
Morris Cars

Six 1928-29

Up to the mid-1920s the traditional body building techniques involving the use of an ash frame and steel or aluminium panels remained the principle system used by the larger motor manufacturers in Britain.

Although other methods of fabrication had been tried, none were suitable for mass-production, Various alternatives included the 'Zephyr' principle of light gauge steel tubes, braced by wire, replacing the conventional timber frame, and the all-steel bodywork introduced on a BSA car as early as 1912. ('All-steel' was not strictly true as the two- and four-seater bodies built under German patent had a frame of T-section members with considerable reliance on cast aluminium corner brackets and panels.) The Weymann fabric-covered silent bodies evolved by Charles T. Weymann (where the interface of individual timbers was held apart by metal straps) were successful for a few years following their introduction on the French Talbot in 1922; this resulted in a spate of fabric-covered versions on the ordinary ash frame, to avoid dues payable for special licences required when building on the patent Weymann system. But the short life of the fabric used and deterioration caused by damp resulted in a fall off of demand for this type of bodywork, although it had helped to popularise the closed car.

In America the Hupp Motor Car Corporation began marketing the steel bodied Hupmobile in 1913, followed by the Dodge brothers, who broke their association with Fords and began to manufacture a Dodge car with all-steel bodywork in 1914. In France, the Citroen Company were the first European manufacturers to adopt steel construction soon after World War I, and it was not long before the Citroen Company's works at Slough were assembling component parts brought over from France. All of which did not go unnoticed by William Morris who, realising the importance of the new technical developments, visited the United States in 1925 to study the American methods and in particular those of the Edward G. Budd Manufacturing Company of Philadelphia who owned valuable patents to the system; and from whom Andre Citroen had bought rights to manufacture all-steel bodies for his B12 saloons and tourers.

Edward Gowan Budd, who was born in Delaware in 1870, had an early career with the American Pulley Company who built up a thriving business machining pulleys stamped out of sheet steel. Then followed a spell with the Hale & Kilburn Manufacturing Company where he and another engineer, Joseph Ledwinka, were employed on the design and planning of steel body pressings. With this background and the foresight to see the expanding use of steel body pressings in the motor industry, it is not surprising that in 1912 he and Ledwinka set up their own company employing twelve men and a capital of £15,000. The Dodge brothers, John and Horace, who approached Budd, for pressed steel body panels, were persuaded that all-steel body was a practical proposition. As a result of Morris's visit to the United States, The Pressed Steel Co. of Great Britain was established in 1926 under the auspices of the Budd organisation, J. Henry Schroeder & Co (merchant bankers), and Morris Motors Ltd (Morris withdrew their interest in 1930 as it inhibited the sale of bodies and pressings to other motor manufacturers). The new company was located at Cowley, adjoining the Morris works, where some of the largest presses in the country (including a 1,600-ton American Hamilton, weighing 249 tons) were installed, making it, subsequently, the largest body plant in Europe.

Meanwhile, in Germany, Budd was also setting up the Ambi-Budd Presswerke in Berlin. In the initial stages, in order to get an early start, Morris purchased dies and jigs for two types of

steel body from Budds for £120,000, together with over four thousand drawings which had to be converted for English manufacture. Teething troubles were inevitable, especially in view of the show vehicles on stand 98 at Olympia for the 1927 Motor Show were narrow-track versions, and the date would also account for the late (May 1928) Road Test carried out by The Autocrat, in which the tester's veiled remarks suggest that he was not specially pleased with the handling at low speeds. Morris sources claimed a speed of over 70mph in top gear and a petrol consumption of 22mpg.

In production form the Light Six or Morris-Six as it was now called was available as a four-door saloon and a coupe with dickey seat. The original listing of a tourer body, in publicity material depicting the narrow-track car, was not repeated. In addition to increasing the track by 8in and the wheelbase by 3in, thus precluding the utilisation of Oxford car bodies, the new design had larger section Dunlop Balloon 30 x 5.25 tyres (in place of the 29 x 4.95) on the same 20in x4in steel artillery wheels. The back axle was also modified from 4.42:1 to a lower geared 4.77:1 ratio and coil ignition had been substituted for the magneto. Costs were also reflected in a price increase of £45 on the saloon, now £395, and the coupe, which despite the loss of the drop-head facility was up £55 to £385.

