

RELIANT KITTEN REGISTER

MEWSLETTER Number 11

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Welcome to the summer edition. It seems that I cannot avoid a sentence which begins with the words " I must apologise to....." in this case it is you all, because of my failure to organise proper drawings in time to go with the last edition as regards the Metro distributor mods, but judging by the huge pile of sae's that were waiting for me on my return from holiday, not too many of you were bothered, so I guess you will keep me in the job for a while yet!

There is an ever increasing pile of mail from a variety of companies offering a wide range of services to us, at a price, and I seldom mention any of them in here, mainly because I would have great difficulty deciding which of them might be of interest. The B.B.C. Top Gear Live show at Silverstone from 18th to 22nd July did make me wonder if some of us might get together there, but on which day? And the entry fees are not small.

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Before I forget, one thing that I do have plenty of, and please don't let that deter you from sending me more, is photographs for the front cover. I have been known to change my mind, and sometimes have the front cover produced separately from the rest of the magazine, so, one day, there is almost bound to be confusion between the text and the cover picture, but, what I expect you will see this time is a very smart 1930's style device which is owned by a gentleman who, in spite of having corresponded with me for over a year now, has failed to take any of my numerous hints about subscribing to the organisation. Perhaps I should stop answering his questions about the Kitten based special, yes, it is both a Kitten chassis, and Reliant engine and gearbox, suspension and steering he tells me that it has done under 100 miles since it was built in 1982!

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Several people have expressed an interest in having some kind of meeting to attend, where like minded folk could get together, but the distances involved are not small, and frankly I am of the opinion that organising such events is not the function of this organisation. Having said that, if any individual, or better yet, group of individuals, wants to organise something, I will be happy to give it a mention in these pages, but be sure to give me at least 4 months notice of the date if you want to ensure that our readers get the information in time. I am quite in favour of say an annual get together, and am open to suggestions as to where and when that might take place – perhaps it would be a good idea to agree to attend an event arranged by some other organisation, I would hesitate to suggest the R.O.C. annual bash, but then again it does tend to be in the Tamworth part of the country. Personally I am not into camping, and would rather it be somewhere other than in a field – talk to me if you are interested, who knows what might transpire. Harry Darby deserves special mention, I did get your message thanks Harry, but was about to leave for the airport and thought the better of returning your call. Don't worry, the change of format is not likely or imminent, and it would not alter the content, save the inclusion of pictures.

The matter of Kitten chassis failures has again reared its ugly head for a number of our subscribers, and so deserves a special mention. The problem seems to be that the front suspension turrets can fail due to corrosion, when they appear, on visual inspection, to be completely free from rust externally. The problem seems to be that the drain hole is not at the bottom, and so they can fill up with water, and rust through from inside, while the original paint on the outside is still intact. So, don't be fooled, fill them with Dinitrol or Waxoil, or oil, and or extend the drain holes to the bottom, or both, but whatever you do, check them very carefully – you have been warned!

Now, don't get me wrong, to those of us with the skills and equipment to weld, such repairs are relatively straight forward, though you do have to take care to ensure that the steering geometry is not disturbed. To the rest of us, getting a garage to do the work will involve a lot of expense, and luck, if the job is to be done well and accurately. The big problem is that while it might pass an M.O.T. O.K. after a repair, it is not for a few thousand miles, and then checking for uneven tyre wear that you will know if they really got it right! (Unless of course they got it so wrong that the

handling has been ruined, and getting it right after it has been done incorrectly would not be all that easy). What I am trying to say is that prevention is much better than cure – check it out, oh, and while you are at it, give those ball joints some grease please.

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Perhaps this is a good time to tell you that I have access to a refurbished Kitten chassis. . It is complete with lower wishbones and track control arms and anti-roll bar, which have all been re-bushed with new bushes. The asking price is just £150 plus carriage, which I am advised would be in the £30 price range. Talk to me if you are interested. No, there is nothing wrong with it, but I already have 2 spare chassis, and I do not have the room for any more, and I thought the refurbished one might sell better than one which still has to be refurbished. But feel free to take one of them off my hands too if you like!

Please note that the offer at this price is only for a short time, as more work gets done to it, the price will increase.

Brian

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George Burdett, our man in the Orkneys, has found a cheaper solution to the new damper situation than that offered by John Blagburn. If you recall, John suggested that we all buy two sets, one to admire, the other to fit to the car. Well George tells me that he has now had his for 4 months, and enjoys looking at them so much that he has not fitted them yet!

