

Reliant Kitten Register

MEWSLETTER Forty

May/June 2001



The Register caters for all the under 1 litre Reliant 4-wheeled vehicles plus all of their derivatives – Rebels, Foxes, Tempests, Salamanders, Ciphers, Jimps, Asquiths and all other specials including the Liege.....

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The Reliant Kitten Register

MEWSLETTER No. 40

The following individuals have kindly agreed to give and receive information on the following topics on our behalf :

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Our Mutual Aid Spares scheme is run by Phil Hallam 4, Greenhead Holding, Stevenston Ayrshire
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Mewsletter pictures – can be sent in via the Editor or sent direct to John Pearce at 22, Brook
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This time our front cover shows a fox Pick-up which was advertised in the last edition. This one has an interesting history having lived in Holland for a while, and then being returned to the land of its creation. It sports a roof mounted spare wheel and spot lights, and has a to bar, and is I believe still on the market, it can be yours for £ 500 I am told – see the adverts page for details.

The Register has a, now fairly old, web page at :- <http://www.uk-classic-cars.com/kitten.htm>

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It should be noted that opinions and ideas printed in this publication are as recommended by our readers, and do not necessarily have the approval of the Reliant Kitten Register. Owners must satisfy themselves as to the suitability of any suggestions made within these pages as no responsibility can be accepted

Hello again, I must try harder, Moira was complaining that she only laughed once while proof reading the last edition – she has for a while been threatening to write a piece on the ‘joys’ of living with the Registrar, and If I wind her up enough, who knows!

Anyway, here we are, edition 40 already – who said it wouldn’t last? You have got off lightly recently as far as input from me is concerned, so I will bore you all with a tale of ancient history, and a plan for the future. I have written the 7,000 odd word story in two parts, after our adventure last weekend (middle of March) we’ll see how much of this edition your contributions fill, before deciding whether to include the whole story in this edition, or serialise it!

When I mailed you your copy of edition 39, about 40 people instead got a letter asking them if their subscription had lapsed because of an oversight, or if they really had had enough of this waffle. I have to say that that is the largest number of non-renewals I have ever had in a year. Offset I am happy to say by a record number of new subscribers since Christmas. I hope that this is neither a trend, nor an indication of a serious decline in Kitten numbers. I know that each year a few are scrapped for a variety of reasons, which, while sad, does seem to be a fact of life. I am also aware that subscribers to this Register represent only about a third of Kitten owners in the land, a considerably higher percentage than many other organisations enjoy, but none the less there is considerable room for expansion.

At the time of writing only eight of them have renewed, and a few have let me know that they no longer own a Kitten.

Phil Hallam in the last edition was giving us an early warning about spares, which I thought was a bit pessimistic, but it is a fact that if we are ever to be in the position of having to get bits made, we do have something of a mountain to climb as far as reaching minimum quantities is concerned.

I know that it is important to do all we can to secure the future for these wee cars, but certain parts, which would be relatively expensive to manufacture, are available in numbers which, based on my experience, represent a supply that would last a hundred years and more, and I am concerned that to draw attention to certain situations, might leave me / us faced with a situation where we have to buy the lot, or risk seeing them scrapped. Given that we have neither the money or space to purchase or store such things, there are decisions to be made, and situations to address. I am grateful to a number of people for their help and advice on such matters. Watch this space.

As I have said in the past, do let me, or Phil or the relevant alternative parts person, know if you are having any spares problems that threaten to keep your car off the road.

On the Kitten front, in response to my comments last time regarding front side lamps, I had a call from Graeme Shaw, our man in Glossop, well, one of our men in Glossop, anyway, Graeme was able to confirm my belief that all Kittens were made with the sidelights incorporated in the headlamps. Even the kits sold after production ceased. In fact he tells me that those kits were the result of a cancelled export order, possibly for Israel, anyway, they were all left hand drive, though some were converted to right hand drive at the time for sale here. They were offered to dealers at the time, without any Reliant warranty. But even they had the sidelights in the headlamps. There is of course no problem getting the right thing, the factory have them in stock, the only problem is the price at about £ 50 each by the time you include the V.A.T. I believe.

