



Minor revival

Thanks to legendary reliability

By Ann Hope

AS BRITISH Leyland announced their new revolutionary fuel conscious ECV2, so the motoring world lent an ear to the reawakening of the Morris Minor, a car of the 60s that died in the 70s; or so everyone thought until Charles Ware came along. He formed the Morris Minor Centre in Bristol, an unextravagant rehabilitation centre for ageing Minors. But now, thanks to Mr Ware, the Minor has every sign of making a major comeback.

All versions of the Minor — Saloon, Pick-up, Estate, Traveller, and Convertible — will be eventually produced in the Ware emporium, but initial priority will be given to the Pick-up and the Traveller. Prices are expected to range from between £3,500 to £5,000 depending on demand.

Major manufacturers need not become concerned about their market shares as Mr Ware explains: "We don't plan a mass production operation, and we have no intention of competing with BL. We are very much a cottage industry.

"At present we're busy restoring old Minors and supplying parts to owners. Of the 1½ million plus made at Cowley, we think more than a quarter are still running. Our plans to produce Minors have simply evolved. We've been propelled forward by Morris Minor owners or former owners. They want nothing else, so we decided to supply the demand."

An agreement has just been reached with BL Heritage, making the Morris Centre at Bath an approved BL Heritage supplier, and referring to Mr Ware's plans to produce the Morris Minor, BL Heritage director Barry Darnell told us: "We have no objection in principle, we will give all the help we can."

Demand for the Minor's rugged simplicity is very strong, says Mr Ware. "People simply loved the Morris Minor and they still do. Since opening the Morris Minor Centre three and half years ago, I've heard from countless people both here and abroad; taking part in a telephone talk-in on an Australian radio station, also people on the West Coast of the States and enquiries from Japan — for parts and for cars". Engines will be 948 c.c. — "able to do up to 55 miles to the gallon" he claimed — and 1275 c.c. supplied by Austin Morris. Running gear and other components will come from BL as well, while panels for bodies will be of steel pressed in the Midlands. Simple electronic ignition will be fitted and the brakes will be servo-assisted.

"It's impossible to improve Sir Alec Issigonis' basic concept," he said, "but we're supplying old-fashioned reliability with all mod cons — more comfortable seats, two-speed wipers, better lighting, hazard warning signals, heating and ventilation".

Morris first used the name Minor in its standard and family version, the 8 hp Minor and a derivative of the 10 which were best sellers in their days. In 1948, the Minor MM designed by Issigonis arrived with the Series 2 in 1952 and the 1000 in 1956. At the end of the 60s, eight versions were still in production, but by then work on its replacements were advancing, and with the Marina's launch in 1971 — a larger car and more expensive but using the same torsion bar front suspension — the Minor was axed, but not forgotten.

"Those who like the Minor simply enjoy reliable, everyday motoring," says Mr Ware. "That's why we're starting with the Pick-up and then the Traveller. The Traveller will be virtually unchanged but the back end will be customised to suit different people. A farmer doesn't need the same things as an antique dealer, for instance, or a journalist doesn't need the same things as a housewife." He went on, "the Traveller was useful, not an odd-ball hatchback. People want the Traveller and we are going to make it." Mr Ware added that he employs 33 people at the Old Mill at Limpley Estate, near Bath where he has an 11,000 sq ft factory. "But we plan to open a series of Morris Minor shops, one in the Midlands, another in the North, one south of London and one north of London." Planned production is modest, possibly as few as 100 of each version a year or as many as 200 or 300 of each, depending on demand, here and abroad. Final comment from Mr Ware: "With inflation as it is today, a simple to make and cheap to run car — with low cost parts and group — which combines reliability and character with comfort must make sense."

Enquiries should be directed to the Morris Minor Centre, Avon House, Lower Bristol Road, Bath.