

# *Hillman Californian*

RARE IRISH MINX DERIVATIVE RESTORED  
BY A CHILDHOOD FAN







### PAGE 4-9 CALIFORNIA DREAMING

While the Hillman Minx saloon was a popular choice in Ireland during its production run, the stylish but more expensive two-door pillarless Californian version was something of a rarity even when new. Today you'll struggle to find one anywhere, so when Rootes enthusiast James Allen uncovered this original Dublin car almost fourteen years ago he didn't let it go, particularly as he has special memories of the model.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN ISSUE 95 APRIL 2014

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### PAGE 10-14 RED TRACTION

Although they were never available from the factory, you do very occasionally come across a 100-Series Massey Ferguson with a four-wheel drive conversion. This Four Wheel Traction 178 has done sterling work at the hands of its long-term owners, and has recently been restored.

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### PAGE 18-21 BEDFORD'S BEST

To post-war hauliers and today's classic commercial enthusiasts alike, the Bedford O-type was one of the finest and most dependable large lorries available. In this part of the world, thanks in no small part to its smooth and tough Chevrolet-based six-cylinder engine.

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### PAGE 22-26 BOXER BROTHERS

While classic BMW motorcycles aren't everyone's cup of tea, it has to be said that those who enjoy their charms are fiercely loyal to the marque. This month we meet up with three such owners on the banks of the Grand Canal in Laois to find out just what makes these idiosyncratic machines so attractive.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN ISSUE 58 MARCH 2011

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### PAGE 28-32 SNAKEBITE



For those performance car enthusiasts that are handy with the spanners, a kit car makes a whole lot of sense. You can get them in all manner of varieties, ranging from vintage-style tourers to high-tech supercar-slayers. Some of the most popular, however, are those that evoke legendary sports cars of the sixties, such as the iconic AC Cobra.

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Welcome to Irish Vintage Scene's dip into the archives. In this free online newsletter, we go back in time and pick out some of our readers' favourite features from our fourteen-year history, as well as looking at an event of the past and a fun competition too. To make sure you don't miss any of our upcoming Irish Vintage Scene 'From the Archive' issues, log onto [www.irishvintagescene.ie](http://www.irishvintagescene.ie), where you can register your email address with us quickly and easily!

*Thomas Heavey*

## ALSO

### PAGE 3 COMPETITION

### PAGE 16-17 KILLARNEY VINTAGE RALLY

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# COMPETITION *Time.*

Put your car-spotting skills to the test here, by telling us what kind of car this is! The winner will be picked at random from the correct entries received, and will win a year's subscription to Irish Vintage Scene. Simply click [HERE](#) to enter! (Winner announced Monday 20th April)



# Identify the car?

**(click here to answer)**



# California Dreaming

Words & Photos by Andrew Pollock  
Andrew@irishvintagescene.ie

*While the Hillman Minx saloon was a popular choice in Ireland during its production run, the stylish but more expensive two-door pillarless Californian version was something of a rarity even when new. Today you'll struggle to find one anywhere, so when Rootes enthusiast James Allen uncovered this original Dublin car almost fourteen years ago he didn't let it go, particularly as he has special memories of the model.*



*Having remembered fondly the Californian owned by his father in the fifties, James was delighted to come across this visually identical car. After much restoration work it's now a treasured part of his collection.*



From  
the Archives

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN ISSUE 95 APRIL 2014

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*Although it's essentially a standard Minx saloon in a posh dress, the Californian's two-door flanks, retractable side windows and wraparound rear screen succeed in giving it a far more glamorous appearance, little surprise as it was styled by industrial design maestro Raymond Loewy. Due to its price when new it's a real rarity today, particularly with an old Irish registration.*



Nostalgia is a powerful thing. You could argue that the old vehicle hobby is based upon it, and I'd bet that everyone out there reading this magazine has at least one car from their early life that they'd just love to have in their garage today. It could be the car you grew up in the back seat of, or an expensive model owned by your flashy uncle, or the first car that you bought with your own money. For me, the vehicle in question would have to be the '79 Mazda 323 that my parents drove for most of my childhood, up until its ever-present rust reached the point of ridiculousness. Thoroughly worn out after twelve years and several-hundred-thousand miles of loyal service it went to the local scrapyard, and so at least I can resign myself to the fact that there's no future chance of finding it in a dusty barn or online in a chance encounter on a car sales website. However, for others out there with similar memories there's always the niggling possibility at the back of the mind saying 'that car could still be out there'.

James Allen from Kells in Co. Meath certainly heard alarm bells going off in his head when a friend of his mentioned that he knew where there was a two-tone green Hillman Minx Californian lying in a shed in Sligo, where it had sat for the bones of thirty years. Ever since his childhood James had fond memories of his father's Californian, which he'd bought secondhand in 1958 to use in his work as a commercial traveller. "He always drove Hillmans" James remembers. "but at the time he had a Mk1 Consul and he found it shocking heavy, so

he went down to Denis Clarke in Galway, who he knew well, to see if he could do a deal to buy a Hillman of some kind or other." Although James' dad really needed to trade up, he was self-employed and money was tight, and the only Hillman car that was within his means was an attractive, but slightly impractical, 1954 Californian, registration ERI 182. "Ideally for a commercial traveller a four-door would have been better" James explains, "but he bought the Californian because they weren't popular; nobody wanted them. He got it at a price, and that's the reason he had it. Not because it was posh."

