

WEST END GARAGE (BRUTON) LTD

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2017/18



"And can it be?" says the hymn in which seems to sum up the lightning passage of this year. Even my grandchildren tell me that time passes far too quickly – perhaps it's because we do so much and have so many pursuits and are blessed to be able to do it.

As another exciting year comes to a close it gives an opportunity to just draw breath to recall a few moments of challenges and achievements. An achievement in my book is the completion of a project to a satisfactory conclusion and achieving a 'feel good factor' to all involved. It's the monetary aspect that's always the issue, trying to balance the result with the budget can be high on achievement but very depressed on costings!



Ready for foreign climes

But still we march on! Last letter I reported on a large project to acquire, overhaul and repaint an ex MOD tank transporter and trailer. Some folk (who must read these missives) were intrigued to know more details. Dare I bore you? *Oh go on then but keep it short!* New customer comes to our site and looking at the largest truck, Oshkosh HET – (stands for Heavy Equipment Transporter) with a train weight of 120 tons and he thought it an ideal robust, cross country vehicle to rescue abandoned steam locomotives in remote parts of South Africa. An 8 wheel drive, this purposeful American truck was developed for the U.S Military and with the total decimation of the British truck industry offered the MOD an opportunity to replace our ageing British fleet of Scammels, 92 were built to a British specification to see us through the next 20 years of transporting Challenger tanks. So when my customer asked to buy one we were fortunate enough to acquire one of the demonstrator vehicles and then sourced a suitable 100 ton trailer to go with it. An obliging local haulier (well used to abnormal loads) brought the kit to Bruton where upon we set about its overhaul for a new life in the foreign! Nearing completion we are informed of a change in legislation that only allowed for the importation

of right hand drive vehicles and ours is left – typical! I will not bore you with the issues, ranging from the steering to modifying all the dash, heater, instruments, pedal boxes, air lines and not forgetting the big air horns!! All painted and ready for onward delivery to Wiltshire. So with a bleary eyed team and lots of flashing lights we were out of Bruton (before the rush hour) and slipped onto the A303 and away into the morning mist and into a large barn virtually unnoticed – Mission successful.

Our long association with Oshkosh has always been an interesting one over the years and 2 years ago we had a "showroom" (actually shed) given over to new models under wraps for UK and Europe. Supplied with the new fleet of tank transporters were 3 clever recovery units which would hitch to an empty tractor unit and capable of towing the whole disabled rig (truck, trailer and tank.)

One of these units had fallen into disrepair, robbed blind and no use to man nor beast. It found its way to Bruton where we managed to find an original supplier of some parts and got other bits and pieces made up locally. Eventually like magic this "big lump" of metal moved and unwrapped itself very much like a 'transformer' and fascinating to watch. Clean, fettled and working it was quickly collected and back into use for training and emergency use. Another steep learning curve, doubtful we will ever need to do it again but another tick in the box of life.

Another request along similar lines was the construction of Hazard boards for low loaders – adjustable brackets to fit many adaptations, metal framework and LED lights etc. Sounds simple but kept us amused for hours. As with all projects some things take some finding and the electrical, waterproof connections were eventually sourced, again from America. Once made, powder coated and built up we were proud at how 'grand' they looked and subsequently worked – so hopefully more to follow.

Again, at the other end of the scale, I mentioned about our rebuilding a Model 'T' Ford. I will not regale you with the sourcing and recovery of it again but progress advanced rapidly towards the end of the summer (I did get the dates wrong, apparently it is already a hundred years old) It shouldn't have surprised us when removing the body that all the cross



Oshkosh recovery rig





100 years of haulage Model T



Rheims Motor Museum

Good job Dr Case and a few of us can remember these from new so can at least know what to do and how to do it. I was concerned to see this lovely vehicle collected and placed precariously on a car transporter onward on its journey to Menorca? What fun, I was quite envious!

We all groan the minute someone wants to tell us and show us their holiday pictures and yet some of you actually want to know! What I

members and bearers were in a bad state. The cab we knew had to be replaced. They must have been very slight folk in those days but we portly (or well built) sorts could just squeeze behind the steering wheel but were constricted in our breathing! Luckily we had one grainy photograph of the original we had to emulate. Building it for a customer and not ourselves we constructed a mock cab and asked for its approval before making the new one. Once we got that sorted, we got going and soon our cab came together, the doors making a beautiful fit but with the soft springing and twisting of the chassis the doors would jam! Henry Ford in his wisdom had large gaps for everything and no engine cover – just keep it simple. So remanufacture the doors! I thought ash was our most popular of hardwoods but goodness the price of it!!? That is when you can actually find a supplier.

