

MY STORY

Richard Bryant, from East Sussex, tells the tale of Marmaduke, his most delightful 1932 Morris Minor van.



I HAVE always been interested in motor vehicles and over the years, my wife Anne and I have accumulated a collection (one Vauxhall, seven Rovers and three Morris'es), most of which have been with us for a long time. In the 1980s, a classic car show used to be held in the exhibition halls of the Metropole Hotel, in Brighton, and at one of the shows, we saw a very nicely restored Morris Eight Series I van, which started the idea in our minds that it would be nice to own something similar one day.

Fast forward to 1993, when a business trip took me through Tenterden, in Kent, where I noticed a small classic car dealer's. On the way home, I called in and found, tucked away at the back of the showroom, a small Morris van, which turned out to be a 1932 Minor in part-restored condition.

The following weekend, I went with Anne and her sister, Mary Plucknett, to view the van. I was able to drive it up and down the dealer's yard, which was a bit scary as it was the first time I had ever driven a vehicle with a centre throttle, and the brakes were very poor, nevertheless, it ran. Obvious



Richard and Anne Bryant with their delightful Marmaduke.

problems included an exhaust made of convoluted piping without a silencer, no glass in the windows of the back doors, very tatty seats and a complete absence of rear lights, let alone any form of indicators.

The two sisters decided to buy the van between them and a few days later, we brought him home on our trailer and the process of improvement and further restoration began. In this, I was greatly helped by my friend, Barry Gandon, who was then running the well-respected Ascent Garage, in St Leonards-on-Sea, but is now retired. Through the Morris Register, I made contact with the late Harry Edwards who, in addition to being an expert on Morris vehicles and their history, ran Yesterdays Components, selling spares. Among other things, he was able to supply a correct exhaust system, new chromed hub caps, ignition components, radiator hoses and sundry small parts.

BRAKE SHOES

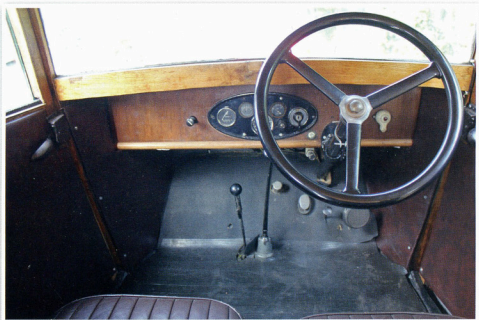
The engine ran well, but it was apparent that the radiator was not in as-new condition, so we had specialists Bryan & Son, of Tunbridge Wells, install a new honeycomb core. Although originally controlled by cables, the brakes had been adapted to rod operation, and Barry and I had to do a great deal of work to make them operate anything like efficiently, including replacing some of the rods and using a new pivot assembly from a "modern" MG Midget. The brake shoes were relined by Chelsea Frictions, of Coventry.

The van was rewired with help from another friend, Paul Tanner, and we obtained and fitted suitable rear lights incorporating brake lights, as well as reflectors and flashing indicators. Although the van would have been made originally either without indicators or with semaphore arms, driving in modern traffic without flashers would not be wise. The front flashers are in the side lights.

Paul also came up with a method of glazing the back doors, which has proved entirely satisfactory, and we repainted the interior of the load bay in cream with a black floor. The petrol tank was rebuilt by a very long-established local firm, Hastings Motor Sheet Metal Works, and the seats were reupholstered by the excellent C A Upton & Son, of St Leonards, using new brown Connolly leather.

We decided to call the van Marmaduke, recalling the old red lorry of the same name from Yorkshire featured in the series of children's books by Elizabeth Chapman from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Work on Marmaduke had to be fitted in between business and family commitments and the need to maintain the other cars in the collection, so it was not until 1997 that he passed an MoT and got back on the road. He subsequently took part in the Historic Commercial Vehicle Society's London to Brighton run on three occasions,



Interior is as basic as they come, but has incredible ambience.



which was great fun, although driving into Brighton the first time in heavy traffic, where the wheels of buses and lorries alongside us in the traffic queue seemed bigger than the whole van, was somewhat unsettling.