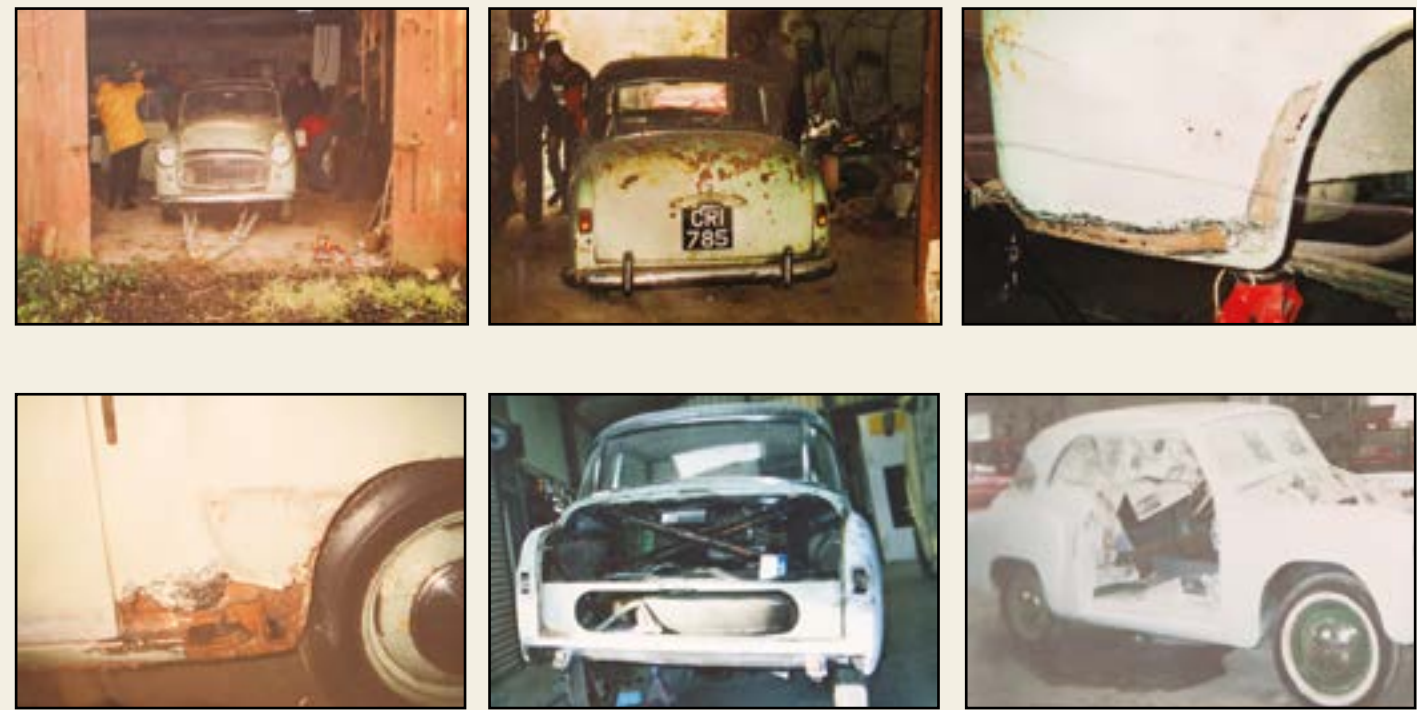
Having made the trip down to Galway with his father and brother Michael at the age of about ten years old, James can clearly remember the journey home in the 'new' Hillman. The car served his dad well for about three years, after which it was sold off to make way for an Austin Cambridge company car. After that the Californian disappeared into the ether and all contact was lost with it, but nevertheless it never faded from the memory. In later years James got into Rootes Group classics in a big way; in fact, the first full feature I ever submitted to Irish Vintage Scene was on James' '52 Minx, way back in October of 2006 (Issue number 5), so to have his Californian on the cover exactly 90 issues later brings things full-circle quite nicely. James restored that Minx in 1991 and has treasured it ever since, as it resembled another car his father used to drive, but while he'd kept an eye out for a Californian for many years he just never came across another on his travels;

they were only made from 1953 to 1956, and despite their attractive looks could never have been called a sales success.

However, as mentioned earlier, during a conversation with fellow Hillman owner Des Flynn at a show in Cavan in 2000 James was told of an identical car that was lying derelict in Ballymote, Co. Sligo. "I was showing him pictures, and he said 'I know where there's one of them lying'" James confirms. "I said 'I don't believe you', but down we went for a look." You can imagine the thoughts running through James' head as the old shed doors were pulled back and he caught sight of the two-tone green paintwork and the old Dublin registration; could this be his dad's old car? In the end, it wasn't, but with its identical specification and similar registration number (CRI versus ERI) it was a very good second place, and despite its poor condition James was loath to leave it behind. The owner, a Mr Gerard Regan, was the third owner, having bought the car in Donnybrook in Dublin thirty years before during a spell spent living in the capital. He'd driven it home to Balymote afterwards, where his family had a business, but when the sidevalve engine developed problems it was put in the shed, never to drive out under its own power. Even though Mr Regan was a Hillman fan himself, bringing his Minx saloon to the odd show, and was sentimental about the Californian after owning it for so long, it's evident that he recognised just how much it meant to James and so a deal was done and the car was hauled down to Kells to its new home.

## The Restoration...

*As you can see, the Californian needed extricating from its place of storage, where it had lain for almost three decades. While it didn't look too bad on the outside, a bit of probing soon exposed gaping holes in the wings and sills, on which Frank Sheppard brought his considerable welding skills to bear.*



*The Rootes Group envisaged the Californian as a car to appeal more to the US market, but its initial offering with an archaic sidevalve engine did its sales pitch no favours. The subsequent change to an overhead-valve unit failed to salvage the situation, and the car found few buyers stateside.*



*The wraparound rear window and lack of B-pillars give the driver fantastic visibility all round. If only modern cars were so easy to see out of.*



*As there are no B-pillars (all of the side windows are retractable) the semaphore indicators had to be fitted in the rear quarter panels.*



*This custom-made model of James' Californian was organised by his brother Michael. It was converted from a four-door saloon, but you'd never know to look at it.*





This rare Californian might have been starting a new life, but it had a long way to go before it was back in the land of the living. “It would need a lot of work, but it was quite good underneath, and at least it was compete and umolested” James explains. Compared to other saloons of the time the parts situation for fifties Hillmans is poor in the first place, but for the rare Californian the prospects are even bleaker, so some ingenuity and sheer luck was needed to effect a proper restoration. However, even before the restoration began there came a lucky break when, at the Beaulieu Autojumble in England, James and his brother Michael discovered for sale a brand new centre section for the all-important front grille, which was beyond saving on this car. “I nearly took hand and all off the man!” James laughs.

