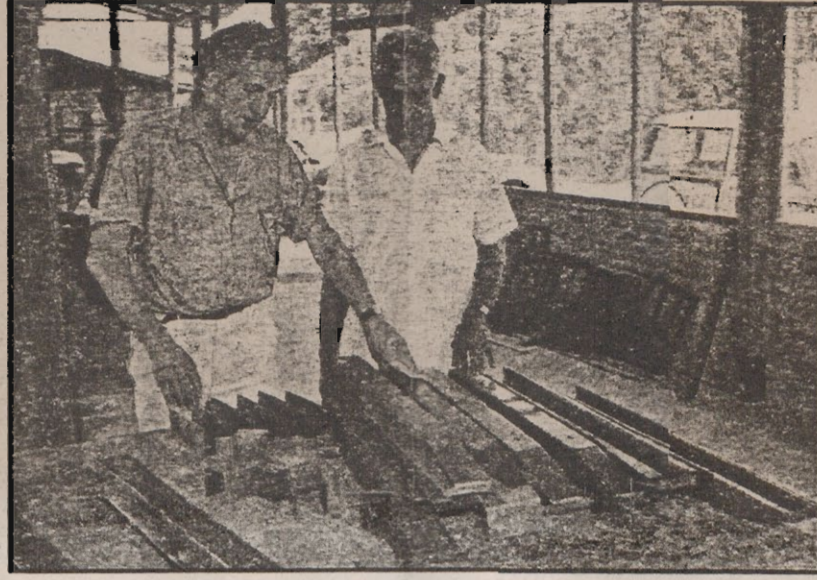




Staff in training at the Sri Lankan factory

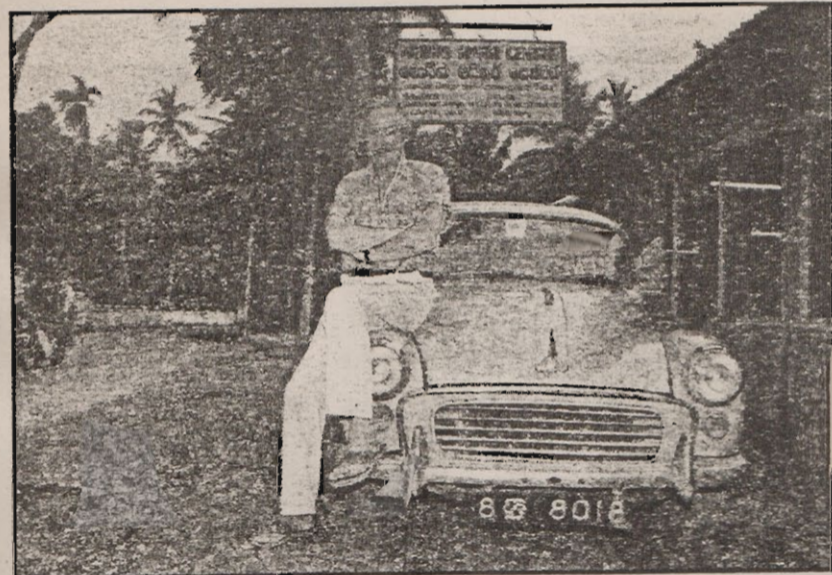


Charles Ware and Dhana Samarasekara check out workmanship



A mechanic carries out maintenance on a Morris Minor

A Minor triumph



In perfect harmony: Charles Ware and Morris Minor



A drive along the empty roads on the palm-fringed coast of Sri Lanka

Car factory on a tropical island where robots are definitely out

IT IS a very Minor, very British affair. On a hot, steamy island in the Indian Ocean, an over-the-hill model of a car called Morris meets its life-long benefactor, Charles Ware.

Like smitten couples do, they set their hearts on making Minors together.

The result is that Bath-based business man Charles, founder of the Morris Minor Centre in Britain, has now set up shop in Sri Lanka.

With his partner Dhanapala Samarasekara (Dhana for short), he has built the Durable Car Company of Sri Lanka.

Vacancies

The factory, officially opened in April and dutifully blessed by Buddhist priests, the company hopes to employ a work force of 1,000 within the next four years and eventually build from scratch, new Morris Minors.

Currently it employs 50. The factory itself is built of palm trees, has windows with no glass and no doors.

Bataduwa, the village where the factory is based, is small and close-knit, so the need for windows to shut and doors to lock is simply unnecessary. Theft just isn't a problem.

This sense of community also cuts out the need to advertise for labour. Charles merely tells someone there are vacancies, and by the following morning, new recruits are waiting.

"I first went out there in 1980 with the express purpose of seeing the Minors," says Charles.

"In those days they were everywhere, plying their trade as taxis, alongside a wide variety of other ancient British and European cars

a transport time warp."

He met his business partner, a former diplomat, in 1983, after Dhana read about his Morris Minor crusade in a newspaper.

"He visited me in Bath to discuss the opening of a Morris Minor Centre in Sri Lanka," he said.

In 1987, after several more fact-finding visits, the idea for establishing a factory was born.

"It's a country not noted for its manufacturing base," said Charles. It's a craft culture. We are simply changing the direction of that culture.

"For the first three months,

trainees will be taught everything, from welding to metal pressing.

"And from this initial pool, the factory's future managers and tool-makers will be picked."

Human

As it expands, the Sri Lankan government will fund a residential block to house about 30 apprentices and a training workshop.

Eventually, when its work force is fully trained and confident, Charles hopes it will produce in whole, Durable Cars — cars which he describes as going on forever.

And of course, they will be based on

the evergreen design of the Morris Minor.

But at present, the factory is concentrating on making body parts and re-conditioning engines.

"We are turning upside down the idea that you need enormous amounts of capital, which is usually spent on high technology machines," said Charles.

"This is a human business. Modern automation is very dehumanising. We want to bring decision-making back to the craftsman."

Charles's intention is to ship the parts back from Sri Lanka for final assembly in Britain.

"It will be a mid-market car priced at around £10,000. I think there is an enormous market for the car in Britain and the rest of Europe."

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