

WHO WANTS TO BUY AN 18/80?

Well here we are again – the sun is positively blazing down outside on a flawless summer's day and I am stuck in here applying digit to keyboard for your collective enjoyment – all offers of free beer by way of compensation next time we meet for the seemingly endless hours labouring away would be most appreciated by the author.

Things in the sleepy South West have been tramping on at their usual leisurely pace of late whereas elsewhere I gather that there has been a plethora of hectic activity in the 'For Sale' department (for information about what is presently on offer contact 'Honest' John Day our beloved Chairman) with no less than three 18/80s currently on the market or under offer and all this follows on from the recent sale of KX (surely the most famous, or at least most used, 18/80 of them all) in almost unrecognisably restored condition.

KX (a Mk1 narrow-bodied speed model, registration number KX 5195 – hence the diminutive 'KX') was the first 18/80 that I had ever driven when once, on the spur of the moment, I was allowed to 'have a go' at the Cheddar Driving Tests (merely to make the numbers up so that there was a 'Vintage' class) by the sanguine Morgan Marshall (an obvious error of judgement on his part). I remember being amazed at the light steering (as opposed to my TC – well anything, save perhaps a Vauxhall 30/98, is light compared to a TC) and absolutely twirled round the car park in the centre of Cheddar that we used to

use in those far distant, innocent days with such ease and aplomb that I was actually rather quicker than the owner (an obvious error of judgement on my part) and so it was several years before I got another go.

The second drive was in SU (the grey Mk2 saloon SU 2596 now another speed model) during the early days of the Bristol Classic Car Show when, after expansion into a new building, the organisers were a bit short of interesting exhibits so, swinging into action as only the South West Centre can, numerous MGs were fished out to fill the vacant spaces – not a few of which belonged to Morgan Marshall. Drivers were needed so, in a selfless act of volunteering, I stepped forward to pilot SU to 'E' Shed in Bristol Docks (now beautified to a restaurant/riverside bar configuration – no good for car shows).

SU had theretofore had a somewhat hard life and had spent many a year sheltering under various coverings (some more successful than others) on the front drive of No 1, Chapel Green Lane, Bristol 6. Some time before the Car Show, Peter Evans (the chap who was famous for building a complete J2 in his upstairs spare bedroom from bits collected from the cornucopia that was the cellar at Chapel Green Lane) wanted to provide a wedding car and, having more clout with Morgan than I was ever able to muster, persuaded him to lend him SU for the occasion.

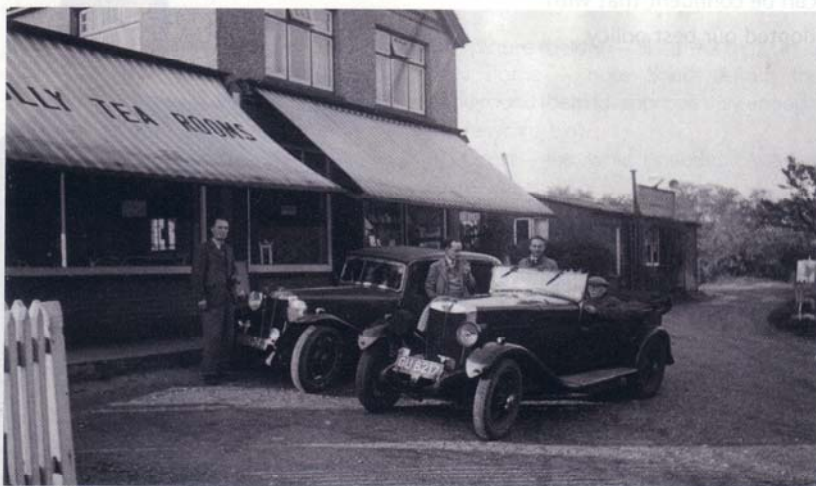
We got it running (after a fashion) and the body repaired enough for all four doors to open and stay reasonably closed,

the seats to stay still when sat on (without getting the bride oily), the engine to work (ish) and most of the petrol to remain in the tank for at least three hours. It did, however, smoke a bit. Thus 'restored' I climbed aboard for the couple of miles across Bristol in the rush hour. I learned a lot about stopping and starting off again that day. After the huge success of the show I drove it home again but this time the traffic was lighter and I managed to get it into top gear on occasion, dropping it down to 3rd and back again with stunning swiftness and lack of 'graunching'. Buoyed with success, I parked it back in the usual resting place and related my journey home – 'it's a double-silent-top on the Mk2, you can hardly fail to make a clean change' was the accolade for my driving expertise.