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Ron Dark, amongst several others, was asking about alternative steering rods (lower steering columns) for the Kitten, the rod which connects the steering rack to the bottom of the steering column. Well, the one on the current Rialto, and Robin, the currently produced three wheelers, uses the same splines and couplings, and is only a little bit shorter, so a cut and weld mod can be done. Having said that one of the current owners of the company (Reliant) did say to Alan the other week that if we were really stuck for any part, to let him know and he would get it made.

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One completely unselfish act I did perform on your behalf recently was to spend an hour or so of a Saturday morning, ringing round about 20 people, non-subscribers, who had advertised a Kitten or Fox for sale in April and May. This idea, and most of the research was done for me by our man in Crieff, well he does not actually live in Crieff, but you are less likely to have heard of Gilmerton. Anyway thank you Simon Chisholm for your effort, time and patience, in collating all the adverts from all over the U.K. for me.

The good news is that the vast majority of the cars had been sold within a week or so of having been advertised, so someone out there is buying Kittens and Foxes. (And its not me, honest – no more space!) The sad fact is that the average asking price was only £360, and worse still the average selling price somewhat nearer £300. Still, at least they seem to be moving fairly quickly, if far too cheaply.

In my own experience, I would have paid more money than I would imagine you have for a Kitten saloon, been given an estate car with only 21,000 miles from new, it turned out to be needing over £400 worth of work to pass an M.O.T.!) and been involved in the purchase of two more saloons one of them M.O.T.'d till August, for £30 and £40 respectively. Confused, me too!

One chap I spoke to was so disgusted with the prices offered, that he decided to keep the van, and, who knows, he may even subscribe to the Register. Not one of the 15 or so folk that I spoke to was aware of the Registers existence, nor the Reliant Owners Club's, so clearly there is some way to go on that front, which brings me neatly round to the matter of a flyer, as mentioned by

both myself and others in the past. Right, I'll do it this time, look out for a small bundle of bits of paper in the envelope, to stick under Kitten, Rebel and Fox windscreens that you may come across on your travels.

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Dear Brian Feb '96

Thank you for the Register news, it is always interesting to hear news and views.

I enclose a photograph of my Tempest and Kitten, which may do for a future front cover. The Tempest is currently powered by a Chrysler 930cc engine and gearbox. It has Fiesta front discs, and a Morris rear axle with Marina 8" brakes fitted amongst other things. It is of course still Reliant chassis based.

As custodian of Kitten spares for the R.O.C. Essex branch I have broken up 3 Kittens because of terminal rust or accidents –

(I am told the expression is justifiable homicide, where a Kitten is broken to help keep others on the road, Ed!)

With reference to rear springs, I have been amazed at the number of different types fitted to Reliants, not only are there different numbers of leafs, but the top leaf occurs in different thicknesses, taper, and apparent ride height from van to saloon and from Robin to Rialto. I have tried many configurations on my Tempest to get bounce and rebound ideal for trialling the car as well as using it on the road. The strongest single leaf is the Rialto, the Robin has parallel and tapered leaf types, and the Kittens have all sorts. I do not seek to categorise, but one can play indefinitely.

Remarks about the roll pins breaking in the clutch clevis I consider to be the carbon thrust bearing wearing away, free play therefore being taken up to the extent that you get coaxial alignment of the pressure plate Centre and the thrust bearing Centre. Metal to metal contact between the pressure plate and the thrust bearing cap and too much leverage strain, and hey presto. I have stripped a number of clutches in this state, and as the gearbox is annoying to remove (I prefer to remove the engine and gearbox as an assembly) I suspect that they were left too long before replacement, and so subsequently break.

To this end I have fitted converted thrust bearings to two Kittens, on one I bought from a bearing factor, an angular thrust ball race, which I fitted into the cup neatly with a little work. But then I had to turn up a rose to extend the inner race to reach the pressure plate. On my second attempt I used an existing clutch thrust release bearing from a Citroen 2CV with a diaphragm pressure plate, but still had to turn the Reliant cup, and in this case make a concentric ring or ferrule to accommodate the bearing. Both are doing well to date.

Should you try this I would suggest that you use the heavier thrust bearing cup which has a lot more metal in its manufacture, as in both cases you need to deepen the cup to get your free play correct.

