

# Morris Minor geared up for fresh start in Sri Lanka

By Paul Stokes

A NEW version of Sir Alec Issigonis's stalwart Morris Minor could roll off a production line inside huts in Sri Lanka within six years, it was announced yesterday.

Production of largely hand-made components will begin in 10 days time at Batadua, near the port of Galle, in the Southern Province.

They will initially be used to provide spares for the 250,000 Morris Minors still in service worldwide, including 80,000 registered in England.

The first body panels are expected to reach Britain within a couple of months.

It is hoped the project will help finance the manufacture of a new car and commercial vehicle similar to those British Leyland ceased producing in 1971.

Mr Charles Ware, who has run the Morris Minor Centre, in Bath, Avon, for 15 years, has teamed up with Mr Dhanapala Samarasekara, a former Sri Lankan diplomat, to launch the venture.

He is confident that a new variety of the tried and tested car will echo its earlier popularity in Asia where 100,000 Morris Minors are still in use, 20,000 of them as taxis.

Mr Ware expects that it will cost about £100,000 to set up the factory in Sri Lanka.

Within a year, he hopes the new Durable Car Company will employ 250 people, rising to 1,000 over the next four years.

Mr Ware, 55, said: "Work will be carried out in constant temperatures of 85 to 90 degrees so we will use open-sided coconut-framed structures.

"We will use very little electricity, with 95 per cent of operations being performed manually. We do not want to pollute the environment so very little energy will be used except by the people."

The project has the backing of the Sri Lankan government and will involve a craft system with workers carrying out apprenticeships.

Mr Ware, who began restoring Morris Minors after the collapse of his property company in 1975, added: "Essentially we are investing in people, not automation."