

RELIANT KITTEN REGISTER

MEWSLETTER Number Eight

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Hello again, welcome to edition number eight of your favourite bedtime reading. I hope that it will not in fact be too far into the autumn when you get this, but at least by giving the four editions the seasonal names. I give myself a fairly wide band of time in which to get them produced and distributed!

Particular thanks are due to Adrian Hanwell, who recently reacted very promptly in response to a question about alternative spare parts. Adrian's experience is related to Rebels, but Rebels with 850cc engines, and so the engine parts information is common. He does use the rear half of a Kitten van as his trailer, so he does have more in common with us than many Rebel owners. The 65 A4 pages of information which he sent me, several of them double sided, have clearly taken a while to compile, and will take me some time to study and file, but do make a good start to what will I am sure be a long and never ending task.

Speaking of Rebel owners, Terry Scott, he of Rebel Register fame, is trying to find a new custodian for the Rebel Register. I have happily volunteered to take this on, after all I only own two Kittens, and at this time I have 4 Rebels! Terry however, seems reluctant to have its custodian north of the border, and is seeking a south of England individual. Personally I don't see the problem, given that contact will normally be by post, and I am usually south of the border three of four times a year. Talk to me Terry!?!

The level of enquiries about the Register has risen recently to about four or five a month. Sadly less than half of them subscribe, the others simply want a question answered, or have a car for sale. Such is the way of things I am afraid.

The good news, well not so good for us, because of the time which Phil has spent on his project this year, he has not had time to put finger to keyboard and tell us of his frustrations, but his Rosso Red much modified Kitten saloon has been on the road since early in September. At the time of writing (early October) it has covered over 500 miles, and while he is still trying to resolve a number of frustrating teething problems, well, that's his story. I think he simply does not want to give Ursula her new car because he is enjoying it far too much himself!

It is great to know that all the effort was not in vain, though I would have to say that I would estimate that more than two thirds of the time spent on this project, was spent carrying out the modifications, and that it would have been finished over a year ago if it had not been for the multitude of non-standard features which the cars now sports. Was it worth all the extra effort? Well, you would need to ask Phil that one, suffice to say he tells me he would never do another one, and is already getting on with the restoration of his Riley nine.

A company called David Ramsden Associates has written offering their services by including any of our members car details on their "International Vehicle Register" for which they are prepared to waive the normal registration fee, and simply charge each individual their normal £25 annual fee, in return for which they offer to put you in touch with T.V. and film companies who are frequently looking for that elusive / interesting vehicle to star in a show / film. If you are interested feel free to contact them direct on 01202 789101, or write to Tony Ramsden at IVR DRA, 8, Richmond Gardens, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 1JD

The Register has also been offered complete three piece clutch sets for the Kitten for £48 plus p&p, I was thinking of trying one out myself, so if you are interested, let me know, and perhaps I can buy a few at the same time. I have in fact just ordered one, and if it seems O.K., I will take orders for them for £55 delivered. I really should watch what I say after the additional costs incurred in the rocker cover exercise ! but, not deterred I would suggest that you give me a ring to confirm suitability and availability before sending a cheque payable to the "Reliant Kitten Register" and telling me just how much of a hurry you are in to receive it, as it would obviously suit me if you could wait till either myself, or another local enthusiast is in your area.

I am still able to offer Lucas exchange alternators, their ref. LRA100 that is the 34 amp one, for £22.50 exchange, and rear 4 leaf road springs with bushes for £68 a pair (+ delivery if required). Also stainless exhausts can be made to order.

We are still looking at a batch of the steady arms for the front suspension, (anyone got a sensibly priced source of the bushes? (and perhaps ultimately, lower wishbones), and a repair section for the roll over bar bottom, since they always seem to rust away, and nobody wants to try and weld fibreglass!!

Reconditioned water pumps are also available, either 3 or 4 hole fan fixings, for the princely sum of £33 plus p&p, but the old unit has to be returned or there is a huge £12 surcharge.

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 help keep as many of these fine cars on the road as possible. We still have copies of the Rebel and Kitten and Fox parts books available, at £8.50 + £1.50 p&p. Also workshop manuals for the Rebel and Kitten at the same price.

