

Travels in a £5 Morris Minor

John Dixon



(John Dixon)

VT 7709 on the Istanbul to Ankara road, 1961

On 5th May 1959, just after watching Nottingham Forest win the FA Cup at Wembley, I noticed an advert for a 1932 Morris Minor on a scrappy bit of paper on the notice board of the Students Union in Sheffield. I had never heard of pre-war Morris Minors but phoned the number and spoke to the owner who was a reporter for The Star (Sheffield's evening newspaper). I went to see it in the garage where it was kept near the University. The owner told me that he had bought the car for £40 a few months before. He had gone on holiday leaving the car at or near a friend's house. On his return he was horrified to find that his friend had allowed all the local children to play in and vandalise the car. It seemed very sound, but the hood was ruined, the headlights and some of the instruments smashed. There were stones in the radiator and the engine would not start. I said I was interested, but did not want to take the car for 4 weeks when I would have finished my final degree examinations. He agreed to pay the 30 shillings rent for the garage for a month and I paid him the £5.

On the 1st of June I was passing the road where the car was garaged only to see my car parked in the main road! The garage was locked - it was clear that the garage owner had pushed the car out and dumped it. I went on my Vespa to the police HQ at West bar to complain that someone had put my car on the road without my permission. I was told that if it was still there when they got there I would be done for no tax, no insurance and for every mechanical defect that could be found. I therefore rode straight back to my car and managed to push it back off the road into the alley from which it had come. I then

got a breakdown truck to tow it to some spare land opposite where I was in digs. Two weeks later my father came in his 1939 Vauxhall 14 HP saloon (EWB782) and towed me in the Morris 45 miles to Bingham near Nottingham.

During the summer at Bingham I tidied up the bodywork, replaced the missing carbon brush in the distributor, fitted new modern Lucas headlights, cleaned out the stones etc from the radiator and petrol tank and got the engine going. The car was then insured and taxed and I had a new hood made of "black duck" for £12 in Long Eaton. I returned to Sheffield in it in October to start my Ph.D. in analytical chemistry. As I was still a learner, having failed my test 4 years earlier in a friend's Morris 8 saloon, my mother sat beside me. She had a licence, although she had not driven since before the war! My grandmother accompanied my father on this family outing.

A big end failed on the Minor in Derbyshire on the way to Sheffield and so I was towed by my father's "new" 1953 Wolseley 6/80 (OKR 344) to the Lewandowskis, my new digs in Sheffield. Alf had left Poland at the start of the war and joined the RAF. His wife had been taken as a 15 year old as slave labour to the Germans. At the end of the war she walked to England and met and married Alf in Sheffield. In 1960 she had no idea whether her mother and family had survived the war. It was to be several more years before she met her mother and family again.

At 1.45 pm on Saturday 10th October 1959 I went to my car and was told by a policeman that it was an offence to repair a car on the road. He had noticed the sump lying in the road (to catch oil drips) and engine bits such as crankshaft on the rear seat. I assured him that I had done the repairs in the garage of my landlord 10 yards away. Being displeased at not being able to prove the contrary the policeman decided to book me for obstruction. I had been parked on this very quiet residential road from 7.20 am to lunchtime. On 22 December I was found guilty and given a conditional discharge for a year, there being no admissible defence.

I had driven my mother down to London on 30th October, returning on 1st November. At the end of the month I failed the driving test again in my car at Worksop, so could only use it at night or when I could find a qualified passenger. I eventually passed my driving test on New Year's Day 1960 in my Morris at the third attempt in Newark. I had joined the University Motor Club and taken part in several treasure hunts in the narrow hilly Derbyshire roads. During one of these events the front brakes had ceased to function because the levers on the back-plate had come up against the outer casing of the modified front brake cables. The poor performance of the rear brakes because of the leakage of oil on to the linings now became apparent. The only real braking effect came from double declutching into first at 20 mph! I never had the same navigator twice! I had had to adjust the front brakes many times, so I sought a better braking solution. The crown wheel and pinion broke so I went to Cooper's scrap yard at Middlewood on the Vespa and discovered a Family Eight saloon with a complete set of hydraulic brakes. I also fancied the ohc engine but some parts of the head were missing. I bought the complete braking system and proceeded to fit the back-plates. However those for the rear would not fit as the axle casing needed 3 fixing holes, whereas mine had 4. So I had to go back and buy the axle casing (and diff unit). After a couple of days' work I now had a braking system with heavy ribbed 9 inch drums that really worked. I could stop in under 30 feet from 30 mph. I also bought a high ratio crown wheel and pinion from an MG which I fitted in 1972 and used until that broke a few years ago.