Duly buoyed by his find, the restoration began in early 2001, the first step being the removal of the damaged sidevalve engine that had put the car off the road in the first place, thirty years before. James’ friend Kevin Rourke, a retired mechanic, quickly got stuck into rebuilding the unit, with James lending a helping hand in order to learn more about the internal workings of the machine. However, as mentioned, the lack of availability of new body panels meant that a highly-skilled, resourceful and, most of all patient, welder-fabricator was needed, and thankfully James found this in fellow Celtic Old Vehicle Owners Club-member Frank Sheppard. The bodywork repairs were aided considerably by another lucky find; a complete donor car that was rescued from a garden in Castlebar. Even though the UK-imported car looked decent enough on the outside it was rotten as a pear underneath (one of the doors fell clean off on the trip home to Meath) so it was perfect for James’ needs and yielded many invaluable parts including chrome trims, window mechanisms and a usable boot-lid and driver’s door.

Off-cuts from the donor car went a long way towards easing Frank’s task as he repaired the rusty sill sections and rear quarter panels, out of which flowed sea salt when they were cut open, an unwelcome souvenir of the car’s time spent on Dublin’s coastal side. The rearmost piece of the front wings were also rusted through, but sections from Minx saloon wings were found to have the same contour and so were blended in to effect an excellent repair. Another friend, Frank Keoghan also supplied a boot floor from a derelict Minx saloon to contribute to the repairs. While “the specialists” were going about the really tricky stuff James got his hands plenty dirty too, spending endless hours sanding, cleaning and resealing the chassis and underside by hand, as well as running about sourcing parts as and when they were called for. He also attended to the interior which, although having survived in excellent order considering, required serious cleaning and care if the original cream check material was to put up with another fifty years of driving. A new set of carpets were made up by Jim Hadcock using the originals as a template. Finally, after four years of work, the shell was ready for its finishing coats of Pastel Green with a Bottle Green roof. This all-important part of the project was carried out by Toss Bruton Crash Repairs in Kells to a beautiful standard, with assistance from his brother-in-law Eamonn. Once the paint was dry the Hillman was brought back to James’ garage where the rebuilt engine was fitted and the last few touches put in place.

With only eleven Minx Californians known to survive in Europe it’s heartening to see this original Irish survivor saved and returned to the road in beautiful condition. While Irish-market Minx saloons were assembled from CKD form by Buckley Motors of Santry in Dublin, James is unsure as to whether the more specialised Californian coupes were built here; if anyone reading has any information on this, he’d love to hear from you through us at the magazine. The finishing touch to the project had to be custom-made scale model of this Californian commissioned by James’ brother Michael as a present, complete with the same colour and registration number; the model becomes all the more impressive when you realise that there is no off-the-shelf model of the Californian model available, this one being skilfully converted from a standard Minx saloon, so it’s every bit as unique as James’ rare Irish Hillman.



As this is an early 1954 model it features the 1,265cc sidevalve engine, which was replaced by an OHV 1,390cc later on that year.



Whitewall tyres, two-tone paint and extra brightwork further lift the Californian’s looks over the standard Minx saloon.

### Thanks . . .

James would like to mention a number of people who were of great assistance to the project, including Des Flynn for locating the car, Niall Monaghan Snr and Jnr, Raymond Lynch, Michael Allen, Frank Sheppard, Toss Bruton, Kevin Rourke and Ollie Hughes.

### Club Membership

James is a founding member of the Co. Meath-based Celtic Old Vehicle Owners Club; for further information on the club and their events, log onto [www.covoc.ie](http://www.covoc.ie).



The Minx’s sales brochure proclaimed such fineries as an elegantly-styled instrument panel, finger-tip gear-change and supreme comfort, and we’d have to admit to agreeing with them. Note James’ father’s hat and leather bag, which add a nice personal touch to this car.



The indicator switch sits in the centre of the steering wheel, as was popular at the time.



Accessory window tray holds the perfect items for a day out in the Californian; a picnic radio and a Hillman mug for the tae.



Stylish gauges and a lovely 'Philips Transistorised' radio inhabit the centre of the dash, plus a legend indicating the layout of the column-shifted gears.





# Red TRACTION

Words & Photos by Andrew Pollock

ALTHOUGH THEY WERE NEVER AVAILABLE FROM THE FACTORY, YOU DO VERY OCCASIONALLY COME ACROSS A 100-SERIES MASSEY FERGUSON WITH A FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE CONVERSION. THIS FOUR WHEEL TRACTION 178 HAS DONE STERLING WORK AT THE HANDS OF ITS LONG-TERM OWNERS, AND HAS RECENTLY BEEN RESTORED.



(L-R) Cousins James and Martin are delighted to have restored the rare tractor that their fathers worked for so long, and which was well known in their locality.



There's an old tyre advert that rightly claims that "power is nothing without control". Whether it's a car, tractor or anything else, there's little point in having hundreds of horsepower if you can't direct that power to where you need it. It's often seen in really wet motor-races, where the less-powerful cars beat their big-horsepower opponents thanks to being more able to put their power down in slippery conditions. However, nowhere is this more evident than in the farm field. Tractors might have coped well enough with two-wheel-drive for the first sixty years or so of their development, but in the 1970s, when power outputs began to climb and implements grew larger and heavier, a driven front axle became a must. Today, only the smallest of tractors are sold in two-wheel-drive format, and these are rarely seen in the grand scheme of things. Power isn't always the reason why you need four-wheel drive though; it can be because you're carrying out such a heavy task in soft conditions that a 4x2 tractor would simply sink to its rear axle. That was certainly the case with the Massey Ferguson 178, which sports a quite rare four-wheel-drive conversion by Four Wheel Traction.

As mentioned in the intro, Massey Ferguson didn't get into producing 4x4 versions of their tractors in large numbers until the late seventies. They weren't the only manufacturer to do so either, and this left the door open for many specialist concerns to offer conversions. On the Ford side the best-known are Roadless and County, while on the Massey Ferguson side the Selene name will often be mentioned; Selene were an Italian company that began converting MF tractors in the late fifties/early sixties, using front axles from army surplus WW2 trucks and jeeps combined with their own design of "sandwich" gearbox adaptor, which added a take-off from the transmission to drive the front axle via a propshaft. These conversions weren't available from the factory as complete new tractors, but rather were sold as a dealer-fit option or aftermarket kit. One William Fuller had been an agent for these Selene kits in London, but was dissatisfied with some aspects of their design, and so in 1968 he set up his own company, Four Wheel Traction, to offer what he felt was the best product. Built along the same basic layout as the Selenes but with improvements built in, 4WT, as they were abbreviated to, offered kits to convert the 100-Series 'Red Giant' Masseys of the time from the 165 upwards (a very small number of 135s are thought to have been converted, but weren't thought to be feasible for full-scale production).

