

RELIANT KITTEN REGISTER

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Hello again, welcome to 1996 and the ninth edition of the magazine for small 4 wheeled Reliant enthusiasts. May I take the opportunity of wishing you and yours all the best for the New Year ahead.

On, and by the way, NO YOU CAN'T – have one!! on the Ciphers as shown on the front cover of the last edition,. Well certainly not all of you who asked, because there are not enough to go round!

The Register is, as regular readers will know, able to offer special deals on a variety of replacement parts, and before you all accuse me of having the same first page in every edition, I will simply say that those offers still stand, write or telephone for confirmation.

It has been suggested to me that to use the front cover to illustrate such unusual Kitten based vehicles as I have been in the habit of doing is showing prejudice, well all I am trying to do is make everyone aware of the existence of such things. The Cipher, shown on the cover of the last edition was the brain child of one Dr. A. Stevens, who was responsible for the construction of 6 such vehicles, two of them in the Reliant factory, and 4 by his own hand. He tells me that at least one, and possibly two others were assembled from parts in addition to those 6. Also, his son still runs the prototype to this day. The main reason that only 6 were built was that that is all the relevant government department would permit without obtaining type approval. (a time and vehicle consuming, and hence expensive business) The front cover this time should show a better known shape, but, as you might gather, I am not deterred from showing you the unusual ones.

To digress completely, as I so often do, I should have made a big thing of the team of three Kitten estates driven so successfully at Doune in August, They did not win this time, being beaten into second place by a pair of Lotus Eland and a Caterham 7, by 6 seconds, I would have said just 6 seconds, but a similar teal Team Lotus, beat us by three seconds three years ago, so we are doing something wrong chaps, unless you are prepared to concede that the Elan is superior in some way to the Kitten (the limited slip diff does help I must help I must admit !) In which case please would you care to step aside and I will show you how it should be done!

You should all, if I am organised enough, have included in the envelope with this a blue renewal notice for 1996. Everyone should have one. If you have joined recently, and I have not been generous enough with back numbers for you to feel that you have had your monies worth, feel free to ask me if you can have till next January to renew. I will probably not argue with you, but I must get to standard renewal date, the work involved in giving everyone a year from when they join is simply not on. It is far simpler to send out all the renewal notices together, so I have decided doing it by the calendar year in future

Brian.

One matter of little or no importance at all, but which does interest me, is the speedometer in your car! Has it got orange lettering, or white, and more to the point the odometer got a decimal place, or just whole miles? Was the tenth of a mile feature added to later models, or deleted from early ones as a cost cutting exercise. Or was the feature a benefit of the DL? Did you even know that some have tenths of a mile shown, and others not? Have a look, and if you have the time, do drop me a line telling me the

year, model, white or orange, and tenths of a mile or not. And if you happen to be breaking one with a speedo which has tenths of a mile, please don't throw the speedo out, or if you are throwing it out, throw it this way!

Enough of such trivia, but then again, was the van's speedo really calibrated differently, to compensate for the lower gearing, or did they just hope that it came within the legal 10%?

I have been driving a van, with side with side windows and a rear seat for a week now. Scott & F.J. went to the States for Christmas, and I must say that I do like the lower gearing. Certainly this one is a particularly good example, only the steering and suspension needing work, but the lower gearing makes it more like the Rebel, which, as you know, is my preference, then again that Kitten heater is good, and there is more space between the front of the seat and the front of the door, that is more room to get clumsy feet in and out! – But a lot of Rebels now qualify for the zero rate of road fund licence, only one of my four does mind you, and not the one with the M.O.T !) Will we see an increase in their values now I wonder?

