

CLASSICS FROM THE SCRAPHEAP

CHARLES WARE works Minor miracles. He takes beloved but decrepit Morris Minors and restores them to such pristine beauty that one of his cars was recently sold for £5,000.

"So far we have done up more than 1,000 cars to different degrees. It's all up to the customer. They spend what they like over as long as they like. Sometimes it's just a matter of replacing any rusty or unsound parts of a basically sound car. At other times it's a pretty drastic renovation job," says Charles.

Six years ago Charles Ware was a conservation property developer and a millionaire. Then he went bankrupt and had to start all over again.

"I borrowed a couple of hundred quid and started doing up old bangers, and in the end I started looking out for them to do up and eventually I worked on nothing else."

It proved to be the birth of the Morris Minor Centre, based in Bath. I may not be as far removed from conservation property development as it at first seems.

Litter

WORKS FOR work in a luxurious office. He wears battered boots and jeans, smokes roll-ups and works in a mountain of litter and Morris Minor bits. But the principle of what he is doing remains much the same as ever.

"In the old days if Bath Council wanted to pull down a building which I thought could still be useful, I used to buy the building.

"If something can be reused in a sensible manner then I'm all for it, and that applies to Morris Minors just as much as old buildings. I'm also interested in the social implications of cheap transport.

"Morris Minors have a lot going for them because they are easy to work on and very sturdy. The engines are accessible and simple and the bodies have bolt-on bolt-off panels.

"There are lots of them around and they can be picked up quite cheaply. There's also a demand for them because they are so reliable.

"So many people have at one time or another owned a Morris Minor, and they —

Story: MIKE STONE

Pictures: DAVID CLAPP

endear themselves to owners because they seem to keep going, come what may.

"It isn't unusual for a car to remain in a family for 15 or 20 years and they can become virtually part of the family.

"The only thing that can kill a Minor is when the chassis goes. Anything else can be replaced without much trouble, but sometimes even when a car has come to the end of its days the owners still want some of the parts to keep going inside another car.

"One woman contacted me from Glasgow and from the description of the car it was just superior scrapyard fodder. I could only give her £50 for it but she still insisted on her husband driving it all the way from Glasgow to Bath so that some of the parts could be used on another car. It must have cost them half the £50 in petrol and rail fares home."

There is a popular misconception among owners of elderly Morris Minors that these days an old Minor must be valuable. Unfortunately this isn't always true.

"If a car is in reasonable condition it will be worth something regardless of how old it is. Morris Minors are about cheap motoring and not about investment, although a good condition or renovated model will at least

The cost of the cars sold by Charles Ware and his 27-strong workforce varies widely. You can pick up a saloon for between £1,500 and £2,000 but there are many more £5,000-plus Minors on the horizon.

"It depends on what people want. One person has ordered Connolly hide for the interior. You can spend £1,000 on the interior of a car alone."

Anyone who had a look at new car prices recently will realise that £5,000 isn't the dizzy figure it was, and Charles Ware is understandably keen to point out that the very top price for a Minor still buys a car which is cheap to run.

"Maintenance costs on a Minor should be as low as running a moped.

"Components, especially electrical ones, tend to be in sealed 'packages' that you can't get at, so you have to replace the whole package. This doesn't apply to Minors.

Having sold his first £5,000 Minor, which consisted of 90 per cent new parts, the next logical step is to produce totally new minors.



Charles Ware: "If something can be re-used in a sensible manner, I'm all for it."

"We are hoping to build the first prototype next year. It would be basically the same as all Minors, although we want to improve the seats and give it electronic ignition and a few other modifications.

"We want to canvass owners to see what they would like to see improved. We are aiming at a sort of family man's Morgan with the emphasis on economy. We hope to achieve well over 50 mpg."

Charles Ware also hopes to issue a simple-to-understand parts catalogue and eventually open regional offices to cope with the inquiries and requests for advice which come from all over the world.

His fame is spreading so far that one letter was addressed: "The Man Who Builds Morris Minor Cars, England." It reached him.



Reliable

Paul Garland bought his 1968 Minor Traveller in January for £375, and has since spent almost £1,000 on renovating it.

"It's had new wings and new structural woodwork, which cost £680. The car has done 92,000 miles but the only attention the engine needed was a decoke," he said.

Working on the car has been part of the enjoyment of owning it for Paul, a 21 year old relief manager from Stourton.

"Just about everything that can come off has been replaced. I should have a solid and reliable car that's cheap to run by the time it's finished," he said.

The best

Buller Thurman, of Claverley, near Wolverhampton, has been running Minors since 1949. His present one, a 1970 model, is his sixth.

"It's British and best. I started running them because I was doing up a house and I wanted a vehicle which was part car, part truck. I had to ferry rubble as well as people, and the Morris fitted the bill.