Finally you mention arranging the Register into chassis number order, I would be fascinated to learn the interpretation of the various letters and numbers, as they do not make much sense to me (We covered that fairly well in edition 10, pages 9 & 10 – Ed)

I enclose along with my subscription more information on the vehicles I have, tho' I may reduce this number as I have bought another motorbike, which is perhaps a little selfish.

With very best wishes, Guy Stanley - Great Abington

Thanks Guy, it is good to know that there are people out there who are both willing and able to improve on Reliant's design, I only envy you the skill and expertise. Ed.

Dear Brian, May '96

Thank you for your letter and the newsletter. Joe has told you about the Bobcat so perhaps I can fill in the TVR / Cipher bit.

When I joined TVR in 1982 on the engineering team, they had been approached by Tony Steven to build the Cipher under licence. As I had previous carnal knowledge of Reliants I was asked to look into the project which was code-named Wee VR. I spent a day at Warwick with T. S. and we visited one of his customers, with a metallic dark blue example, who had a garage on the Oxford Road at Deddington. There were a number of skeletal Ciphers in the workshops at Warwick, but I was not satisfied that sufficient component tooling existed to make them in quantity, and the engineering involved in the chassis / body frame assembly was not very well executed.

TVR bought a white Cipher from T.S. which we ran about for a few weeks. When it rained it was wetter inside the car than out, but everything else worked reasonably well. TVR placed the car in their dealer's showroom in Harrogate to test public reaction, which was very favourable, until they found out about the Reliant parentage! It was eventually sold for about £ 3,000 I believe, but to whom I do not know.

The Cipher was a very pretty little car, but would have needed re-tooling to get it into production, and, bearing in mind that the boss of TVR disliked anything with an engine less than 4 litres, it was doomed. A projected 1.6 litre TVR suffered the same fate! We concentrated on getting the Rover V8 engine to work, and the rest is history as they say
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Kind regards, John Box – Burton in Kendal

Many thanks John for the story, see the adverts at the back for details of some bits John has which are for sale.

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Dear Brian, May.'96

Many thanks for the steering rod, we began fitting it ourselves, but gave up the idea pretty quickly as there was so little space to work with! (Now you know why it took so long for me to get it to you in the first place, Ed) and we didn't know how easy it would be to remove and re-fit. In the event, not so easy, it took our local garage 2 hours to do the job, even with a proper ramp to work with, and we reckoned that it was a good job that we hadn't tried to do it ourselves at the side of the road.

Anyhow, the replacement has transformed the rattle situation. We enclose the old unit as requested, no doubt we will need a reconditioned one at sometime in the future.

Rob & Fiona Wilkes - Abingdon

My pleasure, only glad to be able to help keep another Kitten on the road, mind you, I don't know about this going off at a tangent, I mean this tandem thing – Rob & Fiona seem to have discovered the joys of a bicycle built for two, does this mean their Kitten days are numbered? I think not, but watch this space - Ed.

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Dear Brian, Mar.'96

Thanks for the prompt reply to my last words. As regards extra information on the Register, I do think that the date of purchase / sale is good information to have, as you can then see if a guy is keen and had it a long time, or you'll see the car being sold on. But at least you would have recorded it as you are trying to do. The slot for 'sold' would of course from time to time have 'scrapped' in it when you and I, and a couple of others take one apart. "Justifiable homicide" is the term (should happen to all three wheelers for their engines and gearboxes.) I actually shouldn't be so rude, as I did 83,000 miles in a Robin.

As regards the frequency of the Mewsletter, if that can be every two months, I think that would help no end to keep interest up, and help to justify your maintaining a sales and wants page.

I read in number 7 that John Metcalfe wants to see a 'what fits what' book (oh jings, something else I haven't made progress with, Ed.) So why not let's start with a sheet or two, and see it grow into a booklet. This could be run closely with a "Where do you find this or that ?" part sheet. I have quite a few ideas of how to run this, for quantity, not one offs. Let me know what you think, I'd be happy to help.

As regards my credentials, I have been involved with the committee of the Norton Owners Club for over 25 years – (What, no time off for good behaviour? Ed) and 20 years ago was Club Editor. Which brings me to your mini-mag idea. I have checked with our club printer, and for quantities of less than 500 it is not viable.

