

Reliant Kitten Register

NEWSLETTER 70

May - June 2006



The Register caters for all the under 1 litre Reliant 4-wheeled vehicles plus all of their derivatives: Rebels, Foxes, Tempests, Salamanders, Ciphers, Jimps, Asquiths and all other specials including the Liege.....

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The Reliant Kitten Register

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The Register is a member of the FBHVC, which monitors UK & EU legislation and lobbies on our behalf to protect our freedom to use vehicles of all ages on the roads. Readers are invited to show their own support of this worthy cause by becoming members in their own right. Contact the editor for details.

Web page:- <http://www.kitreg.org.uk/> or have a look at <http://www.reliantkitten.co.uk>

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This too is an interesting cover picture, this very tidy looking Fox Tandy Camper, a recent acquisition of to our newest subscriber, John Scruton from Nottingham. John only sent us that picture early in July, (weeks after this mag should have gone to print!) that must be the quickest picture from supply to print time we have ever had! John is currently having the vehicles front suspension renewed for its M.O.T., and it should be back in service by the time you read this.

The Registrar speaks

Firstly my apologies for the last edition being late, this one too, no one but myself to blame. Hopefully this will get to you before the end of July, he said early in May! Still, the upside to this might be that the next one may – if you write me an article now, be out next month! How times change, in the old days I used to have half of the next edition done by the time I got the current edition back from the printers, and here I am in May, the (March / April) edition still at the printers promised for Tuesday, and I am only now starting this edition as the European F1 Grand Prix is about to commence – how did I get so far behind? (Answers on a postcard please).

Seriously though, for the first time in years we seem to be short of articles from you. I know that Dick Goodall, “Our Man in Tore” one of our regular contributors has both computer problems and has been in hospital recently, get well soon Dick, but the often wide range of stories we are usually blessed with seem to be thin on the ground at the moment.

I was reminded of the Jowett Car company the other month when filling in the Federation’s (F.B.H.V.C.) club questionnaire, Jowett published a very optimistic book on the company’s 50th anniversary, only to go out of business a few years later, and I had to answer the question, as at last year, was our membership static, growing or shrinking, and I just knew when giving the truthful answer that it has constantly grown for 15 years, that that trend could hardly be expected to continue given the diminishing number of our vehicles out there. So it comes to pass that we had the largest ever number of non-renewals this year, I sent out over 50 reminder notices, a record – hopefully by the time I get to the epilogue I will be aware of the level of response to those reminders. Then again is this a statistical thing? Given that our membership has always grown, is it not reasonable to assume that as it does, so the numbers leaving us might grow in proportion? We will see.

I know from talking to a number of people, that cars on the road are roughly equal in number to those off the road amongst our readers. Many of them are either undergoing a rebuild, and that phrase means different things to different people, or are awaiting restoration, another term open to a variety of interpretations. So, while the future looks good for those in captivity with a firm plan in mind, I am not at all clear as to how many of those restorations have actually begun, and of those that have, when last any work on the project was actually carried out!

I can just hear from here the indignant noises coming from the garages of some enthusiasts reading this, but I suspect, sadly, that you are in a minority. Many more of those feeling a little got at will be doing something else, nothing to do with vehicle restoration, and so should feel guilty!

A good body off rebuild takes hundreds of man hours, well alright, a few hundred if you are exceptionally competent, well over a thousand if you work at the kind of pace I used to, or are particularly fussy, and costs a few thousand pounds to complete to a good standard. Rebuilding an engine costs about £1,000 or so depending on how many of the ancilliary components you renew, like the distributor, carburetor, fuel pump, water pump, alternator etc. Those five parts alone retail at over £400 these days. If you are doing a job like that talk to me, we can, at the time of writing, still supply for example a full set of 4 pistons and liners, complete with rings and gudgeon pins, for £150 delivered, I know they sell through a very small number of outlets these days for about £250, so the Register can still save you money. That said I have no idea how much longer such facilities may be available to us. The old adage “use it or lose it” springs to mind.