I am advised (to answer a question) that the Fox road wheels are Vauxhall Viva van, I presume that means Bedford HA, and in that case, since it was the Bedford which in the main replaced the Post Offices fleet of Morris Minor vans, there should still be plenty of them about. (although I must admit that it is a while since I saw one on the road).

Now, for the benefit of one of our minority groups, (and the general interest of the rest of us) the front cover this time should show a Cipher, British registered, as you might be able to make out, but currently living in Holland, thanks to Thomas Touw for the photograph of his car. I have recently found Tony Steven's address, thank you John, and am actively trying to contact him. Tony is the man behind the Cipher.

To digress completely for a moment, I would like to thank those of you whom I was able to meet during my trip south in September, for bearing with me whilst on my diet – I did lose 4 lbs. while away, which was a pleasant surprise after gaining a pound or so the week before – I sometimes cheat you see, but that is difficult while driving!

On the rocker cover front, I was busy telling everyone that it would probably be necessary to put additional washers under the tube nuts you could of course cut them to a more appropriate length and achieve the same thing.

Special thanks to those of you who were good enough to put me up for the night, and to that man from London who does not like to see his name in print, for offering to take charge of the covers for those in the London area. Thanks Bob, it saved me a lot of time.

As far as the rocker cover exercise goes, we did just cover our costs, but only because Phil was good enough not to charge for all hit time and 'phone calls – thank you Phil.

Alan Marshall's Yellow Peril had a major mechanical failure in the engine department in August. He came home one evening courtesy of the R.A.C. after his engine seized in heavy traffic on his way home from work.

Now the engine in that car was rebuilt by Dick Watson barely 145,000 miles ago, and in spite of what Alan might tell you, the failure occurred within a few months of him stopping using synthetic oil to lubricate the engine. A point which I suspect is of more than passing relevance, but that is just my opinion. The failure was particularly interesting because when we removed the head, after removing the engine from the car, there was number four piston, and number three, and number two, but no sign of number one! There was a con-rod, and a gudgeon pin, where you would expect there to be, but no sign of a piston!! Clever trick I thought, how do you remove a piston from an engine without taking anything to bits?!? Well, when we removed the alternator to transfer it to the replacement engine we did find a small hole in the crankcase, and in the light of day (it was dark by the time we got the head off) there are sizeable chunks missing out of the liner, and I do not doubt that once we finally remove the sump, we will find some lumps of aluminium there which really ought to be a different shape, and in a different place.

Now if the problem was caused by excessive heat, why would number one piston suffer first (it was number one which failed on my engine a couple of years ago, though not nearly as spectacularly, mine still ran, just high crankcase pressure and low compression number one.). To a layman like me I would have thought that the front of the engine got some air cooling, and so I would have expected number four to be the first to fail, just goes to show how much I understand about these things.

We had Alan's car going again a couple of days later, though the engine in it now has next to no oil pressure (welcome to the club Alan!) but runs well enough, and pulled a fully loaded trailer to Doune at a steady 60 M.P.H. no bother at all. Like I always try to tell people, oil pressure is fine, and nice to have, but what you really need is plenty of good circulation, and a good quality, clean, well filtered lubricant (cooled if you like) pressure is not the be all and end all.

I once sold an old 750 engine, from my original Rebel PJJ 697L, to a chap locally, for his Robin. The engine ran at 12 – 18 psi. when hot, and he enjoyed 6 years service from it before scrapping the car due to a rusty chassis, admittedly he was only covering about 5,000 miles a year at the time, but 20 odd thousand miles from an engine in that state must prove something!

To digress completely, the reason you did not get this sooner was that Adam Grieve had a loan of the picture I want to use for the front cover, and while he tells me that he posted it to me first class on Tuesday, it is still not here and it is now Saturday morning, admittedly 5:30am.

Members Letters

Dear Brian,

Thanks for details of the Register and magazines which I found very interesting. I have been a great fan of Reliant vehicles since my first three wheeler in the 1950's. I am very pleased to join the Register and enclose details of my present two Reliants.