The fixed-head coupe model, while primarily designed to carry two persons could, at a pinch, accommodate six, by use of the occasional seats provided behind the front bucket seats inside and the space for two passengers in the dickey seat; the spare wheel was side mounted. In the roomy body of the saloon, which had the same overall length 13ft 5in, the seating arrangements were described as amply suitable for three abreast in the rear and two in the separately adjustable front seats. The use of furniture hide for the upholstery and polished mahogany panelling helped to substantiate the makers' claim that the car compared favourably with 'models costing very much larger sums'. Certainly the equipment was not skimmed and the Morris-Six owner had a fairly comprehensive instrumentation; a speedometer with trip, clock, oil pressure gauge, ammeter, dash ventilator control, and lighting/charging switches on an instrument panel with concealed illumination. Elsewhere the equipment including dipping headlights, a Wilmot Breeden Calormeter to monitor the radiator temperature, road springs protected by 'Wefco' leather gaiters (named after the inventor in 1918, a Mr W.F. Cattrell), winding windows, Lucas vacuum-type windscreen wiper for the single-panel windscreen, and a luggage grid on the saloon. The 1928 season saw a trend towards rear mounted fuel tanks, in place of the then customary location on the dash. On both the 15.9hp Oxford and the Morris-Six the petrol feed to the SU carburettor was by means of an Autovac from the rear tank (of 11 gallons capacity on the latter model) which incorporated a large filler cap, a petrol gauge, and reserve tap.

One of the facilities offered by Morris Motors Ltd at this time was a hire purchase plan which the company had arranged with the United Dominions Trust Ltd. Common enough these days, but for the prospective purchaser in the late 'twenties of (say) a new Morris-Six for a deposit of just under £99 and payments of £14 per month compared very favourably with the £150 or so being asked for a two-year old Oxford on the 1928 second-hand market. There is a story of a customer requiring a Morris-Six coupe from Wilson's showrooms in Chapel Allerton, Leeds, in 1928 and insisting on delivery the same day. The proprietor, Arnold G. Wilson, had not got such a model in stock but a telephone call to Cowley and a drive to the local aero club was followed by a flight in a Blackburn Bluebird biplane from Leeds to Port Meadow just outside Oxford. By early that evening the appropriate car had been driven from the Morris works to the customer, who was presumably happy to pay the sixpence (2½p) a mile delivery charge. About the same time a customer for another Morris-Six coupe in Luton was taking delivery of his car from Dickinson & Adams Ltd. Hearing that although the Bedfordshire 'TM' registrations had reached over 4,000 in the series, no one would accept the registration number 'TM13' he specially requested this mark and, defying superstition, took delivery of the car on a Friday.

Was a fan really needed for cooling on the six-cylinder engine or was the water pump on its

own sufficient? Parts were made available in November 1928 to allow for the fitment of a four-bladed fan, driven by a Whittle belt, by the addition of a pulley attached to the forward end of the horizontal auxiliary drive shaft. Ostensibly this was to cater for those owners who felt the need of additional cooling when holidaying in warmer foreign climes. However, it is noticeable that when the 17.7hp engine was later used in the Isis-Six it had a fan fitted as standard (initially four-bladed but later twin-bladed), although the MG 18/80 had no fan. The Motor Show at Olympia was held during 12-20 October 1928 and the 1929 season's versions of the Morris-Six were to be seen on stand 125. Both saloon and coupe examples on display revealed the addition of bumpers (a feature of all 1929 Morris cars) and a larger steering wheel. The basic prices had been reduced, the coupe from £385 to £365, and that of the saloon by a similar amount. However, Tripler safety glass was extra, as were the wire wheels which could be fitted in place of the standard five-stud pressed steel artillery type to both models for an additional 10. A wider choice of five duotone colour schemes was originally listed at the time of the Motor Show, including the brown and beige of the previous season but, curiously, this one appears to have been dropped from the list by early 1929. If the contemporary catalogue photographs are to be taken as a guide wise thing to do as often the previous year's photographs were re-used in a touched-up form) then the new models had the addition of an external glass sun visor and a black leather (or leathercloth) cover on the side-mounted spare wheel - although these items are not mentioned in the specification and may well have been optional extras.

Michael Sedgwick, writing in the *Veteran & Vintage* magazine, wondered if owners would have enthused quite so much over the latter gimmick had they known that in America it was the hallmark of a successful mortician! Was there a change of mind at Cowley as to the most suitable side to mount the spare wheel? The saloon used for the Road Test in *The Motor* in March 1929 was a late 1928 registered car (UD 2329), carrying the spare on the offside. Elsewhere, published photographs (including the catalogue printed for September 1928) depict the wheel on the near-side of the body, which, if surviving examples are any guide, is where it came to rest.

