

TWO BORGWARDS by Chris Harris-Evans

When we lived in Leicester, my father bought his cars and had all the maintenance done by two brothers operating out of a tiny shop up an alley in a scruffy part of town. I always knew them just as “The Brothers” and I don’t recall ever knowing their real names.

In 1965 I found myself without a car and my father told me that “the Brothers” had tried to sell him a used Sunbeam, and maybe I would be interested. Now Sunbeam had made some nice cars including an Alpine sports model so I went for a look. Their Sunbeam was a nice standard sedan but rather expensive and not very special so I respectfully turned it down. The Brothers then told me about something completely different; a Borgward Isabella that was available and very inexpensive as it was left-hand drive. I bought the Borgward because it was a lot of car for the money. It was reliable but it was rather basic and the driver’s door had a habit of opening while cruising along which was a little un-nerving. But now that I knew of the potential I noticed a sports model in the small ads in the local paper and went round to look at it. It was owned by a soldier who was stationed in Germany but now he had returned he couldn’t afford to run it at home in the UK. Anyway, that is what he told me but maybe his wife made him sell it.

It was much nicer than mine, still left hand drive, but with reclining seats, sunroof and the more powerful sports engine. It drove beautifully and was dead cheap so I bought it immediately.

Carl Borgward, owner of the German Hansa group of companies, started manufacturing cars using the Borgward name after the war in 1949. The most popular model was the Isabella, introduced in 1954, and in 1956 the TS, Touring Sports, version was released. The range was extended with a 2+2 coupe, cabriolet and

wagon; but although they were well engineered with independent suspension all round, they were not profitable, and the group collapsed in 1961.

I believe that my car was a 1957 model but as it had been brought into the UK and registered in 1964, this was its official year, and consequently it wasn't liable for the MOT test (equivalent to our annual Safety Inspection) which it otherwise would have been. It was a very comfortable and a well performing car for that time, the interior was perfect but the exterior was not so good with rust well established. Everything worked except the gas gauge so I made do with a dip stick. I was already used to driving with the steering wheel on the wrong side so I was very pleased with my Isabella TS.

That summer my brother and I decided to tour continental Europe concentrating on the ancient civilizations of Italy and Greece and the Borgward was perfect for this. The steering wheel would be on the correct side for European roads and the front seats that folded flat would make beds for no cost lodging.

We took the ferry across the English Channel and drove through France to Switzerland, over the Alps and down into Italy. Each evening we selected a secluded spot to sleep, usually with the roof open, and we had a camping stove to make coffee in the morning. It was remarkably comfortable. After visiting Florence, Pisa, Rome and Pompeii we crossed to the heel of Italy to take the ferry to Greece. There we toured the Peloponnese including Olympia, Mycenae, Epidaurus etc. before heading north to Athens. Up til then we had existed on simple meals of bread, cheese and fruit. In Greece it was yogurt, their equivalent of butter or cheese, but in Athens our guide book recommended an economical restaurant with a fixed menu. We had a fabulous meal, outside on the roof of the restaurant. It included 11 courses and took about 3 hours with as much Retsina (the Greek resinated white wine) as you could drink.

After seeing all the Athens sites we continued north past Mount Olympus and into Yugoslavia then back into Italy to visit Venice before heading home through Austria and Germany. After about four weeks in the car with only the occasional dip into the sea we were ready for a bath and a real bed.

The Borgward had served us well but once back in England I noticed that the rear axle was starting to whine so I decided it was time sell the Borgward and look for something new.



My Borgward Isabella, not pretty but very comfortable.