In the summer of 1959 the USSR allowed tourists in their cars to visit the USSR for the first time since before the war, but an official guide/interpreter had to be taken in the car. In 1960 the requirement to take a guide was removed. I decided that I would go to Russia in my Morris for my holiday. I had not been abroad since going to Spain and Italy in 1957 on my Vespa (NTV360) and 1958 on my ex-army 16H Norton (551ATV stolen in 1982). Everyone said I was mad, would never come back, even if the car got there. I ignored it all. I even refused to take bets, as I did not want to take people's money on what was a certainty to me.

In August I set off and stayed for a few days in Dartford with my Uncle Len. I went up to London each day to sort out the necessary paperwork. First I had to book a camping tour with Intourist. This had to be paid for and stated that I would be going to Moscow, Yalta, Kiev and Lvov. With this paper I was able to apply for my visa. I was told at the Russian embassy to come back in 7 to 10 days! I remonstrated with them and was told my visa might be ready tomorrow afternoon - but no promises! It was - so the next day I could apply for a Polish transit visa and collect it the following day. I could not get transit visas for my return until I got to Moscow. I then got my green card and was off. I got the midnight boat to Ostend. I drove through Brussels and all round the south and east of Cologne in pouring rain (the west side of the autobahn was not finished then) and arrived at my brother's army camp at Bielefeld about 6 pm. He was mid-way through his National Service. The sentry asked me if I had a passport. I replied rudely "Of course I have. How do you think I got here?" I was allowed in without

showing it! My brother was dragged from his bed where he was resting. He showed me round the camp, describing all the missiles and weapons. We then went into the local village. As the locals were catering for the British army I asked if this pub did Bed and Breakfast since I needed somewhere to stay. The man disappeared and returned 5 minutes later with a plate with a sausage and chunk of bread on it. "What's this I asked?" "Brot und Bratwurst" was the reply! After a few hours and beers I took my brother back to his camp and found a quiet spot to put up my tent.

I was woken early by the sounds of tanks playing war games, so I packed and scarpered pronto. By late morning I was in East Germany on the Autobahn to Berlin. I decided to give Berlin a miss this time and press on. The maps available in England in the 1960's were useless. My map showed that the main road to Warsaw went directly from Berlin and not from the Autobahn which ended at Frankfurt on Oder. I turned off the Autobahn and drove north along the river for about 20 miles to what was supposed to be the river crossing. The Russian soldiers told me that the only official crossing point was back at Frankfurt on Oder, but that if I was going to visit someone just over the bridge where I was, they would let me, but I would have to come back and enter Poland at Frankfurt. I wasn't - so I just went back and crossed into Poland. Here I spent half an hour persuading the female official that my Green Card did cover me for Poland, even though PL had been deleted instead of P for Portugal. The practice of deleting all countries not specifically to be visited can be a real irritation - especially when it makes no difference to the charge. It was now dark so I found a quiet place and put up my tent.