From the Archives

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William Fuller's 4WT company continued to offer their 4x4 conversions until the mid-eighties, at which point the manufacturers had really caught up with things and were offering four-wheel drive on many of their factory machines. Today there are still a few 4WT tractors around, some working for their keep on specialist tasks and others being restored for preservation. In fact, the 1969 MF 178 you see here only retired from its working life in 2006, and what a hard working life it's endured. Not a lot is known about its early life, but in 1981 it was advertised in a newspaper as being for sale in Limerick. The advert was spotted by Martin Dunne and Edward Flynn, two brothers-in-law from Co Laois who were involved in land drainage services. What really caught their eye was that the tractor was advertised as having a 'land-drive' PTO (where the PTO shaft can be locked to the transmission, to turn at the same rate as the tractor wheels), but when they arrived at the seller's place and saw that the 178 was also four-wheel-drive, the deal was done with no delay.

The tractor was no sooner back in Laois before it was pressed into hard labour, pulling a stone cart and working alongside a huge Bruff drainage machine. For the uninitiated (which included myself before writing this feature), these drainage machines are impressive pieces of kit – running on tracks, and often with a winch mounted for really tough going, they basically can drive along soft or boggy land, digging a trench behind them as they go. Into that is laid a drainage pipe, and then stone or gravel is poured in to close up the trench. As you can imagine,

with that kind of drag on soft ground, these monsters need huge amounts of both grip and pulling power – the early eighties Bruff machine run by Martin and Edward runs a six-cylinder Ford diesel running through Bedford reduction gears, and the operator cab even lifts and lowers on hydraulic rams as the rear of the machine sinks so far into the ground while it's working. Obviously enough, the tractor pulling the special four- or five-tonne trailer carrying the stone also had to be made of stern stuff, which was where this 178 came in. The trailer also has land-drive, so once the tractor and trailer were linked up they effectively became one big six-wheel-drive vehicle, affording great stability and traction. And, when the working day was done, the 178 was called upon once again, as it carried all of the other machinery back to base on a big low-loader trailer.

By 2006, the gutsy 178 had done a whole tonne of work – it had been through three engine rebuilds in its life, and it's estimated that it had around 40,000 hard hours on the clock. An early 2000s Landini was picked up (again with land-drive) to take over the drainage duties, and the 178 was finally given a rest, parked in the barn and only used very occasionally until 2015, when cousins Martin and James, sons of the original owners, were given the tractor to restore. Martin had some previous experience, as two years ago he restored the 135 his granduncle Denis Tynan had bought new, and so Martin and James set the deadline for completion of the 178 as the local Fisherstown tractor run on the first Sunday in July of this year.



New canvases rejuvenated the Flexicab, which had fallen into disrepair in recent decades.



In the cab, you could almost be in a standard 178, until you look out of the windscreen, that is. Also, the extended transmission means that this cab is almost eight inches longer than usual.



From the 'sandwich' transfer case by the gearbox, a propshaft delivers drive to the front axle.



The drawbar has been modified over the years to better suit the rigours of working with the land-drive stone cart.

"The tinwork was mostly OK" Martin explains of the tractor's condition when they first went to strip it down. "The engine was smoky though and was burning a bit of oil, and the cab was in a bad state." The Flexicab fitted is actually worthy of further mention, as because of the extended transmission due to the sandwich plate the entire tractor, and therefore the cab frame, is six to eight inches longer than usual. Thankfully the cab frame was ok, although the original canvas coverings were in a bad way – most were missing, and the rear of the cab had simply been wrapped in an old truck cover to provide some weather protection for the driver. The tractor

was brought to uncle, Johnny Dunne, who is a commercial vehicle mechanic, for the heavy work to be carried out, including the engine rebuild. There, early this year the 178 was split to allow the engine block to be removed; the cylinder bores received attention, and the block and head were skimmed, and any other internals that looked in any way suspect were also replaced or overhauled. The rest of the tractor's running gear was also addressed, but amazingly Martin and James tell us proudly that the transmission didn't need to be touched, which after such a long and hard-pulling career is a testament to the stuff put into these classic Masseys.

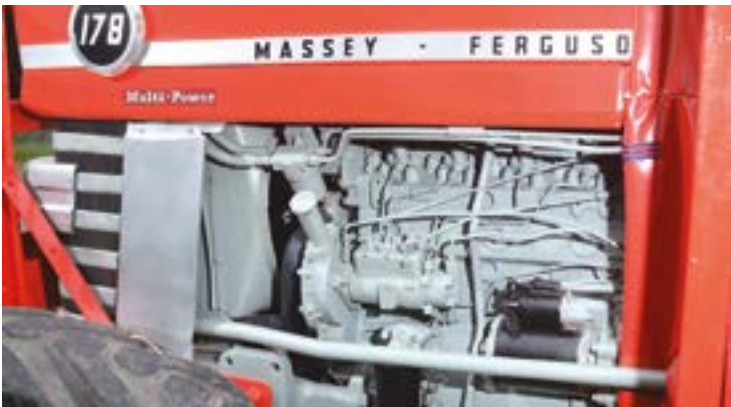
### The Restoration...

These images document some of the stages of the restoration, where the tractor was torn down so the engine could be removed and rebuilt by uncle Johnny Dunne (lower left). Once the engine and skid unit were back together the finer details like cab, wiring and panelwork could be sorted out, all in time for the local tractor run.





