

RELIANT KITTEN REGISTER

MEWSLETTER Number Five Autumn 1994



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Hello again, welcome to this the fifth edition of the magazine of the Reliant Kitten Register.

To those who are current subscribers, (or have first registered since the summer of '94, and so are not yet due to renew), my apologies for the long delay, after my inviting your renewal on the basis of my making this quarterly; to the rest of you, and sadly that is the majority, I have to say that this is the last Mewsletter you will receive unless I hear from you before the next edition comes out. I will try and include a renewal notice with this edition, unless you have already renewed your subscription, in which case my thanks for your continued support.

At the risk of sounding negative, which I have no wish to be, I have to say that the fact is that neither I personally, nor the Register, can afford to subsidise the magazine beyond a few extra copies for sending to potential subscribers. As you will have gathered I was saddened by the poor take up of the renewal invitation, which was sent out with the last edition - about 25%.

I hope it is my literary skills which are causing dissatisfaction, and not those wonderful little cars which we have in common, and with that in mind I will include extracts from a number of your letters in this edition in the hopes of stimulating continued interest.

While I may be somewhat saddened, I am not discouraged, it took me 4 or 5 years to mould the Thistle branch of the Reliant Owners' Club into something resembling a car club, and given that I do not have a clear picture in my mind of how I would like to see this Register develop, I do see a need for a focus of attention and point of contact for owners for a long time to come.

Right, moan over, but do please use the form, and if I have got it wrong, either way, that is to say if there is a form and you think you have renewed, or if there is no form and you do not think you have renewed, please get in touch. I can make mistakes! (But not often!!)

On a more positive note, Phil Hallam, and others, are planning to have a batch of alloy rocker covers made for the Reliant 850 engine, (yes I should imagine it will fit the 750 and 700 as well, if not the 600 too). These will be produced by the same company who currently make such things for companies like Rover and Aston Martin, so the quality should be good. Costs will depend very much on how big a batch we get done, if we can sell over 100 the cost will be about £22, if however, as is more likely we only sell about 10, then the cost will be about £33. In an attempt to give everyone interested a chance to put their money where their thoughts and desires might be, you are invited to send a cheque now, by way of a deposit which will either be refunded if there is insufficient interest to enable us to proceed, or offset against the final cost if we do proceed. Such cheques should be for £15 per rocker cover you may require, and should be made payable to the "Reliant Kitten Register" and sent, with your name and address, and a note as to whether you would like yours to say "RELIANT" or "KITTEN" on top.

Given the rate at which such a small scheme might proceed, we do not expect the covers to be available much before the summer of '95, and only then if a sufficient number of individuals (oh how I wish I could learn to use the graphics capabilities of this machine, if I did, there would be a large finger pointing out of the page at you now!), what was I saying, ah yes, individuals, you know the things, you are one of them! Anyway, if enough

of us act a batch of alloy rocker covers will be produced, the size of batch, and hence the cost, will depend on how many folk send Phil a cheque before March, the future is in your hands, come on now, how often are you offered the chance to alter the future in a specific way. Ah, do I hear a question? "Why would I want an alloy rocker cover?"

Well, for one thing, you might be fed up with the leaks and seeps from the pressed steel one on your engine at present, then there is the matter of keeping those tappets a bit quieter, the sound deadening properties of alloy, compared to pressed steel are pretty impressive. Then again you might be an armchair enthusiast, and simply want it as a mantle piece ornament, I really don't care what the reason, just help us to get a batch - the bigger the better, organised, and don't worry about exclusivity, is that a word? Any way, you know what I mean, they will be pretty rare. Thoughts, comments, answers on a postcard please, or better yet cheques to Phil as soon as possible.

In case you were wondering, yes I want two, and no I have not sent Phil any money, Christmas is only just over, but I fully expect to have taken action by the time you read this!

