

# Morris dancing

A sunshine drive back to Cowley in a pair of Morris's finest.

Words: Mike Renault & Marc Stretton Pictures: Gerard Hughes



**"A 150-mile round trip on a variety of roads. How would the two Moggies perform in heavy modern traffic?"**

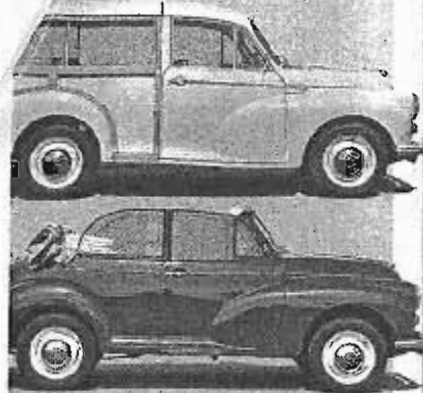
There's a commonly upheld myth among those outside the classic car world that the cars we love are slow and unreliable. But picking up two Morris Minors from Charles Ware's Morris Minor Centre in Bristol, there were no doubts about reliability. Charles had lent us excellent examples of a Minor Traveller and a Tourer for our day trip to the ex-Morris (now BMW MINI) factory at Cowley, via the beautiful and surprisingly classic-filled Cotswolds.

But, with a 150-mile round trip ahead using motorways as well as A- and B-roads, doubts were harboured as to whether the Moggies would be up to performing in heavy modern traffic.

**Mike travels in style**

I've always liked Morris Minors, especially the Traveller. It's probably got to do with the half-wooden estate look so reminiscent of American station wagons. And the Minor is just such a

File



1966 and 1967 Morris Minors

ENGINE	1098cc in-line 4-cylinder
POWER	48bhp @ 5100rpm
TORQUE	60lb/ft @ 2500rpm
TRANSMISSION	4-speed manual
SUSPENSION, F	Independent, torsion bars, lever-arm dampers
SUSPENSION, R	Leaf springs, lever arm dampers
BRAKES	Discs front, drums rear
WHEELS	13-inch steel wheels
0-60 MPH	Approx 24 seconds
TOP SPEED	78mph (est)
FUEL CONSUMPTION	38mpg



**MORE THAN A HANDFUL**  
 Marc suggested that he and Mike pick up a couple of models for the photoshoot.

**Top**  
 These Minors may have tiny A-series engines – but they don't 'arf go.  
**Right**  
 Hero worship as Mike and Marc meet children's television star Brum.

cute car. It's recognisable, it's iconic. But I've been put off owning one for two reasons. One, I'm scared of that timber frame's structural role and the horror stories of how the bodywork collapses once the wood rots.

Second, I've never thought a Minor could hold its own on modern roads. I mean, it's fine for the local vicar pottering around the village from cream tea to cream tea but you wouldn't commute in a Minor, would you? Or use it on a motorway?

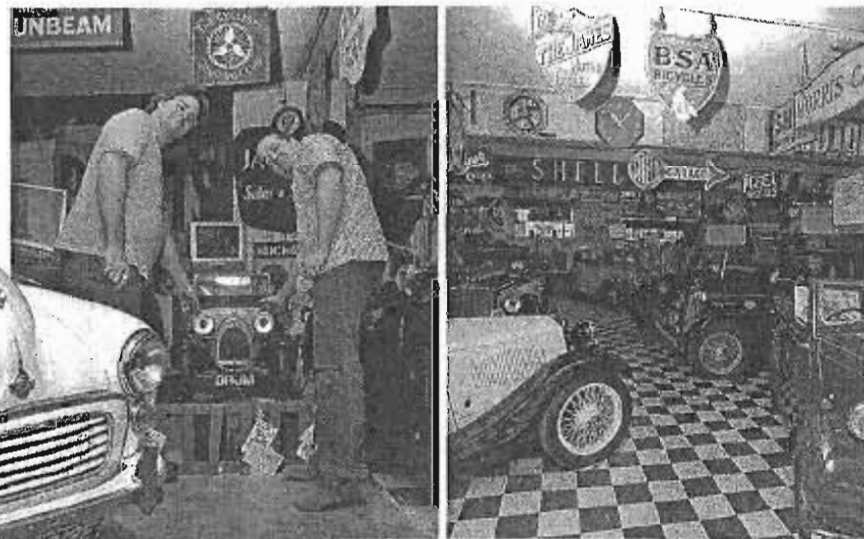
**I can admit when I'm wrong**

After about 20 minutes behind the wheel I've changed my tune from a sorrowful ballad to a hard-rock celebration. This little Morris Traveller is GREAT! Pulling away, I've set myself up to expect feeble

brakes, vague steering and acceleration that couldn't pull the skin off cold milky coffee. Not true. The big steering wheel makes the steering light and the Minor goes exactly where I point it. The brakes might lack the sharpness of a modern car but they're not bad. In more than 30 miles, I've only had one scare when a car stopped immediately in front of me on a wet road. Despite the hard braking, we still stopped in a straight line. Wow.