The next day I drove virtually non-stop right across Poland and through Warsaw. Driving was very difficult at night, even with my Lucas Flame-thrower shining across to the curb about 30 yards ahead, because of the number of unlit bicycles and lumbering bullock drawn carts loaded with enormous volumes of hay. So, soon after dark I found somewhere to camp. After another very wet night I reached the Russian frontier late morning. I had to drive over a pit so that a Russian officer could inspect the underneath of the car. I was not allowed to take my potatoes in. After some argument I discovered it was the peel that was forbidden, so I peeled the potatoes, but by nighttime they were not fit to eat so I had to throw them away in the end. Another long drive to Minsk and my first campsite and wash since leaving London. The next morning I was in trouble with the police for taking photographs of the tiny old shacks that most people lived in. On the opposite side of the road were many new blocks of flats. It was alright to photograph these! Two more long days of driving brought me to Moscow on Thursday evening. It had taken me 7 days in almost continuous rain to do 2100 miles.

The camp site was quite near the city centre and had good facilities. About half the campers were Russians and half foreign tourists. There were several car-loads of British students in a variety of vintage Rolls-Royces and big Austins. Such cars were then virtually unsaleable, but would do many thousands of miles with no maintenance. Most of them were limousines or hearses and most were painted yellow! Most were left to die on returning home with the new MOT's looming. Almost every day I sent a postcard home to my parents with a brief account of my activities. I gave them my next address as Kamping, Yalta in case they wanted to write to me. I wasted most of the Monday trying and failing to get a visa to return through Roumania. So I got one for Czechoslovakia instead.

I had changed £20 at the frontier at the then tourist rate of 28 roubles to the pound, (the official rate for business was only 12), but I had learnt that you could get up to 70 on the black market in Moscow. I was soon invited to change money by a shady character. We took a tube train for one stop then got a taxi which took me back to my car, whilst we exchanged another £20 at 65 each. The precautions were necessary to prevent the KGB from catching either of us, and were normal practice. I visited the Kremlin, parking in Red Square outside St Basil's Cathedral and the famous Gym store. Many people said my car should be in the museum next to Lenin's Rolls-Royce, but I could not agree. I joined the crowd outside the courthouse where the shot-down U2 pilot Gary Powers was being tried, their view of the outcome being exactly correct. I visited the Bolshoi Theatre to see the Novosibirsk Ballet. On my last evening I went to the Lenin Stadium to see Moscow Dynamo play Torpedo. I left 15 minutes before the end soaked to the skin and missed both the goals.

The camp was a good 50-50 mixture of Russians and foreign tourists, mainly British and French. Everyone was friendly, unlike some British campsites. Some of the campers were able to buy return tickets for flights to Leningrad for £3 or 200 roubles. However I decided to seek the sun and set off south for the 1000 miles to Yalta on the Black Sea.

The first 3 of these days driving was very difficult, my average speeds (including stops) falling from 33 to 23 mph. This was because the lorries dragged mud from all the side roads on to the polished tarmac of the main road, which was then like wet ice! All the hills were badly rippled, which strained the suspension. I had to remove the pair of heavy-duty Harford friction

shock absorbers I had fitted specially for the journey as they were breaking away the chassis where they were fitted. (Back in England I had patches riveted by a friend's father who was a retired blacksmith.) Dozens of cars and lorries had skidded off the road into the ditches. Not having windscreen washers, it was impossible to see at night. On my postcard I noted that the sun had shone for only 8 hours in 15 days. All the Russians had said I should be used to it because they all knew that it was always raining in England! Finally at Zaporishe the weather changed. Not only that but the quality of the food in the shops and the ice-cream was as if on a different planet, compared with the awful stuff available in the north.

I washed the car and set off for the final day to Yalta. As I crossed the Isthmus to the Crimea the car looked really smart in the early evening light. It was just getting dark when I reached Alushta on the Black Sea and filled up with petrol (65 to 80 octane and 1s 3d per gallon - a quarter of the price back home using my exchange rate). As I was about to leave for the last 25 miles to Yalta a policeman appeared from an office and made it clear to me, although I pretended not to understand, that I could not go to Yalta as tourists were not allowed to drive after dark. I tried to tell him that I was booked into the camp-site at Yalta and was expected to stay there and not at Alushta, but he was adamant that I couldn't go until the morning. He then produced his phrase book and showed me number 72 out of 75. This said:- I am arresting you and reporting to my chief for further instructions. When he went to the office to use the phone, I got back into my car and set off for Yalta. Five minutes later as I was leaving the town, I was stopped by a policeman, with a motorcycle combination, and got the same speel. A large crowd gathered round, one of them explained it all again to me in German, but I told him to go away as I did not want to use the language of the common enemy. After a few minutes of discussion I gave the impression that I thought we had finished and jumped back into the car and set off up the mountain road.

