



The last big luxury Austin

[September/October 2014](#)



Martin Keeping's car at Ringwood raceway beef night, voted best British car (Naturally!)

In this issue; Austin's at the Ace, BMC day at Peterborough, CGU returns "home," More tales of motoring from Jim Robertson, Internet auction site advice, Next Year's shows and events, Proposed Windsor Castle Event for 2016, Front brake disc remanufacture and the new tax disc rules.

Neil's Bit

Hi Folks; well it's been a great time for us recently. We had a great showing at the Austin's at the Ace Cafe night; despite lots of other clubs saying they were coming the attendees were small in numbers. Our cars making up 50% of the total cars on display; that must be a first for us at a car show!

The choice of day for the Ace Cafe was not ideal being the day before the BMC day at Peterborough which may explain the low numbers attending. I still feel this was better than a weekday evening though. The Ace have contacted me about having a similar event in 2015, I suggested a weekend slot earlier in the year for the next one thus avoiding clashing with Peterborough and other major events. I have picked Saturday June 6th 11am to 4pm.

Speaking of Peterborough, we had six cars which was very pleasing to see, the weather was kind to us at both events which made for a very enjoyable weekend. I also paid a visit to the house where our car spent the first 15 years of her life and took some photos, more on this later. (The current occupant was rather bemused by this!)

Our membership continues to grow steadily; a warm welcome to Tony Fisher, Mark Annets, and Mike Deacon.

We have had good luck with the weather this year and have attended some lovely events. Next year is coming into our thoughts already believe it or not; these things do need some fore-thought and planning after all.

Finally; I have made our facebook page invisible to the world at large, I will just invite new members via email from now on and keep it as a forum for us.

There are two sides to this, firstly it is a bit of a negative as we now cannot be found by potential new members, on the flip side we cannot be seen by folk seeking cars to race. I was getting about 5 people a week asking to join the page/club, all of these folk had profiles completely dominated by the racing scene, most when questioned the ones who replied mainly said they "quite liked the cars.". There is already a facebook page which caters for this interest, and as we are more concerned with the cars preservation this seemed the right thing to do. I hope you share this view, if not please let me know.

Kind regards

Neil

Austin's at the Ace

The idea of Austin's at the Ace really started from an idea to take some photos of CGU 473H outside the house where she spent the first 15 years of her life. I have the service book with all the details in from when she was new, the house is in Stanmore which is only five miles from the Ace Cafe. I figured a trip to the house coupled with a 60's car event or similar at the Ace would be a nice trip out, after looking at the events listed there was nothing really where a 1960's British car would fit in. Hence asking if they would consider an "Austin" event, after all the site was an Austin dealer many moons ago. So there we have the seeds of the idea, they liked it so they went for it. Despite some publicity not many Austin's came so our 3-Litre's were by far in the majority, how often we can say we dominated a car show! It was a lovely evening; in attendance were Barry Dancer, Richard Reynolds and family, and myself. We were also joined by Club Member Alan Wilkins in his splendid Princess 4-Litre R and a lady from Epping in a charming Austin 7. Thanks for coming folks; it was a great evening I am sure you will agree. Great company and good chips too!





Faced with a 90 + mile drive home and another 180 miles to do the following day, we decided to head off while we still had some daylight and go and find Chartley Avenue in Stanmore.

A very well to do area it seems and the road itself is a very quiet cul-de-sac. It was a nice feeling driving the car down the same roads she had been driven down as a new car. Lots of looks along the way from people in their little Euro-hatches too.

I wonder how much the area has changed over the last 45 years. The surrounding streets and buildings are obviously in the main many years old so maybe the streets are very similar now to how they were in 1969, there is certainly no “new build” in the immediate area.

So there we are, parked outside the house where the car lived for her first 15 years, the garage where she used to be kept appears long gone having been absorbed by a house extension but the outer garden wall and the dropped kerb still shows where the driveway to the garage used to be.

So with fading light and our photo's taken we headed for home to prepare for Peterborough!



