

# MORRIS MINOR 1000

## Special

Generations of maiden aunts, midwives and malnourished students can't be wrong putting their faith in the Morris Minor – or can they? **NICK LARKIN** looks at buying one of these omnipresent classics and finds out whether they really justify the hype.

## HISTORY

**World War 2:** While bombs fall and battles rage, one Alec Issigonis is busy fulfilling a brief to design a small car for Morris Motors. A prototype is ready by 1943 but dubbed a 'poached egg' by his boss, Lord Nuffield. Eggs were, however extremely popular, even in wartime powdered form.

**1948:** Morris Minor is introduced in saloon and convertible form at the Earls Court Show. The car steals the show, even managing to take attention away from the Jaguar XK120. The car is all new, apart from retaining the Morris 8's 918cc sidevalve engine. The shape is a little less egg-like, as at the last moment the bodyshell is widened by four inches. The Minor soon makes friends around the world, even motoring scribes who go wild about its excellent handling, thanks to torsion-bar independent front suspension and rack-and-pinion steering.

**1949:** American legislators aren't keen on the lowlight grille arrangement, so Morris modifies the wings to accommodate raised headlights. This applied to export models initially, with domestic cars following in 1951.

**1952:** Series II Minor arrives with, thanks to the merger with Austin to form BMC, an 803cc ohv engine which had been (ssshhh) developed by Austin, but the sidevalve engine continues for another year. Four-door cars are now available. An Austin-derived rear axle is also fitted.

**1953:** At last the wooden-framed Traveller arrives, as do the van and pick-up.

**1954:** Facias are redesigned from the so called 'jukebox' dash into the variant with central speedometer that will continue until the end of production. The front grille is also altered.

**1956:** The car becomes the Morris 1000, with a 948cc version of the A-series engine, improved gear ratios and a wraparound one-piece windscreen. The rear wings are changed too, and a new dished steering wheel fitted.

**1961:** The millionth Morris Minor is built in December 1960, and special-edition Minor Millions follow by February, exclusively in lilac.

**1962:** More improvements with a 1098cc version of the A-series engine, changes to the gearbox and rear axle, not forgetting flashing indicators now on all cars.

**1964:** Interior revisions include different seats and the technological marvel that was a glovebox lid. That makes even the new key-activated starter and improved heater (where fitted) fade into insignificance.

**1969:** After virtually no more changes for five years, the convertible is dropped.

**1970:** Last chance to buy a saloon.

**1971:** The Traveller rides off into the sunset, as do the commercials, of which an Austin-badged van had been offered following the demise of the A35 version in 1968. In all 1.6 million Minors had been built.



## INTRODUCTION

Crafty things these Minors. Tatty examples manage to have an appeal all of their own. There are many vendors fully aware of this situation, realising and capitalising on the fact that Minors are emotional things. They're happy to bodge up a bad car, maybe put on cheap new wings and a blow-over respray before sticking a notice on the car proclaiming that Humphrey is much loved but now needs a new mummy or daddy. And people fall for it.

But why? Well, like a doe-eyed spaniel, Minors look so honest. They represent a world of comfortable friendliness, village tea shops, district nurses, bustling Auntie Beryls, white-coated men in village stores and brass bands playing in the park. Buy a Minor, and not only are you buying into all this but a worldwide movement of camaraderie and enthusiasm for these cars. There are Minor fans everywhere, in fact there are Minors everywhere.

Apart from the deeply cuddly and friendly character, these cars have so much to recommend them. You've got so many choices of car too – from a convertible to a useful Traveller, to an early saloon with a side-valve engine. Minors are so practical, easily repairable and economical, and you can easily get hold of spares for them.

They're always for sale by the dozen too, so there's no reason why, with a bit of effort and a lot of care, you can't get a very nice one.

## Bodywork

Tim Brennan, who has worked for Charles Ware's Morris Minor Centre for 30 years, and who must be thanked for his help with this feature, emphasises that the underside of the car is most important. In fact the centre offers an underside checklist downloadable from its website, but Tim also suggests what he calls a "top tip." Over to Tim: "Go round with a chamois and wash the car. While you are washing it carefully check the condition of each panel and by the time you've finished you'll have a good idea of what's going on."

That said, Tim recommends you start at one area of the car's underside, and work round. And to be honest, just about every Minor will have suffered from underbody corrosion by now, so be careful.

Box sections rot from the inside, so tapping them with a blunt instrument can often help here. A metallic 'ting' is reason to celebrate, but a dull thud would be worrying.

The two 'chassis rails' on each side of the engine need scrutiny, as do the outriggers, front crossmembers, sills, tie plates at the bottom of the engine bay.

Next for severe scrutiny is the large crossmember across the middle of the car, the entire floor and, for goodness sake do not forget this the area around the spring hangers.

Any panel or repair section is available for these cars from a myriad of specialists. Panels are

bolt-on but can often suffer from rusty mountings.

Wings rot around the headlamps and the rear edge, and door bottoms can die, often due to blocked or boded drain holes. Watch the boot lids for rot too, and corrosion around the door hinge pillar. If there's any evidence of flexing, an extensive repair is needed. If you can get away with it, lift the door kick plates and see if there are any hidden defects beneath. Inner sills can be looked at by lifting up the carpet inside the car.

If you're lucky enough to be in the market for a convertible, for goodness' sake check the doors open and close properly. Commercial variants have a separate chassis, but the Traveller doesn't.

Ah now, a potential Traveller owner has his or her own special mission. To hunt down evil wood rot and bring it to justice. The wood giving the Traveller its 'half-timbered' appearance is anything but decorative. It's nearly all structural.

Replacements are not cheap, though specialists Woodies will sell you a kit to rebuild the sides, or for around £3000 will replace everything for you in ash. A rear pillar will set you back about £60 and a middle section £49. But don't spend money replacing a wood section, only to find a couple of years later that this is the only sound bit in a sea of rotted-out wood.

