

MOTORING NOTES



By ALAN DONALDSON

Some time in 1968 I came out of a beat club called 'Club Arthur' on Burgh Quay in Dublin and saw a blue and black 1948 Morris Eight series E parked outside 'The Scotch House' a well-known pub. I was unloading my bands equipment as we played there on a regular basis. I was impressed at how quaint it looked even though it was only 20 years old at that time. It was neatly hand-painted and had a look of a car much loved by its owner and it fueled a desire that had been rising in me for a while, to get an old car. It did not have separate headlights nor wire wheels, two features I sought in my ideal but it did have that wonderfully attractive opening windscreen. Not very useful as it turned out.

For a number of Saturday nights in a row there would be the merry little Moggie in the same spot outside The Scotch House. Once at throwing out time, I saw an old couple emerge from that jolly place arm in arm and get into the car. I approached the driver and said how much I admired his car. He said "Do you want one? I have two and the other ones for sale." "How much?" I asked. "Fifteen Quid." Said he, "It needs a petrol pump and a battery." "Where can I see it?" "Come around tomorrow."

They lived in a little house in a lane at the back of Parnell Square. I duly showed up that Sunday and there outside were the two cars, the black one for sale. It looked grand to my untutored eye and I was happy to do the deal. I arranged with the old fellow to pick it up in a few days after I had procured the necessary parts. This proved easy as Powderly's, the auto/electrical factors were nearby in the same lane. In my eagerness to show off my acquisition to my fellow band members I stopped off on the way home from the gig that night and was somewhat disconcerted to see that the front grill had been removed. I optimistically assumed it was part of the preparations for its revitalization, so still happy I went home to bed. I was to learn an important lesson. If you buy an old car collect it immediately!

I returned a day or two later armed with the pump and battery which were easily installed by my ancient friend, and the car started easily enough. Although I sensed something a bit different to the look of it, I excitedly brought it home. Over the next few days I was to find the causes for my unease. On closer inspection, as they say, I found the grill had been hastily painted a sort of matt black, tyre paint I later discovered. Scraping a bit off a familiar shade of blue appeared, also evidence of poorly repaired damage. The tyres seemed more worn than I remembered, two showing the canvas in places. Still I was enjoying my new purchase even if I was experiencing some difficulty in starting it up. This I put down to my general ignorance. My first real disappointment was when I attempted to obtain insurance. In those far off days it was nigh on impossible to find a company willing to take on anything old. It looked as if I might never see

her on the road. Then my father told me about his insurers, Lloyds,

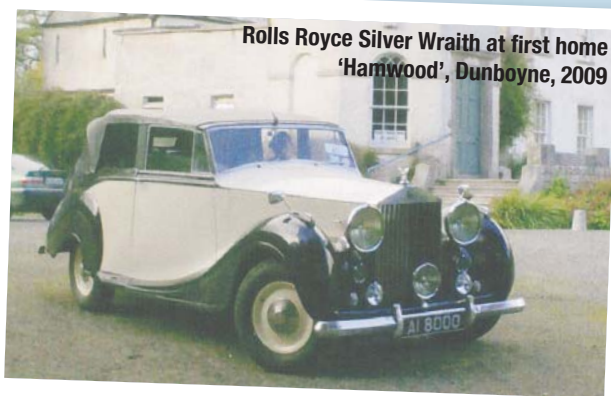
Modified Hillman Minx



Ford Special and Austin Seven



Rolls Royce Silver Wraith at first home
'Hamwood', Dunboyne, 2009



who covered the driver rather than the car, they took on my day to day transport, an Austin J2 van the certificate stating that I could drive any vehicle owned by me. No registration number was in evidence! Wonderful! This permitted me to tax any car I might have.

I hand painted it blue and black same as her sister. I had discovered the joy of hand painting vehicles with the aforementioned J2 which was the first of three excellent ex ESB vans I bought at auction. Slowly it turned from pale yellow and gray to Cardinal Red in Valspar. I was delighted to find I could do the job in a day. Very satisfying!

One night whilst parked outside Barry's Hotel it was struck from behind by a very drunk soldier returning home in his VW beetle. I received 75 Pounds from his insurance which coincidentally was what I paid at the auction and I had driven all over Ireland doing gigs in it, so I was well pleased! I bought a large tin of "David's Isopon" and attempted to repair the very big hole in the off side rear quarter. This proved to be a disappointment and a demonstration of the difficulties attached to the great art of motor body repair. I call it an art for I have found that it takes all the skill, talent and patience of a true artist. It is damned hard work! When first encountering the product, enthusiasm leads to the mixing of too much of the stuff and it "goes off" as you look at it. In no time it has set to the point being unworkable. It is expensive so you still try to use it the result being a surface not unlike that of the Moon. This was my experience. After a fruitless attempt to shape it with a file and wet and dry paper I plonked a second hand rear light in the middle and touched it in with what was left of the "Valspar". Bingo! A practical if ugly repair.

Back to Morris 8s. A few months passed and I received a phone call from the little old lady to say her husband had passed away so would I like the other car and a pile of spares all for 30 Pounds? I had recently married and the wife failed to share my enthusiasm for things vintage so I passed the car on to my bass player. Together we went to collect a horde of wheels, windows, pumps, coils you name it the old boy had it stashed. So I ended up with all this stuff after all, and forty years on I still have bits of Morris 8 in my shed! My friend sold the car for 60 pounds making a good profit I thought.

At this time I was taken over by a sort of vehicular promiscuity for I saw a 1946 Hillman Minx, ZD 5794, parked outside a house along the canal near Rialto. It had the independent head lamps I so desired and its windscreen



Morris 8

Yank 'Heavy Metal'



opened as well. I called in and as luck would have it, the owner, a retired bus driver was thinking of disposing of it in favor of a more modern car. Like my previous old gent he had a host of spares, virtually another car out in his back garden, engine, gearbox, axles the lot. It all could be mine for 20 quid. I jumped at it! Soon I had it looking resplendent in Olive Green with black wings, hand painted of course. I always wanted a car with the spare wheel mounted on the back so like an idiot I bolted a wheel to the boot lid! I thought it looked fab. Oh to be as young and foolish again! The interior was very very worn so I replaced the door panels with brown leatherette and removed the head cloth. I also opened up the sunroof which had been sealed. I soon learned why! I was very pleased with this cars performance, its 12 H.P. side valve had lots of go in it. The wife was less impressed. It soon became apparent as I was permitted just one old car and the Morris would have to go!

One evening I observed a nice looking Series E proceeding along Adelaide Road. I hopped out of my van at the next lights at Harcourt Street and tapped on the drivers window. A handsome young man complete with college scarf greeted me with a smile. He was to become a long term friend of great assistance and support to me over 40 years, the late lamented Tony Colley. I suggested that he might be interested in the purchase of my Morris as a source of parts for his own car, but the idea was politely yet firmly rejected. But from this fortuitous encounter I later received an invitation to visit his home and family seat, a very pleasant place near Clondalkin, off the Naas Road, where I saw for the first time the legendary Frazer Nash and the ancient Renault. It was like Heaven to me as there seemed to be many old cars about the place, some belonging to his friends and of course his cousin Christopher Hone who had an M.G. Dave Dunn was based there at that time and I was delighted to be introduced to that expert, professional and friendly gentleman. On the wall of the stables now used as a workshop, I recall a plaque bearing the legend "A TOOL UNREPLACED IS A TOOL LOST!"