Equally impressive is the car's handling. Get on to a winding B-road and the Minor takes all but the sharpest corners in fourth gear. No leaning or body roll, nothing as vulgar as feeling even slightly unsettled. Admittedly, we're only doing some 50mph but remember we're using technology dating back to 1946.

**"I expected acceleration that couldn't pull the skin off cold milky coffee"**



**GETTING ROOFLESS**

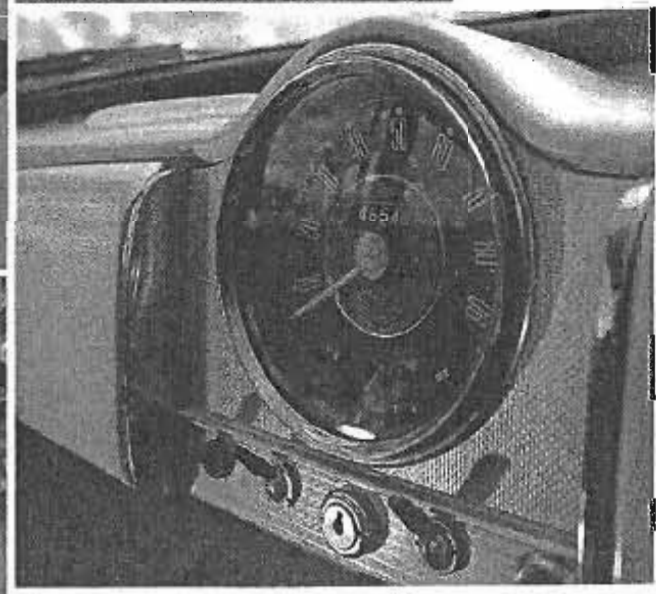
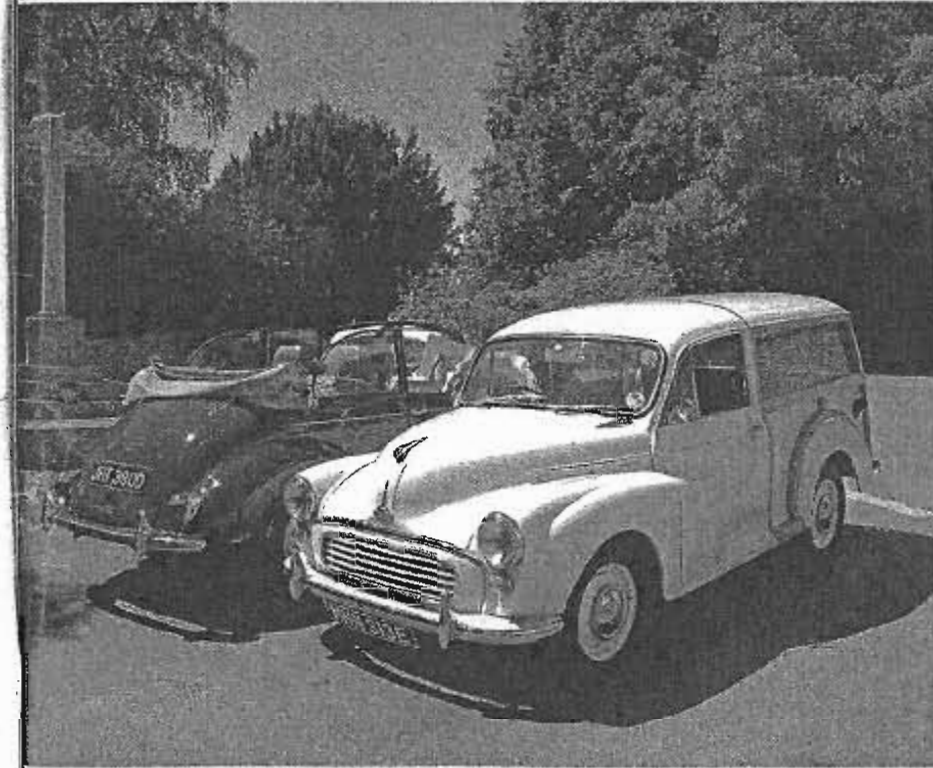
Putting the roof down on the convertible is simplicity itself, but best done with a willing volunteer.