An additional model for the 1929 season was the Gordon England Morris-Six club coupe which at £399, because the small-centre wire wheels and safety glass was included as standard, was actually cheaper than the saloon with these options. Unlike the Austin Motor Company who often included 'custom' coachwork within their catalogue pages (usually by Gordon & Co of Spark-brook, Birmingham - not to be confused with Gordon England Ltd of Wembley) the listing of the club coupe was something of a precedent. A maximum speed of well over a mile-a-minute was claimed by Morris Motors Ltd and a petrol consumption of 20mpg under normal touring conditions. In common with most Gordon England bodywork of the period the four available two-tone colour schemes were arranged to give a light colour to the roof, bonnet top and wheels, complementing the darker colour of the remainder of the body while the mudguards and aprons followed the Morris all-black custom. Additional equipment included pneumatic inners (by the Stockport firm of Moseleys to the Vaumol leather upholstered seats, pile carpets, scuttle and roof ventilators, smoker's companion, lady's companion, cigar lighters, and twin windscreen wipers. The 'companions' were usually an ash receptacle with pipe sack and match box attachments or, in the case of the lady's companion', a container fitted with scent bottles, mirror, note book, etc. Headlamps, combined with the Barker dipping mechanism (fitted to all Morris-Sixes), described as 'extra large', were the Lucas 9in diameter type RB67 lamps as fitted to the standard Morris versions. Of course, there were other body builders who found the Morris-Six chassis an ideal medium for their designs, but these never made the Morris catalogue. Indeed, Gordon England marketed a four-door close-coupled saloon with sliding-head, in 1929. Morgan & Co Ltd of Leighton Buzzard produced a Weymann body six-light four-door saloon with the complete roof folding to give a landaulette-like silhouette, and a similar fabric bodied fixed-head saloon also made under Weymann license. From the Hoyal works at Weybridge came a number of body styles on the Six chassis such as the Hoyal $\frac{3}{4}$ coupe with folding-head of leathercloth and metal panelled body in black, red, blue or brown; the 'Bournemouth de luxe

Fabric Saloon', 'Sportsman Coupe', and the 'Family Fabric Saloon' - all over £400, with wire wheels extra. Stewart & Ardern were offering an 'S & A Morris-Six Fabric Saloon' in November 1928, but as the body was by Hoyal it was probably one of the two Hoyal saloons already mentioned.

Of the surviving Morris-Sixes known to the writer, the copper-aluminium bodied two-seater is the most interesting, as it provides a link between Morris's first abortive venture into six-cylinder cars with the 'F' type of 1923/24 and the second, more successful, Morris-Six. The body, which is constructed with the upper panels of polished aluminium, side panelling of copper, and the extensive use of mahogany, was originally built on the third Silent-Six F-type chassis (registered BW6477) by the coachbuilders Hollick & Pratt for Lancelot W. Pratt in 1923. He was one of the few close friends claimed by William Morris and was, at that time, deputy governing managing director at Cowley. Sadly, he did not live long enough to enjoy using this unique car for in 1924, at the age of 44 years, he died of cancer. The vehicle then appears to have gone to William Morris. What is known is that in 1928 the body was transferred to a new Morris-Six chassis and registered UD2133. After World War II the car got into private hands, and eventually, in the early 'sixties, was sold to a Kidderminster enthusiast who paid £75 for the car and estimated to have spend £2,000 over a period of three years restoring it. For some time the vehicle was on loan to the Birmingham Museum of Science & Industry, by which time a 1903 Middlesex registration number H84 had replaced the Oxford number. In July 1977 the hybrid was auctioned at the Measham Motor Auction and realised what must be a record price for a Morris motor car, £17,000.

In the two seasons that the 'JA' or Morris-Six was available, 3,650 cars or chassis left the lines at Cowley, almost two-thirds of these in the second year. Production ceased in the summer of 1929 to make way for the new 17.7hp Six, the Morris Isis.

Specifications

Morris Six 1928-29 Models, Chassis Numbers, Body Colours and Upholstery			
	1927 Light Six, All Steel Chassis F201-F211	1928 Six Chassis JA101-JA1576	1929 Six Chassis JA1577-JA3750
Saloon, four door Coupe, two door	Blue & grey or brown & Beige duotone cellulose with leather.	Blue & grey or brown & Beige duotone cellulose with brown furniture hide.	Grey & niagra blue duotone cellulose with blue natural grain leather. Wine & maroon duotone cellulose with red natural grain leather. Deep maroon & bronze duotone cellulose with brown furniture hide. Niagra blue & black duotone cellulose with brown furniture hide was originally listed in September 1928 but not quoted in early 1929.)
Club coupe two door			Black with green or cream superstructure. Dark blue with light Blue superstructure. Burgundy with grey superstructure. All with Vaumol leather.
Tourer, four door	Blue & grey or brown & Beige duotone cellulose with leather.		

Morris Six 1928-29

Engine: 'JA' six-cylinder, overhead camshaft, included valves. 69mm bore, 110mm stroke, 2,468cc 17.7hp. Aluminium pistons with three rings. Steel connecting rods. Four-bearing crankshaft. Water impeller. Coil ignition. SU type M3 Carburettor. Three-speed gearbox. Clutch, multiplate with cork inserts running in oil. Axle ratio 4.77:1. Rear-mounted petrol tank in conjunction with Autovac. Smiths single-acting friction shock absorbers. Foot brake by rod to four wheels, hand brake by rod to independent shoes at rear. 12in drums. Divided bronze-ring type universal joint. Barker dipping mechanism on headlamps. Bumpers standard on 1929 models. Dunlop Balloon tyres 30 × 5.25 on 20in × 4in wheels. Artillery 5-stud standard on saloon and coupe. Wire wheels standard on club coupe for 1929 and optional extra on other 1929 models. Side-mounted spare. Wheelbase 117in, track 56in.

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