If you can get the momentum going to go bi-monthly, I can offer you a series of articles based on me and my friends combined 300,000 miles and much modification. Perhaps I will get a page pr two ready before you next go to print.

Cheers, Alan – West Drayton

Thanks Alan,. Yes please can I have the articles, and we must talk some more about the lists of parts – one thing I do want to help get off the ground is the re-conditioning of these front lower ball joints. I believe that the easiest answer is for us all to send one, or better yet more than one, to John Box, as he has done the preparatory work, and has a company lined up to do the job. But needs a minimum of 10 old units to get the system going. They even have grease nipples. So, any old unit lower ball joints to John Box please, at :- Stable Cottage, Thornleigh Drive, Burton in Kendal, Carnforth LA6 1NQ.

Right, having said hat I have just spoken to John to confirm the current situation, and he has managed to get a batch done, and currently (11/6/96) has 6 in stock for just £32 each exchange, plus v.a.t. and p&p, you already have his address, the number to ring is 01524 781841, and don't forget to tell him where you heard about them.

How did I get sidetracked this time, oh yes, never mind. On with the mag.

A Red Car Tale

I pondered for a while as to whether to write this article or not, and if I did, what to call it? As it will form part of the history of the red car, it would be getting written in some form at some time, and since there are not too many articles from other subscribers this time, there were some pages to fill – so, it's your fault, send me no articles and you will just have to put up with my stuff! Anyway, you all had your chance and missed it. The red car in question was advertised both within these pages, and in the prestigious pages of Slice last year.

When I was asked to take a 1927 Morris Cowley down to the Norfolk area by a friend, I wondered if the wee red car had found a new home, as I would have an empty trailer coming back to Scotland. A 'phone call to Keith was all it took to learn that the car had not sold, and was urgently needing a new home, and had just passed its M.O.T. that very week. Well, that put me in a spot because I had neither the money or space to get involved, but as I told you all in the advert at the time, it was an incredible bargain. Much grovelling to wife later, and I agreed a deal with Keith, who kindly allowed me to pay for the car in two stages. And so in February I set off in an effort to combine a number of things in the one trip.

My mother, who does not enjoy driving long distances these days, had expressed a wish to see her cousin who had not been keeping too well, and my daughter loves staying at friends near Gate Helmsley, just the other side of York. Mother's cousin lives in Hessay, just this side of

York, and with Norfolk and back being 850 miles, and so really too much to do in a day when towing, a plan was hatched which would let mother visit her cousin for a couple of days, daughter stay and play with horses at Gate Helmsley, while I went to Norfolk, and collected the red car from Keith on the way back to collect mother and daughter. Sounded like a good plan to me. I would stay at Gate Helmsley on the Monday and Tuesday nights, and fit in a visit to Michael Bentley on the way home. Some of you may remember Michael, he was the chap who used to publish the Rebel Register's Rebellion for Terry Scott some years ago, and has what must be the best restored Rebel in the land.

All was going well and we left Glasgow in bright sunshine on the Monday morning. There was a trace of snow in the air as we passed Beattock Summit, and we pressed on to the Little Chef on the A66 for a coffee. By the time we had sat down the snow came on, and when we left 20 minutes later we discovered that the Police had shut the road, and were diverting traffic back to the M6.

Knowing the geography of the area a bit, Michael Bentley lives in Preston under Scar these days, just a few miles south west of Scotch Corner. I thought I'd be clever and just cut south through Kirkby Stephen and along the A684 to pick up the A1. A bad idea, as the weather got worse. I soon realised that I had made a mistake as I was reduced to first gear and having to zig-zag across the road to get up small hills that were not steep at all, but the snow was freezing, and there had been no gritting on the B road, the B6259 if you are interested. There was not a lot of grip, and I have always towed with quite a high nose weight on the trailer, but with the Citroen being front wheel drive, and the front tyres were just about due for replacement having less than 3mm of tread – Then, through the haze of driving snow, we saw one of the old viaducts on the Settle to Carlisle railway line looming on our left. I had just got over a small hill, in second this time, and had just changed up to third when it became clear that the road was going to turn left and go under the railway. So, remembering those old tried and tested rules of the road about changing direction or speed on snow and ice, I took my foot off the throttle with a view to braking gently – what an idiot, imagine doing a stupid thing like that ! No sooner had I lifted my foot off the throttle than the engine, being high compression as all diesels are, dropped to idle, and the front wheels had lost what little grip they had before I even got my foot on the brake. I knew then I was in serious trouble. I tried a little left lock, no change. I tried blipping the throttle to spin the wheels a bit and see if I could get any grip to steer, but nothing. I tried braking, nothing, By now I was not sure how much left lock I had on, and the bend was upon us. I told mother and Arleen to hold on as we were going to hit the bridge, and stood on the brake in the hope that we might lose some speed before impact. The last thing I wanted to do was find grip at the last second, and turn so violently that the car on the trailer might get up to mischief. Straight into the old stone bridge we went. I honestly don't know how fast we were going, I guess about 15 miles an hour, we did not break the windscreen, but made a right mess of the front lights and bonnet and wings. I tried to restart the engine, it had stalled, and it did run, but there was a screeching noise, so I stopped it immediately, put the hazards on, and hoped to goodness that no one would run into the back of us.