Whatever you are doing, whether it be driving your cars to work on a daily basis, using it at weekends to take to shows, doing a major rebuild, or 'just' keeping it running, I am sure our readers would love to hear from you, An hour of your time could fill a couple of pages in here and allow us all to gain some inspiration – it would be appreciated.

Enough from me, good to talk to you again, and whatever you are doing or not doing with the car, have a relaxing time over the holiday period.

Talk to you again before too long

Brian.

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REBELLIOUS CONDUCT - EPISODE 3

Since purchasing my Rebel "Van with side windows" (as the V5C puts it) in August 2005, almost another 5000 miles have been added up to May 2006. The winter months were accomplished with fingers crossed, not knowing how the Rebel would respond to living outside and daily commuting in the frost and salt. All was well until Christmas and two weeks away from the daily toil. The first start of the New Year and the Rebel responded immediately after its two week rest. "Goodie". However, the drive into work revealed a problem. Every time I braked, around 5bhp vanished. With only 39bhp to start with, the eighth time of pressing the middle pedal resulted in the termination of all forward progress. "B@\$*%£!s". Finding which brake had stuck on was not difficult, they all were. I just sat there, cold, miserable, stuck by the side of the road, half way to work with nothing but the smell of hot friction material for company. Whilst I waited for the brake drums to cool back to more solid matter, I figured that the master cylinder piston must have stuck. It's hardly surprising considering its location just behind the front wheel. It's in line to cop all manner of grunge from the road surface, and at this time of year, grunge is in full season.

A few hard pumps on the pedal and suddenly, it felt different. Either I had blown all the seals out or the brakes had freed. Happily, all 39bhp had resumed their rightful task and we completed the journey to work – on handbrake only! A quick check and a squirt of WD40 behind the master cylinder rubber, normal service was both returned and maintained. I am seriously thinking of making up a cover to help protect the master cylinder before next grunge season. Another "add to" on the list of things to do.

Not that I could lay my hands on one easily, but Reliant did, as an optional extra, a neat shield which fitted snugly along the outside of the Rebel footwell / floor just for that very purpose. *Any of you Rebel guys happen to have a pattern lying about? Ed.*

As the weather eased a little, I set about checking the ignition timing as the engine was pinking under heavy power demands, i.e. – outputs in excess of 27bhp – gosh! The points seemed OK but the static timing was at 10 degrees BTDC. Fine for a standard Rebel but not my "Big Block 850". This should be set at TDC (strange but true) but easily accomplished. This made a huge difference, gone was the pinking, along with most of the power and the ability to run for more than two minutes. In went some new points – no better. In went a new condenser – no better. Change a few cables – no better. Had a cup of coffee – better for me but the Rebel was still being a little Rebel. After checking this that and the other, the only thing left was the coil. This was not on my list of suspects as it looked new. With no other ideas, out came the coil from its bracket by the battery. "Hang on, what's this then?" A sticker on the side facing the

battery proclaimed this as being a ballast coil. “Does the Rebel have a ballast resistor in the ignition feed I wondered”? A check with a voltmeter showed that 12 volts were being delivered both in the Start and Running ignition switch modes. This new coil had obviously suffered an overdose of 12 volts, especially as the ignition was on whilst I re-set the timing – it was cooked. A standard 12volt feed coil was hooked out of my box of “forgotten but might come in handy some day” items that failed to reach the dustbin. Joy at last, full power returned. “New” coil successfully reaches dustbin.

As the weather improved a little more, time and enthusiasm were such that I launched a mission to discover the awful clunk that emanated from the nearside front suspension on the downward slopes of our local speed “cushions”. It looked as though the suspension might come apart easily – and it did! The culprit was soon discovered; the 7/16” bolt that passes through the lower trunnion had two bad wear grooves. Correspondingly, the holes in the wishbone were elongated. The trunnion was moving vertically within the wishbone. This time, the box of “comes in handy” failed to deliver, no 7/16” bolts and certainly no spare wishbone. Instead, I placed a washer under the head of the bolt to move the grooves away from the wishbone holes, and plenty of torque on the nut. It certainly has provided a temporary cure but remains on the list of jobs to be done once the weather has improved even more.