In fact I am happy to say that the general belief is that there is no serious spares supply problem for the Kitten at this time, as I’ve said before, if you think differently, please let me know.

Dear Brian,

01/05/01

Please belatedly renew my subscription to the Register, and could you do me a great favour and enclose the following letter in the Mewsletter, I knew I should have bought a good second hand Fox !

Now I have to say that I do not want this magazine to become a platform for such things, but just this once, seeing it's you Steve:- Ed.

Looking for Aixam Drivers

I am looking for other Aixam owners to find out about their cars.

The Aixam 500 is regularly advertised in my local paper. The advertisement states that it is corrosion proof. When I bought a convertible version I asked about corrosion, and was informed "Longevity was one of the most important qualities designed into all Aixams." Unfortunately, after three months I found my chassis was covered in rust – Aixam replied that chipping was inevitable on an exposed chassis. Additionally I have had repeated electrical faults, apparently due to the ingress of water into electrical connections. Hence I would be pleased to hear from other owners to find out about their experiences with their Aixam.

Please contact Steve Barker, 22 Robinson Road, Rushden, NN120 0EH - For more information see :- <http://uk.clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/aixamandmicrocar>

What I would say in passing is that my understanding is that the convertible is potentially a problem, not only because it has no roof or windows, but also because to give it the stiffness it needs, it is the only vehicle Aixam build which does not have their alloy chassis. That said the obvious comment that I should be making is to say, yes Steve, you should have bought a good Fox ! Mind you, good Foxes are about as rare as good Rebels these days ! Ed.

Dear Brian,

20th February 2001

Passenger Door Lock Problems

The passenger's door catch on PYB 262P has always been erratic in fastening properly, often it just catches on the first (safety?) position. Leaving the door ajar with consequent draughts. So I moved the catch plate (again!) but soon the door would again not shut properly. Curses! look more closely, and try yet another adjustment... and the bottom catch plate screw won't tighten up properly! The threads had gone, so replace it, and all now seems well.

The outside button on the passenger's door ceased working. So I removed the inner door panel, and manage to unfasten the operating rods from the inner handle (no, you do not need to remove the inner handle), then the removal of the 4 screws permits the door catch to be wangled out. The bit of tin that the screw from the outer handle presses onto was bent, and a bit of careful bending back with pliers cured that. Then I saw that the wire rod and tongue to lock the door were floating about. It took a while to work out where they went, but eventually they went into place. Now to re- assemble. After retrieving the inner tapped plate from the bottom of the door, it was tricky to hold both lock and plate in position to insert the screws. A thin screwdriver pushed from outside through one of the screw holes and just inside the door, helped to locate the plate while getting the first screw started. Once all was back in place, the door lock functioned as intended.

year having been used to doing not a lot more than a 10th of that. To be fair to the car, it was my lack of expertise, combined with insufficient funding that prevented it from doing the job.

So by 1978 we were needing a vehicle that would provide reliable daily transport, we went through a succession of tin bodied devices from a Morris Marina through a Hillman Avenger (wonderful car that, almost as good handling as the Javelin, and that's saying something) a Volvo 244, and a Beetle 1302S, funny numbering system they used, the 1302S had a 1600cc engine! There followed a Talbot Horizon, driving the wrong end I know, but you should not knock things till you have tried them, so I have, but in spite of current beliefs, and the fact that we do run a Citroen BX these days, (couldn't afford a Peugeot, but got their wonderful diesel engine just the same!). The one thing that BMW, Mercedes and Reliant, not to mention Rolls Royce do have right, is the wheels they drive!

In between all these diversions I managed to sneak in another Reliant, a Kitten this time. I remember the week, if not the day we bought it. I had booked tickets to see Stephan Grapelli in the Theatre Royal in Glasgow, Moira was not at all impressed, (nae culture!) but I had a wonderful evening grappelling with Stephan.

