

memories

How a Minor new business became a major success

If you were listing some of the quirky things that helped make Britain great, it wouldn't be long before you came up with the words Morris Minor.

The Morris Minor was a British economy car that made its debut at the Earls Court Motor Show, London, on September 20 1948. More than 1.3 million were manufactured between 1948 and 1971. It was initially available as a two-door saloon and tourer (convertible), the range subsequently nromh expanded to include a four-door saloon in 1950, and in 1952 a wood-framed estate (the Traveller).

The idea had been to combine

Next Wednesday conservationist and businessman Charles Ware celebrates the 35th birthday of his world famous Morris Minor Centre

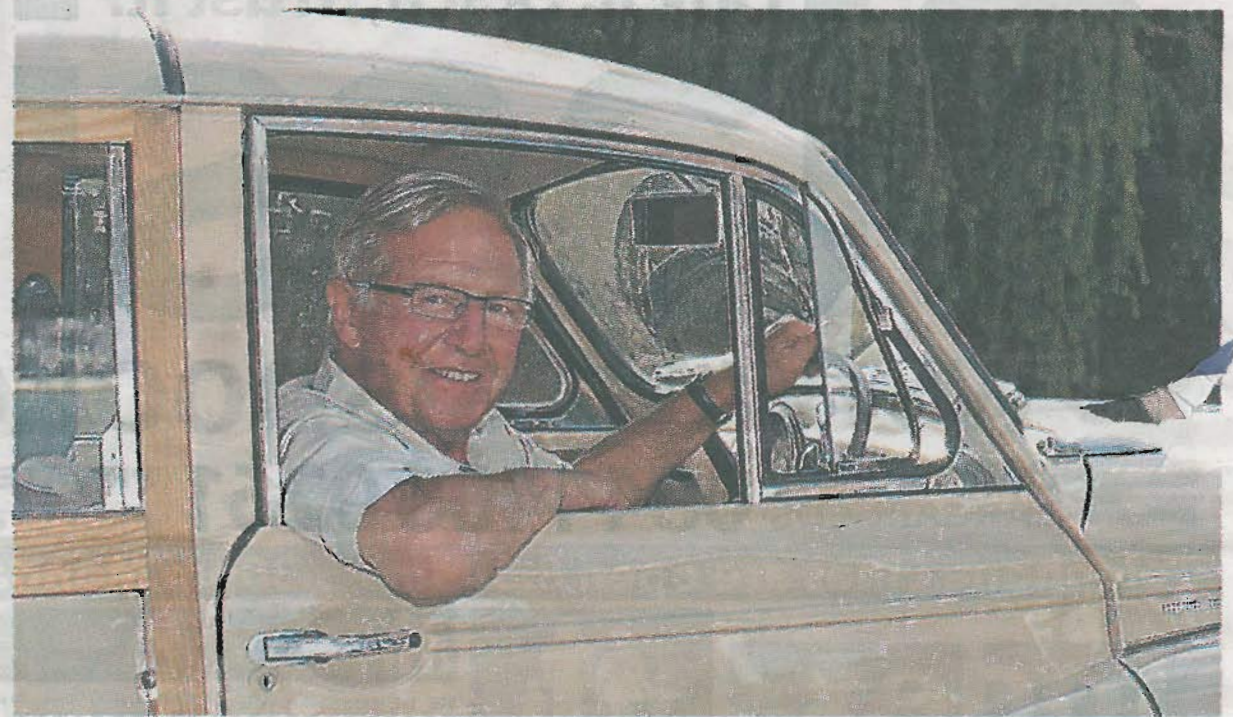
the luxury and convenience of a good motor car at a price that could be afforded by the country's working classes.

The Minor was a roomy vehicle with superior cornering and handling characteristics.

A tourer tested by the British magazine The Motor in 1950 had a top speed of 58.7 mph (94.5 km/h) and could accelerate from 0-50 mph (80 km/h) in 29.2 seconds. It had a fuel consumption of 42 miles per imperial gallon (6.7 L/100 km; 35 mpg-US) was recorded. The test car cost £382 including taxes.

The Motor magazine tested a four-door saloon in 1952. It reported a top speed of 62 mph (100 km/h) and acceleration from 0-50 mph (80 km/h) in 28.6 seconds. It had a fuel consumption of 39.3 miles per imperial gallon (7.19 L/100 km; 32.7 mpg-US) was recorded. The test car cost £631 including taxes.

During the life of the 1000 model,



ON THE ROAD: Charles Ware at the wheel of a restored Morris Minor 1000 at Charles Ware's Morris Minor Centre relocated to Brislington, Bristol after 30 years' trading in Bath

production declined. The last Convertible/Tourer was manufactured on August 18 1969 and the saloon line was discontinued the following year. The year 1971 was the last for the Traveller and commercial versions. Almost 850,000 Minor 1000s were made in all and the car was officially replaced by the Morris Marina.

But you cannot of course keep a good car down and even today you still often see a Morris Minor on the road.

And for that we largely have businessman and conservationist Charles Ware from Bath to thank. Not only did he help to save historic buildings in Bath during the infamous Sack of Bath but 35 years ago on May 25 he started the now world famous Morris Minor Centre Ltd. It started in Bath but has more recently moved to Brislington.

Charles Ware is now in his 76th year and has recently been ill



PLENTY OF WORK: The Morris Minor Centre in Bath

although he is recovering well.

Many things have changed since his Morris Minor Centre was started in Bath back in 1976.

At that time there were an estimated 250,000 Morris Minors on the road in the UK.

This number has dropped to around 20,000 registered vehicles with 14,000 on the road, an unknown number in garages and back lanes and many more around the world, turning the everyman common moggie into a rare breed.

The Centre which moved to Bristol employs 23 people with a combined experience of over 300 years. Some 14 of these people are in the workshops welding, grinding, prepping, remoulding, spraying, trimming, rebuilding and repairing engines, fitting Series III upgrades, varnishing and fitting wood - in fact doing every restoration and mechanical job that a Morris Minor owner could ever need; all under one roof.

In 1976 and Bath property tycoon

Charles Ware's empire had crumbled. After years of tireless work restoring dilapidated buildings back to their original Georgian prime, Charlie had grafted his way up to Millionaire's Row.

While lesser men would probably have held their hands up and called it a day, Charlie Ware picked himself up, brushed himself down, and looked for his next challenge.

In 1976 Mr Ware didn't have the collateral to invest in another property, but he did have enough to buy a few old Morris Minors.

A few years ago he said in an interview: "I remember looking at the cars, which were already classics, and thinking, these need preserving as much as the buildings do. The Morris was already becoming an icon. They'd finished production five years earlier and I felt, even then, that we'd never see their like again."

The rest has become as much a part of Bath's history as the Roman Baths or the Georgian Circus.

CHARLES WARE'S MORRIS MINOR CENTRE



BACK IN TIME: Charlie Ware outside Avon House