Still with Phil Hallam in mind, he has done a lot of work in locating standard parts for the Reliant engine, and while I have no wish to be seen as setting up in opposition to Reliant, and also fully realise that the supply of parts for them is done through Unipart, and so really nothing to do with Reliant anyway, he has available, subject to knowing which type of points your engine uses - what, you haven't all gone electronic after reading Alan's article last year??!!?? Service kits, comprising 4 GKN plugs, air filter, oil filter, that is the short dumpy Reliant type, points as mentioned, and if you like, a gallon of Duckhams oil, although the cost of posting that might be more than the saving, any way, without postage and without the oil, but including VAT. £15.55, + £1.45 p&p. Cheques this time get made out to Phil Hallam, and sent to him at the address shown earlier.

Just to keep the information about bits together, I am able to offer Lucas exchange alternators, their ref. LRA100, that is the 34 amp one, the old 17ACR for just £22.50 providing I have the old unit, minus its pulley and fan, first. The surcharge for not having an old unit is £21.15, so I really need them, or the money, up front. I do have one in stock at the time of writing - February '95. Obviously delivery will need arranging, I do have a trip to Swindon to make in March, so who knows what might be possible! Yes, that is the same thing you can pick up in any branch of Halfords for something like £48, providing you give them the old unit. Cheques to me (Brian) this time please, payable to "Reliant Kitten Register".

Rear road springs, 4 leaf type, complete with bushes are also available for £62 including VAT, and I am having a batch of the front diagonal tie rods organised, the one which goes from the outer front corner of the front chassis cross member to the front of the lower wishbone. The costs for that are under negotiation at this time.

If there is a part which you require, and cannot get from your local Reliant dealer, or other supplier, please let me know, as it is my intention to use the Register to help ensure that we keep as many of these fine cars on the road as possible.

Also I should make sure that everyone knows that we have copies of the Kitten and Fox (and Rebel of course) parts books available at £8.50 + £1.50 p&p. Also workshop manuals for the Kitten and Rebel.

The Hallam Kitten Tale

Tuesday 7th February and I've made up a bracket to stiffen the rear shock absorber mount on the back axle. On this axle they looked O.K., however after sand blasting I could see a crack on one, and Brian tells me that this is a problem and it occurred even on his new Robin (back in 1975). Only time will tell if this is successful, or if the mounting breaks somewhere else.

Wednesday and it's a school holiday, however I only do a little bit on the Kitten as I'm busy building new ramps for the club trailer - got my own back didn't I Alan & Brian? Since I had some furniture delivered, and guess who helped me move it! Still managed to paint the back axle though.

My new camshaft arrived from Piper, excellent service - they also sent details of their range of camshafts, and for those of you who might be interested

Part No. Application Power band

REL BP255 Mild Road 1800-6000
REL BP270 Fast Road 2000-6500
REL BP285 Road/Rally 2500-7000
REL BP300 Rally/Race 3000-7000
REL BP320 Race 4000-8500

You may be wondering why progress has appeared to slow slightly, well Brian knows, and Alan wants one - I've decided to change the appearance of the front of the car by putting a bumper / spoiler on. I have been busy making a wooden buck to make a fibreglass mould, I think Brian's comment was "It looks completely different from a Kitten", Success at last!!

I decided to make an attack on the rest of the Kitten on Saturday afternoon, (12th Feb) so I removed the windscreen, side windows, coil, horns, pedal box, and master cylinder, wash bottle, rear lights, ariel, heater, all brackets and chassis plates in the engine compartment, clutch foot rest, wiring harness, headlining, hand brake tunnel. (*How does he manage to make it all sound so easy? Ed.*) This last item is tatty and consists of a plastic bag containing fibreglass insulation - surely we can do better. There is a material on the market called Cooltek, which is an aluminised thermal sheeting, which could be used to form a bag to contain the fibreglass, and then this could be held in place by proper strapping.