While Johnny tackled the mechanicals, Martin and James got busy on the cosmetic and ancillary items. The panels were stripped back, straightened and rubbed down, and Martin applied the new red paintwork himself. The tractor also needed a rewire, and new cab canvases were manufactured in PVC at Midlands Sacks & Covers in Clara, Co. Offaly. The tractor had worn twin rear wheels during its working life, but the outer pair were slightly larger and so that meant the inner pair are still in great condition, although there are a few marks in the sidewalls where stones became trapped between the tyres and wore the rubber. The front tyres are the same size as a 135's rear tyres, and unusually the front wheel rims are also adjustable. Even though it was in decent nick to start with, the fact that the project didn't really get up and running until the start of this year meant that the rebuild went down to the wire, but Martin and James were delighted that the tractor did just make it to the Fisherstown run, where it went down well as it's always been a very well-known machine in its locality. "When it came up around here first it was like the ultimate tractor" James smiles; "it would have been hired by lads the whole time, so everyone around would have known and driven it, going to the bog or whatever." Even though Martin tells us that he'd much prefer driving the little 135 than the big, more awkward 178, we can tell that getting this family heirloom restored has been an enjoyable pursuit for both himself and James, and with a neighbour's 135 awaiting Martin's attention in the shed for the winter, it looks like the vintage bug has taken hold in another household.



The four-cylinder Perkins diesel has been rebuilt several times in its working career, and it's estimated that it must have around 40,000 hours done.



The Four Wheel Traction 178 dwarfs the little 135 that Martin restored two years ago as his first project – it was bought new by his granduncle, Denis Tynan, and never left the family. Martin tells us that it did a whole lot of baling in its time, and in fact made 90,000 square bales in one year.



The front wheels are adjustable, and wear the same-size tyres as a 135 does at the rear!

SEE THIS RARE TRACTOR ON  
THE IRISH VINTAGE SCENE STAND  
AT THE NATIONAL  
PLOUGHING CHAMPIONSHIPS

This 178 left the factory without indicators, but as it was doing so much road work Johnny Dunne fitted a pair of Leyland truck indicators to the wings, and these have been retained.



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# KILLARNEY VINTAGE RALLY '08

## 23RD MARCH 2008

Words & Photos by **Andrew Pollock**  
andrew@irishvintagescene.ie

There was certainly a sense of anticipation leading up to this year's Killarney Vintage Rally, for two reasons; firstly, it was the first big event of the year in the south, and secondly because last year's event was such a big hit. The 2008 event, while lucky not to get any significant rainfall during the day, did have quite a soft site due to rain in the preceding days, and a strong freezing wind kept spectators on their toes. Nevertheless for the second year in a row the show attracted far more exhibits than the organisers could contend with, indicating the strength of the vintage and classic scene in this country at the moment.

Three very interesting and important machines present at the show were the 1914, 1915 and 1916 Overtime tractors, two owned by Billy

Donegan and one owned by Finn Lynch. It was certainly quite an occasion to have three exhibits of such rarity at an Irish event, and it was a real shame that provision couldn't be made to display the three tractors together in the show site itself due to lack of space. Ossie Bennett was also visiting the event, and received a special award for his outstanding record of competition in the London to Brighton run.

The Killarney rally marks the beginning of the show season for many people, so it's full steam ahead from now on for the Irish vintage enthusiast! We at Irish Vintage Scene hope to see our readers at as many events as possible over the coming year.



### PHOTO CAPTIONS

1. This stunning brass-rad Model T truck really stood out, and featured some neat signwriting for Ballinadee Engineering on its tailgate.
2. Mk2 Lotus Cortina drew many admiring glances.
3. Fiat 411R is a quite rare sight nowadays.
4. This Deutz D15 is a 15hp single-cylinder aircooled model, and was acquired by the Harp and Shamrock bar in Kiskeam in 1960.
5. Fine John Deere Model H in its working clothes.
6. 1936 BSA single is a handsome machine.
7. We got the distinct impression that this Sunbeam Alpine does a bit of classic rallying in its spare time.
8. Jensen CV8 is a rare sight in this part of the world. This unusually-styled car was the forerunner of the better-known Interceptor.
9. Billy Donegan carefully manoeuvres his Overtime tractor on the soft ground.
10. This Anglia Deluxe was absolutely immaculate.

## OUT & ABOUT AT KILLARNEY VINTAGE RALLY 2008



**Name:**  
Richard Wilkins  
**Where are you from?**  
Killarney  
**What do you have here today?**  
This 1969 Jaguar E-Type 4.2 series 2.  
**Any other projects?**  
A 1972 Mercedes 350SL.  
**Are you member of a club?**  
No.  
**Money no object, what would you buy?**  
A Jensen Interceptor.



**Name:**  
Neily Brosnan.  
**Where are you from?**  
Kilcummin, Killarney.  
**What do you have here today?**  
My 1960 MF35 3-cylinder, which I've owned since 1980.  
**Any other projects?**  
No.  
**Are you member of a club?**  
The Friends of Ferguson Heritage.  
**Money no object, what would you buy?**  
A Copper-Belly Ferguson TVO.



**Name:**  
Patrick Cronin.  
**Where are you from?**  
Iniscarra.  
**What do you have here today?**  
A 1967 Land Rover series 2, which used to be a recovery truck for Lee Garage in Cork.  
**Any other projects?**  
A 1968 Austin A35.  
**Are you member of a club?**  
No.  
**Money no object, what would you buy?**  
A steam engine.





*Martin still has childhood memories of travelling around delivering turf in a lorry just like this.*

From  
the Archives

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BUY ONLINE NOW!

# Bedford's Best

TO POST-WAR HAULIERS AND TODAY'S CLASSIC COMMERCIAL ENTHUSIASTS ALIKE, THE BEDFORD O-TYPE WAS ONE OF THE FINEST AND MOST DEPENDABLE LARGE LORRIES AVAILABLE IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD, THANKS IN NO SMALL PART TO ITS SMOOTH AND TOUGH CHEVROLET-BASED SIX-CYLINDER ENGINE.

**W**hen General Motors bought out the British Vauxhall concern in 1930, it opened up a huge opportunity for the American company. As tactical a decision as you could ever see, the takeover neatly circumvented the problems that GM had been experiencing in importing their vehicles into England; now they had a UK base from which to set up a new lorry supply chain, and soon the first 'Chevrolet-Bedfords', as they were known, were hitting the road unhindered by nagging import restrictions. In the Republic of Ireland, which at that time was the Irish Free State, Bedfords were assembled and distributed for many decades by McCairn's Motors in Dublin, with considerable success. The new Bedfords were quickly taken to the heart of many hauliers (if there's one thing the Americans can do well, it's trucks), by virtue of their ruggedness and well-proven nature. A key ingredient in their success was the use of Chevrolet's 'Stovebolt Six' engine, so called after the shape of the fastenings used in its construction. This inline six-cylinder petrol engine was a fresh overhead-valve design, and with a 3.5-litre capacity it had plenty of grunt yet was very smooth in operation. Considering how long afterwards that market rivals would utilise the more archaic sidevalve engines, it was an impressive debut, and soon the name Bedford was synonymous with haulage both heavy and light.