Speaking of Rebels, and my pet desire to see them all survive, and be reliable, your steering is meant to be oiled, although light grease is infinitely better than no attention at all. Those blanking plugs in the vertical link (well I replaced mine a long time ago with grease nipples, but as I said that is better than nothing). What I am saying is lay aside a day, because, if you have not done it before, you will have to remove the whole thing, and that means removing the back plates, no you do not have to disturb the hydraulics, but then again why not do the whole thing and treat the care to new front brake cylinders and shoes while you are in there anyway., and flexible hoses to. Yes, I know, what started out as a let's lubricate the steering exercise, suddenly cost £ 50 odd a side, and perhaps worse, if the years of neglect wore something badly, and you will almost certainly need new bushes in the bottom. Fear not, it is all standard Triumph, or is that Standard Triumph? Never mind, your average Vitesse and Spitfire, has the same parts, even some of the later bigger engined Heralds I believe, and so all the parts are available, new, from a variety of specialist firms. Just give me a ring if you have any problems getting bits.

Enough of this, besides, if, like me, you do not have a garage with light and heat, this is probably not the time of year to do it anyway. Then again, with a very understanding wife, the front suspension assembly will fit on the average kitchen table, even when fully dismantled – only kidding dear, honest – Ouch!

MSK 140 used to be one part number for the bottom bush kit, but I suspect that manufacturer is not making them any more, handy to remember at the old Autojumble mind you.

The news regarding the company, Reliant, is not so encouraging, the company is again up for sale, the major difficulty for us this time, might be the supply of spares, as the most recent custodian had decided to do it all in house, and so Unipart are not likely to be terribly interested in helping us out. Time alone will tell.

MEMBERS LETTERS

Dear Brian, Oct.'95

Thanks very much for the autumn of the Mewsletter which arrived yesterday, and for your note.

We really enjoyed your visit; it was good finally to meet in person. We fitted the alloy rocker cover right away, though we had to open out the holes in the clips which secured things to the top of the cover quite a lot to clear those nice chrome tube nuts.

Yes, sorry, mine does not have anything attached there, but now that you mention it, a lot of them do, Ed.

However, it is now on, it does not leak, and I think it even makes the engine quieter. We look forward to the next edition on the magazine

Rob & Fiona Wilkes – Abingdon – Oxon

Dear Brian, 17/11/95

Thanks for your prompt reply to my telephone call

Yes, I know you have not all had such prompt service, but it does happen! I was most impressed with the selection of Club magazines you enclosed, and will be pleased to join the Register. Just a few more details concerning "POI", which is proving quite a remarkable buy I should take the opportunity to point out both to readers, and to Susan, the author of this letter's lovely long suffering wife, that John is clearly not as fanatical as she would have me believe (she amended my question on the application form about the degree of keenness "Are you an enthusiast, or is it just a means of transport" to "Fanatic"), but it really can't be too bad as he calls POI "it" not "him" or "her", So things could be worse Susan! Ed.

The reason for the purchase was simply as a hobby vehicle –

*Which reminds me, sorry to interrupt again John, but **WHEN DID YOU ALL LAST GREASE THOSE FRONT BALL JOINTS ?** Or in the case of Rebel owners **CHECK THE STEERING BOX OIL LEVEL ?** I ask because I just tried to do the relatively new ones on my recently acquired estate car the other day, and could only get grease through two of them ! Ed.*

My last hobby car was a Range Rover Vogue EFI which nearly bankrupted me. When eventually I reluctantly sold it this year, I did recoup enough cash to get the bank manager off my back for the summer at least.

Our two "mainstream" cars, Susan's Skoda Favorit, and my Peugeot 305 estate proving boringly reliable, I was seriously looking for something to tinker with when the Kitten became available. Bought from a colleague at work it was taxed and had a long test. I had known of this particular car for over 8 years, and knew its last two owners. Eventually a deal was struck for £200.

In the early seventies after completing my apprenticeship (as an electrician with the Ford Motor Company), I decided to go to night school for a few years to do my higher

nationals. During this period I worked for a Reliant Main Agent, Romford Market Garage. This was however before the Kitten came out, although I did get a great deal of experience on Regals, Rebels and Scimitars.

I am 6'2", and the previous owner had boosted the seat with a chipboard base as he was a small chap. The 60 mile journey home was almost surreal, fortunately the drivers seat reclines and by adopting a "Carlos fandiango" driving position, I was abler to peer under the top windscreen rail just enough to see where I was going. First observations were badly pilling brakes, and a slipping clutch.

