

## Some of the Cars in My Life

By Barry Lafbery

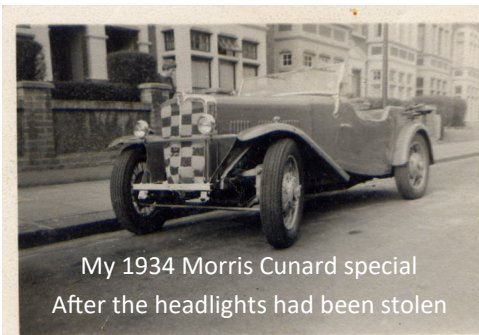
I am sure, that I am like most of you, in as much as the cars in your life bring back many memories. We all have them, some good, some bad we all seem to remember the good times, Blondes Brunettes or even the first time you discovered old cars. In my case it was mainly Rovers I can remember my first discovery, it was actually my second, the first was not really a discovery and I was not wearing handcuffs and sitting in the back of a P6 Police car.



A Cunard with the missing headlights

my very first encounter with a Rover was in the mid 50s. It was a Rover 14 of 1936 vintage, and it belonged to my uncle Bill. I was in the middle of my apprenticeship to become a mechanic. I did some work on the car and even at that tender age i was impressed. Especially the comfort and the free wheel attachment that let you change gear without using the clutch, and of course Mexican overdrive when going down hill. It was many years between that Rover and the first Rover that I owned, and of course there were many other marques

owned during this period of about ten years. They also bring back many fond memories. (here we go drifting back to those Blondes again). The car I remember most, and of course the one you wish you had never sold, was a 1934 Morris 10/4 Cunard Special. This was a 4-



My 1934 Morris Cunard special  
After the headlights had been stolen

seat open body looking very much like an MG. The body was built by Cunard Coachworks, on a Morris 10/4 chassis, it also came on a 10/6 chassis. My 4-cylinder side valve engine was slightly tweaked by having twin SU Carburetors. It was great fun to drive and for the time had great road holding. I owned this car while I was in the RAF doing my National Service, the car was red and seemed to go well with my RAF uniform, and for some reason the girls seemed to agree, I never did find

out if it was the car or the uniform that was the attraction, In the 60 odd years since the Cunard, I have only ever seen one advertised for sale and that was a 10/6, I do hope that some still exist.

Well I hope by now you have had lots of Memories flooding in, whether they be blondes, brunettes, or the odd redhead. With hopefully lots of old cars and with some luck a few of your favorites. Now while still in the RAF and towards the end of my 2 years national service I was driving the Cunard home one weekend when I blew up the engine, I was probably rushing home to some blonde and with only a 48 hour pass, time was of the essence. Meanwhile there was the poor old Cunard on the side of the road with a great big hole in the block and bits of engine all over the place. Of course, that put paid to the weekend and I never did get home to that b or b. A friend and I towed the car back to the RAF camp and

parked it in the hanger and there it stayed. Because the wages from the RAF were hardly enough to live on let alone do major repairs on a car. I was de-mobbed a few months later and sold the car to a fellow on the camp. And that was the end of the Cunard, and I was really sorry to see it go.

On leaving the RAF I got a job as a mechanic with a Rolls Royce and Bentley Agent in Kew, London. Working on R-R really spoiled me for other cars, and this is probably why I drive a Rover now, as they are the poor man's Rolls Royce. Back then of course, I could hardly afford a Rover let alone a Rolls Royce, but looking back, I now realize I missed my one and only chance in my whole life of ever owning a Rolls-Royce. One of the salesmen from our showrooms in Burlington Gardens off Old Bond St. had a 20/25 I think a 1930 that had been in his family from new, (this was 1961). It came to our workshops to be fixed up and sold, I could have bought it for 35 uk-pounds as is. But dads being dads, how are you going to afford to run it he said, after all 35 pounds was about four weeks wages then. So, I never got it. It did go for 35 pounds, the girl who worked in the office, she told her dad about it and he snapped it up. I ended up with a 1934 Morris Isis. Probably just as expensive to run as the Rolls. A big car for its time, and of course all leather and wood like most of the cars back then. It also had a rather nice device on the clutch, it was vacuum operated, one simply turned a valve on the dash and when you came off the throttle there being more vacuum at idle, the clutch pedal would go down by its self.

