



Charles Ware with a car he has restored for a Belgian customer

Humble classic is seen as 'green' car of the future

IT BEGAN as a wheeze, turned into a business and is now a philosophy. It asks us to take environmentally friendly motoring a step further, not so much green as evergreen. Its symbol is not the *Deux Chevaux*, not even the Volvo: it is that post-war poached egg on wheels, the Morris Minor.

Charles Ware started dealing in used Morris Minors in 1975, after his property business went bankrupt and he lost his Impressionist paintings, his antique furniture and three luxury homes.

It did not take him long to realise that it was a special car: whatever the weather, it always seemed to start. A year later, with backing from friends, he founded the Morris Minor Centre on the outskirts of Bath.

The centre began as a second-hand car lot but rapidly turned into an experiment in automotive ecology. It repairs, renovates and recycles Morris Minors, and makes parts for them too. It sees itself as the future of the motor industry. The Morris Minor model went out of production in 1971: the car could go on for ever. Last year, the centre celebrated its fifteenth birthday having spawned a host of imitators — there are now more than 40 Morris Minor specialists — and secured a following among enthusiasts throughout the world. It marked the anniversary by setting up the Durable Car Company of Sri Lanka, a "green" factory employing a skilled workforce to make Morris Minor components.

Mr Ware is a product of the 1960s. The son of pacifist vegetarians, he drifted into conserving old houses, then into property, acquired the sobriquet "Champagne Charlie" in honour of his lifestyle and was a self-con-

David Nicholson-Lord meets a Morris Minor enthusiast who says its influence can only grow

fessed soft touch for passing hippies and alternative causes.

In the Morris Minor he found a fit object for his enthusiasm. E F Schumacher, author of *Small is Beautiful*, might have called it appropriate technology.

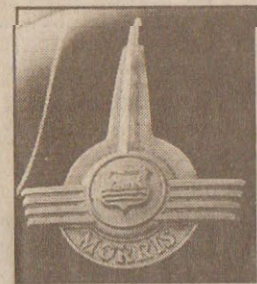
"Because it was quite primitive mechanically, it was totally reliable," Mr Ware says. Its robustness, simplicity and thoughtfulness of design — by Sir Alex Issigonis, designer of the Mini — meant that it remained virtually unchanged for 23 years. In 1982, Mr Ware articulated the parable of the Morris Minor in his book,

Durable Car Ownership, which advocated treating cars like houses, a permanent investment for the future. It proposed a conservation plan for Morris Minors that could be adapted for all durable cars; under it, Mr Ware claimed, owners

could save up to half the running costs of a "planned obsolescent" car and create another 15,000 jobs in the garage repair industry.

Up to 150,000 Morris Minors, less than a tenth of the total produced, remain on British roads. When their owners visit the centre, they usually say: "I want my Morris to go on for ever."

Mr Ware says he is confident that one day, "like the proverbial tortoise, we will pass the fast-moving high-tech hare of the modern car industry, creating a durable ecologically desirable new car firmly based on the Morris Minor."



Some of the 500 cars at the Morris Minor Centre's 'stock yard' at Inkpen, near Newbury in Berkshire Photographs: Nicholas Turpin