

On 27 April we had a visit from Roger and Liz Briance, who are now living (with their Minor) in Indiana, USA, near their daughter Ali (and her Minor). They have a long association with NWMMOC, and Roger kindly took the trouble to write down their story.

The story of a Morris Minor Family



My first encounter with owning a Morris Minor was in 1972, little did I realise that many years later Morris Minors would become a big part of my life. The one in 1972 was only owned for a short while before being sold due to us moving to a new house.

The more recent (25yrs!) association with the Morris Minor was when my eldest daughter, Alison turned 17. Like most 17-year olds she was desperate for a car. My neighbour at the time had a Morris Minor and let us know that there was one for sale just down the road. We went to see it, and although in a bad state, fell in love with it and between us we decided that it was worth keeping on the road as a 'running restoration'. The deal was I would buy it for her but Alison had to insure it in her name. I got the better deal!

So, in January 1992 "Doris", (1970, 1098cc, 2 door) became part of our family. She had headlights that were pop riveted on, rust all over the wings, (and a lot of other places), was multi coloured, but most of all she was loved. Alison went on to pass her driving test and then drove

Doris everywhere and anywhere she could. We replaced the wings with fiberglass ones (£25 as opposed to £100 each at the time), brakes etc etc just to keep her running and passing the MOT. One time we decided to have her resprayed to get her all one colour again. This was done by a local man and although it was all one colour (brown) again, it was not the best of resprays, but it was cheap! As an aside Alison was working at Honda by now and her Japanese colleagues could not understand how she was driving a car older than she was!



Doris was always a favourite at rallies and would often win the 'Car I would like to take home' prize.

Alison joined the MMOC in 1992 and quickly became involved with the running of the North Wilts Branch, firstly as Events Organiser and then Chairman until she left the Swindon area in 1997.

In 1996, my mother-in-law passed away and with the small amount left to my wife Liz, we decided to buy something to remember her by, and that was Jessie. We purchased Jessie (1962, 948cc, 4 door) from a person in Gloucester who owned her for a couple of years, had extensive restoration done, but did not drive her. We are the third owner from new. Jessie has been to many rallies up and down the country, often winning class entries. In the 21 years she has been in our family she has gone through more restoration and upgrades.

The film *The Borrowers* was made in 1996 and for some strange reason all the cars in the film were to be Morris Minors. Anyway, both Doris and Jessie are in it! Liz and Alison spent a long day in Theale, Berkshire for a day of filming. Once the film was completed, Alison was asked if she would transport Hugh Laurie, one of the stars of the film, to the opening night in London. She drove Doris to his house picked him up and took him to London. Hugh Laurie was excited to be driven in style to the opening night!



In the early days Alison and Liz and I would attend rallies together, one memorable occasion was at the Dorset rally in 1998 where we were fortunate to meet and chat with Jack Daniels, one of the original design staff for the Morris Minor who worked closely with Sir Alex Issigonis.

Early 2000 Alison had saved up enough to have Doris converted into a convertible. The idea was she was to be the bridal car for her wedding to Robert in November of that year. Sadly, this was not to be as the conversion took longer than promised (doesn't it always!). Never mind, Jessie stood in for her.

Alison's job took her to the USA for the first time in 2001 so Doris came to live with us for 2 years. She arrived and immediately covered my garage floor with oil. (Worse than a normal Moggy!) It turned out that the engine after 194000 miles needed some deep restoration as well. She was fitted with a 1098 Sprite half engine, retaining the original head (which we had previously converted to non-leaded fuel) and has not looked back since

In 2002 Doris was invited to join in the Lord Mayors Show, which was a fun day.

There have been 3 other Morris in our family. The first was called "Troy". This was owned by Robert, Alison's husband. Troy was a bit of a 'boy racer': 1971 2 door, Fiat 2ltr twin cam engine, big wheels and flared wheel arches. It really looked the part.