After this Morris I made the big mistake and bought a brand new Heinkel bubble car. Looking back it was fun but not the car to go courting in.

I was at R-R for a couple of years and still living at home,( we did in them days you know) my parents moved north of London, to a new town named Welwyn Garden City and of course I and the bubble car went too. It was here that i met the love of my life, no not a Rover, the wife.



1934 Morris Isis

Well at this point, after we had moved to Welwyn garden City. I think I should back track a few years and mention some of the cars I owned as a teenager, while growing up in Fulham, just a few feet from Craven Cottage Football (soccer) Club. The very first car, and I remember it well, because I never even got to drive it. Being only 15 years old. The car was an Austin 7 two-seater, I think it was a 1929 or 30. I tinkered with that car for almost a year, Having turned 16 yrs, the age for driving motorcycles, I could smell the power, I had to have something, anything, so long as it had power, and what did I end up with, a 49cc cycle-aid that mounted on the back of my pedal bike. At least I was under power, not much, but power. Well 49cc did not last long, I was soon in the big league, in the form of a 1939 500cc Norton 16H motorbike and sidecar, yes, a sidecar, mum and dad thought a solo was too dangerous. That was the first year I had a holiday away on my own. A couple of friends and I, with my combination and there 500cc BSA solo, we went camping to the west country, Torquay I think, and fun, we had lots of



Mum and Dad with the Bubble car.  
Checking out the beach at Brighton



Me and the 1934 Austin 12-4

it, good clean stuff you know, 11pm, fish and chip shop, got any chips left mister, yes came the answer, your fault for cooking to many was the reply, and the chase was on, we were in the lead, well most of the time. I had that bike for a couple years, on one trip to Portsmouth the magneto fell off and I tied it back on with a piece of rope and a block of wood, that lasted for a month until I could fix it properly. Then came an Austin 12/4 of 1934, and lots more fun. Us boys, and usually 3 or 4 girls, would pile in the car head for the country, I think it was a place called shillingford on the banks of the River Thames, I remember the road crossed the river by means of an old stone bridge with a very old pub on one side, I think it was the pub that was the attraction, or the quiet river bank and a pretty girl, but I think the girls knew what we were up to as we always seemed to end up back at the pub sooner than we thought. That was a good car that Austin as I do not recall having any major problems with it at all except to keep it under 50 mph, as anything over that, and you could hear the big ends working. Well After a while you could hear the big ends all the time, so I decided to sell it. Now being an

honest sort of chap me lud, I wanted to be sure the car was running nice and quite for the new owner. So, I filled the engine with 90w oil, after that it was so quiet I thought maybe I should keep it, but the add. was in, and would you believe, the first chap that came to look at it didn't even start it up, just walked around it kicked the tyres and said I'll take it. Just goes to show when you try to be honest. I had several other cars after the Austin, to name a few, Vauxhall 14, Morris 8 tourer, Ford 8 model Y. Why I bought the Vauxhall I can not imagine, maybe it was the start of my love of straight 6 engines, I can't recall much about the Vauxhall so I can only presume that It didn't last long. The Morris 8 I recall as a fun car. Then the Ford 8 model Y, and why you might well ask, the only adventure I recall with this car was the time I towed home my neighbour in his 1937 812 Cord that had broken down. To upset you Cord lovers out there, that Cord must have been one of only 2 in the whole country at that time, and my neighbour took a hacksaw and cut the roof off. Towards the end of my apprenticeship I thought I would have a go at building a special it seemed everybody else was having a go so why not me. I got hold of a Singer 9 from somewhere, I don't know why a Singer, it was probable the right price at the right time. It was a 4 cylinder over head camshaft. There was not much building really i just cut the body down and make a two-seater out of it. This bought me up to the time when I was called up for my national service, so off I went to the RAF for two years. It was soon after joining the RAF that I acquired the Morris Cunard that I have already mentioned.