Words & Photography by Andrew Pollock andrew@irishvintagescene.ie

*The old-style turf body gives this lovely O-Type a very authentic appearance.*



*The Chevrolet-sourced overhead-valve six is a rugged but surprisingly smooth unit. This one has received a new carburettor recently, and runs like the proverbial mouse's heart.*



The O-Series Bedford was launched in 1939, just in time to have its release thwarted somewhat by the beginning of World War Two. However, this proved something of a double-edged sword, as militarised versions did very well for themselves during wartime with the Allied forces, and once things cooled off on the fronts Bedford remained in a strong position, returning the civilian versions to full production just where they had left off. Although the O-Type had been a relatively conservative, even dated, design when introduced back in '39, in war-torn markets in 1945 this proved to be a boon as there was a stronger need for simple, dependable and affordable transport than there had even been before, and the Bedford fitted that bill to a tee.

In the peacetime years that followed, the O-Type, along with its smaller K-Type sibling, could be found in the guise of everything from a furniture removal lorry to a car transporter to a coal delivery wagon, and looking back at street scenes from the forties, fifties and even the sixties it's hard to miss them parked in the background, on what seems like every street corner. Lorries like these were an

indelible mark on the Irish landscape, and have practically passed into folklore as they unfortunately became very rare in the years that followed due to the inevitably hard lives they led.

Today, it's a rare treat to come across one of these old bonneted Bedfords even at a vintage and classic event, so when we recently met up with Martin Moloney from Co. Clare we were fascinated by his lovely O-Type lorry. A 1949 model, it has been converted into the kind of turf lorry that Martin, and many others, remember from the good old days, when such trucks could regularly be seen traversing the highways and byways, carrying this locally-produced fuel to businesses and homes. Indeed, Martin remembers well standing between the seats of an O-Type in his childhood, peering through the windscreen as its cargo of turf made its way to its destination; on any given day it could have been a power station, it could have been a hospital, but each journey seemed like a small adventure to the young Martin, and now in his later years he has found a very good example of the breed in which to relive those youthful days.



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*Not many creature comforts here; just a steering wheel, gearstick, a few pedals and somewhere to sit down.*

Sitting in the spartan cab it dawns on you how tough you'd have to be to do a ten-hour drive in there in the middle of winter, without even a heater provided. The fact that the engine is mounted partially back into the cab would have helped matters somewhat in that regard, but it would still be far from ideal by today's standards.



Having sourced a sound basis for the project a few years ago, Martin tackled any bodywork repairs himself, and created the old-style turf body complete with the platform on top of the cab to carry the rolled-up canvas cover when not in use. Under the bonnet the 28 horsepower six-cylinder received a full rebuild right down to the crankshaft, and with a recently-replaced carburettor slung on its side it started very easily on the day of our shoot, and amazingly for a large truck it was almost silent in operation, thanks mainly to the presence of plenty of silencer boxes in the exhaust system. The evocative whine of the four-speed transmission is great to hear though, as is the slight grumble of the

spiral-drive rear axle. Martin tells us that you could do 40 mph if you really wanted to, but 30 is a much more comfortable and realistic speed, and he is full of praise for the vacuum-assisted drum brakes, which he says can stick you to the road if needed.

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bonnet to help prevent the windscreen from freezing up in cold weather, in the absence of any kind of demister mechanism; like I said, you'd have to be made of stern stuff.

Nevertheless, in nostalgic terms the sight of one of these old Bedfords, especially in this particular body configuration, is something to be savoured. Martin explained to us how popular it has been at vintage rallies, especially when he brings it loaded up with turf, where people flock around it full of memories. Many of these folks said that they thought they would never see an old turf lorry ever again; that's what our hobby is all about, keeping our motoring heritage alive.



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# BOXER BROTHERS

WHILE CLASSIC BMW MOTORCYCLES AREN'T EVERYONE'S CUP OF TEA, IT HAS TO BE SAID THAT THOSE WHO ENJOY THEIR CHARMS ARE FIERCELY LOYAL TO THE MARQUE. THIS MONTH WE MEET UP WITH THREE SUCH OWNERS ON THE BANKS OF THE GRAND CANAL IN LAOIS TO FIND OUT JUST WHAT MAKES THESE IDIOSYNCRATIC MACHINES SO ATTRACTIVE.

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(L-R) Jack Cregan, Willie Swayne and PJ Mulhall are all committed followers of BMW's classic bikes, and are full of praise for their quality and ease of maintenance.

If you exclude the relatively modern input of the Japanese, in the realm of classic motorcycles it's pretty much an unwritten rule that the British bike is king, in the English-speaking world at least. Part of this is down to the fact that there are just so many evocative marques to choose from, from Ariel to Vincent and all points between, many of which enjoyed glorious competition records in the pioneering heydays of motorcycling. Many were also very affordable, and thanks to the exporting power exerted by the UK to many countries all over the globe, including our own fair isle, countless thousands of riders grew up on small BSAs and Triumphs, aping the exploits of café racers and factory race outfits as they graduated upwards to progressively faster machines. Outside of our own part of the world the Americans are stone mad for Triumphs and Nortons, as they represent a break from the domestic norms of Harley-Davidson and Indian, and this following is mirrored in the continents of Australia, Africa and India, meaning that classic British bikes have literally a worldwide following.

But what of the others? Let's not forget that continental Europe was a positive hotbed of motorcycle manufacturers up until the nineteen-forties, when the economic cooling brought about by World War Two froze out most of the smaller operations. While European bikes might be seen as something of a niche interest nowadays, there can be little doubt that the likes of Ducati, KTM and BMW have kept the flag flying up to the present day, with the latter perhaps investing the most development of all in their motorcycle operations.