BMC Day at Peterborough

Our second National Rally since we reformed the club was held at the BMC day at Peterborough and saw six cars in attendance which was very pleasing to see. We did have a different mix of cars this year too so it was nice to welcome some new members to this event. From left to right, Gordon and Angie, (Morris Minor but he is a mate and he had bacon sandwiches!) Neil and Heidi Kidby, Malcolm and Annie Stephens, John Ludford, Ian and Dawn Kennedy, Richard and Lyla Reynolds, and Barry Dancer. We also welcomed members and friends old and new to the stand, Steve and Dawn Haury coming down from Liverpool and making a nice weekend break of their visit. Another successful event and very well supported, as ever your support at these events is appreciated as they could not be done without you! Our cars are not the cheapest things to run and some of us had covered some serious miles over that weekend to get to these events so well done one and all. Ian and Dawn Kennedy deserve a special mention as they had another vehicle at the show and brought the 3-Litre along to help our numbers, so of course they had two lots of fuel to consider. Jim Robertson lives in Scotland so well done too Jim! One thing that has come up as an idea is to get either a banner or a flag or similar to have at such events. This is currently being looked into, now that we are a well established club once more, this would be nice to have and would mark us out nicely. The photo below makes an amazing sight for sure.



The lovely Mrs K took me by surprise at the autojumble at Peterborough when she pointed out a new front displacer, I was amazed to find she was absolutely right too! After a good look around it all looked well, no perishing on the bellows and the top looked good too. A bit of a crack in the hose outer layer is not an issue as these can be replaced easily. Well.....let's ask how much it is. The seller knew what it fits and said "it's yours for £100."

Now I rarely take much loot to this event, mainly because there never has been much in the way of 3-litre bits there. A rummage through our collective funds came up with £85 which was duly refused so with cap in hand I borrowed the shortfall off my mate Gordon and strolled off rather pleased with myself. I have only ever seen six new ones in my 30+ years of being involved in 3-Litre's, this includes this one so it was a good find. Needless to say it is now sitting in my loft in my "just in case pile".



More of Jim Robertson's Motoring Tales

Come 1974 and things were about to take a completely different turn. Yes, I discovered the joys of the 3 Litre.

Financing my 3-Litre was courtesy of my Mother (all duly repaid...) at a cost of 500 quid for a barely 3 year old car which had cost over £1700 new. This was at the time of the 1st fuel crisis and gas guzzlers were being given away. I also looked at a Rover 3-litre and a Daimler V8 250. I kind of wish I had opted for the latter looking back but both were considerably pricier than the 3 litre. The garage was just behind Glasgow Cross and nothing was really needed to be done to it apart from a fuel sender and a voltage stabiliser (total cost about 5 quid!!), which problem strangely enough has recently recurred after 40 odd years... She was a delight and glided along with seemingly endless power (it's all relative, Folks). She was an auto in Blackberry with grey seating, Ambla of course, though leather would have been nicer on a hot day. Ouch.

She had done 49k miles and had come straight off the Glasgow Directors' fleet at The Distillers Company, so most of the mileage will have been motorway. Back seat didn't even look like it had ever been sat in. It had had an engine rebuild and before buying, I contacted the Distillers engineer (at their Stepps warehouse just outside Glasgow) who had fixed it. He assured me that it had dropped a valve but had all been repaired correctly. I accepted this since all maintenance was done in-house and I guessed to a pretty high standard – couldn't have a Director breaking down in a chauffeur driven car, now could we? The chauffeur had maintained the service log – all done at Carlaw Cars Glasgow (then the premiere Austin dealership in Glasgow) and his records showed that little repairs had been required other than a rear drive shaft replaced (twice...).

Amusingly, for months after purchase, I used to be allowed free parking in the National Car Park opposite Distillers head office (and near my office), just being waved through until the attendant twigged that I was not a "director".

I recall the 1st time I used the kickdown. It was on a business trip to Greenock and I had pulled out to overtake something when I spotted another car coming towards me over the brow of a hill. Booted it and she just seemed to take off, pulling the horizon in very quickly.

It could certainly motor fast on A or B roads but then again it is all relative and after a Moggie (souped up or otherwise) I guess a blind man on a pushbike would have seemed fast. What was disconcerting was that you could just about see the fuel gauge go down and, it has to be admitted that fuel consumption was pretty spectacular (on the downside....). I couldn't believe it could be this heavy and much time was spent "tuning" the twin SU carbs to try to improve things. All to little avail I might add. Until I came across a Road Test (AA, I think) which pointed a finger at a wildly under-recording odometer (was it 10%??). Adjusting for this improved things a little, but not much and even on a run it was v/rare to see over 19mpg (adjusted). Indeed, years later when I used to use her into work in the centre of Edinburgh at rush hour I reckoned she was getting all of 13 mpg. Read it and weep...

