

THE MIGHTY WAH

WAH 793H is a seemingly unpretentious Morris Minor Traveller, the kind your Auntie always ran around in. But when you drive it, there are a few surprises in store, as Matthew Carter — and others — discovered

People laugh at the Morris Minor and, in truth, they shouldn't. Ask the drivers of the Ford Capri, MG Midget and BMW 528i that encountered an innocent-looking white Traveller the other day.

A traffic light grand prix saw off the Capri. It was in the left lane looking to turn right at the next junction and *knew* he could out-run the Morris. When he found he couldn't, the driver was moved to mouth a modern — and rather vulgar — version of 'Well, I'll be blowed' and proceeded to cause chaos to the following traffic by trying to cut across three lanes of rush hour traffic.

The Midget and BMW were both discovered on a quick dash up the M3. As the 15-year-old Traveller overtook the sports car, the sound of the driver's jaw hitting the floor could be heard for counties, while the BMW driver is probably still scratching his head, wondering why he needed to be doing 90mph to pass the wooden wonder.

Those drivers could be excused their disbelief. After all, most Minors appear fit for the little more than the scrapheap, unless, of course, they are owned by classic car fanatics and then they are molly-coddled in such a way that they never go above 50mph anyway. This Minor is different!

For the mighty WAH is the pride and joy of the Morris Minor Centre in Bath, the brainchild of Charles Ware. In a nutshell it's a Minor for the 80s, a car that can more than keep up with modern traffic and has none of the in-built obsolescence of a modern motor for the masses.

People used to laugh at Charles Ware, too. But no longer. The former property tycoon who went under when the bottom fell out of the market in the mid-seventies — the *News of the World* was moved to write a story about him then, headlined 'The Rise and Fall of Champagne Charlie' — has bounced back in a big way. They laughed when he started dabbling in secondhand Minors, but now accept it wasn't such a stupid move. He's not yet back to millionaire status... but there's time for that later.

After a slow start, first just selling Minors, then offering a service and repair facility, Ware realised there

was more to the Issigonis masterpiece than met the eye. Here was a car so fundamentally over-engineered when it was designed back in the 40s, that almost no matter how badly neglected, examples could be saved.

Ware started buying parts from BL then, as they dried up, creating his own. Before long the Morris Minor Centre was big business and scores of other companies jumped on the Minor bandwagon. With a total of 130,000 Minors currently in use, estimates Ware, the profit potential for specialist companies — and sharks — is obvious.

But Ware is not a man to sit still for long. Rescuing and patching Minors is one thing, but he was painfully

aware that the car was now well outmoded by modern vehicles. To use one regularly as every-day transport is not really feasible, he believes, without some form of updating. Hence this Traveller.

On the surface it's a beautifully restored Minor Traveller, with not a speck of rust, nor a trace of woodworm. Only the bigger than usual tyres on smaller than usual wheels give away the game...

As the Capri, Midget and 528i drivers discovered, this is no ordinary Minor. Under the bonnet lurks a 1275cc BMC A-Series engine mated to a Spridget gearbox and putting its power to the back wheels via a Morris Ital rear axle. Hardly a specification

to burn rubber on a 1/4-mile drag strip, it's true... but it's enough to allow the car to show a clean pair of heels to many.

And it has a properly controlled pair of heels, too. In the past axle tramp, even with a standard 48bhp, was inevitable. WAH has a pair of radius arms keeping the live back axle under control. The difference is incredible. Add Ital disc front and drum rear brakes and the mechanical package is virtually complete.

As well as taking the car to MIRA, we spent 500 miles using it as we would a normal road test car. There was no shortage of takers each night... For it is a car that *can* be used everyday. The MM Centre's changes have produced a car that now keeps up with — and out-performs in some cases — modern cars. The brakes add a sense of security lacking from the standard offering, and, by giving the car decent seats (from a Metro, in this case) and re-trimming throughout, Ware has turned it into a civilised beast, too.

Driving a 'real' Minor calls for anticipation not appreciated by other road users. Speaking from recent experience — I own a 948cc, four-door, 'born' on 1 January, 1960 and have been known to drive it to work — that gap you leave, designed to accommodate the comparatively poor braking capabilities of the all-drum set-up, more usually accommodates the cut-and-thrust merchants as they carve their way to work. Performance more usually annoys than impresses (I'm going as fast as I can, I promise), while trips of longer than 20 miles are back-breakers.

WAH was a revelation, both to the driver and other road users. And it's not finished yet. Ware is a disciple of the durable car ideal. He believes that WAH is only half-way to completion and further improvements can and will be made. The promised finale is a brand new Morris Minor fully type-approved, with a 15-year corrosion guarantee, and enough performance and comfort to make it a real alternative to next year's multinational supermini.

Areas for further improvement are obvious. You tell Ware the gearbox is a mite agricultural and, being only a four-speed, needs a higher top gear ▶



Charles Ware is the man behind WAH and the durable car ideal