

In 1965, when I left school, I had no firm idea as to what I wanted to do with life, so my father arranged for me to be apprenticed as a motor mechanic to Westgate Motor House in Gloucester. This garage was a Standard Triumph dealership, and also had the distinction of at one time being a de Havilland aircraft dealership as well, this being advertised by a plane installed on the roof of the building. I believe the plane was removed in the early 1960s. This was a wonderful time in my career, not only the fascinating jungle of life in the motor trade, but of course the social entertainment in the latter part of the 1960s.

Various interesting cars came and went during this period, Austin Seven Ruby Tourer and a MG TC gave me the background in restoration of older motorcars. About 7 years ago I sold a couple of concertinas and used some of that money to get back to classic cars. An MG Midget, followed by a TR4, followed by a 1934 Singer Le Mans which I still keep. I had a mind to get a second older car so that I could wife out as she would not travel in the Singer on the grounds that it was probably hazardous! So an MG MGB Tourer came, but I liked it no more than 2 others I had previously owned years ago, so that was sold. A 1928 Ford Model A was offered to me and life was good – apart from the fuel consumption and that was followed by a Riley Merlin (a good car but bought in haste and I did not like it), then the Austin Seven Fabric Saloon came along. That little car was great fun.

I was not really expecting the following to happen; it is curious how life can throw these dingbats around. One day in September (a Monday I believe) the Automobile magazine arrived and reading through it, I was enthralled with Gerry Michelmores' article on the Trojan Utility and read through it a few times. Maybe I just did not believe it first time round. Musing to myself that there are not many of these cars around I was somewhat surprised when one popped up on ebay. Reading through the description, I thought that's nice. Despite the advert warning off timewasters, I contacted the seller on the Wednesday and said I was interested, but I did not have the wherewithal until I sold my 1928 Austin Seven Fabric Saloon. The seller responded that he may well be interested in the A7. Hmm. Well the deal was done and agreed.

The following is extracted from a letter I wrote to one of my Austin Seven friends who was quite upset that I swapped the Austin for the Trojan. I think he would have bought the Austin like a shot if I had given him the opportunity. So please bear with any "this is how you suck an egg Granny" statements!

Sunday 22nd, myself and friend Richard Line headed up to the latitude of Preston using his Fiat Van and trailer, with RK saloon on board. We unloaded Austin and that met with approval. Went to see Trojan, and was given a demonstration on exactly how to start, with dire warnings that no other method will succeed. Trojan started and we had a quick whizz up and down his lane. Loaded Trojan onto trailer, did the paperwork, looked at his collection of vintage and classic motorbikes, includes Vincent and Brough Superior all the way down to a James. Must have been 30 or 40 bikes. We got back home by 14:00, dumped Trojan in garage and relaxed.



Me and BT



This Trojan is a 1925 Utility BT8799, and was owned at one time by Eric Rance who over his 38 year ownership co-wrote the book called "Can you afford to walk?" Which was a sales slogan for Trojan. There is a decent history file with the car, which includes pictures of the car in the 1920s and 30s at Hanley Swan where the first owner a Major Cardwell lived. The BT registration is Hull where the Major was stationed at that time. It looks as though the second, the Hon J A H Wallace, lived in the house at Kempsey where Jim Dudley (he with the Chummy) lives or was born, Napleton Grange. I'll have to ask Jim about this. More on that later. Then to a Mr Getley in 1958. Another part of the history is a newspaper article (enclosed) showing Eric Rance dispelling the myth about Trojans getting trapped in tramlines and ending up back at the depot. Eric

Rance acquired the car around 1965, from a syndicate of 6 people who had taken the car apart and gone their different ways with sections of the car with the intention of refurbishing all the parts. Eric Rance had to track down these different people and reclaim all the bits.

I had 5 folders of stuff, consisting of History, research, spares manuals, two copies of workshop manuals. Also the original Trojan workshop manual, the "black book". There was supposed to be a load of bills receipts, but I don't have them, yet the seller says I do. Asking him for specifics like, are they in one of the folders, or what quantity, only gets the response "you must have them". Which was not particularly helpful.

I have a quantity of spares which should be useful; hubs, chains, carbs, distributor, and a set of solid tyre wheels (in good condition).

On the Monday, I started the engine successfully and with trepidation drove down to the A38 and believing discretion to be the best of valour turned right and downhill. There are 2 forward gears, one very low and the other is high. I did not want my first trip to be ascending the hill and cocking it up on the first gear change. Anyhow all went to plan and got, from a frantic whirring off engine in low gear, to the change in top gear where the engine pulled away from what seemed like tickover, but it did that well, with confidence. We drove 2 miles up the road, turned round in a road junction, and discovered that whatever I thought that whatever the clutch pedal is supposed to do, didn't as expected and stalled the engine. I am told that stalling is something you should never let happen, so I felt fortunate that the engine restarted promptly. Starting is by using the foot pump primer and then pulling back sharply on a long lever, and removing chunks of flesh from ones elbow on the door catch.

Heading back south on the A38 we climbed the hill through Severn Stoke in top gear albeit down to 10mph at the top of the rise. And thence to the Garden Centre for a chat with Richard. The next leg was the sensible one to the Rose & Crown for appropriate refreshment. More discussions and more showing of engine and transmission. Then back to home. A few more manoeuvres of the car, and in all about 8 successful engine starts.

Herein endeth the good times.....