Wednesday night again and it's bitterly cold in the garage especially stood talking on the 'phone to Scott. I decided to fit the studs for the rear wheel spacers since Alan said that with 165*10 tyres fitted the tyres rub on the rear springs. The spacers would solve this problem, and also allow me to fit Minifin drums. I ordered a set of 3/4" solid spacers from Larkspeed -excellent service, however the spacers are not as solid as I had been led to believe, so I've been busy making a pattern to cast my own. (*There he goes again 'I'll just make a pattern and cast my own' - we don't all have those skills or facilities Phil! Ed.*) I had to remove 5mm from the longer studs, and even then I had to force them in through the hole in the backplate where the wheel cylinder usually fits. At least now I've solved all the

problems for the benefit of those people out there wanting to alter their back axle - who would want to I here you say?

It's now Friday the 25th of February, it's also snowing so I may as well get snowed into my garage. I decide to rebuild the engine as this means I don't have to move away from the stove which is about 6" away from my feet! Brian has often said that the build quality of the Reliant engine is poor, and I try to match the exhaust manifold to the cylinder head to find about 1/8", about 3mm mismatch. So I file the manifold gasket to match the head, then bolt it to the exhaust manifold and grind the manifold to match. Afterwards I take a new gasket and enlarge the cutouts to match the ports. Even the inlet manifold is mismatched, this time by about 1/16", about 1.5mm. Next I remove the valves keeping them in order, and measure the free length of the valve springs. They measure between 37mm & 38mm, which is below the specified length of 39.82mm. In view of the new camshaft I will replace them. It's strange that these (worn) springs are the correct length as those for a 750cc engine!

Saturday, and after a morning spent sledging, I decide to get the heat on and lay up the front spoiler mould, well at least one half. In between I clean up the cylinder head, and find a minute mark across the head - further investigation shows that it is not a crack, but since it may become a problem I decide to have the head skimmed, so I need to remove all the studs.

Wednesday night and I decide to remove the fibreglass mould for the front spoiler, an easy ten minute job - two hours later and it pings off after using wooden wedges, hammers etc. Next day I'm told by a fibreglass canoe maker that you need to go over the whole mould hitting it with a rubber mallet to release the air trapped between the mould and the buck. Oh well, you learn something new every day!

Saturday, and were into the first week of March, I decide to take the engine to bits and rebuild it. It all went O.K., but the whole engine is covered in an oily sludge which took me 4 hours to get reasonably clean. Now I know this sounds silly, but I usually wash all my engine parts in hot water and Lux soap flakes, you should see the oily film that removed, and if you happen to fail to wash it all off, the Lux flake you miss will not do any damage to the engine. The hot water helps the parts to dry quickly. I then blast with compressed air, apply a smear of oil, and finally wrap them in newspaper. So you think I'm a bit eccentric, well I've never had an engine fail, and the oil usually remains clean for at least 12,000 miles.

Well, I've not done much this week on the car since I've been putting up lights and operating a spotlight at the school show. It's Saturday afternoon and I decide to clean up all the wheel cylinders and fit new seals, since they are all in good condition. After finishing this I assemble the rear brakes on the axle. On the front back-plates I've cut off the rounded ends of the brake adjusters, drilled and tapped them to take 6mm cap screws, which I've fitted and brazed in place. I hope I can now adjust them using an allen key, only time will tell.

You may think that things are slowing down, well I am getting a bit older and my blood is thinning, but seriously there is a lot of time spent cleaning things and thinking up ideas. I may have a donor car for both front and back seats, a Volvo 480, yes the sporty one - take a look at it's seats and see what you think. Advert time, anyone know where there is a damaged 480, or can anyone oblige?

It's Tuesday, and so you may wonder why I am in the garage, well tomorrow I'm off to pick up 5 pairs of Kitten rear springs (get yours while stocks last!) I've washed my work trousers, you know Brian, the ones that stand up on their own, so I'm wearing my better pair of jeans, you know, the ones Ursula will let strangers see me in. I decide to do a bit of woodwork, (yes yes, timber on a Kitten!) making the buck for the fibreglass spoiler round the rear window - *let's not forget this is a Kitten Saloon we are dealing with here, Ed* - Brian's quite correct, it looks a bit different!