To cut a very long story short, (yes really) the A.A. could not get through to us because of the weather, and a local farmer, whose wife had been a wonderful hostess for the afternoon, ran us to the tow truck, which took us to Gate Helmsley, kindly dropping mother off at Hessay on the way. The following day they recovered the cars, and trailer home for me.

I took the train, well 4 of them actually, as it happened, from York to Kettering where Keith who had kindly arranged the afternoon off work, met me, and took me to be united with the wee red car, which, instead of getting a ride to its new home on a trailer, was going to carry us all home to Scotland. (Another Kitten liberated!)

Perhaps I should have realised then that it was not all going to be plain sailing, but then again since it was a car I was buying, and not an aircraft or a boat, perhaps plane sailing would have been too much to hope for.

I think that was probably my third visit to the Parrott residence, and I always seem to be in a rush. Sorry Keith, one of these days I'll have time for a proper chat. Still, the wee red car took me back to Gate Helmsley for the night, and we loaded our stuff on board the next morning in about 2" of snow, and went off to collect mother from Hessay, and called in to see Michael Bentley, as planned, on the way home.

I had noticed on my way up the M1 yesterday that the voltmeter got so hot that you couldn't touch it, but only when you had a drain on the system, like light on. But on the way up the M6 the drivers wiper blade flew off, and I had to drive without wipers a few miles to the next service area, where, fortunately, the shortest blade they had was only 1" too long, and fitted fine. By the time we got home, I had also detoured by John Box's and left mother and daughter shopping in Kendal. I had a list of 14 things I wanted to do to the car. This, the wonderful beast I had been trying to encourage you all to buy but a few months earlier!!

In the best Gilbert & Sullivan tradition, my little list went like this:-

I must remove the cooling fan so the engine will get hot a bit, and fit expansion tank so the rad will hold some more of it.

Align the voltage meter more correctly in the dash, and find out why it gets so very hot, oh balderdash.

Make bright all of the instrument illuminating lights, remove the thermostat and all other things like that.

Align the windscreen washer jets and check the all round tyres now.

Retard ignition timing while fitting new plugs and points you know. I don't think they'll be new, I'm sure they'll not be new!

Then these's the steering column bush, and all round brake adjustment too.

I'm sure they'll need done, they really must be done.

O.K, G & S were a lot better at it than I, but that's my little list, and I don't think much has been missed.

Thanks to Phil Hallam for the use of facilities. I got all 4 brake drums off, cleaned and dusted, and adjusted the brakes, one front adjuster was tight. Indeed I still have to free it off. But the adjustment reduced by half the brake pedal travel and handbrake lever movement. So that was two things off the list. Fortunately Phil had a steering column bush, so that got done, and I was able to take advantage of having the steering wheel off, to align it properly at the same time. It had only been one spline out, but those little things really bug me, especially in a car that is far and away the best I have ever owned in so many ways. An oil and filter change took care of two more, and Donald Jack kindly finished removing the fan for me the following week. It never fails to amaze me how some of those bolts will come out with your fingers, and others, like on this car, need a spanner the whole way. Also of interest to me is the fact that on some Kittens I have owned I could remove the fan with a small socket and ratchet, while others, like this one, simply do not have enough clearance between the radiator and the fan for that to be possible, and it has to be done with an open ended spanner. Now I realise that some Kittens have the earlier metal fan fitted, and some the three blade deeper nylon thing in which the bolts are recessed, but even between those with the same type of fan there seems to be varying amounts of clearance between them and the radiator.