Now that brings us back to Welwyn Garden City. Now moving to a new town meant a new job, and that is where I met the wife. It also meant a new selection of cars to own before owning the first Rover. Now, We have all done our fair share of courting, maybe not all of it with the wife, but I am sure we will all agree that comfort is a must, so let me assure you, a bubble car is not the place to win a girls heart, or anything else for that matter, so it was always, Dad, can I borrow your car, and that car was a Borgward Isabella. A great car that came



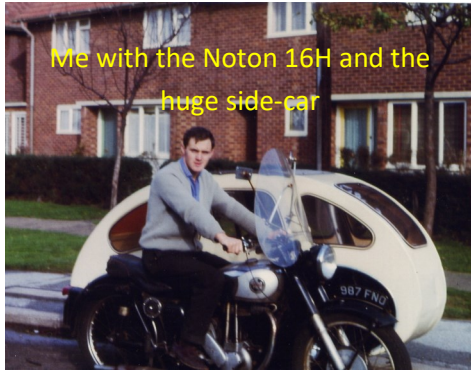
The Singer nine special I built when I was 18, I hope to make a better job this time



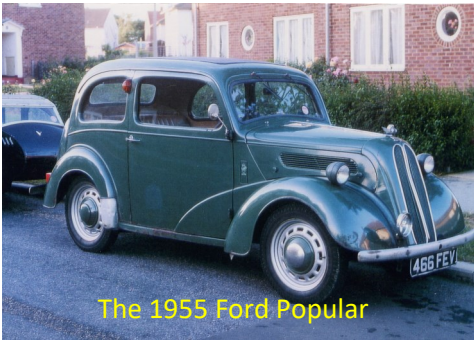
The Ford Popular with it's fibre glass body

with all the comfort you needed for what ever you were trying to win, and a German radio, that would pick up the local police with the press of a button, very impressive back then, (before the days of hand held scanners). Now, as time went on and the fair maiden's heart had been won, the mode of transport changed some what, A 1937 Fiat 500 topolino, was next, not much better than the bubble car, but at least it had 4 wheels and 4 cylinders, I swapped this car for a fiber-glass special, mounted on a Ford popular chassis, this car was a lot of fun. Then you could hear the sound of wedding bells, so the saving of money was the main agenda, and very cheap transport was sort, so from one extreme to the other, we ended up with a Lambretta scooter, needless to say that did not last long, then going back almost to the beginning, we bought, (I say we, because it was soon to be that day when the two of us would become we.) a 1947 Norton 500cc 16H motorbike and sidecar, the sidecar was a huge double adult, almost as big as the Fiat. That bike lasted well into our marriage, when it was decided, that we should return to 4 wheels, A 1955 Ford popular sit up and beg type, appeared on the scene. Comfortable car if you

didn't mind rolling around corners on the door handles, transverse springs front and rear remember. Then came a couple of Renault Dauphine's, in my opinion a truly great car, very much under rated in its day, very comfortable bucket seats, we're not courting now remember, and 95 mph and 50 mpg. But unfortunately, Mr. Rusty had a sweet tooth for them, but they were great while they lasted. I remember the first one a 1958. We towed a Daily Mirror tent trailer with everything in it but the kitchen sink to Devon one year on holiday. It did very well, seeing as it was only 745cc. But the journey from south Devon along the coast road to Folkstone to visit my parents was another story. The Dauphine decided it had had enough of this towing lark. First the near side suspension on the trailer collapsed, then the generator bearings went, I then lost 2<sup>nd</sup>. Gear then 3<sup>rd</sup> and finally first at this point we started to have trouble getting up hills, I had phoned my Dad in Folkstone to come to the rescue. We finally came to a stop a long way from Folkstone, at about 10 p.m. with a flat battery, no lights, and only one gear. My dad arrived about an hour later in his Humber Hawk. We put the wife and kids in the Humber put the towrope on the Dauphine and he towed me back to Folkstone, we



