

MINOR MATTERS

THE OFFICIAL MORRIS MINOR OWNERS CLUB MAGAZINE



Vol 34 N°1
July/August 2012



Why will a 1969 four-door saloon soon be making tracks for Hungary? Dávid Kerényi explains

A classic souvenir



Outside the Hungarian Cultural Centre in London.



As a small child I was really mad about old cars. I remember the vans and buses of Matchbox's 'Yesteryear' series with period adverts; those were the very first pieces of my growing model collection. Later on, though, my great affection for cars disappeared without a trace. I never wanted to drive in my home country at all, and I did not have a driving licence. So how did I become the only diplomat owning a Morris Minor in central London?

I moved from Budapest to the capital of the UK four years ago when I joined the Hungarian Cultural Centre in London as Finance Manager. The institute is part of an international network with another 18 similar centres in different countries. Our office and small concert hall reside in a nice period building in Covent Garden. The Centre was established some twelve years ago with the aim of promoting Hungary — this Central European country with a rich cultural heritage and birthplace of Franz Liszt, many Nobel laureates, the ballpoint pen and Rubik's cube.

'Promoting Hungary' means that we organise concerts, festivals and exhibitions, mostly by cooperating with London venues. My favourite event was without doubt last year's summer exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts dedicated to 20th-Century Hungarian photography and featuring Robert Capa, George Brassai and László Moholy-Nagy, just to name a few. I did not take part in the artistic side of things of course; my job entailed, as always, the coordination of the payments and the

very complicated net of international loan agreements!

Right from the start I was amazed by the diversity of Britain's countryside, especially the coastline, and I planned to visit as many places as possible during my stay. I soon recognised, however, that making excursions was not feasible without a car, and learning to drive seemed to be unavoidable.

Well, I started with the green provisional licence and I found myself in the busy London traffic on my very first lesson. It was a rather strange experience, as in Hungary one is not permitted to drive in real traffic unless one has passed a first aid exam, quite a complicated theory test, and an out-of-traffic practical exam proving that you have learned how to manoeuvre the car. The left-hand traffic was quite a challenging experience, but I soon understood its logic: you sit on the other side, so you must drive on the other side too!

Before my practical test I bought with my girlfriend our first car, an old Mercedes C Class that we used over the next two years. Even if I felt a bit over-aged when I passed the test at 25, driving became my passion.

On holiday in the Lake District or the South Downs, the sight of people enthusiastically driving classic and even vintage cars made me very envious and I knew I had to experience how such an old car drives. Native readers may not think so, but Britain is a perfect place to run an old vehicle; mild winters, a good 'B' road network, and a huge market for decent cars and parts provide an excellent environment. After all, there is no other country where technical history is as vivid as it is in Britain. I was especially amazed by the steam railways, and by the cable-hauled tramway that I saw in Llandudno.

Although I liked the idea of owning an old car, I never gave it serious thought as I thought it would be far too costly and



At South Stack Lighthouse during a trip to Anglesey.

Near Llanberis, Snowdonia.

Back in London I bought every possible piece of literature to learn more about the Minor, and slowly prepared myself for the journey back in time!

time-consuming. However, on a sunny April morning last year I accidentally found an advert for the Morris Minor Centre in Bristol, and I knew this was the way I could get my own classic car. On the very next weekend I headed to Bristol, where the guys carefully explained everything. It felt like being on a different planet. Back in London I bought every possible piece of literature to learn more about the Minor, and slowly prepared myself for the journey back in time!

After the summer had passed I paid another visit to Bristol, and there I found her: a 1969 Peat Brown four-door saloon with Snowberry White coach line and Cherokee Red trim, XPF 910G. A very original car with low mileage, from one lady owner. Peat Brown is a rather unusual colour for a Minor, manufactured only for a short period of time, and in my view, together with the red trim and carpet it makes a distinctive, elegant impression. So there was no

question whether or not to go for her, although there were a couple of weeks to wait while the garage overhauled the mechanical parts, did some necessary welding underneath and got her through the MOT.

Finally, on 12 November, two of my friends joined me on the very first journey in my Minor, from Bristol to London. I could not sleep from excitement the night before, but there was really no need to worry: the car ran smoothly and, although we did not break a speed record, we arrived safe and sound in London. The planned arrival party was postponed though, as we all were exhausted by the end of the day.

Over the next week my Minor had to change her black number plates for the more conventional diplomatic registration where the first three digits, 173, denote Hungary. We also tried to find the car an appropriate name. First we called her (him?) 'Pete', like the colour, then we temporarily gave her the name 'Alice',

after the lady who originally purchased the car in part-exchange for an Austin A60 on 31 March 1969, paying £487 5s 5p! It took quite a while until I decided on a final name for the car: 'Zsuzsika', which means something like 'little Susan' in Hungarian. I did not have any particular reason for this choice, it came very intuitively — one day I looked at the car, and this name just came to me.

So I became the proud owner of a classic car which I could not even have dreamed of before. I carried on making excursions in the old style of the Morris Minor, enjoying the popularity that such a lovable car can bring. Passengers wave from overtaking cars on the motorway, and tourists take pictures when I go round Trafalgar Square! In addition, I feel really lucky as my car has filled the promise of the Morris factory about trouble-free motoring. I have done more than 3,000 miles and every failure could be fixed by using WD-40!

As my mandate in London expires this summer, I will presumably move back to Budapest in order to find new challenges in my professional life. Instead of boring T-shirts and fridge magnets though, I will take my Minor as a souvenir, a piece of Britain. She will remind me of the people and places I got to know during the wonderful time I spent in the UK. ●

