

## **My First Car....My 1933 Morris Minor two seater convertible by Chris Harris-Evans....**

I finished high school at 17 and as I already had a place at Southampton University for the following year, I decided to take a job for a year. My passion was amateur radio so I investigated local electrical and electronic possibilities and landed a position as a lab technician at the English Electric Company in the Control and Instrumentation laboratory. English Electric was the electrical engineering partner in a consortium building nuclear power stations. My job was fascinating; one of the things we were doing was testing the Chief Engineer's proposal for monitoring the alignment of control rods in the reactor using light beams through holes in disks rotating with the rod position. It didn't work, but another idea for checking how many control rods were attached to the hoist by measuring the weight was more successful and I found myself calibrating all the lifting clamps.

Another lab maintained an analog computer for simulations. In the early 1960s computers were vast, comprising hundreds of individual plug-in amplifiers with tubes requiring continuous calibration and repair. One of the technicians in this lab owned a couple of old cars in storage and they needed to be moved, so he was looking for good homes for them. I went to see the vehicles. One was a 1930s Armstrong Siddeley, maybe not quite the "Cadillac" of English cars but definitely a large and luxurious automobile. The other was a 1933 Morris Minor two seater convertible. I may have been tempted by the opulence of the Armstrong Siddeley but as my only previous experience of owning a mechanized conveyance was a 1918 Levis motorcycle (which is another story) I sensibly took the Morris.

I was now the owner of an automobile, free but not running. As I didn't even have a driving license I persuaded another colleague to tow it home with my older brother at the wheel of the Morris. I rode passenger in the tow vehicle, an Armstrong, and watched as the rotten soft top of the Morris peeled off in tatters as we picked up speed. Otherwise it arrived home in one piece.

The Morris Minor was a very basic model selling originally for £100, equivalent to about US\$400 at the time. It had a side valve 847cc engine, a four speed non-synchromesh gearbox, an accelerator pedal mounted between the clutch and brake pedals and a single bench seat which folded forward to access the boot (trunk).

My first priority was to get a driving license and second to get the car roadworthy. The body was removed, not so much for a "body off restoration" but it was so easy and light that it was the best way to access all the mechanicals. A new top was fashioned out of canvas from a surplus US Army tent.

The only real problem was the brakes. Even at that time in the UK all vehicles over ten years old had to pass the MOT (Ministry of Transport) test which included handbrake and footbrake performance tests. The brakes were very crude; both the foot pedal and the handbrake lever were connected to a tube mounted across the chassis under the seat. Four arms on the tube were connected to the cables running to each brake. To pass the test everything was adjusted to remove all slack from the system but then with more than one passenger the frame would flex enough to apply the brakes all the time. Once the test certificate was obtained a compromise setup was possible.

Not much stopping power was complemented with very little go power. The little side valve engine could manage 10mph per gear resulting in a top speed of 40mph.

I wanted to increase the performance so I visited a local junkyard and picked up a larger downdraft carburetor to replace the original small side draft model. I persuaded the fitter at the lab to fabricate an adaptor to mount the new carburetor to the existing manifold. This was quite successful, raising the top speed to 50mph but the weak brakes meant that I had to be really careful and I learned to keep a good distance from the vehicle in front of me. I had a few scary moments when a vehicle in front of me braked quickly but I never actually hit anyone.

I was young and after a few months I was yearning for something better so when I discovered a real sports car, a Singer Le Mans, the Morris was history. I put it up for sale in the company parking lot for £5 and my original benefactor was not at all happy. I sold it to a colleague in the lab; he had a wife and child and wanted economical transport, so he put back the original carburetor.

I learned to drive in the little Morris with the center accelerator pedal and the double declutching for the crash gearbox so I will always have a soft spot for this model. I could even push start it when the battery was low, running alongside, snicking it into gear and jumping in as the engine fired.

I saw a 1930 version of the same model for sale recently in Hemmings Motor News but I am now too accustomed to the luxury and power of Cadillacs.

Submitted by Chris Harris-Evans