No matter, a change of thermostat, why can't I get a 92 degree thermostat these days? my local accessory shop claims to sell them, but every box I open has an 88 degree one, even though it says 92 on the box!

I still can't get the engine up to temperature without a large bit of cardboard stuck in front of the radiator!

The list was getting smaller, then the horn failed, and the interior light, wait a minute, aren't they on the same circuit ? check the fuse, O.K., but it turns out to be an intermittent fault, and the headlamp flasher does not work now either. Then I find that only one brake light is working, but it's not the bulb, and it's working again. I am trying not to get frustrated, but it is a pain when faults are intermittent, I think I'll replace the fusebox itself, and see if that cures the horn and interior light problem.

One problem which did arise was the inability to unlock the passengers door, a real pain, as not only is one of the car's daily tasks to take daughter to and from school, but I also run my 82 year old neighbour to the pub every evening, and while Arleen can climb over, Jim can't ! Thanks this time to Douglas Philip, who helped me to remove the door trim, not easy when the door is closed, and we removed and freed off the operating rod which was causing the problem. I find it very difficult to put these things back, you can see where the rod is to go before you put your hand in to do it, but once your hand is in there you can't see a thing. Douglas managed it for me, but could not get the retaining washer back on. It has been working fine for a couple of months, but I have no doubt that as soon as I forget about it, it will come off again just to remind me that I still have that washer to fit. We shortened the locking rod a bit, it is threaded, and I often find with Kittens that when you lock the door from inside the car the handle springs back a bit, well springs back forward if you see what I mean. Whereas if it is adjusted properly, it goes back with a neat clunk, and stays right back against the other opening lever. The reason that so many of them spring forward again is simply that the locking rod is too long, and the rod flexes when you force it back, and springs back to being straight when you let the locking handle go, hence forcing the handle forward a bit. I have no doubt this will sound very strange to those who have ones which are adjusted correctly, but I am sure that many of you will have experienced the problem all too often. Perhaps it does not bother you at all, perhaps you even thought that was how it is meant to work, and please don't go taking it to bits to see, because, if your fingers are nearly as clumsy as mine seem to be these days, you will need Douglas, or someone like him, to put it all back together again – you have been warned. That old maxim "If 'taint broke, don't fix it" springs to mind.

I have done nothing, except worry a bit, about the volt meter heating up, and I have not done anything about fitting an electric fan yet, well, it is June now, and it still won't heat up properly. As to making the radio work without the ignition on, well thanks to Les Cruickshank, that works fine now with the ignition on the auxiliary position, you have to feed it from the relevant spade connector on the ignition switch, not the fuse box.

There is however a leak from the new windscreen rubber which I have to address, though in fairness all of my Kittens have leaked, it's just that this one did not when it came into my custody, and it was nice to have a dry interior for a change.

I have yet to do something about the rear window stay, or lack of same. I think it was the Hillman Imp that used the same part, but there ain't many of them about these days either! All of a sudden the list of things to do seems to be getting bigger instead of smaller, still, I suppose if I got out there and did some of the work on the car instead of writing this, I might make some progress!

The water consumption that I mentioned elsewhere, was in fact simple to cure, but the solution involved a slight modification to the rocker cover. This car has one of the alloy rocker

covers which we had made last year fitted, and it is in fact slightly wider than the standard pressed steel one. In this car that meant that you could not turn the brass heater take off pipe on top of the cylinder head, without either removing the rocker cover, or, as we did, cutting a little of the aluminium away, just to clear the points of the nut, or whatever the technical term is for that bit. Thank you John Blagburn for fixing that for me.

The car has averaged mid fifties to the gallon for the 4,000 miles or so it has covered under my right foot in the past 4 months, and does not use a lot of oil, though more than I am used to. It always starts very well when hot, but cranks for a while before firing every morning. So, as you will have gathered, I have not found life at all dull with the wee red car. Do I regret buying it ? Not for a minute, but it has given me more trouble in 4 months than almost any other Kitten I have ever owned, and it did cost 5 times as much as the average price I pay for my Kittens, but none of them have a galvanised chassis, or Goodridge flexible brake hoses !