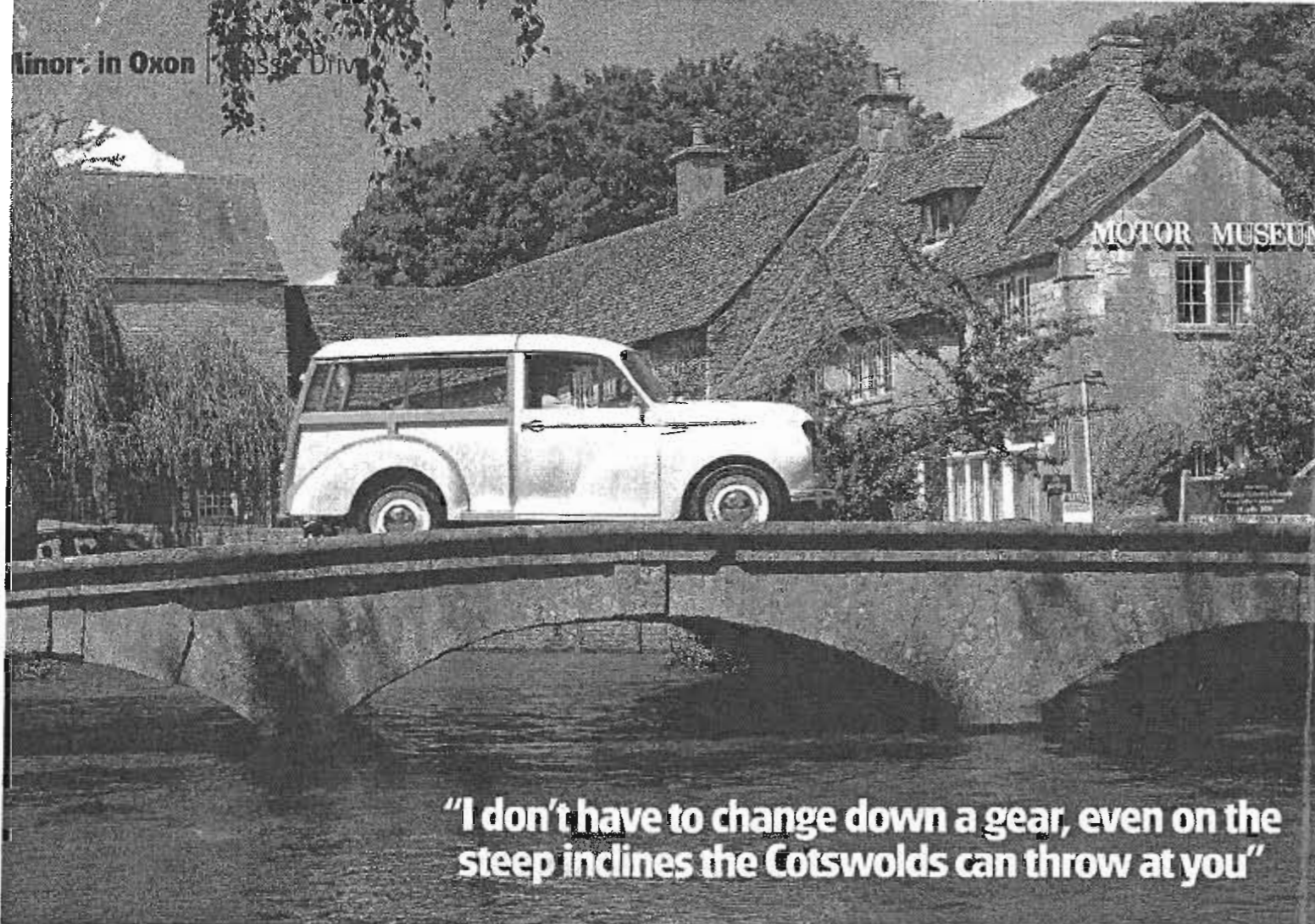
**Top**  
 Virtually every square inch of floor and wall space is used to show off Morris memorabilia at the Morris Motors Museum.

**Left**  
 Journey's end as we finally reach the Cowley factory. Now we just had to battle through the traffic to get back home again.

**Bottom Left**  
 A line-up of the Cowley workforce on the day the 100,000th Minor was built.

**Below**  
 Iconic – there's just no other word for this speedo.





**"I don't have to change down a gear, even on the steep inclines the Cotswolds can throw at you"**



**"77mph as standard. It's not hard to believe either car could touch 80mph"**

**Marvellous Morris archive**

A lunch of sandwiches (and soft drinks, of course) is taken at the New Inn in Minster Lovell. It lies near Witney in Oxfordshire, the home town of both British Motor Heritage (CM's MGB Roadster project partner) and Oselli Engineering, a once-massive name in A-Series engine tuning that still trades in and repairs BMC/MG sportscars.

There's only time to fly past these classic landmarks on our way to Long Hanborough and the Oxfordshire Bus Museum. Bus museum? What's that got to do with Minors? Well, not much, but it's a fascinating place for anyone who appreciates old machinery.

