

# Motorscope

## How a humble car set an wide search and a test on

THE MAN in the grubby jeans and denim shirt had just held several surgeries, and after our lunchtime interview in the sunlit garden of a Somerset riverside pub, would be holding several more, to make up his daily quota of half a dozen.

"People come from all over the place," he said, between pulls at his pint of cider and puffs of his home-rolled cigarette. "I'm never quite sure whether I'm supposed to be a doctor, a surgeon or a vet.

"It's all very anthropomorphic. This morning I had to look at a Gertie and a Mildred. They're always like children or pe's — always part of the family one way or another."

With his amused but caring manner, Charles Ware might just have passed as a vet or doctor, in spite of his apparel. But for the love and attention heaped upon them, Gertie and Mildred would remain mechanical, just two of the thousands of Morris Minors taken every year to his Morris Minor Centre, in Bath, for free consultation and diagnosis.

### Reputation

The surgeries occupy much of his time, but have been an essential ingredient in building up a reputation second to none and a business so successful, that in less than five years it has made the Morris Minor unique among recently discontinued popular cars.

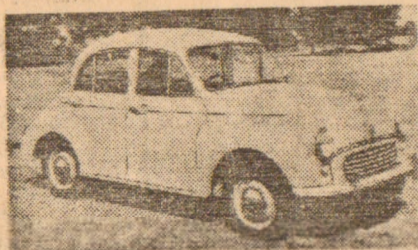
Until now, the service has been concentrated in Bath, where his offices and workshops have grown ad hoc and his spares department has absorbed one of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Great Western Railway building across the street.

But of roughly 1.6 million of the cars built as Minor and 1000 saloons, travellers, convertibles and pick-ups between 1948 and 1971, he reckons there are 750,000 surviving worldwide and only 300,000 on the road in Britain.

So, today, he is due to leave London — typically, on "stand-by" — for a three-week sales and promotional tour of the countries which contain many of the survivors.

He'll be presenting the prizes at a rally of the Minor faithful in San Francisco and going on to New Zealand, Australia and Sri Lanka.

Then, soon after his return, he intends to publish his own 30-page equivalent to Glass's Guide which, along with his service



**Charles Ware, the man who rescued one of Britain's best loved small cars from obsolescence, is due to depart today for his first worldwide sales tour and international surgery.**

**A few days, between patients at the Morris Minor Centre in Bath, and over a pint of cider at a riverside pub, he talked to William Raynor ...**



*The doctor and surgeon: Charles Ware with Gertie, or is it Mildred? Above: The patient, a Morris Minor*

## Surgeon with grubby hands

and parts catalogues, will provide enthusiasts with a complete package of information for preserving, buying or restoring their Minor goldmines.

Within the next 12 months, he also plans to open spares shops around the country — although when and where in Scotland has not yet been decided.

And all this, he told me, was to take some of the heat out of the market and pressure off his business.

"The publicity we've had," he explained, "has meant an awful lot of people want Minors, and automatically think they're worth an enormous amount of money.

"But the prices are often too high, mainly because people don't know about the car's underside. A car they think must be worth £1000 could need 300 hours' labour to be put into proper shape.

"Only last week, for instance, we had a convertible in from London whose underside had been filled with flattened Chinese takeaway tins, and you could still smell the chow mein!"

The Morris Minor Centre is Ware's second major business venture — he made a million saving and restoring old houses and went bankrupt during the property collapse of the early 1970s — and since he started it the emphasis has changed from

buying cars to do up and sell to restoring them on his customers' behalf.

This side of the business accounts for two-thirds of the working hours of his 32 employees and a similar proportion of his turnover of nearly £700,000, and in present economic circumstances allows him greater flexibility.

But it has not stopped his more ambitious projects — to produce a special Minor pick-up and an economy traveller.

The pick-up — which has a flat bed with timbered drop sides and customised back end — costs up to £4000, has a six-year chassis guarantee and, if a buyer wanted it, could probably be fitted with an Ital engine and five-speed gearbox.

### Punters

The Traveller, coming out later on, will cost up to £7000 and have the option of an engine which will do as much as 60 m.p.g.

"We may just manufacture shells so that we can then decant the old Morris into them and save time rebuilding rusty cars," he suggested. "But we're doing it by ear — it's up to the punters."

Because of the run-down in Leyland's stocks and the demand the revival has created for spares, he started manufacturing parts and panels early on, but has this year been appointed the official dealer and restorer in Morris Minors by BL Heritage, which moved to Sion Park in the London suburbs at the end of last month.

"This means," he said, "that like the other dealers appointed for other discontinued models, we're entitled to use all the original working drawings and produce authentic parts — which makes sense because of the size of the Minor market."

But it does not mean he's going to become a major manufacturer — "we see ourselves essentially as a labour intensive cottage industry" — and it does not mean that all Morris Minors have been elevated to the status of "Collectors' Cars."

"The only collectors' cars," he emphasised, "are the Minors built between 1948 and 1951. Otherwise a lot of nonsense is talked about them. They are not rare, but because they are very efficient at what they do they've created a quite remarkable brand loyalty.

"People want to go on running them — they're a marvellous, basic form of transport which can be, and should have been, upgraded. But they won't go up in value until they're structurally sound."