Morris Cars

Eight 1935, Series I & II

There can be little doubt that the most successful of all the pre-war Morris cars - and the one which helped to lift Morris Motors Ltd. out of the depression years - was the ubiquitous Morris Eight. By July 1935, only nine months after its introduction (during which period the Road Fund Tax on an 8hp car was reduced by 25 per cent to £6pa) over 50,000 Eights of all body types had been sold. This success continued despite competition from other small car manufacturers, including the Ford 8hp saloon, which was reduced at the Ford Motor Show in October 1935 from £110 to £100 with the boast that 'This makes the £100 saloon car produced in Great Britain'. Fords cautiously included the word 'saloon' in this announcement, remembering that a Morris Minor two-seater had been available at that figure during the 1931-33 seasons, and Austin's £100 two-seater, the Austin Seven Opal, was already on the market.

The Morris Eight, as announced in August and introduced at the Motor Show in October 1934, gave the prospective purchaser an option of two open models, a two-seater and a four-seat tourer; and two-door or four-door saloons with a Pytchley sliding-head or fixed-head. A 5cwt-van version was available with a light body thanks to the generous use of plymax panels, which kept the unladen weight of this small commercial below 12cwt, thus qualifying for the £10 annual Road Fund Tax. Colour choice on the cheaper fixed-head saloons was limited to an all-black or a two-tone red and black body with the usual Morris practice of stove enamelled wheels, wings, and aprons in black. To keep the price to £120 for the two-door, or an additional £10 for the four-door body, the trimming was in a red 'Karhyde' leathercloth, while bumpers and Lucas Trafficators were extra. Slightly up-market, the deluxe sliding-head versions must have been a good buy when for an additional £12 10s one had an Eight complete with front and rear bumpers, trafficators, luggage grid, real leather upholstery, and a choice of three two-tone colour schemes.

Little did anyone know, back in 1934, that nearly fifty years later the most sought after Eight, and the ones to command top bids for Eights at old-car auctions, would be the cheapest of all the Morris models at Olympia -- the Eight two-seater. Listed at £118 and £120 respectively, the two-seater and tourer models as originally presented were without bumpers or trafficators (which were extra) and trimming was in Karhyde.

A completely new 918.6cc side-valve engine, type 'UB' with a three-bearing crankshaft, had been designed for the Morris Eight and a proprietary single dry-plate clutch, Borg & Beck 6¼in was introduced for the first time. The three-speed gearbox and engine unit was mounted at four points on rubber; the rear mounts consisting of rubber-to-metal bonded attachments. In his biography (Out on a Wing, 1964) the late Sir Miles Thomas (Lord Thomas of Remenham) writes: 'One of the reasons why a simple, cheap and dependable side-valve 8 h.p. engine was produced so quickly by Len Lord at the Wolseley factory was that he had no inhibitions about following good examples. Any student of automobile history who cares to compare the 8 h.p. Ford engine of the late nineteen-twenties and the Morris 8 engine of the early nineteen-thirties will find a remarkable resemblance.' Presumably Sir Miles Thomas was referring to the Ford 'Y' type Eight which was introduced not in the late 'twenties, but in February 1932; he was, of course, right and there are many obvious similarities. A Ford Eight was produced by the Morris organisation and data from the completely stripped down engine was used by the assistant chief designer at Morris Engines Branch, Claude Baily, and his team to expedite the design of the new Morris Eight 'UB' power unit which emerged with a smaller capacity and stroke, and a larger bore than the Ford's 56.6mm bore x 92. 5mm

stroke, 933cc engine. It seems to have been fairly common practice to copy the best of other designs, and certainly Morris Motors Ltd were not averse to doing so. Just before the Morris Eight came on the scene a prototype saloon was built which was decidedly like the Austin Seven Ruby in styling, albeit with hydraulic brakes, hydraulic shock absorbers and semi-elliptic road springs, but nothing came of this. Also when Singer presented their Bantam at the 1935 Motor Show this was undeniably based on the Morris Eight saloon, although its 972cc overhead-camshaft engine ensured better performance; and anyone taking a good look at the 650cc Lloyd produced by Lloyd Cars Ltd of Grimsby, between 1948 and 1951, might be excused if they concluded that they were observing a Morris Series Z van cut down to make a neat four-seater special tourer.