The Kitten had been used for towing, and unfortunately had two broken back springs. NNS 191P stayed with us for a couple of years, by which time I had started collecting Rebels. My search for my first one took me to junction 8 on the M1. This memory of mine, while no use for many things, does retain some unbelievably useless bits of information. Victoria was the then 3 year old daughter of the woman from whom the Rebel was purchased. PJJ 697L had been given to her husband, a Scimitar man, to repair, and he had removed its gearbox and taken it to a specialist to be fixed. Then, tragically, he had an accident in a private aircraft, and the Rebel's owner told his widow just to sell it. So she advertised it in Exchange and Mart, and it came about that I took a trailer 400 miles to buy an unseen white Rebel estate car, with the gearbox in the boot, for £150. This in 1981 or thereabouts.

When I fitted the gearbox, and started the engine, the big ends were away, and so began the foundation of an intimate knowledge of these wee cars.

It was just about that time that I had discovered that my legs didn't work properly, and I had secured a place on a training course at Q.E.T.C. in Leatherhead in Surrey. I was hastily trying to complete the Rebel to make it reliable enough to use to commute between Renfrew and Leatherhead every other weekend for three months. I almost succeeded, but lack of funds stopped me short of getting the radiator reconditioned, and the one failure it had during the 6,000 miles it covered in the following three months was the 'new' voltage regulator that I had fitted along with a new starter motor and new generator. It turned out that none of these items were new at all, they were all reconditioned, and in the case of the voltage regulator, not very well reconditioned! That apart, engine overheating was the only problem encountered. Cruising at more than 48 to 50 M.P.H. for any distance was not sustainable, and so it became a 12-hour journey from Renfrew to Leatherhead every other weekend. I had a Kingston bridge to cross at both ends, the one in Glasgow over the River Clyde, and the one at Kingston on Thames near the south end of the trip.

The one thing those three months did teach me about the Reliant was that it could be depended on, and was a very useful cargo carrier which did not use a terrible amount of fuel. As an added bonus it was fun to chuck around, you could drift it round corners in the wet, the only thing it needed was a bit more power, and there was by then a certain 848cc engine available....

So there I was, a fibre glass bodied estate car, with by this time a stainless steel exhaust, and radial tyres, yes I always tell insurance companies about these digressions from standard spec. I even removed the dashboard, fitted an extra fuse box to feed the reversing lights, rear fog lamps, rear wiper,

and electric washers. Painted the dash brown, fitted a row of three extra warning lights along the top, between the two instruments, fitted an additional 300 degree sweep oil pressure gauge, and generally had it just the way I wanted it to be.

The training at Leatherhead however failed to produce the job I had been hoping for, being trained is one thing, having experience is quite another, and so circumstances forced me to choose between the Rebel, the Kitten and Moira's Beetle. Well we had buyers clamouring up to buy the Beetle and the Rebel, so we let them go and ran the Kitten for a while.

The Rebel did come back into my hands the following year after it had been involved in an accident, and I had to graft the front of another one onto it to make it useable again, yes body and chassis grafts were involved.

Tragically, well exceedingly frustratingly at any rate, vandals burnt down the lock-up where I had been working on the Rebel just before I got it back on the road. I was so close to having it ready, that I had even transferred the insurance to it, but the company I worked for sent me to London on a course for a couple of days, and I did not have time to get it M.O.T.'d first. Unknown to me as I was flying out of Glasgow, the lock-up was being burnt to the ground with the Rebel in it.

Anyway, there I was, expecting to be on an intensive course which in fact turned out to be the proverbial walk in the park, so I took the evening off and went east to the west end, the Prince Edward Theatre it was, "Anything Goes" was the show, (you know the one, - "In olden days a glimpse of stocking...") wonderful evening, only to return home the following day to find my pride and joy destroyed by vandals.

At this point the Kitten was having a number of problems, and a succession of Rebels followed. Chassis corrosion was the biggest problem that they suffered from. We devised solutions to them all, but I was getting less and less able to do the work myself.

By this time our daughter Arleen had come on the scene, and the wee Rebel saloon FYS 32L served us well for a few years, however in spite of lots of waxoil, chassis corrosion got the better of it too in the end. Its body lives on to this day having just changed hands from John Johnstone to Ian Johnston this year!