Towards the end of his motoring life Morgan let me drive KX to take him to the shops and so on – always a delight even when it only had two working brakes one of which 'grabbed' in the most alarming manner. I learned a lot during these trips.

Many years later, when I came by GU (Mk1 Tourer GU8127), I learned again the arts of driving a vintage car. In those days the Vintage Register used the VSCCs Welsh Trial as an excuse to potter up to mid-Wales to spend a weekend eating and drinking all Phil Jennings's cakes and tea, having hilarious dinners at a selection of 'interesting' hotels, and driving each other's cars. I remember the 'Sussex lot' motoring across, picking up Roger Stanbury on the way, then me before heading off over the Severn Bridge. Every half hour or so we would swap drivers and motor on. This was an excellent way of assessing what particular facets of your machine fell into the better/worse/'I thought they all did that' categories and so in need of repair/adjustment. Now that the prices have risen to stratospheric worth, few are willing to let any other near the driving seat and this, I feel, is a shame.

18/80s are still used for competition in places. GU won the Kimber Trophy in the historic Kimber Classic Trial last April for the 'Best performance by an MG' (there were 25 MGs entered – MMMs, T Types, Midgets, MGA, MGBs and so on). We even got the better of one of the original Austin Seven 'Grasshoppers' but were beaten to 3rd place overall by



GU with Morgan and his father, en route to Prescott 1946



KX possibly at the VSCCs driving tests at Madresfield or it could have been early Silverstone

a Singer Chamois and a Morgan 4/4. So they can be competitive against all-comers, even today. Be encouraged.

We also entered a team in the California Cup at Silverstone – alas then we are in the same class as the M Types they enjoy a certain agility that we lack. However, all those who entered had smiles on their faces ALL DAY – magnanimity in defeat?

Then, again in 2008, 18/80 won the South West Centre's Drivers Championship overall. This is a multi-event effort that includes trials, hillclimbs, sprints, gymkhanas, social runs, treasure hunts, Autotests and probably many other things that I may have forgotten all about – surely your car could have a bash at least some of this sort of thing – see your local centre for the events they run.

On a personal note, things with my car have taken a funny turn. When I initially had it on the road it used to run hot (the first trip up the Wye Valley to the Phil Jennings' for the Welsh was a nail-biting affair) but things soon settled down and it tended to run on the cool side – much to the annoyance of many other 18/80 owners at the time. I noticed on a trip up the motorway earlier in the year that the temperature kept rising to boiling point if I kept it between 3,000 and 3,500rpm (around the 70mph mark, I think). Reflecting on this I recalled that the 'new' radiator that I had had made was now something over 20 years old (where has all the time gone?) so, when I did the kingpins for the MOT, I took the opportunity to

flush out the cooling system, clean it with 'rad-flush' and put it all back together again – no discernable difference.

John Day then recommended a product called 'Radiator Relief' available for a mere £10 from a very friendly crowd at www.agriemach.co.uk – in went a bottle of the stuff – again no discernable difference. Ah-ha, I thought, this substance may be designed for a modern cooling system and that of the Six uses a considerably greater volume of water so I acquired another dose to give a stronger solution – still no discernable difference. Ho-hum.

Any bright ideas sent to the above e-mail address would be greatly appreciated.

As I write this I am conscious that there

is very little on the 14s published. Having fallen in love with the 14/28 4-seat tourer that David Potter used to own and drive with suitable abandon and disregard for the machinery, I got very near to buying the flat-rad 14/40 4-seat tourer from Phil Jennings but was unfortunately rather between overdrafts at the time. Fred Body ended up with it and has completed his customary super job of the restoration. Who knows if I had made the leap even further into indebtedness and nailed it together I might have some news for you. As it is, I wait forlornly for any information regarding the exploits of the earlier product.

So, with hope springing ever more eternal – adieu until next spring.



SU at the Cheddar Driving Tests at River Farm c1985 driven by Peter Evans