The chassis frame design of the Eight was unconventional for Morris in that the side members were reversed, as it were, so that their open portion faced outwards. Unfortunately, this was to prove a water trap and prone to rusting, especially around the wheel arches. Other departures from normal Morris practice was the positioning of the battery in an accessible container under the bonnet, the use of the (then) small 14mm sparking plugs, transverse mounting of the front Armstrong shock absorbers, and the use of the 'smaller' diameter 17in Magna wire wheels with six-stud fixings - double the number considered sufficient on the previous Minor. The tendency by designers to move the radiator further and further forward continued, so that on the Eight the dumb-irons were now completely covered by a front apron.

The radiator shell design itself, while appearing to follow the general lines of the previous three years, was deceptive, for behind a false honeycomb was mounted the radiator proper and the header tank cap was to be found in a hidden position under the bonnet. Except on the 5cwt van the two-piece mascot, fitted in place of a conventional radiator cap, was a device said to represent the Morris term 'balanced motoring'. Did the designers deliberately choose the ancient Chinese symbol for 'creation'? This mascot was in fact short lived and replaced by a similar shaped single-piece component carrying a symbolic '8' medallion on each side. From the beginning the van radiator carried a simple sundial triangle and a cheaper wire mesh in place of the honeycomb.

From the early stages, the design of the Morris Eight took ergonomic factors into account, with the use of an adjustable skeleton body which allowed the designers to experiment with seating positions, steering rake, etc with average size people in situ. The approach of building a chassis to suit the body, rather than the reverse, paid off, but there were minor snags, which could not have been foreseen. Readers who are familiar with the control arrangements on the Morris Eight, especially those with an eye to the aesthetic, may wonder why the arm used as a mounting for the horn button, indicator switch and dipping control, has a neat rounded surface on the underside, allowing the various fixings and inspection panel to show on the top surface. The simple answer is that this control arm was originally intended to be mounted with the smooth surface uppermost and the direction indicator switch pointing downwards. Unfortunately it was found that the average driver would knock the protruding switch with his or her knee when entering or leaving the car. When this fact was brought to the notice of Cowley early in 1935, assemblers and Morris agents were instructed to reverse the mounting. Other early modifications were the repositioning of the indicators (when fitted) on the open models from the scuttle to a position behind the doors, and the fitting of a hand throttle control to the lower part of the instrument panel.

Of all the 1935 season Morris models, only the Morris Eight survived the 'Series Model' policy of mid-1935, when it became the Series I. At that time something like 47,000 Eights of all body types had left Cowley and minor changes to the specifications were made, such as the longer-reach Champion L 10 sparking plugs, a new design of brake drum with anti-splash rims, and the replacement of the original fabric-disc universal joints by proprietary Hardy Spicer needle-roller units. From time to time small changes were introduced as the demand for the Eight continued unabated. About September 1935 the engine block casting (which required a

mould with no less than thirty-one separate core pieces) was modified and this was followed four months later by replacement of the digital speedometer (incorporating a revolving drum which indicated the speed figures in a small aperture) to a needle-type instrument.
The mid-months of 1936 saw a breather tube attached to the tappet cover, a change in king-pin bushes to a rolled type, an indent added to the inner edge of the near-side front wing to allow the subsequent fitting of an air silencer on the SU carburettor; a solenoid dipped the near-side headlamp while simultaneously extinguishing the off-side lamp. About the same time the Lucas Altette horn found a new mounting position under the front apron, having originally been mounted on the head of the engine. By September 1936 a more flexible steering wheel of moulded rubber had superseded the earlier hard moulding, and in the next few months the minor changes continued with a change in the design of the Lucas starter motor (giving a higher ratio), the fitting of light safety guards below the doors on the 5cwt vans, while a self-starting windscreen-wiper motor replaced the 'spinner' type previously used. On the closed models the internal mirror which had hitherto been attached above the windscreen was now incorporated with the adjustable windscreen finger pull on the lower part of the frame. Side-screen fixings on the open models were reversed about May 1937 with a wing nut replacing the previous wing-screw.