Nonetheless, I used her for a couple of years and she took my wife and I on honeymoon to the Highlands and Barra and gave great pleasure – the car that is, not the new wife though she was alright too.... If you're in a hole, stop digging!! She could touch an indicated 100mph, though with some vibration, which has only gotten worse over the years, despite new prop shaft joints. It was about now that I noticed a "rattle" on starting. Local garage assured me that it was the bottom pulley and this was rebuilt. But, of course it wasn't and she has done so ever since (now 86k miles). Most likely the oil draining out of the filter housing – See Neil's recent article on this problem.

About this time I well remember a back roads tussle with a Daimler Majestic Major (3.8 Jaguar engine). That was one heck of a big car but boy could she shift. It was being used to take a newly wedded couple to the reception across country in Ayrshire and the driver obviously felt he should show the accompanying 3 litre a clean pair of heels. True enough she had me every time on acceleration despite me liberally using kick-down, but she wasn't getting away and I could always easily pull her in on the curves and twisty bits. Quite a hairy trip for the bride I fancy and suffice to say she arrived "shaken but not stirred"!

By 1976 I decided to relocate to Hong Kong to pursue my CA career and the 3 litre was parked up in my Sister's wooden floored garage. I came home annually and she never ceased to start after some new petrol, a battery charge and sometimes new plugs and all seemed well until some years later when she subsided through the wooden floor – but was easily pulled out!

I toyed with the idea of shipping her out to Hong Kong but was glad I didn't since I think the humid climate would have wreaked havoc with my still immaculate 3 litre. I did see one 3 litre while in Hong Kong. She was in white and parked in Mid-Levels (half way up the Peak) where we lived. Even then when she would only have been about 7 or 8 years old, the rust was getting into her rear flanks and her quarter bumpers were holed. I doubt this will be a long lost survivor sadly. I did however meet a fellow owner recently at a rally at Stockwood Park (Luton) who had a very nice 3 litre in said white. Seems it was originally a left hander, converted back to right hand and I briefly wondered if this might be my Hong Kong 3 litre since this one had been with the MOD (when we still had a base in Hong Kong) but then I remembered that we drove on the right out there, so collapse of theory.

There weren't too many interesting cars in Hong Kong though I did once come across an Armstrong Siddeley Sapphire sleeping away the years in the tropical heat in an open garage in Mid Levels and another Armstrong Sapphire stretched limo was often to be seen being driven round Victoria with its Chinese Chauffeur resplendent in his uniform and cap, with ex-pat owner in the back of course – presumably a Hong (big Boss).

My own cars in HK with one exception were undistinguished to awful. A Beetle which I liked driving foot on floor was replaced by a VW 411, an awful barge of a car (and even worse...in beige) which despite much "tuning" never really ran right and with a transmission which you could hear before the car hove into view. She eventually caught fire under the dashboard on the mountain road in the South of the island. Much insulating tape saw it returned to service but at the end of the day she was towed away from our block of flats with rear end dragging along as if reluctant to go. For my part, I was less than reluctant to see it go...

Most of my friends' cars were similarly downmarket – there was little sense in having a good car only to have it battered on bad roads and congested traffic. Honourable mention must go to an enormous black Buick Electra which cut out on right hand bends and where the fuel gauge could visibly be seen to fall if you pressed the loud pedal and of course, Tommy. Tommy was a Triumph Herald with a neat two-tone effect. It started out as all light blue but along the way had acquired a fetching contrast on the driver's door..... of ingrained vomit which, baked by the sun, had sadly darkened with age!

Such was the state of most ex-pats' cars in those days. The then owner of dear old Tommy now has an Aston Martin V12 Vantage and a Jaguar V12 E-Type in his (Scottish) garage and rest assured that neither has any trace of said substance on their drivers' doors...

