

# Charles Ware's Morris Minor Centre... ...35 Years and still going Strong!

We have recently visited Charles Ware's in Bristol, it was good to see Charlie up and about and nice to meet with his son Zac, who has been helping out throughout his father's illness. It was nice to wander around the centre and see the process at first hand. I am amazed at the quality of the paintwork finish using water based products. The centre has been in business for 35 years, so who better to interview the man himself than his son Zac, who has provided us with an abridged history of Charles Ware and his Morris Minor Centre, he sure does have a lot to answer for...

Words Zac Ware  
Pics Zac Ware & Russ Harvey



**CHARLES WARE'S  
MORRIS MINOR  
CENTRE**

**1976-2011**

**35 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE MORRIS MINOR**

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IN 1975 Charles Ware was well known in Bath for his property dealings and conservation work, such as saving Kingsmead Square and revitalising the Theatre Royal. Unfortunately, like many others, he went bust due to the market crash. Not one to be kept down for long, a couple of friends suggested that he go to some car auctions. It was there that he bought his first three Minors. The grace of it's design, the ready supply of spare parts and the fact that they always started led Charles to the conclusion that there was a gap in the market restoring and maintaining Morris Minors. In 1976 he moved from a tiny garage with space for three cars to Avon House on the Lower Bristol Road. At this time no one was specialising in this recently deleted brand. Charlie's appearance on Pebble Mill at One and in various major newspapers revealed dedicated Minor owners grateful that someone was willing to keep the marque alive. Letters arrived from around the world addressed to 'The Morris 1000 Man, Bath', 'the re-builder of Morris Minors who has appeared on the Pebble Mill program' and 'the garage that specialises in repairing and restoring Morris Minors, Taunton Somerset.' Amazingly all these letters arrived.

As word spread the business expanded so that by the early 80s the centre was employing thirty-six people. During this first six years Charles and his team developed the concept of Durable



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Car Ownership (publishing a book of the same name in 1982) in contrast to the built in obsolescence of modern car manufacture. Electrical advances and boxed units meant that modern cars began to become too advanced for the average motorist to service and repair themselves, while the bolt together nature of the Morris Minor meant that it could be easily maintained and restored. Drawing on his experience in the building trade Charles thought that cars such as the Morris could be treated like buildings. So long as they are structurally sound one can adapt, repair and keep the car on the road for everyday use. The loyalty of Minor owners to their cars has seen this philosophy carried out in practice all over the world. At about this time customers began to ask if there were ways of improving the drivability of the Minor to meet modern driving conditions. The handling was famously light, the brakes were famously bad and

the seats notoriously uncomfortable. This led to The Series III modifications based on Marina technology. Disc brakes, suspension kits, new seats, wheel bearing kits, 1300 engine, five speed gearbox, exhaust and rear axles all were adapted to keep the character of the car in line with customer demand for change. These adaptations are still used by the centre to this day. The 'Mighty WAH', as the companies flagship; a fully adapted Series III white Traveller, became known, found itself becoming quite famous as it overtook BMW's on the motorway.

The Spares Department and its fully illustrated catalogue play a central role within the company. When British Leyland was on it's way out Charles Ware was part of a consortium which founded BL Heritage to guarantee the continued manufacture of spare parts, by arguing that there were enough of these old British Cars to make it worthwhile. The rolling nature of repairs and upgrades to Morris Minors means that few cars are as they were when they came off the production line. This means an expert is needed to find the right parts for each model and its variations. Luckily the people in Charles Ware's stores department have spent years dealing with the workshops to understand the many differences and peculiarities of individual Minors and are therefore able to guide the home restorer through the 4000 parts in their catalogue. Looking to the future, the website is being revamped to give a clearer sense of what is done at the Centre and the online catalogue will be restructured for easy navigation, while some parts will become available to 'buy now' in the finest tradition of e-commerce. During the 80s Dhanapala Samarasakera, a Sri Lankan landowner and diplomat, contacted Charlie. He drove a Morris Traveller and saw that every village had at least one Morris, while many areas used Minors as their taxis. The same solidity and simplicity of repair made it the ideal car for a country with the limited means of production that Sri Lanka had at that time. A



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plan was developed and in 1991, The Durable Car Company was founded to manufacture panels utilizing traditional panel beating skills. The idea was to make parts on a labour intensive human scale so empowering the local people, keeping traditional skills alive and guaranteeing employment that could help sustain the local community. The partnership continues to this day. Charles says that the most interesting and satisfying thing about the Centre has been the customer he's met over the years. Coming from all walks of life the list is as varied as can be imagined. Writers, artists, actors, doctors, lawyers, mechanics, engineers, labourers, brick layers, nurses, teachers, vicars, couples who've owned the same car for 40 years, children who learnt to drive in the car their parents learnt in and who are now teaching their own children to drive in. Charlie's even taken a drive around the grounds of Kensington Palace with Princess Dianne and her children in the Viscount Langley's convertible.

35 years on and Charlie Ware is now 75. A period of illness has forced him into retirement and his son, Zac, (guitarist with The Proclaimers), is helping at the centre in his place. The Centre has moved to Bristol and continues to repair, restore and rebuild Morris Minors (and other marques when requested) and has nearly 400 years worth of combined experience in it's 23 employees. Tim Brennan (Director) and Andy Hemings, are still there organizing the workshops while Adrian Fry now deals with car sales. At least 5 employees have been there over 20 years with many more close behind. Combined with customers who have been going there for over 30 years this gives the place a sense of a good old fashioned family concern.

*Sincere thanks to Zac and Charles Ware for all their assistance with this feature and allowing use of their images and for our guided tour of the premises its always a pleasure to visit.*