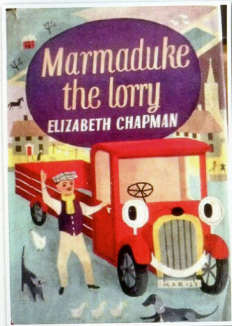
He has also taken part in several of the HCVS Spratt and Winkle runs from Sevenoaks to Hastings, and he has appeared at a number of classic vehicle shows in the

south east, gaining several awards.

What is he like to drive? The seat does not adjust, so the driving position is cramped and totally unsuitable for anyone over 6ft. Rear vision is poor, like many vans. The steering is very direct and the brakes can best be described as adequate. The pedals, with the accelerator in the middle and the brake to the right, require concentration, as does the three-speed



Seats have been refurbished – they look comfortable.



Marmaduke was named after the old red lorry featured in the series of children's books by Elizabeth Chapman – the name is so fitting, because he actually looks like a Marmaduke, we reckon.

gearbox with reverse where first would be on most cars. He sets off quite briskly and a comfortable cruising speed is 35 to 40mph.

Various improvements have been made over time, including original-specification Lucas headlights to replace the Butler units (from a tractor?) with which he arrived, a re-spray and signwriting showing the name Rushin and Daughters of Bexhill. Local residents often say they cannot recall a business of that name and ask what they made, to which the answer is "daughters". When Anne's father, Lieut-Col A H Rushin, retired from the Royal Army Ordnance

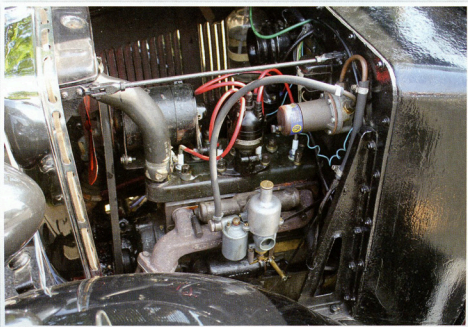
Corps in 1955, the family moved to Bexhill. After Anne and her sisters got married and her parents died, the name Rushin (in this branch) died out and so Anne and Mary decided to commemorate it on Marmaduke, using the year of their parents' birth for the telephone number and the year of their marriage as the date of establishment. There was no real business called Rushin and Daughters.

COMPLEX ENGINE

Mention Morris Minor to most folk and they will think of the car designed by Alec Issigonis, produced in various forms

from 1948 to 1972. However, the original Minor was announced by Morris in 1928 as a somewhat belated response to the very successful Austin Seven. It was a proper car in miniature and very well received, but Morris chose to endow it with a rather complex, four-cylinder, overhead-camshaft, 847cc engine, which gave good performance but whose design frequently caused the dynamo to be drowned in oil, so in late-1930, a simpler sidevalve engine of the same capacity was introduced, initially for the cheaper versions and then for the whole range during 1933. The van version arrived in 1930. Minor production ended in 1934, when the very successful Morris Eight was introduced.

The appearance and specification of the Minor were altered from time to time over the six years it was in production and marque experts will spot, as Harry Edwards did, that Marmaduke is not quite as he left



Engine provides a comfortable cruising speed of 35 to 40mph.



This sight would have been a familiar one to small tradesmen in the 1930s.

the factory at Cowley, in Oxford. He has a later engine from an early Eight, but retains the three-speed gearbox. He has the right radiator, but his front wings are from a 1934 model and his body is clearly a near, but not exact, replica of the factory van. His Heritage Certificate shows he started out as a two-seater car.

In 1994, we were approached by someone who subsequently produced a copy of a 1974 auction catalogue, where Marmaduke was being sold as a shooting brake, not a van. We love him as he is, but would be most interested to hear from anyone who could shed more light on his history from first registration in Cornwall in 1932 until we first saw him in 1993. In the meantime, Marmaduke continues as a sprightly 85-year-old, taking turns with our other vehicles, and very likely to be seen parked outside the local shops.

What a wonderful story and most wonderfully told. Richard, we thank you most kindly, and Marmaduke, it

is indeed a pleasure to meet you, sir. You come from an era in the relatively distant past and we are so glad that you have not only survived, but been brought back to your glory thanks to Richard,

his helpers and, of course, the two enthusiastic sisters. Well done, everybody. Incidentally, if anybody can provide details of Marmaduke's past, please get in touch – Editor.