At the top I was stopped by another policeman, who also had two men with rifles standing by him. This time they showed they really meant business. I was told that I would be sent back to England for this. Using light from his headlamp, a report of my misdemeanours was written which I refused to sign. Two illiterate hunters witnessed the policeman's signature with crosses. Within a few minutes several more police arrived on their combinations. He started to copy all my visa details from my passport, and before he had finished I went to take it back, but he put it into his pocket and drove off towards Yalta. I jumped into my car and went after him. He had stopped after a few bends in the cliff-top road and was copying more details. I told him that he could copy all he wanted if I could have my passport back and go to Yalta. He agreed and off I went. The road was loose gravel and very windy with no protection at the side before the long drop to the sea. I got the impression that the Russians were very concerned that foreign tourists would not have accidents and so get bad publicity in our dreadful rag press. Anyway after a delay of over two hours I made it to the campsite and surprisingly never heard any more about these events.

The site at Yalta was very pleasant and friendly. One of the cleaning ladies insisted on doing my washing because I was on holiday to enjoy myself and not have to do chores. She returned it all beautifully ironed and was fascinated by my Lux soap flakes. The beach was a bit rocky, but OK for swimming. At the campsite I met three French Citroens travelling together and two campervans from Japan, which had come from Vladivostock to Moscow on the Trans-Siberian Railway, otherwise all the campers were Russian (or Ukrainians etc), except for 4 Cambridge students in a modern Morris Minor.

On 2nd September I received two letters from home, which was a nice surprise. The next day I greased the car and changed the engine oil. On previous changes I had used up all the Castrol XXL, which I had brought with me and so had to use local oil. This was very thin and suitable for the Siberian winter - not the heat of summer. I drove slowly with only 5 psi oil pressure over the mountains to Simferopol and then on the flat gradually increased my speed to about 40 mph. After about an hour there was a sudden noise of number 4 big end rattling. I stopped immediately and assessed the situation. Since there was no roadside recovery service I had to make it to a town where I could get the bearing re-metalled. Going back 40 miles to Simferopol was a better bet than going on to Melitopol (with its gorgeous ice cream) or Zaporoshe which was about 200 miles. So driving with the engine constantly on load to stop the rattle, by keeping the throttle on - even when braking (tricky) I made it back to Simferopol. The policeman I had spoken to over two hours earlier was still by his motorbike so I stopped and asked him to listen to the rattle from the engine. He knew what this was and led me into the town to a garage, where the mechanic told me that he didn't usually work on Sundays, but he would come in specially to repair the bearing. An Intourist interpreter lady was called in and she explained to me what was to happen. She took me to a hotel and said she would phone me in the morning and take me back to the garage to see the car being repaired. I had the dreaded meat-balls for dinner and went to bed. During the night I was so cold - there were only light covers on the bed and I had left almost everything in the car. By the morning I felt utterly dreadful. I had to crawl on my hands and knees to the toilet where I stayed for an hour. Soon after I

crawled back to my room the interpreter rang. I told her I was too ill to go to the garage. She sent a doctor and I was carted off to the local hospital and put in isolation in a side room. I stayed there for four days. The first day I was so ill I remember trying to translate my temperature from centigrade in Russian to Fahrenheit in English whilst being delirious. I had 10 penicillin/streptomycin injections, 2 blood tests, two glucose injections, an unknown injection, numerous tablets and one deep bowel washout. The engineer had been told so he had his Sunday off, but he came in to see me with my melted big end and con-rod to show me what I already knew. He promised to put some thicker oil in. The interpreter also rang the campsite at Yalta and arranged for the students from Cambridge to visit me. This they did, but I've no idea who they were now.