An MGC GT in Tartan red came next for me. This was a 1968 model which had been imported and was a bit of a goer on HK's twisty and mountainous roads and despite what contemporary Road Tests said, never had any bother revving and with plenty low down torque. Gas consumption was fairly heavy (18mpg?) and I cannot now remember what a gallon cost in the late 70's but certainly less than in the UK and anyway you were earning a lot compared to Britain, so it was not really an issue. There was many a race across the Island with a friend's MGB. The C could easily outpace the B on the straight but straights are few and far between in HK and the B always caught up on the curves where the C's heavy nose and ponderous cornering made itself felt. Overall, she was in good shape but with some rust in front wings and sills. This was "repaired" by Mr Soo (Wanchai) making up new panels – doubt they'd do that now.

How times have changed. Drinking and driving were not so frowned upon in those far off days (wrong I now admit) and the C got me safely home many a time after a heavy night "playing darts" for the Gaslight Barflies (need I say more, the clue's in the name....). However, I was caught out once when speeding up Garden Road from Central and I was pulled over by a smart young Chinese Policeman fitted out in khaki uniform and regulation shorts and peaked cap. The fact that I was none too steady – indeed, could barely stand – was overlooked and the officer kindly helped put me back into the car and politely suggested I "go a bit slower, Sir" – ah, those really were the days!! The C came back to Britain with me in 1980 by ship and I have her to this day. Bodywise she had suffered a bit from being exposed to salt air on deck, so a fair amount of restoration was needed, though with a new battery she started up and drove fine. I stripped her down to bare metal and replaced front wings (nightmare job to line up) and had new sills put on. Other than that she was remarkably solid underneath and the engine bottom end had been overhauled while in HK. The intention had been to use her but you know the story, the resto was just too damn good to use her regularly and so – to my eternal shame – she sits resplendent in one of my garages (still on HK plates) and has

done for nigh on 35 years now, awaiting me getting round to finishing her – shame on you.... I sprayed her myself in original Tartan red cellulose using an old Electrolux vacuum cleaner on reverse thrust, a technique which I like to think I have some expertise in since I did same later with 3 litre. Even if I say it myself, the finish (courtesy of much hand rubbing down) is outstanding and has stood the test of time excellently. She has a Webasto folding roof and new leather on the seats. She has run very occasionally round the block much to my young daughters' amusement as they sat in the back with feet dangling through the holes for battery boxes and road rushing below. Though she was smoking a little when idling – possibly valve stem seals. God willing, I WILL finish her (sometime).

Meanwhile the 3 litre was pressed back into service adding another 20 odd thousand miles commuting between Glasgow and Edinburgh until we moved to Edinburgh. She again proved herself to be a fine fast cruiser (80-85mph) and extremely comfortable but aforementioned vibration now meant I kept away from maximum speed. An o/s rear driveshaft was an early casualty (I think the 3rd in 60k miles) but a used spare got her on the go again. The auto box was starting to slip and was overhauled in the mid 80's but never to my satisfaction. In constant use it was ok but when left for a week about a pint of oil would be dumped and this problem has never been solved – ANY SUGGESTIONS?? (*Gear selector shaft seals? ED*)

A series of company cars followed and the Austin was quietly retired to the garage with only occasional use for local shows where she invariably picked up an award or six, much to my daughters' delight in getting to ride round the Winners ring. Plus, the 3 litre was always a pleasant place to disappear to for a snooze on a hot afternoon and to escape 3 demanding young daughters. Meanwhile I had taken over my Mother's Beetle for everyday use – great little cars. Flat out only 70mph but you could drive flat out all day long so made pretty good progress even on Motorways since she would wind up to over 80 on downhill sections. But, you try stopping one on a wet or icy road with cross-ply tyres – lethal! No ABS in those days. Then a Golf Mark 1. An amazing car which I had for well over 30 years and only recently disposed of. If they still made them I'd buy a new one! She did 246k miles in this time and regularly ran between London and Edinburgh.

You could rev the nuts off that engine (1093cc) and cross country the handling was amazing – few could pass her.