Two things happened now. The first being that I put some fuel in the tank. The petrol oil mixture is made with engine oil not 2 stroke, as the oil is supposed to fall out of the fuel when it enters the engine and from the bottom of the engine to be merrily chucked all over the place. Even more haphazard than the A7 lubrication system. Erroneously I bunged the oil in the tank first, expecting the following deluge of petrol to do the mixing. I now know that best of all is to pre mix, or drop the oil in after the fuel. This may or may not be relevant to the

following. I also found that the combined ignition/fuel tap knob is removable. I inspected it and replaced it.

I went to restart engine and drive to VSCC monthly meet, but start it would not. I then noticed that ammeter was not kicking as the engine was turned over. Figuring that removal and replacement of ignition knob had something to do with that, I investigated and found that knob had displaced the long flat ignition contacts so that the ignition circuit would not be made when the knob was turned. I corrected that and the ammeter started kicking again when the engine was turned over. However, still no start. Knackered, I gave up the unequal task, retired hurt in feelings and couldn't be bothered to go out anymore.

The next morning, I went to see what could be done. The sparks plugs sparked and at the right time, but I changed them for another pair - albeit second hand from the Austin. No start. Maybe no fuel due to oil from the fuel tank blocking jets in the carb, or the primer pump. I drained the tank, took top of float chamber and gave a good blast with the air line. Gave fuel a good shaking and bunged back in tank. No start. Investigated priming pump, yes it was delivering as expected. Tried a syringe of different petrol into priming chambers and then later directly into plug holes. No start.

At this stage the cavalry arrive in the form of Bruce Young, I thought he was someone who only dealt with early Aston Martins, but apparently he has a couple of Trojans. So we have something like 70 or 80 known pre-war Trojans, and there are two within 4 miles of me. Bruce has a look, and agrees that all is as it should be. He fails to start it. We have a quick tow and that is also a fail to start. He gives up and goes away saying "don't worry, it will start eventually". Huh! He does suggest dismantling carb and primer.

Remove carb and priming pump, and fuel lines, dismantle, clean, blow out etc, reinstall. No start. New plugs arrive from the Green Sparking Plug Company. No start. Go and buy 20 litres of the better petrol, mix oil thoroughly, drain tank and replenish with fresh fuel. Also check that there is air coming out of end of exhaust when engine is turned over, in case of blockage. And that there is compression in the cylinders. No start.

Richard will come over this afternoon and we can have an enthusiastic tow start. If that fails there is still the option left of loosing off the exhaust pipe from the engine, but if I recall two strokes need some back pressure to start, but with those strange double piston design, who knows.

I am now getting to the point that I understand where some auction lots come from, with the description "barn find from the estate of a deceased person". Maybe push it into the corner of the garage and walk quietly away from it, and

ignore forevermore. Then someone else can dispose of when I croak it in 15 years' time. The trouble is, Niki really likes the car, as do others. So that may not be an option.....

I put some more work into the car and took off the silencer and dismantled it and cleaned it out. Still no start.

On the 8th day, decided that enough was enough. One of my pals came round and we towed it with a some vigour and it started. With the engine running I started driving it in figure of eight circuits of increasing radii from 1 mile to more and more. So that it was not too far to walk home if the car failed. I covered 11 miles. I put the car away.

The next morning I went into the garage and addressed the car, (which as usual was, a festering moody hulk determined not to come out and play and was taunting me). I clearly said "start you b*stard, or it's off to Brightwell's auction with you", and I really meant it. I climbed in, primed the engine, placed fuel valve to fully rich, switched on, pulled starting lever..... and the damned thing started!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I took it off for another few miles drive. Since then, it has started reliably. 2 to 6 pulls on lever when cold, 1 pull when hot. I have now completed about 100 miles in the car.

It's an absolute hoot to drive. What with the chain drive to the solid rear axle which makes it skip round corners as the rear wheels argue as to whose revolutions are correct. Then there are the two forward gears, 1st is 12:1 and 2nd or top is 4:1. One takes off in 1st and with a huge amount of noise can get to about 9 mph, then one changes into top, whereupon the revs drops nearly to tickover, and the noise stops. Pulling away then is like a traction engine with understated chuffing. Then there is the single rear brake on the back axle. This can be added to by using the handbrake which is a transmission brake, which is normally soaked in oil destined for the chain drive, so plenty of oil smoke will issue, when one forgets to release it when driving away. There is also the option of using reverse gear as an emergency brake. It's an epicyclic gearbox with brake bands so the concept is not as daft as it sounds.

You may conclude that I am now friends with the Trojan. But the previous frustration really tested me to the limit. On the plus side I am far more intimately aware of the car than I may otherwise have been so.

This afternoon I went to visit Jim Dudley, he with the Chummy in Kempsey. Now this is curious. He owned BT8799 in the 1950s for about 2 or 3 years and

was the second owner of the car. His name then was the Hon J A H Wallace. On the death of his mother in 2002 he changed his name to Dudley. His actual title is Baron Dudley; the Earl of Dudley is a distant branch of his family. He remembers BT well and kept up a long correspondence with Eric Rance. Jim assumes that Eric is dead now as he no longer hears from him. Two of the photos I have on the history page were at Jim's house, Napleton Grange. He lives next door now at Little Grange. These are the only two houses he has ever lived in. When he bought the car it was in a right state as one of my history pics shows, it had had the back cut off to make it into a pickup! He remembers it as a right pain in the ass to get it started sometimes, and very slow.

When I came to leave, to the huge surprise of both of us, it started on the first pull. On the way back to Severn Stoke I seemed to collect the usual loyal band of followers who don't seem to want to overtake, even when they can.



Napleton Grange c.1955



Jim Dudley



Napleton Grange c.1955

I am pleased to say that now I am friends with the car, and its future with me is assured – assuming that it remains relatively well behaved. More pictures of the car (and others) can be found at my website www.mothy.co.uk