Saturday, and it's the start of the Easter holidays (see those teachers!). Surveying my garage I decide I've too many Kitten parts in bits, so lets put the engine back together - remember those lux flakey bits I wrapped in newspaper? I always build my engines with a mixture of 50% new oil, and 50% STP, as this adheres to the parts. All goes well with the rebuild until I try to fit the Cooper S oil pump, it doesn't fit - so I remove about 5mm from the drive shaft (after first wrapping the pump in tape), and then increase the depth of the slot by 5mm. Editors note, given that a Metro distributor is will fit the top here, and as you say Phil, you can adapt the Cooper S high capacity oil pump, what about the bit in the middle that drives them both, if a Metro or Mini Cooper part would fit would the Reliant crankcase would that perhaps save all this filing and milling ?

Sunday afternoon and I am finishing off the rebuild so that I can seal the engine and prevent dirt getting into it. By Monday morning the engine is complete and Brian helps me move it into storage.

Monday still and I start to clean the gearbox parts, the reverse gear is worn, but luckily the laygears are O.K. the synchro springs are 2/3rds the length of new ones and the plungers have deep depressions in them where the balls have worn them away. Still, I am fitting new springs and balls and plungers to the synchromesh. The pin in the reverse selector shaft is badly bent and worn, so I replace this. From the wear it would seem as if someone has been forcing it into reverse. Hopefully re-assembled all will be well! (I could have said with such an excellent engineer assembling it that the gearbox will be perfect - but I know better) *Yes Phil, and you were not the one who had the most difficult time trying to hold it in second when I drove it to your place all those weeks (months- even almost years!) ago Ed.*

Tuesday I am really tidying up the garage - well, it does look a little better.

Well, the Easter holidays are over, and as usual I've not completed all my targets. In fact I'm typing this on local government election day May 5th. For the past few weeks I've been making the Kitten look different. I have so far made all the patterns from which I will make the fibreglass moulds to make the various parts, so if anyone out there wants a 'clone' or a 'part clone', I can produce it. Obviously this requires a lot of fibreglass (seems to be more that Reliant used in the body) and I've got this from Glassplies. Front lights are now Volkswagen Jetta Mk1, and after much searching the rear lights are Ford Cappy - sorry Capri. one thing for sure, I'm, learning a lot about fibreglass.

Saturday 15th May, at last I've finished all the bucks, so that I can take the female moulds. It's been a bit of a struggle to get to this stage as I have other things to do in the garden and around the house. Hopefully I can get the moulds laid up over the weekend and remove the bucks, then I can get the body sandblasted to remove the paint. On Thursday night I got the gearbox back together, and the change seems to be more

positive with the new synchromesh springs etc. One MAJOR problem is that I don't know what colour to paint it! Fiat Punto gold looked good on the photos, but now that I've seen it for real, and Ursula does not like it. Could always do it the original turquoise. Ursula particularly likes Goodwood green, but she's not a Celtic supporter - watch this space!

Well, it's been a long time since May, it's now October, and what have I been doing? Work on the body, which at last looks completely different from a Kitten (*what's so bad about a Kitten body in the first place Ed.?*) Lots of fibreglass work, so much so that Brian is now giving my name out as an expert!

During a few odd hours I did put the front and rear suspension on the chassis, and fit the gearbox engine and propshaft. Last weekend we sprayed the engine compartment (*is this the Royal we Phil, or do you have a helper I don't know about -Ed.?*) Brian's running a competition to guess the colour; the prize is you get to rub down the clubs new Ant body!

Well, I have now fitted out the engine compartment with the master cylinder (dual circuit) and wiring harness. The latter I relocated with black harness tape (don't use insulation tape as it will become very sticky) and took the opportunity to add a few more wires into the loom.

I decided to fit an electric fan and took one off a Metro, together with the shroud. This fan is mounted behind the radiator in the Metro, whereas I need it to be in front. The fan needs to be turned round on the shaft, and the direction of the motor reversed - *just think about it people, Ed!* - I also removed the thermostat from the side of the Metro radiator, but I've decided not to fit this yet. If this thermostat is unusable both capillary and electronic kits are available from Pacet.