Having got home it was into the workshop, up on stands, and off with the wheels and drums, one new wheel cylinder and a set of front shoes were fitted, the brakes bled, and the clutch slackened off, and the car is now in daily service. The plank has been removed from under the seat, and I can just get in now, and wayward handling was down to both back tyres being at 12psi.

(Yes, I've met that before several times. I think they do it, well some of them at least, in an attempt to get softer ride, very dangerous Ed)

Now running with them at 24.

The chassis is in fine order, never seen a welder, it has a tow bar fitted, and is mostly still covered in (factory?) silver paint. The suspension appears good, with the exception of perished top rear shock absorber bushes, and the car generally seems to accurately reflect its recorded 50,000 miles. The body is undamaged, but starting to show signs of micro blistering over much of the surface. I have a part interest in a local body shop, so a respray should not break the bank. (if I can obtain a set of correct decals)

Oh, that reminds me, talk to Bob Neal, Barbara, is Bob listening ? – what about those originals which you were going to let Douglas Philip borrow to copy ? Were they just Robin, or all models?

The speedo did not go over 25 mph when I got the car, and I discovered there was almost ¼" of vertical play at the gearbox output flange. The reason for this has not yet been investigated, the car changes gear cleanly, and the syncromesh works really well! I will have to remove the gearbox in the next few weeks, and the clutch still slips when provoked, so I will investigate further then.

In the last year, it has had a new battery, alternator, and two new Uniroyall Rally tyres, The exhaust is however on its last legs. The car readily starts first turn of the key, hot or cold, but runs like a Pig, unless the choke is out, some carburettor work to be done I think. The oil pressure appears to be good at 35psi hot at 50 mph, there is no exhaust or breather smoke, and no sign of overheating. The car is warmed up in about three miles, and the heater is too good!

The car was originally registered in northern Ireland, hence the registration, in, according to D.V.L.C. 1977. It was imported into England in 1979 and has 8 recorded previous owners, three of whom I know. It came with some service history, a full factory manual, all M.O.T.'s since 1988, and I have a serious interest to find out more of its history.

Cosmetically it is in need of some quite major work, the hazard switch is the wrong type, as is the wiper and washer switches,. Luckily the dash has not been hacked about to fit the current items, they have been left tapped in place, dangling on their wires. Even the non-working radiomobile radio has been fitted into a plywood panel screwed to the glovebox aperture. I shall repair this and fit it in the correct manner.

The trim in general is good, but the rear parcel shelf is a home made chipboard item. The door panels, vinyl pocket type, are beyond repair, and the drivers seat, in addition to essential mods to make me fit, needs re-padding, and has split up one of the seams of the backrest.

This Kitten is not, and never has been fitted with a steering lock as described in the workshop manual (Did you not know that they don't steal cars in Ireland, so such security is not necessary! Ed) I am curious to know how many of the trim panels are common for example to the Robin / Rialto. I also do not know of any Reliant dealers or agents in my area, though Kettering is no too far away, so I can use Queensbury garage if necessary.

Finally, if you have any members in this neck of the woods, please pass on my details to them, in addition to my home and mobile numbers. I can be contacted through my work, either by calling the main London underground switchboard on 0171 724 5600 extension 21953, or on the office direct line, 0171 262 3444. John A Pearce – Leighton Buzzard

Thank you John for the tale, John is, in true star trek fashion, the Scottish chief engineer, though only on the London Underground, however I am sure that there are times when he wishes that someone would beam him up! Ed.

Dear Brian, 6/3/95

Thanks for the excellent Mag. I noticed from issue No. 5 that there seems to be some concern over rear leaf springs. After 16 years use, including a lot of off road work carryng mountain rescue equipment, perhaps I can offer some help and advice. First, how to preserve the ones you've got!