Me with the Noton 16H and the huge side-car



The 1955 Ford Popular

arrived about 2 a.m. Even after all that I still think that they were a great little car. After the second Dauphine came another 25-pound fixer upper in the form of an Austin A40 Farina, what can I say, but it did the job. Now not far from where we were living in Welwyn Garden City, was one of the many watering holes the city had, this one, THE GREEN MAN, was on the corner of Chequers and the Hatfield Rd. Back then it was very much in the country. I doubt it's even there today. But right across the road from this pub, was a small farm, now, one Sunday afternoon while 'we' were sitting in the beer garden enjoying a quiet pint, I saw it, well actually I saw the chickens first, as they were getting out of the back seat. Why I hadn't seen it before, I do not know, maybe too many pints. Any way there it was a ROVER. On talking to the farmer, he agreed to sell his chicken house for 35 pounds. It turned out to be a 1939 Rover 14.

Well having bought the 1939 Rover 14 from the farmer, the 35 pounds had to be raised, and this is where the good wife did her bit, with a visit to the bank manager, this car duly became the washing machine, we had a very understanding bank manager, or he had an eye for a pretty girl. This was the first of many visits to the bank as later on we were to buy a stove and a fridge. Having got the financing out of the way. I was more than keen to say the least to get the car home and to start tinkering with it. It was only about 2 miles from home to the farm, and I wondered if it might start and I could take a chance and drive it home with no insurance or road tax. So loaded up with a battery, petrol, and tools, I set off for my adventure, on arrival, the farmer had removed the chickens, eggs and most of the straw. But the car was still sitting where I had first seen it. I put the new battery on, checked it had oil and water, and turned the key and pressed the starter button, it turned over, I put in the fresh petrol, had a look at the points, they looked OK, so I continued to crank it over and after a couple of minutes it burst into life I could tell it was running as there was not much left of the exhaust, in fact everybody over at the pub knew it was running. Now with the brakes being Girling rod, I did not have to worry about not having any, I knew I would at least have something. So, in I got and off I went, 5 minutes later I was home, and I didn't even see one policeman. My lucky day.



The Renault Dauphine having rest from  
towing the tent trailer

Well, the first order of business was a good clean inside and out, the leather seats came up just super, looking just like leather seats look when they are nicely worn. I would not like to guess how many coats of paint there was on the body but there must have been a lot. The car was black, and it polished up like new, it was quite amazing. Having got the car looking healthy I turned to the mechanics to make sure it was all OK, new oil, plugs and points, and a

good tune up, and some repairs to the exhaust had the engine purring like a kitten. At this time the car would have to pass the m.o.t. (city test) test before I could insure it, so I made



The 1939 Rover 14 after a good clean

sure every thing was in good order, the only thing that needed work was the kingpins, I was lucky at that time to have a friend who worked in a plant that had a rather nice machine shop, so he took the spindles in and made new bushings and kingpins for me. These installed the car passed the test with flying colours. I was running the Austin A40 Farina as my daily car. I transferred the insurance over to the Rover and started to drive it, it was heaven, the leather, the wood, the ride, the attention, everybody

wanted to talk to you about the car, just like they do now when you are out in your classic or vintage car. What I used to do was drive the Rover for 2 or 3 months then go back to the Austin for 2 or 3 months, this was because I could not afford to run the Rover full time it being a 6 cylinder engine, and to run two cars back then was completely out of the question. After running the Rover for about 6 months I noticed a lack of power and a bit of a miss fire, so decided to remove the cylinder head and have a look. Well it turned out to only have five and a half pistons, and not much left of most of the exhaust valves. The big question was where to get pistons and valves for a car this old. No internet back then. Well after phoning all over the place I felt like giving up. The next day on my way to work I stopped to get petrol at my usual country garage on the Hatfield to Potters Bar Rd. the kind of garage we wish we still had around. It was run by a very large friendly man who I think had been there for ever, while having our little chat while paying for the petrol, I mention my piston and valve problem, to my utter amazement he turned around and took a box of exhaust valves of the shelf behind him, are these what you're looking for, he said, he followed with, I think I've got the pistons at home I'll bring them in tomorrow, well I couldn't believe my ears. The next day I called in and there on the counter was a box of six new pistons, I asked how much? 6 pounds for one he said or six pounds for the lot, of course, I took the lot. It was so nice to hear the engine running on all six cylinders and to be back to quality motoring again.