On the subject of spares, I have had really excellent service from a firm in Northampton, they specialise in Fox and Scimitar. They are:- Queensbury Scimitar, 28 – 32 Queensbury Road, Kettering Northants NN15 7HL Tel :- 01536 513351. The only part they have been unable to get me is a new steering wheel cover, apparently only available on a new steering wheel!!

I see from the magazine that you have some members doing fibreglass work. I worked in several factories over the years building amongst other things, Scammell lorry cabs, racing car parts, septic tanks, boats etc. etc. If my advice can be of any help in this direction pass my 'phone number on.

My Fox has been 100% reliable over the 100,000 miles I've had it. It had a top overhaul, valves etc, but nothing else done on the engine. Road springs all round. The worst problem I have had is with the clutch driven plate. I have never worn the friction discs out, always the centres, and the springs come loose and cause vibration and noise. However this was before I replaced the gearbox bearings which were quite worn. Maybe this was the problem? Unless they all do the same?

There are three or four Foxes around, and a couple if Kittens, if I get a chance to speak to the owners I will put them in touch, all the best for now.

John S. Whitfield - Newcastle Emlyn

Dear Brian,

I would have written sooner, but I've been waiting until we had a photo of the restored Kitten to send you. As you can see OYC 321P is now on the road and in use as our sole car. There are still a few things which need sorting out ; the top universal joint on the steering column has a lot of vertical slack, which rattles over uneven surfaces (passed the M.O.T. though - and we have one on order from the local dealer, but we have been told it might take a while to arrive. There's a very slight seepage of oil at the back of the gearbox (presumably part No. 6217, which we've been told is unobtainable, so any suggestions as to sources or useable alternative parts welcome!). The roll over bar needs repairing and we're very much hoping that you will get a batch of repair sections made. The grille surround still hasn't emerged from the factory, but we can afford to wait, as the repaired one doesn't look too bad.

In the very hot weather recently the needle of the temperature gauge has only been a hairsbreadth off the "hot" mark; this has been an ongoing problem. We've fitted a reconditioned radiator, the water pump is new (only a three bladed fan though) and there's a new thermostat and heat sensor. We've run the engine with the radiator cap off and looked for bubbles, but could see none, so we guess the head gasket is O.K. Maybe its oil cooler time? - Problem now solved, the new thermostat was faulty!!

In a couple of places the paint is beginning to lift; only two small spots though, and we intend to wait until everything that's going to lift or shift has done so, before having any imperfect areas sorted. The finish is still good generally.

We've had one or two other problems since we've been back on the road. One of the replacement vertical springs in the drivers seat frame broke again, this time I've fastened it back with a jubilee clip which is completely solid, but to make it less of a bodge I used a shiny stainless steel one from a local marina. We fitted the old sunroof O.K., but in the first down pour it was like being under a domestic shower. Copious amounts of sealant and removal and refitting and sealing the hinges made no difference at all, it was still like being under a shower. We gave up and got a new one professionally fitted, and stuck on some gutters to stop leaks through the tops of the doors. (Could only get the sort with a stainless strip for the back door, so the ones on the sides are just black plastic, not nice) now were waterproof (so far 1). There wasn't anything substantial enough under the new headlining to fix the interior mirror to. We tried a similar one which glued directly to the windscreen, and held it firmly in place for ages, but it fell off within a week. Now we are using a smaller suction type, which is actually a better size for the car, and seems quite secure, and will be much easier to refit if it does come adrift.

It's great having the car back on the road, it's much more fun to drive than the Ambassador it replaces, and much cheaper to run too, once all the problems have been sorted out (well they have to be eventually, don't they??).

Rob & Fiona Wilkes - Oxon

Thank you for keeping us up to date, great news that the Kitten is back in service. There was a situation regarding windscreen rubbers and the need, or otherwise, to remove the dashboard, about which I would seem to have been mis-informed, as Rob and Fiona had no difficulty in replacing the windscreen with the dashboard in place. Ed.

P.S. I did have a drive in Rob & Fiona's Kitten in September, and have to say, the steering joint apart, that it is one of the good ones. It always interests me the difference between cars of the same make, some are much better / worse than others, and each owner nearly always assumed that all the others are just like theirs in every respect, and I have to tell you that is not true, there are vast differences.

