



## SPECIALIST PROFILE

# CHARLES WARE'S MORRIS MINOR CENTRE

Paul Wager visits a firm which pioneered the classic Minor scene and finds the people behind the Durable Car concept.



**F**ew classic car specialists can boast that their business is underpinned by an entire philosophy but in the case of Charles Ware's Morris Minor Centre the entire operation was born from his vision of making the humble Morris last forever and in many ways it's an aim that he has achieved even if his 'Durable Car' concept for a network of Morris Minor centres hasn't quite materialised.

The history of the firm is legend in classic car circles: having made a fortune in property, Charles Ware suddenly lost it again when the market collapsed and found himself back to square one. He ended up renovating Morris Minors on a small scale and the business started from there, established as the Morris Minor Centre in Bath in 1976. Along the way he developed his Durable Car Ownership philosophy as a reaction to the built-in obsolescence of modern electronics-laden cars and the sheer durability of the Morris Minor. The idea eventually developed into a book (currently available to download from the firm's website) in which he proposed a nationwide network of centres which would

continually refurbish your Minor to make it last forever. That didn't quite happen but the idea of uprating the car to cope with modern life and traffic was one of the principles of his philosophy and gave rise to the range of upgrades which the firm offers today.

As the Minor began to be accepted as a classic rather than just another old car, Charles was one of a consortium which founded BL Heritage to ensure parts supply and during the '80s he established a joint venture with a Sri Lankan diplomat and Minor enthusiast to manufacture Minor panels in Sri Lanka where the car remains a common sight. That was back in 1991 and the largely hand-made panels are still arriving at the firm's Bristol premises, providing an income for the Sri Lankan community and quality panels for UK Minor restorers.

The firm moved to Bristol some five years ago and although Charles himself has taken a back seat in recent years, the business is still run by son Zac and the team of long-serving staff, many of whom have been with the company for 20 years or more. Charles Ware's Morris Minor Centre continues to

offer the same mix of restoration, parts, upgrades, servicing and of course car sales. The workshops are busy with everything from small repair jobs right up to major bodysell rebuilds, with the 'Series III' upgrades still a popular choice: everything from brake servos and disc conversions to telescopic damper conversions and even 1300 engines if required. Yes, they're aware of the value of concours-perfect pristine examples but appreciate the need to upgrade the cars in order to use them every day. After all, things like seat belts, alternator conversions and similar add to the enjoyment of the car rather than detracting from it.

They're also happy to turn their expertise to other classics and have already worked on a Morris 12 in addition to other marques: with the facilities extending to an in-house paint oven and trimming facility, there's nothing they can't handle.

Meanwhile, the parts stores are crammed with every component you can bolt to a Minor and orders are despatched all around the world. The parts staff all have experience in the workshops so they know the Minor inside

out and can advise owners what they need to buy for a certain job.

Car sales have always been a feature of the business too, with an array of Minors on the forecourt and ready to go, while other customers will start with a budget and an ideal spec and the firm will then search out a suitable car and rebuild it to suit. This explains the fascinating selection of Minors in various states of repair in the yard, with Travellers currently the most sought-after and the firm's convertible replica popular too.

As Zac explains, that Durable Car concept has now come full circle, having obviously struck a chord with modern trends towards green issues and recycling in general. He points out that they have several customers who may have spent £15,000 on their Minor over a space of 15 years but that's a drop in the ocean compared to the financial cost of regularly buying new cars – and the environmental cost of building them.

Throw in free road tax, the fact that you can service it yourself for £30 and you do begin to see where Charles was coming from all those years ago.



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