Brian

The 1996 Doune Classic Challenge

One of the things which I used to like so much about the May Doune Inter Club Challenge, was the fact that it used to be just a day for a variety of Car Club members to meet and enjoy themselves, without the hassle of trade stands or the general public. Sadly commercial pressures over the years have led us to the unfortunate compromise with which we find ourselves stuck today.

I say unfortunately because it takes away a lot of the enjoyment for me personally, but it does have two advantages, well three if you count the fact that the organisers make money out of it now, rather than having to subsidise it as they did in the past!

Firstly, because there are other things going on, the organisers, who, being mere mortals like the rest of us, can't do two things at once, give us a rest while they try to sell cars. Now in days gone by I found it really annoying to have our days driving interrupted in this manner, and I still do, but I will concede that in my old age such a break in the days proceedings is no bad thing. It means that we are not having to dash about moving cones between events, but can take our time about it. Also, and credit where it is due, John Blagburn's eagle eye spotted a pair of Kitten type headlights, brand new in their boxes, for just £9 the pair, in the autojumble! less than I had been looking for one secondhand one, which Jim Spence had been looking for, and I had been unable to come up with anyway. So there are advantages to all this outside attention!

I had brought John Blagburn along with me as his own Kitten is off the road at the moment, and we had arranged to take Andy up with us. Just to give another of those with the missing wheel a taste of what we get up to at such events – sadly the R.A.C. regs prevent the participation of tricycles in such things.

My own Kitten (the wee red car) had developed a water leak from the heater take off at the back of the cylinder head, and I was reluctant to attempt a repair in case I made things worse, so, running with a loose pressure cap and a spare water bottle we did the best we could.

In the event, Alan's starter motor was proving less than reliable. This was his Kitten's (the yellow peril's) first day out for a couple of months, and while it was looking good after its respray, and decorated in its Demon Tweaks logos, yes he has managed to find some sponsorship at last, a shiny car that won't start is not a lot of use for such an event, besides, Alan was in the wrong place at the wrong time when Tony Flint, the event organiser, was seeking help with the running of the event, not only that, but Alan had a better stopwatch than Tony, so he was duly elected official timekeeper for the day, and we were down one car and driver.

Jim Spence had said all along that he was not happy about competing in his Fiat 1600cc twin cam powered Kitten due to a lack of ground clearance caused by his non-standard exhaust system, and I would be the last person to try and persuade anyone that there is no risk to the cars

at such an event. So while we had 5 Kittens, and Hamish in his Scimitar, we just entered the one team, and found a Triumph and a Morgan to keep Hamish Company. They called themselves the mixed bag, which seemed fair enough, and we were of course running as the Resin Rockets.

Our Rockets were manned by Adam and Gerry Grieve, who were the only car competing today who had been part of last year's winning team, in their faded red Kitten estate. Peter and Gavin Linfield, all the way from Banavie above Fort William, who were taking part in this sort of event for the first time, (they would have won the scruffy wheel award if we had such a thing) and yours truly, in the wee red car, smartest of the bunch if I do say so myself, with Andy as passenger to give him a real taste of the event, well, John had both driven and been a passenger at this sort of thing before, and besides, Andy can run faster!

There were 10 teams in all, we were picked to run in the third group, against Morris Magic, a team of three Morris Minors. I did hear the team name Morris Dancers banded about, but we ran rings round them whatever their name was.

To try and give you a mental picture, each team consists of three cars, each with a driver and at least one passenger. The course is run by all three cars relay fashion. It begins and ends in the centre of the field where the official time keeper and chief marshal are situated. The field is split in two, with virtually identical courses set out in each half. Two teams run simultaneously on the course. When the two teams have completed their side of the course, they swap sides and do it all again. This not only gives us twice the fun, but removes any advantage one side of the course might have over the other.

The two drivers, one from the first car in each team, are started off when the time keeper starts his clocks, they have to run to their cars, open the driver's door (no jumping in to open top cars is allowed, unless the car has no door) get in, start the engine, and drive round the course, usually this takes between 1 and 2 minutes. At the end of the course you are required to stop astride the finish line, and the passenger then has to run to the second car in the team to start it off. Sometimes we have to pass on a tennis ball or other token. The second car, which will have been sitting with its engine running, will now dash round the course (half of which was driven in reverse this year) When the second car finishes , its passenger runs to tag the third car, and the same mad dash ensues. This time at the end, the passenger has to run to the point in the middle of the field where the first car's drivers started from to stop the clock.

