

BUYERS CHOOSING CLASSICS

DESPITE – or possibly because of – the generally bad economic news at present, the classic car movement continues to thrive. What's even more reassuring, though, is that people are continuing to choose a classic as an alternative to a depreciating modern car. What's more, they're willing to pay very strong money for properly renovated cars.

Charles Ware's Morris Minor Centre in Bristol has been advocating use of Minors as everyday cars through their 'durable car programme' for more than a quarter of a century. Today business is strong. According to Charles's son Zak Ware, the market has – not surprisingly – changed in the 35 years they have been in business, with most new customers now wanting to buy a restored car, often with 'all the bells and whistles' in terms of specification and finish. They claim to sell 50-60 'refurbished' Minors a year at prices ranging from £6000 to £18,000 depending on specification and condition, but all will have been fully and

properly restored structurally. As a look at our price guide will confirm, £18,000 is a lot of money for a Minor Traveller, but the car will be completely 'as new' in every respect, suitably upgraded for daily use, and being bought as an alternative to a new modern car.

The Morris Minor Centre also still do their 'Durable Car Programme' which is basically a planned programme of restoration over an agreed period of time as the customer can afford it. It starts with the important structural work and finishes with cosmetics. Most general restoration work, apparently, is now on Minors that have been owned by a family or individual for a long time and where there is a desire to return 'Gran's car' to its original condition.

BIGGER ALTERNATIVE

Although people do use Minors as everyday transport, they are more often the second family car. For those who need something a

bit bigger, another popular durable car is the W124-Series Mercedes, preferably in estate car form. From the time before M-B's 'rusty' period from 1995 to 2003, these cars are massively tough all round and quite capable of completing half a million miles with normal servicing. There isn't that much in the way of upgrading here though, because the cars already drive as well as a modern and are every bit as usable. They are also totally classless in terms of image – used by anyone from tradesmen to university professors. There are restoration specialists out there, but there are also still plenty of sound cars that need little more than routine sympathetic maintenance; buy from £3-4000 upwards. Volvo 240s are also worth considering and can be cheaper, though these aren't as modern to drive and – contrary to popular belief – not quite as durable as the Mercedes though that's a bit like saying Snowdon's not quite as high as Ben Nevis...

If your budget will stretch somewhere between £117,000 to £134,000, Jensen International Automotive will sell you a fully refurbished and 'modernised' Jensen Interceptor that's based on a carefully selected and sound donor car. These feature a 6.2-litre V8 Corvette engine, independent rear suspension and a new transmission. Refurbished/modernised Jaguar MkII and E-types are also available and people sometimes pay over £200,000 for a refurbished E-type.

Prices like this may seem ludicrously high to those of us who have been in the movement for ages. We do, though, need to bear in mind that people buying in this price range don't generally want to 'tinker' at weekends as we do, and probably aren't that interested in buying bits from autojumbles. They simply want a car that looks good/different and which can be used reliably and basically, are paying for that.



People are still buying refurbished Morris Minors as an alternative daily driver, and paying very strong money for cars that are fully and properly refurbished for regular use.

THOUSANDS SIGN FREE TAX PETITION... BUT THERE'S OPPOSITION...

More than 8500 people have now signed the online petition calling on the government to restore a rolling qualification date for free 'historic vehicle' road tax. When introduced in 1997, the final year of John Major's Conservative government, the free tax concession was to apply to all cars made more than 25 years ago. However in the following year the new Labour government changed the basis from a rolling date to a fixed qualification date of made before January 1, 1973. The petition calls on government to reintroduce a rolling date but based on 30-years old, meaning pre-1981 cars would currently qualify, and the date would move forwards each year.

would have to be 'fiscally neutral' – in other words the lost revenue would need to be regained from somewhere else.

However, speaking in a personal capacity David Hurley, the Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs Director in charge of UK Legislation issues, has said that he believes now is the wrong time to raise this 'anomaly' and that doing so is likely to be counterproductive.

He points out that the government is bound to be against a change at present since it would go totally against main government policy and "effectively give away revenue to a minority interest of people who some perceive as 'Hooray Henrys in their expensive classics' at the same time as unpopular cuts

to extend the concession for many years. It might even lead to some questioning whether we deserve the existing concession."

To be guaranteed a debate in the House of Commons a petition needs 100,000 signatures and the support of the Backbenchers Committee; so still some considerable way to go. This one is 'live' until August 2012. To view the petition and decide whether to sign it go to <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/183>