On the fourth day I was deemed fit the next day. I was able to telephone my parents from the hospital for 3 minutes. Walking through the hospital to the phone was a real eye-opener. It was so crowded with dozens of people lying on the floor in the corridors.

After final tests I was taken back to the garage to collect my car and set off late in the afternoon for the 3000 miles drive home. That evening I did 190 miles. The next day I saved 100 miles from my official route by cutting across a minor road to join the main road from Kharkov to Kiev. I reached the campsite at Kiev after 400 miles in the day. The next day I had two punctures. I was wondering what to do, when a lorry driver stopped to help. Almost immediately a car stopped too. The occupants had seen me on the campsite at Yalta the previous week. Between them they vulcanised my tubes and gave me the kit in case I needed it.

I passed through Lvov, where my landlady's family had lived before the war when it was in Poland. I camped in a quiet field a few miles from the border with Czechoslovakia. This point was also only about 30 miles from Poland, Hungary and Roumania. The formalities on leaving the USSR took some time. I had to give up all the Soviet banknotes I had left. I was to be credited with the amount at my bank in England. As I had only changed £20 officially, and had £8 left, I wrongly suspected that I would not see the money! They read my diary and copied all the addresses I had.

In the clear autumn sunlight Eastern Slovakia was really beautiful. When I reached Kosice, the whole town seemed to crowd round me, fascinated by my car and my trip. Unfortunately I had to press on. The next day I reached Vienna. After a morning sight-seeing I drove to Linz. Early the next morning I went through Passau, which, with the still misty Danube, was particularly beautiful. I was aiming for Würzburg when the car hit a high ridge across the road. I hung on to the steering wheel as we took off. As we landed there was a bang and the car skidded to a halt. The rear right-hand road-spring had snapped near the front, hit the body and locked on the handbrake. I jacked up the car, slackened off the handbrake until the brakes were free and let the spring rest on the timber frame. I drove to the nearest village, Kitzingen, where I found Herr Muck the blacksmith. He would start to repair the spring first thing in the morning (7 a.m.) if I took it off. This I did, spending the night in his yard. With a new stronger main leaf I drove across Germany. It was dark when I got to Brussels and having been stopped by the police for having only one headlight (the right-hand one had been broken early in the trip) I put up the tent at the side of the roundabout at the start of the autoroute to Ostend. I got a ferry from Calais, called at my Uncle Edward's at Margate, drove up the M1 and got home in Bingham at 10.20 p.m. I had done 683 miles from Kitzingen in 35 hours.

Accounts of my journey and experiences and photos were published in the local Nottingham and Newark papers soon after my return. I went to the Star newspaper in Sheffield to see the reporter I had bought the car from. He arranged for a freelance photographer to meet me at the University. This photographer went into the Students Union and soon came out with seven female students, from various parts of the country. He took a photograph of me in the car with the seven girls in the back seat! This, with various brief accounts was published in the Daily Mirror, Daily Herald, Daily Mail and the Sketch on 24 September 1960. The same picture was later distributed to local papers throughout the country and it appeared in them and the Daily Express on 24 October 1960. I received a fee of £2.

Towards the end of the year I was visited by Chris Rogers in his Austin 7, *The Vicar*, CZ 765. I had met him early in the year when he had advertised parts from a Morris Minor, bought for him by a friend who thought it was an Austin 7! Whilst I was on my trip he had taken an Australian friend in *The Vicar* beyond the Arctic Circle and all round Scandinavia. The car had been covered with a variety of paintings, which made it rather conspicuous. Chris had got fed up with people asking him if his was the car that had gone to Moscow, and on being told that he had gone to the North Cape they immediately lost interest! So he came to tell me off! We've been friends ever since. Chris had had glorious weather for weeks in the Arctic, whilst I had continuous rain.

