

The Seventh Annual Pre-war Minor Network Rally

Marnhull, Dorset 3rd-5th June



Minors at play in Dorset (Kate Martin)

Friday 3rd June

Twenty Minors and their crews, along with a 1927 Austin Heavy Twelve (and for Sunday Derek Brockway's Eight Tourer) had travelled from as far afield as Dereham, Norfolk (230 miles - Mike and Sue Jones) and from as close as 60 feet (Dan Brockway) to assemble in the car park of The Crown Inn, Marnhull, Dorset on the evening of Friday 3rd June. For the vast majority gathered there the rally had started much earlier in the day when they left home to journey to England's hilly deep-south. Some had departed from home earlier still, giving themselves two or three days to complete their long journeys.

Our hosts for this rally were long-term Minor stalwarts John and Jo Nagle who live a stones-throw from the pub and it was at their home during the course of Friday afternoon that the first gathering of Network members took place. Thanks to the Nagle's large front garden those of us who had trailed their cars to Dorset off-loaded our Minors and had arranged to leave their trailers on-site for the duration. This activity took place in glorious sunshine and immediately adjacent to the main road into and out of the village.

Throughout this period a number of other Minors had spotted this hubbub on their way to The Crown Inn or their B&B's and did no more than turn around and join us for a cup of Earl Grey in what was beginning to resemble a typical English summer garden party. In fact the presence of the two marquees, the bunting draping the trellis and the Union flag atop the flagpole may have caused other road users to believe that this was all a well-

planned adjunct to The Queen's ninetieth birthday celebrations. The fact that her 'Maj' didn't call-in may well have averted a security incident as at some point during the afternoon the lock on the 'privy' failed in the 'on' position leaving an unfortunate female crew member with little to do for half an hour other than to sit on the throne! Fortunately the skilled use of an angle-grinder saved the day.

The Crown Inn car park on Friday evening was a site to behold with a long row of 85 year old cars gleaming in the sunlight while the pub's façade was draped with a PWMN banner. Among the cars' was Henry Harvey's 1932 Minor Two-seater along with Dan Brockway's similar 1934 version, both of which were debutants at a PWMN rally. Sadly Terry Lloyd's 1933 Saloon failed to make it following an engine rebuild, so determined not to miss the fun, he arrived with his son Nick in a beautiful white P1800 'Saint' Volvo. Another non-attendee was the second entry from Equipe Lambert, a 1930 MG Midget which was to have been driven by my son, but work commitments prevented him from attending.

Rally packs were distributed to crews and it's at this point that the routes for the two tours are revealed. The fact that Bulbarrow and Blackdown hills were both to be climbed the following morning may have caused a pulse to quicken here and there but it wasn't noticeable among the general revelry which was taking place both inside the pub and outside in the car park. An interesting facet of Friday evening is that it is here that the Minor equivalent of 'horse-trading' takes place. In the run-up to the rally, forum posts, emails and numerous telephone conversations take place where spare-part items sought are traded to be handed-over at the rally. For my part I took along a starter motor and starting handle and became the recipient of a brake cross-shaft and bell housing as part of this trading cycle. I'm often asked why did I use the word 'Network' and not 'Club' or 'Register' when I named the website? This Friday evening activity illustrates the reason 'why' perfectly.

Saturday 4th June



“Stand by your cars” - The traditional pre-Saturday tour photo.(Kate Martin)

After the glorious sunshine of the previous evening, Saturday morning was something of a shock to the system. The sun was nowhere to be seen and the temperature was circa 12 degrees C. Apparel changed from tee-shirts to fleecy jackets. There is no disputing that

the weather affects moods and it was a far more sombre Crown Inn car park than that of a few hours earlier. Heather Hogg and son Ronald arrived with the long-term family owned (in excess of 50 years) 1929 Tourer and off-loaded it from their trailer perhaps for one of the last occasions as they have recently decided to part-company with the car. That MT 3286 was to travel some of Dorset's highways upon one of its last journeys in their ownership seemed fitting as Heather's late husband (also Ronald) enthusiastically drove these byways in 'MT' for many years.