The Kitten chassis is both younger and less prone to corrosion, and so we bought another one of them. By this time my walking was so bad that I qualified for a "motability" car, and so we opted for the diesel Citroen BX, and I have to say that after 7 and a bit years, and 125,000 miles or so (it has done 159,000, but had done almost 34,000 when we bought it) it still manages to go further on a gallon of fuel than either my current Rebel or Moira's Kitten, though they are both more fun to drive than the Citroen, it does have to be said that its comfy ride and good heating and ventilation system are beginning to win me over on these cold winter days!

Arleen will soon be learning to drive, and I need to decide if I can afford to insure the Kitten for her, or if she will be 'stuck' with the Rebel, which for some reason is a lot cheaper to insure than the Kitten – Classic car polices excluded! (such specialist policies do not cover drivers under the age of 25).

So there you have it, a Rebel estate car is what I need, and so when the chassis rotted away under HYS 418L, which had a particularly good body, I opted to find a good chassis for it, and do a full restoration, including the installation of a good 850cc engine, and, if done properly, that would last for decades rather than years, and give trouble free, economical enjoyable motoring, that was the Plan! Yes yes, and a good plan too!

Gresley Pacifics, come on, own up, who else besides me remembers the L.N.E.R., and their Chief Engineer Sir Nigel? – we do still hold the world record for speed with a steam locomotive you know, set just before the outbreak of WWII – NO I DON'T remember, my dad told me !

*More recently Auto Union, well Audi at any rate, use that series of letters and numbers to denote the type of motor car you are buying from them, and several of them will exceed Mallard's 126 MPH! Not bad that, over two miles a minute by steam over 60 years ago, (even if it did run its big ends doing it!) progress – what progress? strange old world we live in – anyway, enough of my digressing, Ed. - It does sound as if it is another can of worms you have opened, the best guide is to ask the person you are buying from, what grade are they ?. If they say they don't know, or it doesn't matter, go elsewhere, the best answer is it is as listed above or 'I will find out'. As a general guide I would say that using s/steel nuts and bolts **together** to secure body parts and trim, fine no problem at all. Putting s/steel nuts onto plain steel studs or bolts be careful, you could be making things worse. Remember s/steel is a mixture of steel and exotic metals which under the right conditions (especially wet) will react with the steel stud/bolt to give you rapid corrosion by electrolysis, that is in simple terms the metals form a crude battery. The second often forgotten point is that the plain steel and the s/steel will have different rates of expansion with heat and will either jam solid or more likely work loose. The other trick people forget is that the torque settings given for the normal steel joints will be either too high or low. What is the best grade ?, A2 would be best and I have used this on very high loading joints, after this the bigger the number the lower the grade.*

P.S. The old chestnut about s/steel not being magnetic is not really true, any s/steel will magnetise if the ratio between the piece and magnet is big enough.

Braking without a servo

On some of the earlier Scimmies it has been a problem that the servo cannot be repaired or exchanged and one answer was to fit a different master cylinder. The main criteria was to fit a larger bore, this increases the piston surface area and the pressure of the hydraulic oil acting on the brakes, I believe in the above they used MGB parts. It is weird at first to drive but after a short period you do not notice the difference, unless of course you go back to a modern car.

Assuming your cylinder bore is 1" you can with your right foot exert 100lbs (at least) push on your pedal creating 78.5 psi on your hydraulic system which is boosted by the servo. Using your school maths for the area of a piston ($3.142 \times r \times r$), *yea, I remember, "See I have a rhyme..."*, *how many blackbirds was it again ? Oh yes, Kitten wheels on the road plus the first or second part of perfect vision. Oh just eat the blooming thing! Ed.* multiplied by the 100 gives the psi. If you can find a piston of say 2" you will create 314 psi. If you can push harder you will get more but I am just trying to give an example as the pressure created is not as simple as you first expect. The downside would be that as you now have a larger piston you are moving more oil for the same amount of travel of your foot, the 'feel' of the brakes will be totally different.

I hope these points are of interest to you.

David Asselbrough - Fleet.