The major apparent changes came when the Series II models were announced in September 1937, by which time some 164,000 Morris Eights had been produced; about 15 per cent of these were open cars. Gone was the chromium-plated radiator shell with the imitation honeycomb and in its place a paint finish to match the bodycolour, and an inner of vertical slats brightened by three chromium-plated strips. The Magna wire wheels were replaced with 'Easiclean' disc design, (still stove enamelled, as were the wings, aprons, etc) while the spare wheel mounting had forsaken its brass-buckled leather strap for a studded wooden boss attached to the rear bodyframe. On the sliding-head two-door and four-door saloons the standard luggage grid was now pressed steel. By about December 1937 a new ratio crown-wheel and pinion altered the spiral bevel rear axle from 5.175:1 to 5.286:1. One of the last modifications involved the replacement of the plain hand-brake cable to a covered Bowden type, about April of 1938.

It may have been the need to utilise existing stocks of components special to the earlier private cars, but whatever the reason the title 'Series I' and the chromium-plated radiator surround was retained on the 5cwt van right through to the end in 1939. Officially there were no Series II 5cwt vans but the writer has seen a brake version of the Morris Eight carrying the chassis prefix 'S2/EV ...' tie Series II Eight van) dating to June 1939, fitted with a professionally built body using the same technique as the post-war Minor 1000 Traveller, even to the method of joining the timber over the rear wheel arches. To this puzzle can be added the cryptic advertisement which appeared in Motor Sport in January 1963 offering a '1938 Morris Minor Traveller, 8hp. Rare. One of Six'.

From the outset 'Export' versions of the Eight were available, with both left and right-hand drive options. In the first two years nearly 25,000 Morris cars of various body types were exported, with New Zealand the best overseas customer. Equipment differed slightly on these Eights destined for overseas markets. One example being the Magna wheels of 3in x 16in diameter carrying larger section 5.25 extra low pressure Dunlop tyres on the cars with a similar reduction in diameter on the 5cwt van from 400-18 for the home model to 450- 17 on the export model. Some speedometers were marked in kilometres. Other variations were less obvious, such as the increase in the number of leaves in the rear springs. Many of the Eights, either complete or in CKD chassis form, were exported by Morris Industries Exports Ltd to Australia where local body building firms such as Ruskin Motor Bodies Pty Ltd of Melbourne, and T.J.Richards, turned out some interesting variations of the '8/40' (as the Morris Eight was known in Australia) with fixed-head coupe, four-door tourer, roadster (two-seater) with dickey seat, and 'Ute' (pick-up) bodies.

That is not to say that Australian coachbuilders had the monopoly of special bodies on the

Eight chassis. In the United Kingdom, Stewart & Ardern offered a four-seater drop head coupe. This model, bodied by Cunard, was of aluminium panelling on an ash frame with the extended rear portion forming a luggage compartment, recessed to carry the spare wheel. In the Midlands Jensen Brothers moved the radiator forward of the cross member, lowering it, and extended body beyond the rear of the chassis, so as to produce a long bonneted aluminium-bodied four-seat tourer. The Jensen bodied Morris Eight was made in small numbers between 1935 and 1937, and three examples are known to have survived to the present day. One Danish-built variation, a roadster cabriolet with bodywork looking very much American, although stopping short of a dickey seat owing to length limitations, was built by Randers Karosserifabrik in Denmark.