Back to the company cars. A Vauxhall Cavalier estate (1600cc / 4-speed box) was a great rev machine and surprisingly fast. I once saw 116mph with that car but hate to think what the revs might have been... It could easily outpace its main competition – Sierra and Montego. A really good car and sorry to see it go after a couple of years. To be replaced by a Volvo 240 estate. A bit of a barge but with a big lumpy 2,300cc 4-pot engine but not as quick as the Vauxhall and heavy on gas (20-22mpg around town). Nor terribly reliable either, breaking down twice with what was eventually traced to a distributor fault and then the gear lever dropped its connection – stranded again. Also hesitant off the mark until I “persuaded” a Volvo mechanic to open it up a bit and tone down the emission crap which was strangling the car. In other words, turn up the mixture and advance the ignition. After that it went very well. Comfortable big car and my (smallish) wife absolutely loved that car. You figure...

Next came the choice between an early Rover 820 – quite nice and fast enough – or a BMW 520. As soon as I heard the BMW’s engine I was sold. A delightfully silky machine and it certainly looked and sounded the business..... But... while very comfortable and a nice drive, it was not quite as fast as you expected. It was kind of writing cheques but struggling to cash them. Also a little hesitant off the line. I once discussed this with a BMW guy and he confided that you really had to have the 530 before this was not an issue. Hmmm. But a nice car nonetheless and one which my youngest daughter adored.

A VW campervan (wreck) was restored in the late 90’s and again sprayed in the open using the trusty Electrolux. I spent a lot of time getting this one up to scratch and it was a bit of a labour of love since we’d had one in the States after leaving Hong Kong and over 6 months she went coast to coast covering 13k miles and was great fun, before being sold in Boston to a couple who wanted to do the same trip in reverse – she may still be shuttling back and forth for all I know! *The final part of this fascinating tale is in the next issue.*

Internet Buyer beware!

The following advice was sent in by a club member.

Could I advise that if people are thinking of buying a new old-stock indicator stalk from eBay at the moment that they confirm from the seller the item is genuinely new old-stock, that it is definitely the item in the picture and that it hasn't been tampered with or modified in any way. It would also be worth double-checking the returns policy in case of issues, especially if the item is from overseas and the postage is a fair amount of money.

Use Your Car Day

Any day in June 2015. Not everyone can get to our bigger shows, especially those of you from overseas, so just for a bit of fun, let's have a use your car day! Have a drive out somewhere, take some pictures and send them in with a note of where you went, all entries will go in the owners club newsletter.

Pride of Longbridge 2015

I did get notification from the Austin & Longbridge Federation that they were looking to get somebody to run the Pride of Longbridge Event in 2015, the event has grown from its humble beginnings in 2005 to an amazing 2000+ car display in 2014. I did book a club stand at this year's event but despite some interest we didn't have any 3-Litre's attend, any thoughts on 2015?

It will by then be 10 years since the ending of car production at Longbridge and it would be nice to mark this milestone. Please let me know if you would like to attend this one.

Austin's at The Ace 2015

I received an email from the Ace Cafe asking if we would like to repeat the Austin's at The Ace in 2015. I of course said yes but asked if we could pull it away from August so we don't clash with BMC day at Peterborough. I went for Saturday June 6th 2015 from 11.00am to 4.00pm. Thank you to those of you who have already pledged to attend. The move to June and better publicity should see a good increase in cars there I am sure.

BMC Day 2015

I always get great feedback from those of you who come to this event, so of course I will book it again in 2015.

A Right Royal Longbridge Celebration

2016 marks the 110th anniversary of the construction of the first Austin being completed in the former White and Pike printing works at Longbridge. (This building was demolished by BMW in the late 1990s during their ownership.) An opportunity has arisen to have a Royal celebration of this part of Longbridge's history, the event is being organised by the Rotary Club of Windsor and Eton and will possibly following a similar format to an MG event held in 2009 which marked the 85th Anniversary of that marque.

The event should be open to vehicles with connections to Longbridge, as our cars were designed there we are eligible for the event and have been invited to attend. At the moment confirmation and dates need to be formalised and things can only proceed if sufficient support from car clubs and individual owners are willing to support this. I have pledged our support at this initial planning stage, please let me know if you would like to attend. Please note there are several options being planned but there will be an entrance fee. The options being considered at the moment are only in the planning stage and are as follows;

Option 1: Friday night drinks reception in Windsor Castle (400 guests can attend) with an approximate cost £55 per person.

