

THE CAR YOU LOVE TO LOVE

Exactly 30 years ago, the first Morris Minor was unveiled as the 1948 Morris Minor and was an immediate smash hit. This year, with wheels on our mind as the 1948 Morris Minor approaches its open as the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham on Friday—we wondered about the continuing popularity of the Minor. Morris, of course, don't make it any more—but the Minor still resides in fact. Its associations with Director Pearson and maiden aunts have dropped away and it has become a cult car. BOB LUSTIG reports.



Morris Minor. The actress, with a story about the time she owned a Morris Minor and gave a grand tour, just drove a little home to it. As they stepped at some traffic lights, a large and ornate American car pulled up alongside. The driver moved down for window and helmet. "You're edgy. You're very, very edgy."

If there is one thing Morris Minor owners love, it's value. Affordable, sensible, maintenance-free—has value, even. Even the second of Morris' 1000 Traveller with extra body already and rolled up back windows when I came across in Bath recently was heavily edgy. It looked more like one of those women, orange-belted and yellow-haired, whose neighbours used to refer to disapprovingly behind their car windows as "a bloody doer". Not edgy, really, just nervous and very tight.

The one you instantly recognise as the inferior, unassuming Morris Minor should now be enjoying such a successful renaissance. There are those who say it has never been out of fashion, others believe its popularity is all part of the 1990s nostalgia bid, the growing belief that anything old must automatically be worth the its owner's investment.

In the Morris Minor is the sort of car that an ecologically-conscious manufacturer can afford to be seen driving around in. It doesn't use much petrol and it's unlikely to prove a nuisance on the M1, and, it is, self-evidently, such a sensible, reliable automobile that no one could possibly object to it.



Here there is a wide range of devoted customers for Charlie Wain's Morris Minor Centre in Bath. Above: Jack Rolfe and his Morris 1,000,000

"They're also not interested in Morris Minors used to be much more than most of the people you meet in the business," says Charlie Wain, a 42-year-old property millionaire, who runs the Morris Minor Centre in Bath. Many of them are service business, social workers. Not out of thing.

The first Morris Minor rolled off the production line in Cowley, near Oxford, on 8 October 1948—30 years ago last weekend. The last one, a Traveller, was produced in 1971, 23 years and nearly 1,000,000 Morris Minors later.

There are probably more than half a million of them still chugging along happily in most corners of the world and the majority of the early models were equipped, and there can hardly be a car driver in Britain who has not, at some point during his or her driving career, not behind that once-ruled steering wheel and peered over the car's distinctive curving nose.

The Morris Minor was, and is, the perfect car to leave to drivers—safe, reliable, and supremely easy to handle. Perhaps that's why such a relatively high proportion of them seem to be driven to people who, by part of its history, were happy to 25 mph than to 40. But perhaps it's just their energy-saving consciousness at work.

Not that every Morris Minor owner is a purveyor of driving virtue. I know a friend who admits to having one, while at the wheel of a Morris Minor convertible, to drive while drinking up, head with close to the windscreen in a vain attempt to clear

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