Some interesting one-off specials were made from time to time on the Morris Eight chassis but perhaps the best known, particularly as it still exists, is the completion car made by William Ashley Cleave. It started as a crashed Series I saloon in 1937 and Cleave rebuilt it using a 1934 Morris Minor four-speed gearbox and supercharged the 8hp engine with a centric blower. In the hands of Ashley Cleave and his co-director Charles Burleigh it appeared at many prewar sprints and trials, gaining a substantial number of awards. Since the war it has been extensively modified until today the blue finished aluminium body on small diameter Magna wire wheels hides a 1,250cc supercharged Morris engine which enabled its designer to do a standing quarter-mile in 15. 2 seconds and reach a maximum speed of 115mph. As late as 1972 Ashley Cleave, then aged 72 years, was still competing at Shelsley Walsh with the car. Not quite so spectacular are other one-off specials such as the pre-Series tourer upon which a certain Eric D. Clarke transplanted a Series III Morris Ten body in 1948!

Morris Eights of all Series certainly justified the term 'ubiquitous'. A report in the trade press in May 1936 described the use that the Eight chassis was being put to in New Zealand by Perpetual Forests Ltd, where they were equipped with flanged wheels to run on railway lines as fire-fighters where the tracks ran through dense forest plantations near Lake Taupo. The sparks emitted by the wood burning engines which hauled the lumber through these forests represented a source of danger so each train was followed by adapted Morris Eights carrying fire-fighting equipment and a crew of two men. In converting a Morris Eight for the Algemeene Volkscrediet Bank in Batavia (now Djakarta, Java) in 1936, the unknown coachbuilders were really pushing the engine and chassis to its limits for the vehicle had a twelve-seater brake body, used to carry children to and from school. To accommodate its juvenile load the body overhung the rear chassis by something like 18in from the rear wings, and the spare wheel was located on the offside front wing. What became, one wonders, of the Morris Eight tourer purchased by the exiled Emperor Haile Selassie from Bath Garages for his son, the Duke of Harar, in February 1937, or the Series II two-seater which Alexander Duckham (the oil manufacturer) supercharged in 1938 and affectionately called 'Nipper'? Another Morris Eight, and one which has survived, is a two-seater Series I car which was entered in the Monte Carlo Rally (competing for the Riviera Cup for cars under 1,500cc) in January 1936, driven by Norwegian Bjarne Wist with co- driver Sverre J. Herstad, starting from Stavanger. Of the ninety-two starters in the severe winter of 1936 only seventy-two cars arrived in Monte Carlo, including Wist's Morris. The car still exists in northern Norway.

Use of the tourer version of the Eight by police forces is mentioned elsewhere in this book, these forces including Bradford, Sheffield and Hastings. The War Office also found a use for the Morris Eight and special equipment was installed in the open tourers used by the British Army. Known by the Army as 'Morris Eight, Two-Seater Wireless Cars' these vehicles (like the earlier Morris Miners and Austin Sevens) were fitted with the 'No 1 Set', a RadioTelephone and Morse transmitter-receiver introduced two years before the Eight. The body type was that of the standard four-seater, but the apparent misnomer is explained by the single bucket seat fitted for the driver and accommodation at the rear for the wireless operator; the remaining space contained the wireless equipment, batteries, spare petrol container, aerial gear, etc. The aerial was mounted on special brackets fixed to the offside rear

of the body. The all-over finish was khaki, including those parts normally plated such as windscreen surround, hubcaps, radiator shell (and even the radiator mascot). The War Office specification included deep tread Dunlop types similar to the 'Town & Country' type, Autovac in lieu of the normal SU electric petrol pump, a locking cover on the tool box, towing hooks, and electrical interference suppression on all electrical components, which may account for the vacuum-type wipers fitted to the early cars supplied. Bumpers were not fitted, but radiator muffs were.