- 1) All leaf springs using more than 1 leaf, wear at the points of contact where the leaves slide over each other, to reduce / minimise this wear they MUST be lubricated.
- 2) Road dirt, grit and water will wash any lubricant away, this erosion can be reduced by using a dry teflon lubricant such as GT 85 (cycle shops sell it for lubricating bike chains)
- 3) The leaves can be more fully protected after lubrication by wrapping them with something. Over the years I've tried several things, but the best so far, seems to be builders flashband, this is thin, aluminum sheet, coated on one side with bitumen.

Using the above techniques tends to double the life of the springs.

Secondly, choosing springs for replacement. Reliant have issued several spring types over the years.

1. The original Kitten 2 leaf (hard suspension).
2. The Kitten DL 5 leaf (soft suspension).
3. The Kitten DL estate springs 1983 onwards, which have the same number, but 20% thicker leaves.

All are interchangeable, but type 3 are the most durable.

Finally, you can make your own leaf springs.

1. When the springs fail, it is usually the lower shorter leaves that wear through and snap – the upper ones often being in as new condition – **not always my experience, Ed** This means that, given two broken springs, you can cut up with a hacksaw, some of the lower sections of one to make new short pieces for another. It works well, I have driven for 30,000 miles on “mended” springs in my Kitten when Reliant were out of stock. So the rule is don't throw anything away!
2. If however, the worst ever comes, don't despair, single leaf, Robin / Rialto springs are the same length and use the same sized shackles!

Take care Happy Kittenning, Graeme Shaw – Glossop.

Thanks Graeme, see folks, if you wait long enough, I will probably get around to printing your letters ! that one should save me a few sets of new springs, but of course it is sometimes the bushes that fail you on the M.O.T., and the new springs come complete with new bushes, (also, they have 4 leaves, how does that fit in I wonder ? I thought the 5 leaf ones were only fitted to the Fox ??? Ed).

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Dear Brian,

Thank you for the information on the Kitten Register. Please find enclosed my cheque and application form plus a couple of photos to prove the cars exist ! I have been looking out for a club for owners of these vehicles for some time, but only heard of you when I read Practical Classics Club list last month.

I was quite impressed by the Kitten when new – but couldn't afford one, and the same with the Fox. A few years ago a Kitten with a broken crank came on the market for £50, and I bought it to fix for a friend. Things changed and another friend from work got it. We fixed it and it ran well. Another one came on the market, and I bought it as a runner and tidied it up and used it till I saw a Fox in a farm yard, taking root. A complete rebuild, and the Kitten's engine and gearbox later, and it was running. A rear seat went in, and windows to do the school run. The Kitten went out to grass, literally, and later got the works from my colleagues Kitten and went back on the road.

The story now becomes one of dying engines and gearboxes, and a colleague buying a Micra and abandoning his Kitten back in my yard, currently both are in use. But the Foxe's new engine of 18 months (factory lead free and all) is burning oil badly, and needs work.

My wife runs a Minor convertible, and we have been to many Minor events, but with ferry fares at £350 we can't take the car often. Old cars on a tight budget are a necessary way of life, but we might as well enjoy them as much as possible along the way.

There are no three wheelers over here (Guernsey) as there is no tax advantage. All cars are taxed per CWT. And we have no M.O.T. A few Rebels were sold of which I think one survives, about 15 Kittens, mostly estates, and then 5 Foxes, of which mine and two others started life with the local Water board. (Wouldst not a Dolphin have been more appropriate one wonders, Ed.) A few Kittens and 4 of the Foxes survive, though not all are in service.

A few technical thoughts. No. 1 cylinder is overcooled by the turbulence from the water pump. All engines I have stripped have had excessive wear on No. 1. Electric fuel pumps under the seat work well. Morris minor carb insulators work if you dent the rocker cover for the jet. Fox front springs seem too soft??

(do you mean on the Fox, or the Kitten? Ed)

Access to the front of the propshaft is easy if you cut a square hole in the top of the transmission tunnel, and fit an alloy plate using self tappers. Use stainless steel bolts and self tappers whenever possible.