"I have still got my last Minor, a G registration, which I am going to renovate.

"I'll probably never sell my present car. Where else could I get such reliable motoring so cheaply?" said Buller, who has turned down several requests to buy his car.



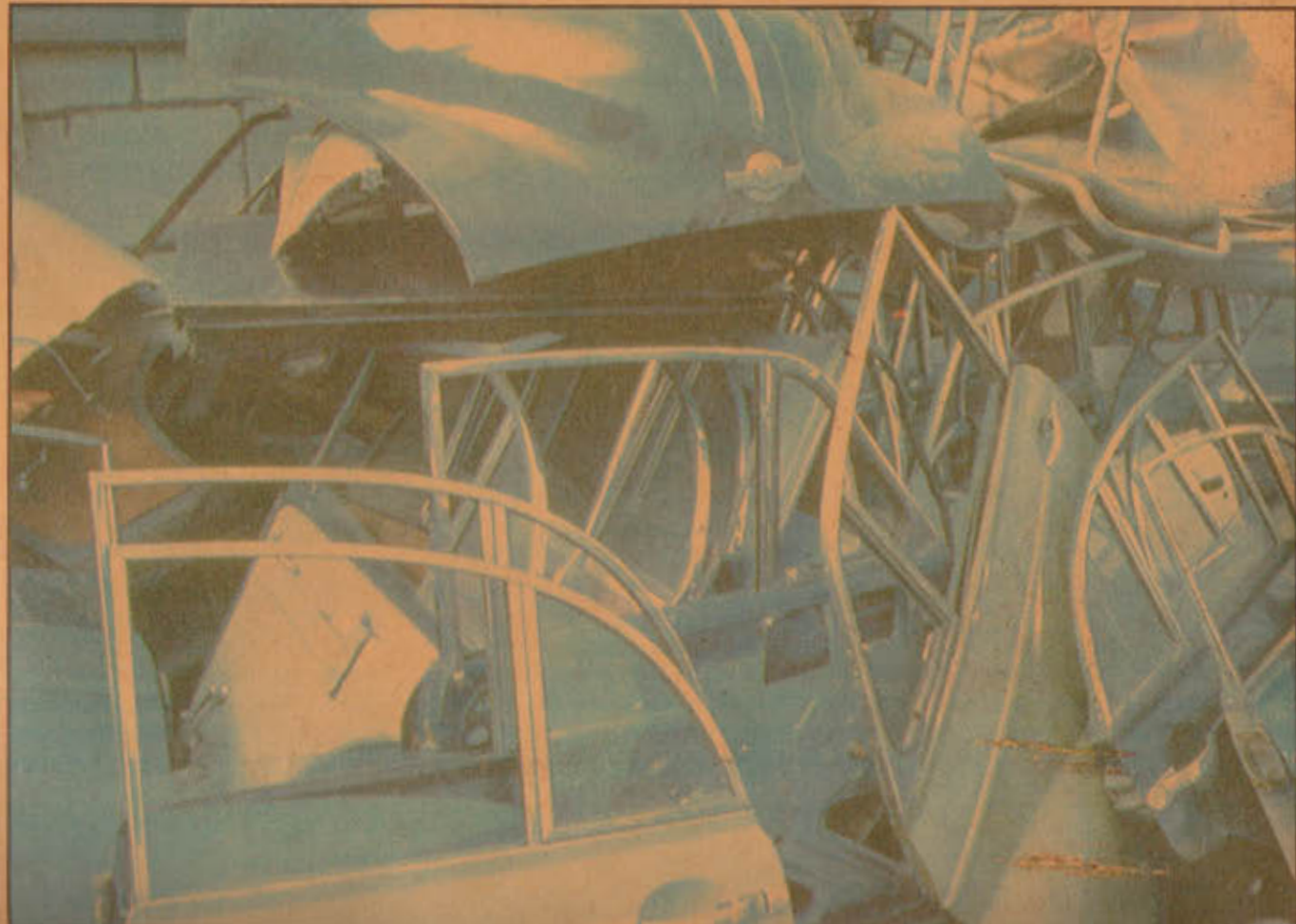
Vintage

Pat Barratt's H registration Minor saloon cost £480 about a year ago, and acts as back-up for her husband's company car.

"It's the third Minor we've had since we were married and we have no intention of ever selling it. It just wouldn't make sense.

"It's a 1970 model that's done 46,000 miles from new. I keep hearing about soaring costs of motoring, but all the Minor costs is road tax, £41 fully comprehensive insurance a year and petrol.

"The thing I like about it is that it feels like I'm driving along in something expensive even though I'm not. There's a vintage



Scrapheap or gold mine? These Minor parts will eventually find their way back on to the road.