Chris's father was a retired blacksmith and he riveted patches across the gaps torn in the top of the chassis by the shock absorbers when I was in Russia. The car did 18000 miles in 1960.

I had agreed to share a flat with a friend who had killed his passenger when the door of his left hand drive VW beetle flew open when the car went out of control on a bend in Derbyshire and overturned in a field. The throttle had stuck fully open within hours of a service by the main agents and the novice driver did not know to switch off the ignition. His passenger was unmarked but died instantly from a broken neck. The driver had been exonerated by the inquest and had sworn he would never drive again. I was most surprised therefore to find he had returned to University with another VW beetle. This time it was a souped up model. I took him to the agents to buy seat belts for his car, but he only bought one. When I asked him why only one, he replied that the number of times he took a passenger it wasn't worth buying two! Within a few weeks we fell out and he asked (told) me to leave.

I bought an old ex-seaside caravan for £25 in October 1960 and had new springs fitted to it as they were badly rusted. These new ones were little better as they were not strong enough. However I towed the caravan with the Minor and persuaded a pub owner to let me park the van behind his pub high up on the moors overlooking Sheffield. However he soon complained that the van was too conspicuous and asked me to go. I found a proper site at Grindleford and just managed to get the van up the narrow twisting 1 in 12 hill into a nice alcove well protected from the wind. I had fortunately fitted a 4-speed gearbox some time before and so bottom gear was much lower than the original 3-speed box.

In February 1961 the new MOT was to be introduced. I checked the car over and took it to be tested a week before the deadline to my father's local garage in Bingham. It failed on many major, expensive and impossible to fix at that time, points. I rectified what I could, made others difficult to spot and took it to a garage in Sheffield. They failed the car on a completely different set of points, namely worn shackles pins at the rear of the front springs, worn bush in the steering box and one of the lengths of hydraulic brake pipe not sufficiently secured to the body/chassis. I returned to Cooper's scrap yard on the day that the MOT started, to try and find some better shackle bolts and steering box on one of the 5 or 6 scrap Minors there. However none were any better than mine so I returned to my car which had been parked outside, only to find a police car behind it. I was asked "Is this car yours?", "Yes", "Has it been tested?", "Yes", "May I see your documents?", "No, I don't have them with me." I was given a slip to produce my license, insurance certificate and MOT certificate at West Bar police station. I had less than 3 hours to fix the faults and get the MOT redone. I returned to the University Chemistry Department, scrounged some copper sheet and a centre punch from the workshop. I cut up the copper sheet and wrapped it round the shackle bolts until they were a tight fit and refitted them so that no copper could be seen. I used the centre punch to burr over the bronze bottom bush in the steering box until no play could be felt and screwed up the hydraulic pipe to the floor. I returned to the garage only to be told that the mechanic had gone. On pressing them further I was told he was at a show-room a couple of miles away. So I went there and he checked the 3 faults had been fixed and gave me my MOT certificate, which I then took with the other documents to the police station. As this was the first one they had seen it took a while for them to check its authenticity. During the next 6 weeks, I was stopped by the police 10 times in Sheffield. Even though I had a brand new MOT they insisted each time on checking the brakes, lights, hooter etc. Not once could any fault be found! At this time it was not possible to pass a policeman without being stopped, so whenever possible I turned off or did a U turn if I saw a policeman or police car ahead.