The Metro was an automatic, and this yielded an oil cooler which is situated to the offside headlight, and so not in the normal oil sprayed areas. Mine was like new, and cost £10, new ones cost about £40. I needed a plumbing kit and decide to go for a thermostatically controlled take off part number SERTB2 from Burton Power Products. This fits to the crankcase where the oil filter normally goes, and the oil filter then fits on top of the adaptor take off. Two disadvantages are that the mechanical fuel pump has to be removed, not a particular problem in this case as I am using an electric pump mounted under the rear seat, and the crankcase blanked, and I can only use the small Reliant type of oil filter. Otherwise it will foul the steering column. The cooler has been fitted Australian into the fibreglass vee that can be seen from the offside wheel arch when looking forward. I have had to cut some of the fibreglass away to provide airflow, but I think it looks neat. *It certainly does look very neat, Ed.*

Thanks Phil for the story so far, I will have to get a move on putting things into print or it will be a book!

Now, to prove that the whole thing is not just a figment of my imagination, some extracts from a few of our subscribers letters

Dear Brian,

This is a summary of the present situation: - Alternator, the running voltage deteriorated further, down to 11V. Checked with an independent reconditioner, who

quoted only £16 exchange, so no problem, except that with the deposit, and V.A.T. meant it was nearer to £40. The new one did solve the problem, except it rattles. The voltage did drop again today, hopefully it is only that the drive belt has settled in, and just needs adjustment.

The mystery of the fuel filler pipe adaptor is not solved, I still do not have a lockable cap. It looks as if the adaptor could easily be forced off. The question of unleaded fuel does not arise as I have identified my engine as a high compression leaded 'Rialto' (yellow rocker cover).

Thanks for the contact re- Shock absorbers, my problem is not in fact the durability of the units, but the hard ride and durability of my back!

On the subject of seats, do you know what alternative seats could be fitted? So far I have looked at Renault 5 two door, the main object is to get some with head restraints.

John Player - Coventry

John, see Phil's thoughts about the Volvo 480, personally I think they are too big, but I may be wrong. I do know that the Volvo 300 series ones can be cut down to suit, our man in the Orkneys has done it, but it is a lot of work, you can however retain the heated pads!! Still more work for your alternator!

Dear Mr. Marshall,

We've just applied to join the Reliant Owners Club having bought a Kitten Estate - OYC 321P, to restore. We enquired about a Kitten Register and Graham Chappell the R.O.C. secretary suggested that we write to you, saying that you keep such a register and publish a magazine twice a year. If the Kitten Register is still going could we join it?

Rob & Fiona Wilkes, - near Abingdon

Rob & Fiona wrote again after joining in October last, and the following extracts are from a 3 page (A4) letter which I may serialise later, thank you both for your support and enthusiasm.

Thank you for sending the R.K.R. application form so promptly - *see, I do respond promptly most times! Ed* - We're very eager to join and enclose our subscription. Many thanks for the issues of the Mewsletter which we found full of interest. It's nice to know that there are other people out there who appreciate the character of Kittens.

Is there a Reliant Kitten Register badge we can buy?

Sorry, not yet, but it is an idea, any views on the format, proposed artwork welcome.

Dear Sir,

I would like to be put on the R.K.R. I own a Kitten Estate MGS 577P, I am a member of the Hampshire branch of the R.O.C. and it was pure chance when talking to

the club editor that he remembered your ad in one of the magazines you sent to him. Hope to hear from you soon.

Barry Crampton - Havant

Yes, I really should do more to advertise the Register, Ed.

Dear Brian,

I would like to join the R.K.R., having been a Kitten owner for over 4 years. At present I have two Kittens, a red saloon, UJY 416S, which is gradually being dismantled for spares. I am using OAP 521R, a turquoise estate at present, which I purchased earlier this year.