Dear Brian,

Thank you for your prompt reply to my application to join the Register and also about the details about the Tempest. I managed to find a brochure at an autojumble recently. I also found a mint condition 1975 brochure for the Reliant Kitten car. While at the autojumble I met an old friend who deals in interesting cars. He told me that he has sold a part built Kitten / Fox kit car by a firm called Tempest. And that the kit was going to be a shooting brake when finished. The sale went, complete with some plans and some spare parts, to a man in Scotland. (*Not me this time, honest! - Ed*) but at the time of writing, my friend had not found the address.

I thought I might put an idea forward to help further the membership of the Register. In my local Land Rover Club, of which I am an active member, we carry around with us a small card, made up from a Photostat of the Club's details, then, when a possible new member is spotted or met, simply give or leave them with the card. In the beginning of our Land Rover Club we all succeeded in giving each other at least two cards, but eventually we began to recognise members from non-members. With the Kitten Register we all live so far apart that the problem should not arise too often. I would suggest that about six in each magazine for members to pass on would be plenty for the time being.

Lastly, if anybody knows of a van type Kitten for sale I might be interested.

Colin Etheridge - Bootle

Thanks Colin, I did have a flyer which I used to use, yes, it's high time I re-circulated it! There is a Kitten Van coming on the market up here soon (round headlights and lower gearing) but, like most of the others I know of, it has been fitted with side windows and a back seat, is that a problem ?

On the subject of vast differences between cars of which I spoke at the end of Rob & Fiona's letter, let us take the engine as one example. Theirs has not been rebuilt, and is one of those which does not cut out when you put your foot on the clutch – I am sure while many of you will be wondering what I am talking about, an equal number will know all too well just what I mean. Also theirs starts first turn of the key, hot or cold, and again some of you will think this is quite normal, but I'll wager that a greater number will not believe it for a minute, well, its true. As to why, ah well, there we have one of this centuries great unsolved mysteries!

I knew a chap once (a long time ago) whose local garage had a customer with a Riley RME 1.5, which was one of a number of similar vehicles which the garage looked after for a variety of customers, but this particular one was 15 MPH faster than any of the others, much quicker off the mark, and used a lot less fuel to do it. It took a couple of years, but the garage proprietor was so persistent that he eventually convinced the fortunate owner to allow him to remove and strip the engine to see why it was that it was so superior to all its contemporaries. What happened, well he could find nothing out of the ordinary, but when it all went back together, it performed just the same as all the others, much to the dismay of the owner, who promptly sold it. So there really must be something to it when these wise old men tell us that it really does matter how you screw it all together.

Now, as you may have noticed, I do not normally advertise cars for sale in these pages, basically because of the long gap between editions, but these two deserve a special mention (probably both will be sold long before this comes out, in which case I will hesitate before doing this kind of thing again) Both Donald Jack, and Keith Parrott have for sale Kitten saloons which have both had body off rebuilds carried out in the nineties. Engines reconditioned, headlinings replaced, chassis galvanised in Keith's case and generally so much work done, yes resprayed etc etc. and neither of them is asking even a thousand pounds. I really don't know, either car has to be good for many years to come, and I am sure, he said hoping that neither if the wives were reading this) that a figure somewhat nearer £2,000 has been spent on them in the past few years to get them into the sort of condition they are in today. Anyway, now you know where to get a really good one. No, neither gentleman is giving up Kittens, they both have an estate car which they are keeping, and yes, in case you were wondering, both the estates have had body off rebuilds done too!

My thanks to those of you who took the time to advise me of errors in the Register as published last time. I probably should make it the last few pages of this edition, but it is getting so big, up to 175 cars now on file, that I really hesitate to incur the expense with every edition, and then again perhaps the discipline of putting it in print is a good way of enabling those of you with whom I have made mistakes, see that they have been corrected, indeed check that they have been corrected accurately. I guess the thing to do in future is to publish the Register details as a separate thing, and, as I have said before, get it into chassis number order. Oh, decisions, decisions, fear not, what was it that chap said, publish and be restrained by a large concrete wall, or some such phrase!

Brian