More importantly, the site's also home to the Morris Motors Museum. This collection of cars, memorabilia and photographs is housed in a separate building, and although only small by most museums' standards, it's jam-packed with exhibits. We'd challenge anyone to take it all in even if you spend all day there. And for just £3 admission

for both museums, it's a no-brainer on any enthusiast's must-visit list.

**Crawling to Cowley**

The last part of the day was meant to be a nostalgic trip to the gates of the Cowley factory, near Oxford, where both our Minors would have been built. Unfortunately, our serene olde-world driving day is brought back to modern reality by the horrendous rush-hour traffic around the Oxford Ring Road. Despite a slight worry about overheating, both cars perform faultlessly in an hour-long stop-start shuffle along the A34 and A4142, proving once again that a good Moggy can be far more than a weekend motor.

Pictures of our destination taken, it's time to head home. Our journey involves a fair section of travel along the M4 motorway and once again the Minors surprise us cynical hacks. Although happiest at a little above 60mph, the Traveller manages 70 without a strain, while the convertible keeps up the pace with ease. The factory claimed a top speed of 77mph and it's not hard to believe either car could touch 80mph.

So, would we change anything about the Minors? Well, in an ideal world, a bit more grunt for the hills, a wiper for the Traveller's rear window and a fifth gear for the motorway would be good. But overall there's no real need to modify these capable cars, just the pace of life we all seem to live at.

**Post script**

The day after this shoot in glorious sunshine, the heavens opened and Marc can report the convertible's roof was totally waterproof on his drive to return the car to Bristol.



**CHEERS, CHARLES**

Thanks to Charles Ware's Morris Minor Centre for the loan of these two superb Minors, and for not being too cross when we kept them out past bedtime!

20 Clothier Road  
Brislington  
Bristol  
BS4 5PS

0117 300 3754  
www.morrisminor.org.uk

**Check out some history**

The Cotswold Motor Museum is open from 10am-6pm, seven days a week, between February half-term and the first Sunday in December. Admission charges are £2.50 adult, £2.50 children 4-16, under 4s free. A family ticket costs £11.

The Oxford Bus and Morris Museum is open from 10:30am-4:30pm Sunday, Wednesday and Bank Holidays throughout the year and on Saturdays between Easter and the end of October. £3 entry for adults, £2.50 for OAPs and disabled, £1.50 children 3-16, family ticket £7.

**Marc says don't miss...**

The A429 Fosse Way between Cirencester and Bourton on the Water. This Roman road is a tarmac rollercoaster!



**Top Left**

Basic interiors with mountains of charm. While the Traveller was all original, the Tourer had replacement seats - they were supremely comfy.

**Below**

This convertible began life as a saloon, but the conversion is easy enough because the soft-top system isn't too complicated.

**Bottom Left**

The Cotswolds offers chocolate box photo opportunities in abundance.



**Marc's open-top tale**

Meanwhile, up front in the Tourer I'm having as much fun as Mike. I'm a convertible addict anyway, so being let loose in this almost-perfect 1966 ragtop is far from a hard day's work.

I have to agree with Mike - the power delivery, road manners and braking of my steed are all way above expectations. One of the biggest surprises is that I don't have to change down a gear, even on the steep inclines the Cotswolds can throw at you. The little engine just keeps pulling. Presumably, the convertible weighs a little less than the Traveller, but I'm still impressed with its climbing abilities over the Woody.

With the hood down, there's very little scuttle shake (less than on my recently bought Saab soft-top, in fact) because the Tourer was a solid car even with the roof removed - the Minors that were converted didn't require much strengthening to keep things rigid. Occasional body flex at slow speeds over rough country roads meant that the door on my car came unlatched a couple of times, but this was due more to the catch not being fully adjusted than anything more serious.

**Mike picks up the trail...**

Our first stop is the tourist mecca of Bourton on the Water, home to the Cotswold Motor Museum - a fascinating

collection of cars and automobilia stretching back to the earliest days of motoring. The best aspect of the museum is the way the collection's scattered around a selection of buildings, meaning that you never quite know what's around the next corner.

The exhibits include a special attraction for children, too. The model car from the TV programme *Brum* lives at the museum, when it's not off filming.

When we leave, Marc and I find that our cars have drawn a small but appreciative crowd of tourists, nearly all of whom explain that they've owned, or at least had experience driving, a Minor.

"I passed my test in one," says a lady from Birmingham, "but it had those indicators that came out from the pillars. Were they called trafficators?"

Charming is a word that keeps cropping up regarding both of these Minors. The indicators, for example, are controlled by a wand-like stick on the right of the steering column, the tip of which blinks green to remind you that the indicator's on. Gearchanges can't be rushed but allowing a count of two between cog swaps makes for smooth changes up or down the 'box. I was a little bit disappointed that I couldn't get the A-Series to do its characteristic exhaust 'fart', although Marc was managing to fart away quite happily in the convertible.