5 second penalties are awarded for touching a cone, failing to fully enter a 'garage' or taking a wrong route.

I must admit to feeling a bit tired these days, and instead of watching what should have been going on, I just watched what Peter did, and copied him. That was most unfair of me because, as I said before, this was Peter's first time at this sort of event, and he was driving a noisy car, the silencer having come off at Crianlarich on his way down earlier in the day. He had in fact gone the wrong way round part of the course, for which we picked up 10 penalty points, and I did the very same thing! So much for experience. Still the attendant 20 second penalty put the team into 7th place overall, and went some way to lulling our opponents into a false sense of hope that they might finally manage to beat the Resin Rockets.

A team of Kittens, and in some years gone past the odd Rebel, has either won this event, or come second for the past 4 years, so we have a psychological advantage, it has become a standing joke when the others see us arrive, they all know that their battle is for second place!

The tactic seemed to work well enough, because after the second test we were lying third equal, and so still had some way to go if we were to retain the rose bowl, and win first prize.

I had felt wickedly pleased when Tony Flint, one of the organisers, had rung me up the previous Wednesday, to ask if I would mind collecting the Jim Arbuckle memorial trophy from

Club Lotus (I'm sure some of those Elans have LSD's) and bring it with me for presentation to the winners. It seemed ironic that the award should be brought back to Doune in a car belonging to team Lotus' main rivals. They were not able to put a team together for the event this year, perhaps Lotus' hibernate for longer than our hard working little cars!

The final saw us up against a team of VW Beetles from the Lothian VW Club, the combination of low power, large wheels, and the engine sitting over the driven, rear wheels, makes a beetle a formidable opponent on wet grass, and by now the rain had been on for half an hour. We seemed very evenly matched, till one of their lot was unlucky enough to clip a cone and so incur a 5 second penalty, giving us the edge. On the final half of the course it was very close, reminded me of running against team Lotus in years past. We couldn't seem to get ahead of them at all, try as they might Adam and Peter were running neck and neck with their opposite numbers in the VW Club. When it was my turn I was really wishing I had let the tyres down a bit more. It is very frustrating wanting to go faster, but not daring to press the go pedal any more, as you are already spinning a wheel, oh for a limited slip diff. Still I seemed to pull something out of the hat, because Andy had started his run in to the finish, and I was able to watch my Beetle draw to a halt, and his passenger start his run in to stop the clock, when Andy was already half way home. And we still had that 5 seconds in hand, what a final!

The important thing is that we enjoyed the day, had a lot of fun, and, of course kept the title and our reputation intact for another year, and reinforced the belief that those Kittens are virtually unbeatable, on grass at least – more silverware for Moira to polish!

Brian.

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For Sale :- Fully restored and part customised royal blue metallic with black trim, new headlining and carpets & re-upholstered Kitten Estate 1976. Completely overhauled engine, gearbox and chassis and suspension. New wiring loom, inertia reel seatbelts + 2 spare sets of running gear, halogen headlights, dual circuit brakes, lots of detail work. Walnut veneer inlay dash board and matching steering wheel. Oh the list is endless. Tel : 01325 469202 & ask for Malcolm Glasper £900 o.n.o.

Kitten Van, not modified, but very original, offers around £400. Tel. :- 01708 704739

Alan tells me, we are both often asked, "How much" for the Yellow Peril, that he will let it go for £1000. I'm tempted to talk to my bank manager and call his bluff! 01505 328114

John Box has the following secondhand bits for sale:- 700cc engine £75 rear axle, front suspensions, L/H door, bonnet, and a full set of saloon glass @ £50 the lot

Right, you have all had a couple of editions now without the basic Register details taking up part of the magazine, and already some people are asking why? Well, as I said before, it is happily getting bigger, 230 odd entries at the last count, and so it would fill almost a third of the magazine, so you'll know when I'm getting short of articles!

Seriously though, if anyone wants an up to date list, just send me 4 first class stamps, and a brief note with your name and address, and I'll send you off a copy. Otherwise, as I'm sure I said somewhere in the past, I may put it out once a year.

At the risk of repeating myself (I'm running out of time, and am not going to read it all over again to see if I told you already) the July edition of Street Machine has an interesting article on how to make your Kitten go faster, a bit desperate for my liking, but see what you think – thanks to John Blagburn for the information.

Talk to you again in the Autumn.

BRIAN