Thanks for that David, I look forward to the day when you 'finish' the 6A, and we might hear from you again – sorry for the interruptions, it is currently the 18th of March, 02:15, and I am still coming to terms with the shock of having sold, yes, you heard me, I have sold the Rebel project – good luck with it Ian (Johnston). Don't worry about me, I will recover, and might even write the book, be not breath

holding in anticipation, it is now almost three years since Moira's wee red car took me from Lands End to John O'Groats, and I have not finished writing that story up yet!

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While we are in the technical part of the magazine, a spares issue really, this. After the fairly negative nature of Phil's letter in the last edition, whether by coincidence or not I have no way of knowing, but there are two people now looking for Fox back springs, and I believe that Fox brake back plates are difficult also. There are a couple of situations that need to be understood. Firstly if we are to use the Register to try and get discounts from suppliers of parts that Reliant Partsworld or other specialist suppliers cannot supply, then we have to appreciate that a small batch to a manufacturer is a lot more than we are likely to be talking about. They tend to talk in hundreds if not thousands. Secondly we need to understand something of current costs and prices.

It is easy to get things like Fox back springs produced, fortunately thanks to a helpful benefactor, we have access to a new one, which we can use as a template. But, with the cost of postage and or carriers, the cost of new ones is likely to be over £ 100 a pair range, and I know that some of those who would like such things are not prepared to pay that much for them. So, we have the second-hand option. Now it so happens that Foxes are in demand as donor cars for Tempest sports cars, and the Tempest needs a lighter spring, so second-hand Fox springs are available. Sadly not all of the Tempest donor Foxes have springs that are in first class condition, and so not all of them are suitable for re-use, but some are.

So, unless and until you are prepared to pay the going rate, I am very much afraid that the production of Fox rear road springs will be done on a one off basis, i.e. a batch of two, as required, and that unfortunately will make them even more expensive ! That is of course unless a few of you Foxy folk get in touch and we can organise a larger batch. I am afraid that as things stand it would be foolish of me to suggest that the Register would carry more than 1 pair in stock if a batch were to be produced, but even that 1 pair could make the difference as far as price and or viability is concerned. Talk to me if you are interested.

Brian

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Reliant 'Kitten' steering gear

Ref. Reliant Workshop Manual, P.3 fig.2 P.4 fig.3

Supposing recommended maintenance to have been carried out, the parts most subject to wear are the components of the upper ball race, item 5. There are two reasons for this.

- 1) The dust cover, item 3, is not a good umbrella, a lot of water gets splashed on top of the rack housing and is sucked in by the pumping action of the gaiters.
- 2) To describe the 'O' ring, item 4, as an oil seal is not very accurate. No oil ever gets to it. It is hard to see how any could without turning the car over. The water gets in though. The remainder of the mechanism, including the bottom race, seems to survive quite well in the mixture of oil and water.

Always keep a tin of old engine or gear oil handy, and apply it liberally and regularly over the dust cover, using a small paintbrush. Anoint the lower universal joints of the lower column at the same time, and it will not be amiss to treat the rear spider of the transmission shaft as well, even if it does have a grease nipple.

For Sale:- a set of 4 Dunlop alloy wheels, complete with serviceable tyres, and a steel spare with a new tyre £50 the lot, 01494 511413 and ask for Richard. – High Wycombe

For sale:- Jimp, chassis No 68. Just out of test and tax, used daily for past year. Best offer over £500 for quick sale – drive away. John Metcalfe Bridlington East Yorkshire Tel :- 07944 399064 or 01262 603940

For Sale:- Reliant spares, Kitten and Robin. Approx. 6 cars all on shelf. Consider selling in 1 lot or bits. P/Ex W.M.Y. 01262 603940 – 07944 399004

For Sale:- 1976 Kitten saloon, off the road for a while, lots of work done, no tax or test. Free to a good home, also loads of spares, too many to mention. Call Peter on 01457 855567 – Glossop.