Option 2: A 300 car parade in Windsor going around the Quadrangle of the castle then ending up in the Castle grounds allowing the public to view the event at a charge (for the MG event it was by programme). In addition other eligible cars would park along the Long Walk . The cost of parading a car would be £90 per car whilst parking on the Long Walk would cost £25-£30.

Option 3: On Saturday evening there could be a Gala Dinner in the Castle Hotel. The cost would be in the region of £50 per person.

Option 4: Another option is to go for a drive through the Windsor Great Park finishing by parking on Long Walk for a static display just on the Saturday after all the clubs have a run from their home bases. It is thought that it would cost £50 per car to partake.

Brake discs remanufacture

Ian Ripley from Australia has found a company who is willing to remake brake discs for us, this is quite an achievement considering the response we got here in the UK! I have contacted several companies about this, of the ones who bothered to reply I got a definite no from all of them. Jim Robertson also went down the same route a few years ago and judging the price quoted they clearly didn't want to manufacture them!

The company willing to remake them have a minimum order of 50 discs and the converted price is a very favourable £40 each at current exchange rates. UK members of course have a freight cost to consider and there may be import duties to pay. Ian asked if the company to see if some could get some sent to a EU distributor to reduce the freight cost and import taxes, but they have no distributors in the EU. The UK batch will be sent to one UK address for distribution. For other localities different arrangements will be looked into. The project at the moment is in its infancy but with 36 discs reserved at the point of going to press, interest is reasonably sufficient for Ian to progress with the project. Due to surviving car numbers this may be the last time this can be done on a viable basis.

The build will take about two months to complete once sanctioned. We have four UK members who want to have a pair including myself. Please feed back your interest to me and I will collate it for Ian.

The end of the tax disc in the UK

From October 2014 drivers no longer need to display a tax disc. I have gained the following information from the internet about the changes.

A new electronic road tax database will keep track of who was paid - and those who don't face a fine of £1,000. **What is going to change?** From next month, motorists will no longer receive a paper tax disc to fix to their windscreen, and will instead be asked to pay their road tax online, via the **DVLA** website. Drivers without access to the internet will be able to pay at post offices. **What happens if my road tax is valid for a few months?**

You don't have to do anything, although you can take your paper tax disc off your car windscreen if you want to. Your existing road tax will remain valid until its expiry date, at which point you can renew it using the new system.

How will the new system be enforced?

Automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras, which track all cars, will catch those who haven't paid up. The police can look up registration numbers on the Police National Computer system. Offenders will face fines of up to £1,000.

Does this affect the buying and selling of used cars?

Yes, this is where the changes will be felt most keenly. From October, vehicle tax will no longer be transferred with the vehicle. This means the buyer will not benefit if there are unused months left on the tax disc. They will have to renew the tax straight away.

The seller can claim a refund from DVLA for any full calendar months left on the vehicle's tax. However, they are also responsible for informing the DVLA of the change of ownership and will face a fine if they do not do so.

Are there any disadvantages? The new system could make it easier for car thieves to operate, without the need for a tax disc with the correct registration number, it will be simpler for thieves to disguise stolen cars using a set of number-plates that have been copied from a properly taxed vehicle of the same make, model and colour. The ANPR cameras will not be able to tell the difference between the legitimate car and its clone.

How can I check if my vehicle is taxed correctly?

You can look up the tax status of any vehicle by using DVLA's [Vehicle Enquiry System](#). You will still be sent a renewal reminder when your vehicle tax is due to expire.

Why is the system changing?

The DVLA says the reforms are aiming to streamline the service.

There is more on the site about saving money and motorists benefiting from lower premiums on their insurance, call me cynical but.....!

If this is the car for you

The Austin 3 Litre. Smooth, spacious, sophisticated. Power steering, hydroelastic suspension, self-levelling system and servo-assisted brakes with discs at the front.

Austin 3 Litre

The Kenning Motor Group does, of course, provide the kind of service (before and after sales) which befits a car of this class.

this is the place for you

KENNING MOTOR GROUP
Main Office, Old Road, Chesterfield, Derbyshire.
Tel: 0246 37241



KENNING CAR MART
Austin House, 87/89 Hampstead Road, London, N.W.1.
Tel: 01-383 1212

And finally, a rear view of our lovely cars at Peterborough in August