I have spent the last two months completely overhauling and fitting a replacement engine, and have had a great deal of heartache with leaks at the base of the cylinder liners. To cut a long story short, I eventually had to rebore another block to solve my problems. However I like Kittens very much, they are quite nippy, and great fun to drive. Incidentally the front wheel bearings are the same as my other car, a 2 litre Bond Equipe! I have discovered that the front brakes are mini based, and would be interested to hear of any engine parts which are common to any other vehicles.

Ron Dark - Bideford

Yes Ron, as you will have read in Phil Hallam's tale, the oil pump is Mini, and the Cooper 'S' high capacity one can be fitted with minor mods. There is an alternative timing chain, from memory it is a Fiat part, I got mine from Pistons and Components for less than half the price of a Reliant one. The Mini distributor does the job. The 750 Car Club are the folk to talk to if you want to make it go faster, or just send a blank cheque to Dick Watson in Forres. Dick's engine, in Alan's car left John Blagburn a long way behind on the motorway on the way home in January '95, so much so that John was all for stripping his down (he has a blueprinted ported and balanced engine which is better than most, but can't come close to Dick's one). It has now covered over 120,000 miles since Dick last rebuilt it, and still has 55 P.S.I. when cruising at 60 M.P.H., and on a good day will pull well over 6000 R.P.M. in top, but we don't talk about that, because they tend to take your licence away first and ask questions later for three figure speeds!

Our man in Fife who has a BMW as his other car has an interesting story, as does our man in Ireland. As for our men in the Orkney and Shetland islands, thanks Jim for the Fox parts book and photographs -yes well I could go on, but Jim Smith was on the 'phone earlier asking me if I had realised that he had remembered to renew his subscription, as I had told him this was going to be quarterly and that was in August! So, I will shut up, get off the air, and hope to talk to you all again sooner rather than later.

Just to keep you up to date, the Fiat 1600cc twin-cam engine and five speed gearbox'd Kitten which used to belong to Dave Wardman from Leeds, now belongs to Jim Spence from Uphall, near Edinburgh. Another Kitten liberated from the South!!

Scott Rodgers had me go to Rainow in Derbyshire last month to collect a Kitten van, and trailer it to Bridge of Weir for him, and what does he do, only drive it to Stockport

and abandon it in his in-laws drive to bring his 'new' Porsche 928 back to Scotland, Aye, its a strange old world. (For those not so good at the old geography, Rainow is less that 20 miles from Stockport. 265 miles from here!)

I have failed to get this to you in 1994 as I had at one time intended, it is now the first of February 1995, a belated Happy New Year, may we see more Kittens on the road this year than last.

On the subject of failures, not that I want to dwell on them, but I must again apologise to Les Cruickshank, who did give me an article for these humble pages on his Kitten body off rebuild well over a year ago now, and I keep finding excuses for failing to include it. On this occasion it was because Phil's story was so big, not complaining chaps, merely trying to excuse / explain my way of doing things, next time Les, I promise.

Talk to you again later in the year, by the way the Thistle Branch of the R.O.C. is again having a do at the Doune Classic weekend the bank holiday weekend at the end of August, we had 9 Kittens and a Fox there last year, why not come along, drop me a line or give a ring if you are interested, camping and local B & B are easily arranged / available. Alan is in charge of the campsite again, talk to him for more details **** *. We do also attend, and compete in the Doune Classic Challenge which takes place in May, an R.A.C. waiver of permit is obtained for these events as the intention is to have competitive fun, not wreck the cars, and the wee Reliants are very competitive on grass, why not come along, we only had 6 Kittens and 1 Rebel there last year (see front cover - I hope!), and so could only make up two Teams (there are three cars, with driver and passenger, required to make up each team). We can normally supply passengers locally!

Just one more thing, the Thistle Branch of the R.O.C. does have this trailer, which is south of the border 4 or 5 times a year. I only charge 10p a mile + £10 a day (when south of the border anyway) to move small Reliants, if you think I can help, give me a ring.

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