In the spring of 1961 I bought another Morris Minor for spares. This was a standard 1934 2-seater, HV 3621, advertised in Motor Sport for £10. I went to Pontefract to see the car and the owner quickly persuaded me to take it for £7 10s. I returned the next day with a friend, who had never driven any kind of vehicle, to tow it back to Sheffield. After a couple of miles I noticed the front offside inner tube of the '34 car was bulging out from the tyre. I stopped and changed the wheel, using my own spare. I asked my friend if he was having any problems - no, so we carried on and parked the car at the back of the chemistry department. A few weeks later the studs holding the water jacket pipe on the side of the engine on VT7709 failed and I could not keep the water in. I needed to get back to the caravan for the night so I swapped the battery, number plates and license disc, put some tools in HV3621 and set off for Grindleford. I soon found that the brakes were almost non-existent, the steering was dire and the exhaust was leaking. After a mile I was going up a long hill as quietly as I could, when a policeman ran across the road to stop me. "I thought it was you!" he said, "I recognised the car." He had stopped me in VT7709 some 6 weeks before and checked everything, but found nothing wrong. Well, the car was a Morris Minor, green and black instead of light and dark blue, a rounded covered rear 2-seater instead of a 4-seater, a two piece windscreen instead of

a single piece, running boards, different lamps, radiator shell etc. etc. He just wanted a chat and to see me drive off! I had to try to set off up this hill, without drawing attention to the bad brakes and the noisy exhaust. Twice the car rolled back, the second time I had my foot off the clutch with the car firmly in first gear. I explained to the officer that a half shaft had broken and that I would have to get a bus back to where I worked to get a spare that I happened to have there. I pretended to wait for a bus until he had gone out of sight. I then returned to the car to get my jack and other tools. I went back to the University, removed a half shaft from VT7709, fitted this to HV3621 and went back to the caravan.

In the summer I decided to go to the Middle East for a six-week holiday. I got a visa for the UAR, which then covered both Syria and Egypt and set off for Turkey. Chris Rogers was also going to Turkey in The Vicar and left a day or two after I did, but we made no arrangements to meet since neither of us knew just what we would be doing and also because Chris was going for 6 to 9 months, depending on how his money lasted and would stop for days at a time, whereas I had to be back to continue by Ph.D. I drove through Luxembourg to Karlsruhe and along the autobahn to Munich and Salzburg. I went south over the Würzen Pass (1 in 4 for a stretch of 200 yards) into Yugoslavia. I naturally chose to go south over the Würzen and north over the Loibl as these were the steepest routes! I passed through Ljubljana and along the motorway from Zagreb to Belgrade. There was a Peace Conference attended by all the leaders of the most suspect countries of the time. Archbishop Makarios swept past me whilst I was surrounded by Yugoslavs fascinated by my car and its massive 4-cylinder engine! The last 50 miles of road from Nis to the Bulgarian border was very bad and primitive. The crown wheel and pinion broke up so I fitted my spare and made sure that I had enough oil in this time. Petrol had to be obtained from 50-gallon drums at a railway siding. I averaged nearly 300 miles a day and reached the campsite at Istanbul within a week. I had a mixed grill at a tourist restaurant about 80 miles before Istanbul, but regretted this as I was laid low for several days with the trots. One of the front springs of the car was broken so I replaced it with the only spare I had and stupidly threw the broken one away. At this point I decided that I would go no further than just across the Bosphorus on the ferry to Asia and to have an easier and more leisurely journey home via Greece. I did not know it at the time, but the 300 ton ship HMS Waterwitch, which my grandfather had been master of in the Aegean and Bosphorus at the end of the 1914-18 war, was still being used as a ferry in the Bosphorus. I did see her sister ship Kalender and have a colour photo of her. Both these old ships survive. Waterwitch was converted after retirement in 1986 into a luxury motor yacht, Halas, used by royalty and featured in the American Express magazine, Discovery, which I came across while awaiting my take-away at The Eastern Queen in Catford.

Having spent a week in Istanbul, I drove round the coast to Athens, where I saw the usual sights. I drove over the bridge over the ancient Corinth Canal and along the coast road to Patras, visiting many of the beautifully decorated Greek village churches. I took the ferry across to the mainland of Greece and set out up the west side of the country. I soon came to a sign, which said in Greek "Road under construction for 50 Km". When I got to the end of these 30 miles of very rough stony road there was another sign saying "Road under construction for 80 Km". This was repeated every 30 to 50 miles all the way to the border with Yugoslavia. The Minor's silencer was smashed to bits by the boulders and eventually I had to dump the whole silencer and tail pipe. The car was not too noisy if I drove gently.