Have you noticed that when you own a certain make of old car everybody else keeps offering you more, well It's the same with old Rovers, and It's nothing new, even back then this was the late 60s, people were doing it. I had owned the Rover for about 9 months, when a neighbor said her uncle who lived about 60 miles away had an old Rover to sell, and would I be interested in it and as it was not running he didn't want much for it, about 30 pounds, she thought. I could see we were going to need a new fridge.

Having thought for all of 2mins I decided to go and have a look, as you never know, and we all know what happens when we go and look don't we, how many of you have gone to look



The 1956 Rover P4-90

at an old car and come home without it, I don't see any hands. I cannot remember exactly where it was, some where north east of Welwyn Garden City I think. So one sunny Saturday morning my self and a friend set of for our adventure armed with a good towrope and the mortgage money. We found the place quite easily it was a large old house set way back from the road the sort of place that when they buy a car they don't tow it home. As we drove up the drive, we passed a row of open garages in one was a green P4, it turned out that was the car.

Not much haggling went on, 30 quid take it or leave it. You guessed it we took it. The car turned out to be a 1956 90 P4 green in colour. On went the tow rope and off we set, an uneventful journey got us home late afternoon with a new car to play with and no mortgage money, on seeing the car the wife said it looks like we are going to have a new fridge, so Monday morning off to the bank she went and home she came with the money for a new fridge. Amazing what a nice pair of legs will do. Well it didn't take much to get it running some fresh petrol a look at the points a clean of the plugs and away she went. I seem to remember there was a hole in the floor on the passenger side foot well, a piece of aluminum from a London Bus (I was a mechanic working for London Transport at the time) and some pop rivets soon fixed that. A good clean, inside and a polish outside, some repairs to the exhaust and we were mobile.

Like the 14 I kept switching the insurance so all the cars had a turn. Driving that P4 around back then you could pretend to be anyone you wanted, a Doctor, Vet, Bank manager, (after all he did buy it) It was amazing how lesser cars would give way to you all the time. It was great fun.

It was not long after buying the 90 that I saw advertised in the Exchange & Mart a 1960 Rover 105R the only automatic they made at that time, well of course I had to go and have look, and we all know what happens when we go and look. Well the next weekend my friend who had helped me with the P4, and myself set out to look at the 105R. I seem to remember it was somewhere south of the Thames in London. The asking price was 20 pounds as it had some damage to the right front wing. Well damage was putting it lightly the wing was a real mess but the main impact had been to the front wheel that was not facing the way it should be, the left wheel was facing ahead and the right one turning hard right. Well a deal was done to the tune of 11 pounds. Now I had to get it home, I really did not want to make the journey again, so yes you guessed it, in went the petrol and off we set with no tax no insurance and not much steering. What a fight that steering was by the time we got home my arms were ready to drop off. I fixed up the steering and the fender and got the car running nicely. I never did drive it on the road except for the journey home. It was now 1973 and we had applied to emigrate to Canada, so things had to be sold, the two P4s went as a pair and the 14 went to an older fellow who couldn't even drive it, It broke my heart as I watched it go down the street, I even shed a tear. As they say hind sight is 20/20, I should have kept the 14 and brought it to Canada with me such is life..

After arriving in Canada in 1974 it took about 12 years before I got back into Rovers, the vehicles I have owned here in Canada are a 1950 F8 Dennis Fire Engine that I bought with a friend after a couple of years I sold my half to him but I still have access to it and can go play with it when I want to. It has a 4 1/4 litre Rolls Royce engine that runs, but the whole vehicle does need a lot of work. In more recent years I owned a couple of 1958 series 1 107in LandRovers.

I half restored one of them and then sold them both as the workload was getting to much. Since then I have owned several Rover P6s and a 3500S. and a 1963 3ltr. My present vehicles are a 1949 Rover P3 75 and a 1939 Rover 14 that I am making into a special.

And there you have it,

Barry