Simple things like drilling 6" of timber begs the question where do I get a drill from - none in the stores! Being predominantly metal folk you forget the basics you need for heavy timber. However, windows, doors and body all on and over to the paint shop and that took far longer than I thought - just a couple of primers and good gloss but it didn't work like that.

Mechanical was interesting; wouldn't start, turn ignition to the left not the right- silly. Make up new bulkheads, fuel lines, battery cables etc, etc. Single light to rear. Repair lights with new innards. Only brakes on the rear strip out and replace felt seals and rebuild etc, New wheel bearings etc. Those were the easy bits to source. Shot blast the wings only to find holes. Source others and get them remanufactured.

Finally, fettle, clean and we are ready for inspection.

A very smart transporter arrived (another refurbished vehicle we did this year) and off chugged our little friend to be the important part of a new heritage collection for a large local haulier. Thank heaven someone else has nostalgia! Congratulations to Mr John Gregory taking the family firm into its centenary.

Interesting aside as a lucky local lad acquired a beautiful Mini Moke for his Christmas/Birthday. Not refurbished by us but very nicely done it only came in for a check over and MOT. Unfortunately it required quite a few jobs to get it up together.



Mini Moke off on Holiday to the foreign

cannot work out is whether the 1% that tell me they enjoy it and the other 99% are incandescent with rage chuck it into the bin? So for the 1% a quick potted history of the "Adventures of Rin Tin Tin?" – Whoever he is?



On patrol with HMS Torbay



Loading up Submarine

In spring this year we kicked off with an early morning in Plymouth and boarding the nuclear sub 'HMS Torbay'. (120 sub mariners plus us landlubbers) Having given myself a good talking to "It can't be any worse in a submarine than inside a tanker". I didn't fully appreciate how big a sub is and how crammed everywhere was. Imagine 120 blokes underwater for 90 days (Food runs low then). So impressed with the professional crew. Shown most things from the engine bay – terribly hot! Propulsion room, engine control room, weapons bay; standing on live cruise missiles, torpedos, sick bay etc. 6 hours on and 6 off hot bunking and the passage of the day measured by mealtimes and the week by its meals. Sunday is roast, Tuesday is Pizza and coffee continuously flows. How it will ever work with a mixed crew I cannot imagine. The camaraderie of the chaps and the shortage of space can only lead to problems!

Having gone through the horrendous fire drill (you don't surface!) and then the evacuation procedure the highlight was the call to battle stations. Being half way across the English Channel and out in the deep chasm, running at 18 meters, a French frigate was "spotted" on the training radar. Everyone on a high alert and mounting tensions. The first officer apparently didn't like the French so decided we should sink it! Orders shouted in the silence, buttons pressed 'thump' as the torpedo launched. Torpedo running to target 4000 yards and the umbilical breaks and torpedo runs to target on its own navigation. Success and the blip slips beneath the waves! Very unpolitical but great fun. Periscope depth fascinating... "I want one". Eventually back to Plymouth with the fresh air at last. How my admiration goes out to these unique men and how glad am I to work where I do!



Fry's Army

Time to get the motors out and this year the old Healey 3000 clocks up its 50th birthday. International Healey meet at Leamington Spa – very organised and very good weekend with 70 Healeys.

September took off with nonstop driving firstly again joining fellow enthusiast Mr Withers with MG RV8 for a dash to the Champagne region at Epinay and then on down to Beaune in Burgundy. Hood down all the time and dropping in to see Monsieur and Madame Baker of Magyar tanker Fame.

Always bemused at how the French system works, they don't rush about like us, they seem to have a more relaxed style of living and also appear to be better off – how do they do it?

Oh; the space and the roads, there are just too many of us squashed into too small a space in England.

Last day join the toll roads, leave Burgundy for Calais, ferry to Dover. Welcome to England grid locked then the M25 and finally Stonehenge (say no more!) 600 miles back home and 12 hours later. Just hold it steady at 80 and the car is on song and very happy.

Week later 'Highland tour Rally' requiring the skills of a good navigator (thanks Pam) organised by the Lancaster Motor Club (don't ask!) Oldest car club in Britain. Hood down and go for it! Being a bit of a wimp as the rain lashed down in Glen Coe we did put the hood up for a while! Fantastic roads, many single track across Moorlands up to Tongue (at the top) we covered the west coast in figures of 8 including the huge and amazing Submarine base at Faslane. We as a nation could not afford to move that facility even if the "Queen of Scots" insisted!