Today's BMW motorbikes are efficient and highly distinctive machines, still extensively utilising several design features handed down from their post-war predecessors such as boxer engines and shaft drive. Much like in the car world, fans of the more 'romantic' motorcycle marques might label BMWs as cold and utilitarian, but there can be no denying the reliability, build-quality and high performance exhibited by the German manufacturer's designs. This is something that the three owners on these pages are well-aware of; PJ Mulhall, Willie Swayne and Jack Cregan, like many others, took a while to warm to the unusual German machines; now, however, they are fully committed to the marque. "I remember being on a bike rally years ago, and giving out about all of the BMWs that were on it" laughs PJ, "now I'm the opposite, and I've gotten rid of all my British bikes."



Earles forks were fitted to suit sidecar duty. These give an unusual ride quality, as the front tends to rise instead of dip under braking.





*PJ's R60/2 once belonged to an all-Ireland fiddle champion, and he has fitted this subtle badge as a nod towards the bike's past.*

"I REMEMBER BEING ON A BIKE RALLY YEARS AGO, AND GIVING OUT ABOUT ALL OF THE BMWs THAT WERE ON IT" LAUGHS PJ, "NOW I'M THE OPPOSITE, AND I'VE GOTTEN RID OF ALL MY BRITISH BIKES."



*The large, polished casing at the front of the engine houses the highly durable electrics. Even though only 6-volt, the lighting is surprisingly good, we're told.*

Although practically identical in appearance, the three machines shown here are not all the same model. While Willie's and PJ's are both R60/2s, from 1964 and 1965 respectively, Jack's bike is a 1960 R69, with a higher-powered version of the same 600cc flat-twin thanks to more aggressive cam, different pistons and larger carburettors, among other detail changes. To those unfamiliar with the marque the naming system can seem a little confusing, but in a nutshell this family line began with the R60 of 1956; this machine was built for heavy-duty work in a range of areas, and came complete with a very strong frame with integrated sidecar mounting points, Earles front forks and a shaft rear drive. The 28bhp output of this machine was increased to 30bhp for the release of the slightly updated R60/2 in 1960. Running parallel to this line was the more powerful R69, boasting 35bhp, and this was further increased to 42bhp for the R69S, also released in 1960. With shaft drives running in enclosed tubes, as opposed to the open shafts of previous models, combined with the understressed engine, top-quality electrics and heavy frame, these motorcycles were extremely durable. They weren't for everyone though, as they were also massively expensive when new,

and didn't exactly set the world alight in terms of performance either. "You could have bought two Bonneville's for the same money when they were new" Jack explains, as PJ adds "they're a bit agricultural; they sound and go like a TVO tractor, but they never give trouble."

On our kind of roads, this kind of toughness and reliability is perhaps the most valuable trait of all, and over the last seven years the three lads have become more and more enthusiastic for the brand, regularly taking in the big BMW motorcycle run in Wales each June. Jack was the first to take the plunge, when he picked up his R69 in Wales as a restoration project about seven years ago. Although complete and running, it was only doing so on one cylinder, and it was badly in need of a total stripdown and rebuild, which it duly received. Apart from the engine internals Jack did all of the remedial work himself, including rebuilding the gearbox, and now knows his machine inside and out, which is always handy when you're out and about. Indeed, the only major failure he's suffered on the road was a dead coil, but as he pointed out himself, it was the original, fifty-year-old unit and so it certainly had paid for itself at that stage!



Having owned a couple of later BMW bikes before, Willie picked up his R60/2 from a friend in Yorkshire about five years ago, and although it was in good order he has done plenty of detail work in his ownership, having the Hoska fuel tank repainted and adding some practical accessories such as the windscreen, just the ticket for touring. On the other hand, PJ, like Jack, took on a full restoration with his R60/2. PJ is no stranger to these pages, as his previous BMW, a single-cylinder R26, was featured back in our March 2008 issue. He is also no stranger to a challenge, having been involved in plenty of restorations through the years, and managed to turn over this project in about seven months. Although it came his way as a rebuilt engine in a rolling frame, he tells us that there was a lot of detail work and fettling involved, as well as a lot of new parts to be bought. Parts availability for these bikes is excellent, but it's not cheap, and in the end his R26 was sold in order to fund the extensive shopping list needed for this R60/2.





ON OUR KIND OF ROADS, THIS KIND OF TOUGHNESS AND RELIABILITY IS PERHAPS THE MOST VALUABLE TRAIT OF ALL, AND OVER THE LAST SEVEN YEARS THE THREE LADS HAVE BECOME MORE AND MORE ENTHUSIASTIC FOR THE BRAND, REGULARLY TAKING IN THE BIG BMW MOTORCYCLE RUN IN WALES EACH JUNE.

BELOW: Flat-twin's cylinder heads dominate the head-on view.



Jack's R69 packs a higher-powered version of the familiar 600 boxer twin, with different cam, pistons and carbs.

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# Snakebite

For those performance car enthusiasts that are handy with the spanners, a kit car makes a whole lot of sense. You can get them in all manner of varieties, ranging from vintage-style tourers to high-tech supercar-slayers. Some of the most popular, however, are those that evoke legendary sports cars of the sixties, such as the iconic AC Cobra.

Words & Photos by Andrew Pollock  
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Paddy is a soft-spoken and modest man, but knows how to build and restore a very fine car. We're sure he knows how to use the right-hand pedal too.



**RETRO**  
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Magazine

RESTORED - MODIFIED - DRIVEN

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For those of us into cars that are pretty unobtainable for the common man, kit cars and replicas are a great option, and represent a really satisfying project for someone even reasonably handy in the workshop.



Kit cars can tend to split opinion a bit, with some folks labelling them as simple 'fakes', and a bit of a copout. Why, they argue, would you spend time and money putting together, say, a Ford GT40 lookalike, when what you're left with at the end isn't a real GT40 at all? I've always found this argument a bit pointless and short-sighted; have these people actually seen the prices of real GT40s? If you could even afford to buy a real one, would you be brave enough to actually use it? There are also some of us out there who relish the actual process of putting something like a kit car together, to put your own touches into it and to feel the pride of driving down the road in a serious head-turner that you actually put together with your own two hands. Not all of us are able to fabricate complex stuff like chassis and suspension systems from scratch either, so to be able to use the benefit of all the research and development put in by reputable kit-car manufacturers is a real boon when you want to construct your own car. To further drive the point home, if a kit car is properly built then it can actually be worth a good amount of money itself if you were to sell it on, meaning that these aren't a money pit by any means, and in fact can often make more economic sense than a classic restoration, depending on the model, of course.