Having assembled for the obligatory group photograph the twenty cars set out on their outward trip to Abbotsbury located on Dorset's world famous Jurassic Coast. For some the journey would be of about 40 miles in length, while for others who went 'off-piste', either deliberately or otherwise, it was undoubtedly longer. Of all the rallies attended down the years this particular route severely tested our cars. First gear hills were commonplace but fortunately, thanks to good route planning by John N., traffic was extremely light and our presence caused little disruption to local traffic. There were however plenty of opportunities to pull over to permit cars and crews to take 'a breather' and on a sunny day these lay-bys would have provided spectacular views across Dorset. Sadly, the low cloud and mist conspired to mask this spectacle but ironically did help to keep radiators and engines cool. Crews did take advantage of some of the suggested stopping-off points including a large lay-by at the top of Bulbarrow Hill. Here it was evident how hard the cars had worked as crews exchanged notes. It was reported that at least one car had to resort to ditching a passenger in order to negotiate a particularly tough section.



Woolland Hill lay-by (Kate Martin)

The section from Bulbarrow to Piddletrenthide was duly completed by all crews but not without drama along the way. It was on this section that two of the three potentially tour-ending breakdowns occurred that day. The Mike Jones owned 1930 Semi-Sports managed to fracture a half-shaft shortly after Bulbarrow but thanks to Toby Sears who carried a spare was soon back on the road. At the foot of a hill in Piddletrenthide Stuart Clark's 1930 Minor Saloon needed the services of the RAC to resolve a distributor issue which had caused his car to fail. Although roadside bound for well over an hour Stuart soon made up

time and arrived at Abbotsbury belatedly for lunch but back in the rally. (It should also be noted that it was initially thought that Stuart's points had failed and so John and Jo Nagle, after a mobile phone call or two, dutifully duly drove off to collect a spare set from another rallyist returning to Stuart only to find that they weren't required.)

Despite an unexpected road closure in Piddletrenthide most Minors made it to The Poacher's Inn for coffee before setting off for the final leg of the morning run to Abbotsbury. The ascent of Blackdown Hill near Crewkerne at 705 feet was another monumental climb for our Minors of over a mile in length. At its peak is a car park situated adjacent to the Thomas Hardy Memorial (National Trust), a tall watch-tower which can be ascended on foot and affords 60 mile views on a clear day. On Saturday Chesil Beach which is just a few miles distant was shrouded in mist and all but invisible.

Spirits were not dampened by this as we descended into Abbotsbury. Here it was our car's brakes that were tested to fading point. The route down was over gradients greater than any experienced over the course of the rally weekend. Selecting a low gear was essential as every bit of engine braking potential was required to aid that generated by the small drums. Meeting a vehicle coming up the hill was, according to Toby Sears, 'squeaky-bum time' as great pressure was applied to the pedal in order to pull up in sufficient time.

Martin Gregory was delighted to find that the car park at Abbotsbury Sub-Tropical Gardens was of gravel and not tarmac as it meant that he could leave the large piece of cardboard he carried on his Coachbuilt Saloon's luggage rack neatly stowed away. This handy implement was in fact a makeshift portable drip-tray onto which the dregs from his cylinder head dripped (via the dynamo) following a failure of a seal on the cylinder head vertical drive housing. This didn't detract from the car's appearance which following a program of refurbishment over the winter has left his Saloon looking very impressive indeed.

Over lunch we learned from Peter Yates that his 1933 Saloon's differential was making extremely disturbing noises on the overrun. Despite this (and me incorrectly informing him that the afternoon's run would be easier on his car) he decided to continue the tour and make his way back to Marnhull. It transpired that a dif bearing had expired but he did make it back to base before being recovered on Monday and returning home to Leicestershire in the cab of a breakdown truck.

As intimated above, the return journey was no less a test for our cars than the morning run. Visibility had improved and so (marginally) had the temperature. The one planned stop on the way to The Udder Farm Shop (our ultimate destination and cream tea venue) was at the Cerne Abbas Giant, a famous hill chalk engraving where straight faces were hard to find either on the club wielding giant or those observing him from a distance.

The section from Cerne Abbas to the tea stop was made in part over fast B roads with an obligatory water splash run-through to clean the wheel arches. As has become customary the most spectacular 'splash' will have been photographed and score highly in the annual Photograph of the year competition but still fail to win. This year Trevor Wilkinson provided a free irrigation service to the two farms adjoining the ford via his numerous high speed passes.



Trevor Wilkinson's 1934 Two-seater making waves (Chris Lambert)

Although The Udder Farm Shop is located adjacent to the busy A30 road, 15 cars and crews opted to end their afternoon runs there and enjoy the indulgent pleasure of clotted cream and strawberry jam spread upon a warm home-made fruit scone and washed down with a pot of Dorset blended tea. The tea room adjoined a well-stocked 'deli' and souvenir shop which provided an opportunity to purchase a local memento or two before we returned to our cars to travel the short distance back to Marnhull in order to prepare for the evening's activities.