(Love to, Ed, but where do you get stainless self tappers at a sensible price?)

Fitting the screen does not need the dash out, I've done two. If you ever have the gearbox off, check the roll pins that hold the clutch thrust yoke on to the shaft. I've seen several shear off and slip, causing a jamb which causes the whole set up to be out of line.

Am looking forward to the next Mewsletter, Merry Christmas, and good luck with the Register next year.

Keith Dumont – Guernsey C. I.

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Someone, I think it was Colin Ethridge, made the very reasonable suggestion that we should have an introduction card for the Register, which we could all carry a few of around with us, and when an owner is spotted or met, simply give or leave them with the card.

I did have a flyer which I used to use, yes its high time I re-circulated it. I will try to make a smaller version, as it was A4, and let you all have a few.

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Dear Brian,

My Kitten van is currently off the road for the winter break, and engine, gearbox and suspension rebuild.

The car was bought in Halifax as one half of a pair, one running, and the other for spares. As the spares car had such a sound chassis, it seemed a shame to break it, so it came about that an 18 month body off rebuild, and modification to take a “normal” battery saw the car on the road till early 1995, when a previously helicoiled stud tore through the head gasket , so a replacement engine was fitted.

The van has had a back seat put in, but I still have the wooden van board panels (floor).

The car came fitted with spotlights and holes for auxiliary instruments, so I presume (correct me if I am wrong) it is a DL. (It also has chrome effect guttering fitted). It is mildly modified with a sports steering heel, and fully enclosed dash (Oh how the language lets us sown sometimes, what is a fully enclosed dash? Ed.) It was laid up in November, and should hopefully be back on the road in April. Could you tell me if any similar registrations are known (See back pages for details, Ed.) I ask this because a Reliant van was seen on the television programme Byker Grove which is filmed locally (XVY 444R) but I am unsure as to whether it had three or four wheels.

Paul C. Adgar - Washington, Tyne & Wear.

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SALES & WANTS

As you might have realised by the absence of such a page in the past, I felt that a quarterly magazine was no place for such a thing. But, it seems that some of you have lives that are as slow / disorganised, what have you as mine, and that in fact three months or so is not too long to find that elusive bit. (perhaps it is because we are so organised, and like to plan that bit ahead!!) Whatever, it seems that there is some need or such a thing, here we go, soon be needing that index I seem to remember mentioning at one time!!

WANTED :- A pair of Kitten bonnet hinges, complete bonnet stay, gear change lever gaiter, 2 heater control knobs, and a saloon / estate car rear axle. Phone Mike on 01603 881338 if you can help.

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One bit of news I must share with you is that Jim Spence, current custodian of the Fiat 1600cc twin cam powered Kitten estate, has just got it through its first M.O.T. since the engine change, and been successful in arranging agreed value insurance on it. That was the week between Christmas and New Year, so it should have been on the road for a few weeks by the time this reaches you. It has been by no means plain sailing for Jim, there were many frustrating problems, but the man persevered, and got the job done. I hope you have a lot of fun with it Jim.

I have decided to yet again include the main Register details, but do not intend doing so in future, other than once a year, As you will see it is growing fairly quickly, and I really need to get to grips with the software and produce it in chassis number order. We have been invited to a number of big Classic Car Shows during the year, and I know that some of us would love to take part in LEJOG, the Lands End to John O'Groats reliability trial run in early December. But it is both very demanding (something like 8 hours sleep in an 80 hour event) and fairly expensive, in the region of £700 per car, plus fuel. Not that I am suggesting it can't or shouldn't be attempted, just airing the thought.

As you may have noticed, I decided that we really did not need such large margins as we have enjoyed in the past, and by reducing them I have managed to make this edition a whole A4 sheet of paper less than it would have been. I did consider reducing the size of the print, but decided that many of you are just as old, or even older, than I, and the eyesight might not prove up to the job?!

On the leaf spring matter, you can get leather protective covers made, for a price. Talk to you again about Easter, Brian.