At that time it was impossible to enter Albania at all so I had to drive all the way round. The roads were even worse, but merited no signs! One day to Skopje (largely destroyed a few months later by an earthquake) I drove for 13 hours and did only 91 miles, virtually all in first or second gear. Both my front springs broke. On one side every leaf behind the axle broke and on the other side every leaf except the main leaf broke on both sides of the axle. This meant that the chassis was supported on the front axle only by the old rubber bump-stops. Every big bump or hole meant that the axle fell away from the chassis, only to be crashed up against it a fraction of a second later. I therefore had to negotiate the bumps and holes to minimise this. It was not until I reached the coast again at Kotor that I found a blacksmith who could repair the springs. I removed them and he cut up some suitable old leaf springs and rebuilt mine. The job took him all morning and cost me £10. Fortunately I was able to pay this with special vouchers that we were able to get in UK in those days as getting cash from a bank took about a week and credit cards had not arrived and I was running short.

I visited Dubrovnik with its beautiful harbour, sadly recently ruined, was envious of the super rugs and carpets for sale, only lack of funds and the impracticability of carrying a carpet in the Minor stopped me buying one. I drove along the coast road admiring the scene and the beautiful islands. Suddenly at Zadar I came to the first tarmac road since just after Patras. As I approached the Alps the car started to misfire badly, eventually stopping altogether in the middle of nowhere. Obviously the condenser had failed but no worry I had a spare in a distributor. However sods law applied - there was no condenser inside it! Whilst pondering what to do a chap on a moped stopped. He was an electronics fanatic and was sure that he would have

something that would do. I rode on his luggage rack for a few miles to his workshop. He dug out a few approx 1 μ F condensers and we returned to the car. One of them worked so I was on my way duly grateful. As I approached the notorious 1 in 3 Loibl Pass into Austria, the new condenser started to pack up. I managed to buy a Bosch condenser from a garage and because it was so fat I had to fit it outside the distributor. Now I had a good spark so got to the top with ease - well just! The pass was closed for 30 years shortly after, as a tunnel was built. It was opened specially for the re-enaction of the 1913 Alpine Rally by the RR-EC for their Silver Ghosts in 1993.

Three more days and I was back in England. I was driving to visit my friend Bizuk, whom I had met in Italy in 1957 and who was now working in London with his wife Miranda 16 hours a day to pay off a debt that a friend of his welched on, and for which he had acted as guarantor. Unless the debt was paid off within a few years Bizuk's aged parents would have their home taken by the bank and be thrown into the street. A few miles from his work and house near Heathrow I was stopped by the police, who complained that the car was noisy. I explained that the silencer had dropped off in Greece, but they took offence and proceeded to find fault with the car. One yanked the steering wheel from side to side and even though there was less than an inch of free play at the steering wheel he managed to turn it 90° before the good tyres moved on the road. I pointed out that he was bending all the steering rods, but was ignored. In due course I was to get my summonses.

On 21 December I had to go to London in HV3621 to answer my summonses for inefficient silencer and defective steering. After a few miles on the day before, the coldest of the winter, the engine boiled and blew out a core plug. The radiator was frozen. Fortunately I was outside the workshops of the Canadian Air Base so I soon got the core plug back, thawed the radiator and cooled the engine. I sat through all the other cases, all found or pleaded guilty, except the last whose AA solicitor bored the magistrates to death, but managed to get his client off for doing 60mph in a 40 mph area, because the 40mph repeater signs on the street lights were missing or obscured. This despite the clerk pointing out that the driver should have assumed the speed limit was 30 mph! I had to return after lunch. I fought hard but as I didn't have a silencer, it could not be inefficient and in any case I was not charged (as I could have been) with making excessive noise. So I had to pay £3 for the silencer and £5 for the steering, as much as I paid for the car two years before.