There were forty one of us seated for dinner at The Crown Inn on Saturday evening, including our guests of honour Jackie Hammond and her mother, Pat Oliver. Pat is in her 90th year and her daughter had contacted me in the spring to ask if I could help to track-down the car in which her mother was taught to drive in 1951 - a 1930 Minor Tourer. Unfortunately our search for the original car was fruitless but I did put Jackie in touch with Janie and Phil Shepherd who own a 1929 example of the model she was seeking. Thanks to Janie and Phil's generosity and hospitality a reunion with a Minor Tourer followed for Pat which resulted in an extended trip around the Leicestershire lanes near Janie and Phil's home and an invitation extended to them both to attend the rally.

Serving 40 guests politely and efficiently is no mean feat and the Crown Inn staff did just that at our rally dinner on Saturday evening - while the food they provided was both tasty and plentiful. Throughout the evening the noise from the tables rose in direct proportion to the volume of wine consumed and when Ken Martin rose to announce the 2016 award winners he could still just about be heard! Having restored order, Ken welcomed our guests and then announced the names of the following award winners 'in absentia':

Harry Edwards Trophy - Peter Brock - For his significant contribution to the 'Around the Edge Challenge'.

Brian Maeers Jug - Arthur Bell - For his enthusiastic daily use of his 1933 Minor Saloon and his photographic contributions to the website and forum.

LAT Plate - Kartik Lunia - Winner of the 2015 Photograph of the year competition.

Ken then went on to make book awards to two of our youngest members, **Andrew Miles** and **Dan Brockway**.

Ken gave way to John Nagle who along with wife Jo had donated an award for the 'Furthest distance travelled to the rally in a Minor' which went to **Mike and Sue Jones** who had journeyed to Marnhull from Dereham in Norfolk.

Sunday 5th June



Mrs Pat Oliver reunited with a Minor Tourer after 65 years (Kate Martin)

The contrast between Saturday and Sunday's temperatures was marked with 25 degrees C registering on thermometers by mid-Sunday afternoon. This made the rally's Sunday tour to Bovington Tank Museum all the more enjoyable, particularly as the Nagles had opted to route the tour via the beautiful town of Shaftesbury having obtained permission for us all to use a terraced car park adjacent to the famous 'Hovis' hill. The car park afforded breath-taking views of the Dorset countryside while the rooftop vista at the top of 'Hovis' hill immediately brought to mind brass bands and a vision of a child wheeling a baker's pushbike over the cobbles.

The route from Shaftesbury then directed us to Zig Zag Hill on the B3081. Here the road takes the traveller up several hundred feet via several very sharp hairpin bends. The hill is best ascended in second gear in a Minor but this does require an element of bravado as it's important not to let the revs drop too much when negotiating each hairpin. Upon reaching the top the vista opens up to reveal even more of that famous Dorset countryside. Another highlight from the Sunday morning run was an unscheduled stop in the village of Ashmore. The village has a large dew pond that on the 5th June was being invaded by House Martins

either swooping down to drink on the wing or landing in the margins to collect mud for repairing or building their nests. This was then followed by a second invasion of pre-war Morris Minors and their crews stopping to take photos of this rural idyll.

Upon arrival at the Tank Museum our cars were marshalled to a designated area of the car park and those with pre-booked tickets roamed the museum while others had lunch and then spent the afternoon exploring more of the Dorset countryside. Although designated 'the short tour' by the time most of us had returned to Marnhull that evening there were another eighty or so miles recorded on our odometers.



Toby and Linda Sears pass through the village of Ashmore (Chris Lambert)

For those staying on a further night the Nagles had laid on a 'farewell' barbeque and 26 of us descended upon their garden once again. Jo had spent the day at home preparing the 'spread' while we got to enjoy the fruits of her labours while going over the numerous highlights of the weekend with our fellow rallyists. Our host's efforts, both prior to and over the weekend itself were much appreciated by all who attended and so a big thank-you to John and Jo Nagle for their magnificent contribution.

These notes are being written just a few days after the event but I'm sure the lasting impression I will take away is that Minorists don't take life too seriously as I can't recall too many moments when smiles or laughter were not evident. We are already looking forward to the 2017 rally!

Chris Lambert

To find out more about the Pre-war Minor Network and to view further images of the event go to www.prewarminor.com