For Sale:- A wide variety of mainly Rebel, but also Kitten spares. Some new. Send an s.a.e. for the basic list, (very basic at the moment as it has yet to be completed ! - there are 'only' 400 odd different parts on the list so far) or ring and ask for any particular bits that you might be needing. Brian 0141 8866117

For Sale:- Reliant Fox Custom Van – no tax or M.O.T. Make me an offer @ £ 100 and drive it away. Unleaded head, new clutch, call Derek on 01501 742830 or 07967 976511 – West Lothian.

For Sale:- Fox door window frames, second hand but in good condition, one on a door, the other separate but just the big top part, not the bottom, and no 'W' channel, contact Brian on 0141 8866117 in the first instance.

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Wanted:- Petrol tank to fit 1970 Rebel Saloon 700cc, or information of anyone who can repair petrol tanks. Contact Andy on 01623 744064 mobile 0850 208548 Email : andrew.woodard@lineone.net

Wanted:- Early Rebel gearbox remote linkage, complete with gear lever.
Who for Brian?!? The chap who used to have a yellow Tempest and is building a Liege.

Wanted:- Rebel road wheel, with or without tyre (will consider a full set) Also can anyone help with a supply of Rebel track rod ends and drag link ends? Contact Andy on 0151 366 6968 or e-mail trigger@ntlworld.com Wirral area.

Wanted:- Kitten / Fox steering rack, either serviceable or suitable for reconditioning. Contact Eddie Kemp on 01306 500857

Wanted:- Reliant Kitten / Regal rolling chassis or complete car to build Austin 7 Ulster type special. Call Mike Wood on 01292 477162 (Ay)

Wanted:- Kitten front stub axles, a pair of them, contact Julian Fack on 07626 954208 and leave him a message or e-mail him on jfack@cwcom/net

Wanted:- Kitten driver's door glass, yes, just the window. Brian Millar has two spare drivers doors, and not a window between them! Can you help him out? Yes, the Robin one is the same. Give the man a ring if you can help please. 01779 471139

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NOTES

Oh well, here I am again already! As you will have read there are concerns about spare parts, and I have to say that we are in the fortunate position of having the vast majority of bits that we require to keep our cars on the road and in fine working order, readily available off the shelf from a variety of sources, not least Reliant Partsworld and Graham Walker, who between them can provide over 99% of the parts that I know to be available for our little 4 wheeled wonders. Please don't forget to tell them where you heard about them when you are ordering your bits.

Brian Millar, our Kitten alternative parts man, had the misfortune of having his Kitten's chassis fall apart beneath the car last month. I did feel a bit guilty, as I had sold him that car a few years ago, we were both aware that it had been welded in the past, but neither of us realised what a poor job had been done. My consolation was that I had also more recently sold him a refurbished Kitten chassis which is in excellent condition. (Mind you, it was intended as a spare chassis!) Brian took just 3 weeks to replace the chassis, renewing all the suspension bushes and blasting and painting all the suspension components in the process – well done Brian.

This does bring home to me, as I seem to remember saying in the early days when Phil Hallam and Les Cruickshank were both involved in carrying out body off restorations, almost a decade ago now, the need to remember that they do not last forever, a good chassis is probably worth almost half the current market value of the whole car! And that when the worst happens, there are always options.

Oddly enough Phil just fitted his new, as in never used, Rebel galvanised chassis to his Rebel saloon over the Easter break – any chance of the story Phil?

I know that the reason we have eyes in the front of our heads is so that we can look forward, but just for a moment I must take you back to the last edition. It has been drawn to my attention that I, not once, but twice, referred to the interesting vehicle on the front cover as being rocket powered, those reading the text closely will have realised of course that it is jet powered, jet propelled even, I can only say that it was a momentary lapse on my part.

On a different front completely, John (Pearce) pointed out to me the other day, that each time that Reliant have moved in the last couple of years, they have got nearer to Glasgow, not a lot, and there is no plan to have them here that I know of, but they are getting closer to me all the time! I just thought I'd share that with you! Still with John Pearce in mind, the front covers for this edition which John had sent in good time, fell foul of the recent Royal Mail dispute, they have yet to arrive three weeks after posting! Thanks for re-printing them so promptly John.

Summer is now out there, so make the most of it, and I'll talk to you again in August.

Brian