Next to come along was "Jack". This also was a bit of a boy racer. It was a pick-up converted from a Traveller, again with the big Fiat 2ltr twin cam engine etc. Jack was originally owned by Alison and Robert but came into my possession when they moved to the USA in 2005. Jack was sold a couple of years later



The third in this series was a flatbed pick-up, but Oh Dear! what a crock. After selling Jack I still longed for a pick-up to renovate. Unfortunately, my heart fell for this wreck, I should have been more sensible.

Henry, as it was called, came with a few useful upgrades. A 1275 Midget engine and gearbox, disc brakes, 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ " SU carburetor fitted to a water heated inlet manifold and a large bore LCB exhaust manifold and stainless steel exhaust system. Also included were original 5J Minilite mag alloy wheels.

The restoration got underway, but very soon it became obvious that the cost would outweigh the purpose, so sadly I called a halt to it all. I managed to sell on most of the replacement parts I had purchased and a lot of the old, keeping all the good upgrades for future use.

As you will have guessed by now, Jessie now has a 1275 Midget engine and gearbox etc, all the good bits from Henry! The Minilite wheels have gone (sold to a person in the Philippines) but have been replaced with some new and very smart, Minilite 'lookalike' wheels.



Our story now moves 4000 miles to the state of Indiana in the USA. In 2005 Alison and Robert (and by now Oliver), moved permanently to Fishers, a city on the outskirts of Indianapolis. When the container with all their possessions was loaded, Doris was loaded in it as well. Doris continues to attend rallies and win prizes.



Jessie remained in the UK with us for the next 9 years and then in 2014, Liz and I decided to move to the USA as well, and like Doris, Jessie was loaded into our container for her journey 'across the pond'.

Our neighbours were most surprised when the doors to the container opened and I drove Jessie out! She has now become accepted and always draws attention to herself when out and about.

Together with Doris and a friend of mine who has a Hot Rod (1970s 7ltr, V8 Dodge Challenger (10mpg on a good day) attend the local 'Cruise In'. This is a fun gathering

of mainly American 'muscle cars' in a small town about 5 miles away on a Wednesday afternoon. It is completely informal. You just arrive and park up in the main street. Eventually all the spaces are filled with these amazing cars – and Jessie (and Doris) hiding amongst them! The Minors always get a lot of attention. A normal turn out would be about 30-40 cars but on one particularly warm Wednesday evening last year there were 142!

I joined the MMOC at the same time as Alison in 1992, initially to support Alison (we had no Morris at this time). Later in 2002 I was asked to become chairman of the branch. We reinstated the annual rally and regular monthly meetings in various pubs around the Swindon area. Our first rally was held at Westonbirt Arboretum and it rained and rained and rained! But when the rain stopped, Morris Minors started arriving and it turned out to be a success. By the time I handed over the chairmanship to Dave Waters, in 2006, we had had some great rallies, and built up a band of regular followers from outside our branch. I was vice Chairman for the next 3 years or so still with responsibility for the annual rally, then I was just happy to be a branch member until our move to the USA.

So our story continues. On the rare occasions we do need spares we contact the David Manners group in Birmingham (used to be known as Morris Minor Center, Birmingham, I have used them for years) and they send them out at a reasonable cost.

To my knowledge there is only one other Minor in our area. That is a white one upgraded with a 1275 Midget engine as well, but unfortunately its owner is not one for rallies so we only see it occasionally. We are no longer members of the MMOC as the branch is country wide, so no local meetings to attend. The cars do not get driven as much as we would like. We experience very cold winters (regularly to minus figures



Fahrenheit) and very hot summers (usually 100F in August). That said any other time when it is not raining or freezing it is fun to drive them on the other side of the road!

Lastly you may wonder why we have called our Morris 'Jessie'. I always say (with tongue in cheek) that she is called Jessie after my mother-in-law because she was a cantankerous old biddy as well!

Roger Briance, May 2017