There's probably a kit-car for everyone, whether you like modern, lightweight mid-engined roadsters or brawny front-engined V8 monsters. Some even have room in the back for the family too, but for the most part kit-cars are sportsters in which to get away from it all at the weekend, to blast around a racetrack or to simply blow out the cobwebs on your favourite

piece of road. There's a vibrant enthusiast base for them too, with the Irish Kit Car Club being a particularly social bunch, so there's plenty of craic and support on hand to help the build along. There are a couple of dedicated magazines on the shelves from various parts of the world, and lots of online sites and blogs too. In fact, it's amazing that there aren't more kit-cars around!

Paddy Somers from New Ross in Co. Wexford hadn't ever built a kit-car before when he bought his Dax 427 a few years ago. That said, he had just finished a long nut-and-bolt restoration of a classic Morgan 4/4, and had a career in high-quality carpentry behind him, so the necessary skills were there. In fact, when we saw how much work was required in his Morgan restoration we reckon that the Dax must have been a walk in the park for Paddy. As Cobra replicas go, the Dax 427 rates as one of the best-quality ones out there, and therefore not the cheapest either. You do have the benefit of having a very capable performance car at the end of the project though; it's certainly not all looks and no go, as the suspension and brakes are taken from a classic Jaguar XJ saloon, famously praised to this day as some of the finest-suspended cars ever made. Using this donor means you get coil-sprung double wishbones up front and the legendary Jag IRS system out back with its inboard disc brakes, LSD and twin shocks per side, so you're sure to be able to keep up with any engine you'd fit under the bonnet. The chassis, too is a very beefy piece of kit, built in heavy rectangular-section steel to provide a solid base for the fibreglass bodywork.



*The fit and finish of this Dax is extremely good, and there's nothing on it to catch the eye unnecessarily. Note the big side exhausts, which are two proper 4-into-1 systems.*



*The Rover V8 fitted to Paddy's Cobra might "only" be a 3.5, but it's been well warmed up with a four-choke carb and manifold, electronic ignition and a hotter cam for north of 180bhp. Plenty of Edelbrock sparkle to be found too, with those eyecatching rocker covers and air filter. Note the tubular exhaust manifolds, which initially point forwards due to the constraints of the engine bay.*



*As it's smaller than the American V8s the Rover can be set well back in the frame for much-improved handling. You can see here how much room is left up front; the Jaguar V12 is also a popular engine choice for these Dax cars.*





The grey leather interior has been well finished, which is just as well as it's on open show almost all of the time. The wiring loom kit used by the Dax utilises a Ford Sierra steering column, complete with its switches, which in turn acts on a steering rack from a Triumph Dolomite.



Willans harnesses look great and add a little racing toughness to the interior. Of course, they are also handy in preventing you from falling out at speed.

Speaking of engines, while it's possible to fit a V12 or straight-six into this Dax, almost all builders go for a V8 of some variety; it is supposed to be a Cobra, after all! Paddy chose a Rover 3.5 over the many American V8 options out there which, although very powerful and plentiful, are large and very heavy compared to the all-alloy Rover. Add to this the fact that you can mount the Rover farther back in the chassis and you're left with a far sweeter-handling car, with plenty enough power to be getting on with. Paddy managed to pick up a rebuilt 3.5 ready to go, complete with some choice mods already carried out including electronic ignition, a fruity cam and a four-barrel carburettor on a performance manifold, all good for a reliable 180bhp plus, and shed-loads of torque too.

Once Paddy had his Jag running gear mounted to the chassis, the bodyshell glued and riveted to the chassis and the engine bolted in, he was able to concentrate on all of those finishing details that make such a massive difference to the quality of any kit-car build. The interior is one area that's on particular view with these cars, as it's totally open to the elements most of the time (this car doesn't even have external door handles), so it's important to get this right. Paddy brought his woodworking skills to bear here, making up his own dash instead of buying the fibreglass item available from Dax, which he's covered in a padded light grey leather to match the bucket seats. The doors and transmission tunnel, too have also seen lashings of hide, with a woodrim steering wheel adding a dash of rich colour to the cabin. Having started out with a secondhand set of fifteen-inch wheels, replicas of the classic Halibrands fitted to most original Cobras, Paddy ran into trouble finding wide-enough tyres at a reasonable price, and so he subsequently moved up to the sixteen-inch versions you see here, which are from Image Wheels in the UK and come complete with the trademark centre spinners, a tribute to the old 'knock-on' racing wheels fitted to original racing Cobras in the sixties.. The tyres are 215/55s on the front and meaty 245/45s on the back, and not only are they large, but Paddy's taken no chances and has stuck with quality Toyo Proxes too. No bad thing given this car's ample power and light weight.

Through those massive sidepipes the V8 sounds just as it should. A deep, rumbling note that isn't particularly loud until you really step on the throttle, at which point it becomes an angry roar. The five-speed Rover SD1 gearbox Paddy has in this car provides pretty relaxed cruising, with 70mph available at just 2,500rpm; he also tells us he has the canvas hood pretty well set up too, so he has no fear of heading off to a show anywhere in the country. Despite living in Wexford we've spotted Paddy's Cobra as far from home as Mondello and Dunboyne, and it always attracts lots of admiration. It's not one of the wildest-looking Cobras you'll see - it doesn't have Shelby stripes, chrome wheels or a massive American powerplant - but rather is restrained and timeless in its approach, and really has been finished off well. It prefers to let the Cobra's curvaceous lines do the talking, but when called upon it can hold its own with most cars on the road. And, if the 3.5 ever gets boring for Paddy, he can always fit the more modern Rover 4.6 he has waiting on the garage floor...



Although centrally mounted, the instrumentation is clear and well laid out.



#### Irish Kit Car Club

For information on the Irish Kit Car Club and their regular meets and events, log onto [www.ikcc.com](http://www.ikcc.com), see their Facebook page or call Peter on 087 2343658.

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