Vikings in the Highlands



Family life in Scotland

10 days later back up to North Yorkshire with no 1 (and only) son who enjoys driving his car once a year. I have to ask for permission to borrow it! Weather on the Yorkshire Moors as you would expect – torrential rain and floods. I constantly felt sorry for James Herriot (All creatures' great and small) as he staggers through the mud to visit sick beast in bye on "top o' moor!" I know how he felt!

So that's a quick 6000 mile resume of one old car – pre electronic and pre electric!!

I usually feel I must let you know of how frustrated I get nowadays with our trade: as a good customer brings in his 4 year old Mercedes 4x4 for various faults – most resolved but the radio problem; have to take it to the Main dealer to be told you need a new one (as you are aware radios are no longer simple but computers with sat nav, information banks etc, etc). To replace said radio £4500.00 we were so incensed we took it on to fight the manufacture who generously eventually conceded to give a 36% discount! How can we carry on with these horrendous costs - it just writes the cars off. Talking of which (really getting going now!) Just bought a nice compact estate all the right specification and colour suffering from a damaged wing, headlight, bonnet and bumper. Written off and destined for the bin – how can this be a good use of resources/recycling? My trade magazine tells me that 40% of the cost of a new vehicle is in the electronics; doesn't leave much for the engine, glass, leather etc!

Other truck rallies and excitement etc have left me behind this year but the "boys" have been enjoying themselves with several road runs around the countryside and various shows.

Our 'Military division' has grown and is popular and much requested around the west. Our appearance at Weymouth in strength for their D.Day celebrations and later at Newton Fitzwarren was much enjoyed by our crew. We have managed (with some degree of success) to get a 1940 Morris Quad (complete with limber and 25 powder gun) refurbished and up and back on the road. Running speed was alright 70 years ago but not quite up to today's standards. When out with its big brother the AEC matador and 5.5" howitzer they make up an impressive sight.



Loading for D Day at Weymouth



1940 Morris Quad limber and Gun



Yorkshire AA patrol man!





STAFF PROFILE: MEET GAVIN PITMAN

Native of Bruton and all round good egg! Family man with a handful of children! Came to us as an Apprentice many years ago in our Peugeot days and stayed until we had our dramatic downsize! Went to learn about Japanese vehicles in particular Nissan and after many years got him back to carry out body/ mechanical work/ jig work etc. 12

years ago at our restructure he took himself this time to learn about all things Swedish and in particular Volvo truck and Bus. Still living in Bruton made sense to help us again on the Commercial Front. With his knowledge and gift of chasing problems on both car and truck his electronic skills are invaluable.

As if life wasn't busy enough his hobby is building and racing Grass track cars – not surprisingly he is good at it and regularly features in the National Grass championship and travels the country.

Using the services of the post office again we are hoping you will get this before Christmas but it necessitates getting

it done and dusted before November so the Christmas spirit is far from my thoughts at the moment.



David & Avril Shepherd opening the office

"The man who loved giants"

As you are probably aware the artist David Shepherd passed away in October. David had become a good friend with his infectious interest, enthusiasm and wicked sense of humour and fun. Always telling himself and us – "aren't we mad?" He was interested in everything,

loved the garage, the big trucks and insisted in going out in the Matador. His love of steam gave us lots of excitement and fun times. Sadly our time together was too short but ever grateful for his and Avril's generous time to open our new office two years go. What a fantastic legacy he leaves behind not only his talented family but a huge Wildlife Foundation dedicated to saving our magnificent animals but also his passion for his steam engines. Hopefully no one will ever forget that without David there would be no Cranmore Station or East Somerset railway, what a shameful crime that the BBC and most of the media couldn't find the time to report his death and his magnificent achievements – how will we ever inspire our youngsters? Rest in joy David.

However wishing you all a peaceful Christmas, a cracking New Year and to all our wonderful patient, long suffering customers thank you so much for supporting us and letting us carry on with all the fun, frolic and heartache that the daily grind gives us!!

If you have never used us then we would be delighted to meet you and show you what we have and hopefully what we might be able to do for you. Look us up at: Bruton Station Lineside!!

P.S New electric trains stopping for an unscheduled visit, strangely hauled by a diesel 125? = work that out!

Jordan. W. Fry



Ghost Electric Train?

Having started with the words of a hymn, thought it appropriate to finish in the same vein:



IT CAME UPON A MIDNIGHT CLEAR

"Yet with the woes of sin and strife, the world has suffered long, beneath the heavenly strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong. And man at war with man hears not the tidings that they bring. O hush the noise, ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing."



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