page 67. D21

Surviving Minor Fabric Saloon Images



Both of these cars found new homes in 2012. RX 4207 was purchased by Arun Motors at a Goodwood auction prior to being sold to John Hall in Kidderminster, While SK 1508 was purchased from Tony Gamble by Norman Fisher from Lincolnshire.



BF 4527 was formerly registered as LG 6677. It was photographed by Ken Martin at Beaulieu in September 2006 (above right) before losing its original plate and being sold on eBay. Now owned by Derek Hardman.



Perhaps the fastest Morris Minor of all time is the Mike Hewson owned 545 LWP (formerly CL 7777 and DS 9618) This car was supercharged whilst in the ownership of Capt. McLeod. KR 5670 is now owned by Ian Grace in the U.S.A.

Further surviving Fabric Saloon images...



CP 8177 was rebuilt by Chris Baines during the first decade of this century and can be regularly seen at old car events in the North West of England. VG 3815 is resident a long way from its Norfolk home, and is now owned by Peter Caldwell in the USA.



MY 1435 looks as if it's still has some original thirties fabric clinging to its body, while Neil Craddock's current car, the smart UR 4313 was rebuilt by Alan Jubb in the last decade before eventually being purchased by Bill Piggott.

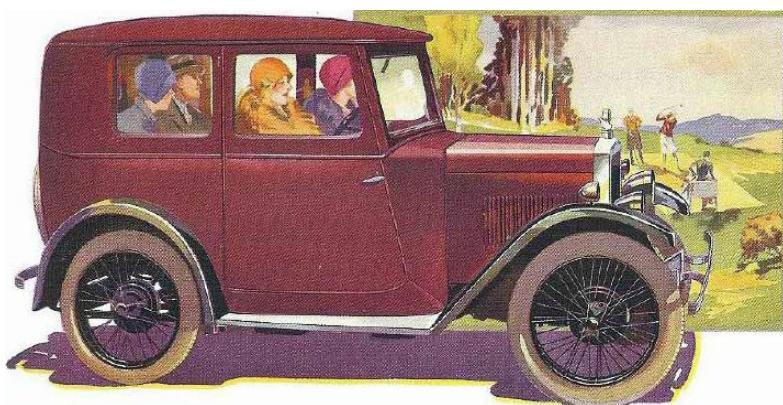


TE 8966 is a permanent resident at the Myreton Motor Museum in East Lothian, Scotland and is one of four survivors to have spent long periods in such a place. Halbe Tjepkema's VG 2007 was rescued from a Norfolk barn and is now well on the way to the completion of a total restoration of a very high standard.

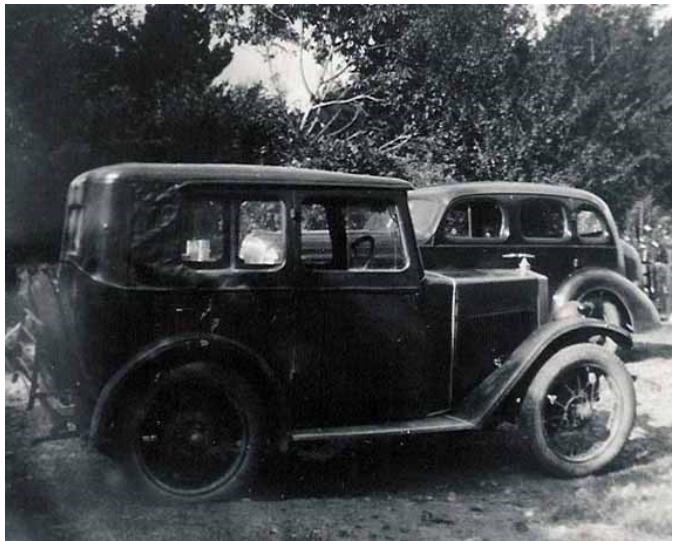
Australian Fabric Saloons

Although none are known to have survived, mention should also be made of the Minor Fabric saloons produced at the Holden, Woodville plant in South Australia. Harry Edwards' article on 'Australian Bodybuilders' in the Morris Register Journal of Autumn 1980 gives the following production figures: 1928 – 182, 1929 – 177, 1930 – 36. Total = 395

Editors Note: Other Australian coachbuilders may well have constructed Minor Fabric Saloon bodies. However, as all the contemporary images of these cars seen to date depict a single design, it will be very difficult to prove that this was the case. Co-incidentally the design was supplied by Morris Motors as the cars are almost identical to their Cowley built counterparts. If anyone knows of a surviving Australian example of this model please contact chris@prewarminor.com



Morris Motors published a catalogue in 1930 which was supplied to their dealerships in Australia. The left hand image shows an artists impression of the Holden built Fabric Saloon body, while on the right one such car (chassis no. Y407) was imported to the UK by enthusiast Tony Gamble, but the body was beyond salvation.



The Government of New South Wales archive was the source of the left hand image which shows a Minor with an ill-fitting bonnet and wooden framed door clearly visible beneath the taut fabric. On the right the Lambess family car has been the subject of an attack by birds and the resulting damaged fabric is clear to see.

Article Acknowledgements: VMR registers and magazines, back catalogue of the *Morris Register Journal*, the *Morris Owner* magazine and the *PWMN*.

Mike Houston - December 2012.