A few of these ex-Army Eights that have found their way into the hands of present day enthusiasts and are easy to recognise by the chassis number prefix 'S1/EWD...' Because military transport in the 'thirties carried Middlesex civilian registration numbers issued to the RASC Vehicle Reserve Depot at Feltham, they retain their original plates. Many of these Army cars found their way onto the civilian market via a motor agent, T. Scott of Bobbers Mill, Nottingham, so it is not surprising that most of the survivors are in the Midlands. The exact number used by the Army is not known to the writer, but research suggests that the first contract in January 1935 (V2964) was for sixty-six cars, a latter contract (V2743) may have been for a similar number, and with the suspicion of a third contract it can be assumed that the numbers used were well into three figures.

It is worth recording that the South Africa Army also used tourers. Also the side-valve 8hp engine was used to provide auxiliary electrical power for Centurion, Conqueror and still in service.

Specifications

Morris Eight. Chassis Numbers		
Model	Chassis Prefix	Chassis Numbers
Cars, 1935	35/E	901-48612
Series I	S1/E	48613-165000
Series II	S2/E	165001-219000
Vans, 1935	35/EV	901-48612
Series I	S1/EV	48613-221837
Military versions of the Morris Eight Tourer carried the prefixes 35/EWD and S1/EWD		

Morris Eight 1935/Series I/Series II, Body Colours and Upholstery			
	1935	Series I	Series II
Saloon, fixed-head two & four door	Black or red/black cellulose with red Karhyde.	Black or read/black cellulose with red Karhyde. Blue/black cellulose with blue leather. Green/black cellulose with green Karhyde.	Black or maroon cellulose with red Karhyde. Blue cellulose with blue Karhyde. Green cellulose with green Karhyde.
Saloon, sliding-head, two & four door	Blue/black cellulose with blue leather. Green/black cellulose with green leather. Red/black cellulose with red leather.	Blue/black cellulose with blue leather. Green/black cellulose with green leather. Red/black or black cellulose with red leather.	Blue cellulose with blue leather. Green cellulose with green leather. Maroon or black cellulose with red leather.
Two seater and four seater tourer	Black or green cellulose with green Karhyde. Red cellulose with red Karhyde.	Black or red cellulose with red Karhyde. Green cellulose with green Karhyde. Blue cellulose with blue Karhyde.	Black or maroon cellulose with red Karhyde. Black or green cellulose with green Karhyde. Blue cellulose with blue Karhyde.
After September 1935 body colours for fixed-head and sliding-head saloons were the same.			

Morris Eight, 1935 Series I & II
Engine: Type 'UB'. Four-cylinder, side-valve. 918.6cc, 57mm bore x 90mm stroke. Three-bearing crankshaft. Aluminium pistons. 5.8:1 compression ratio. 23.5bhp at peak 3,900rpm. Coil ignition. Cooling system thermo-syphon aided by fan. SU carburettor, 7/8in. diameter. Three-speed gearbox with synchromesh top and third. Clutch, single-plate Borg & Beck 6¼in diameter. Lockheed hydraulic brakes. Rear mounted petrol tank, 5½-gallons. SU electric petrol pump. Spiral-bevel final drive. Bishop-Cam steering. 6-volt electric system, negative earth. Propellor shaft with fabric disc universal joints to chassis 48612, later chassis Hardy-Spicer needle bearings. Armstrong hydraulic shock absorbers. Wheelbase 90in. Track 45in. Wheels, 6-stud. 1935 Series I, Magna wire wheels 2.25in x 17in with 450-17 tyres. Series II, Easiclean spoked disc wheels 2.5in x 17in with 450-17 tyres. Export cars 3in x 16in wheels with 500-16 tyres. 1935 Series I 5cwt vans, wire wheels 2.15in x 18in with 400-18 tyres. Export vans 2.5in x 17in Magna wire wheels with 450-17 tyres.

For further details please refer to *The Morris Motor Car 1913-1983 by Harry Edwards*
ISBN 1 871814 01 4