In sympathy with the front suspension clunk, the nearside rear also provided some audible entertainment over the bumpy stuff. Whatever it was, it sounded very loose, but nothing loose could be found in under floor expeditions. It looked as though the rear leaf spring could easily be removed – and so it proved. Once out, the front leaf retaining strap was found to be loose. A squeeze in the vice tightened it but more importantly, the front bush was off centre in the spring eye. The side of the spring was rubbing on the location bracket. I managed to fiddle a washer in to move the spring away from the bracket and prevent the rubbing. Filled with optimism that the rear end audibles would now be banished – it made not a jot of difference. Win some lose some, the list of jobs to do is threatening me.

Over the winter months, I attempted to scale the learning curve on matters Rebellious. The internet proved very useful in sourcing information whilst Brian kindly supplied a factory Parts Book which has proved highly interesting. As bought, I got the idea that my Rebel was originally a 750cc because it has an all synchro gearbox and hydraulic clutch. However, it has the dashboard, rear lights and radiator of a 700 Rebel. On checking further, I get the idea that the very last 700cc Rebels were indeed equipped with the later transmission. I noted a change in chassis spec just before the end of the 700 Rebel which seems to provide the bracket for the clutch master cylinder. Perhaps any Rebel experts out there could provide conclusive proof of this. The chassis number of my Van/side windows seems to be in the very narrow gap between this change and the issue of a new chassis notation for the 750. The parts book only provides some clues as to how the chassis numbering system was applied but I assume that this could be somewhere near the truth.

Rebel 700 Saloon	R100955	(First with hydraulic clutch)
Rebel 700 Van/Estate	E150529	(and all synchro gearbox?)
My Rebel Van/Estate	E150682	
Rebel 700 Saloon	R101035	(Last 700?)
Rebel 700 Van/Estate	E150725	(Last 700 ?)

Rebel 750 941001 (First 750 saloon)
 941203 (First 750 Estate & van)

Can anyone enlighten me further please?

High on the list of jobs to do is the crankshaft pulley oil seal, the Rebel leaving its mark where ever it goes – or stands for more than 30 seconds. The discolouration beneath the Rebel’s snout is now a way of life, which is a bit of a cop out on my part. Then, one day, even I couldn’t pretend that it wasn’t normal. The pool had become a lake. I just couldn’t believe that so much oil could leak out, I was right; it was not just oil, but water too. The mess under the bonnet was awful; everything was dripping in an emulsion of oil and water. “What’s that hole where the top hose should be?” Just that, a hole. The top hose stub had come out of the radiator, followed by the water. I must have been really lucky. The Rebel had run perfectly OK on the way home from work with no sign of over heating or nasty smells. It must have let go just as I parked. Anyway, just like everything else on the Rebel, the radiator was easily removed and treated to an interesting few minutes with my blow lamp and solder. Not a pretty repair, but it’s holding for now.

Impressions so far, my Rebel is doing exactly the job I wanted it to do, it’s cheap to run, easy to work on, reliability is very good and very importantly, its fun. Fuel consumption is working out at an average of 43mpg overall, which includes stuck brakes and cooked coil. Its best measured frugality was on a 140 mile round trip to the West Somerset Railway which worked out at 52mpg. I must admit that I rarely exceeded 50mph on this trip in fear of centrifuging most of the oil out of the sump via the leaking crank pulley oil seal. The engine compartment was not a pretty sight following this jaunt! The forthcoming 5000 mile oil change seems rather pointless judging by the amount of self-changing oil this leak is providing – must do something about it – soon!

There is a down side, the attitude of certain other road users. Driver’s of following vehicles squeeze up behind to read the badge on this funny little vehicle which they do not recognise. Having discovered that it is a Reliant, and being far too close to see that it doesn’t have a single front wheel on it’s centre line – feel it imperative to overtake – whatever and wherever. I have experienced more scary overtaking antics by other drivers in the few months that I have owned the Rebel than in 40 years of driving. (Damn, that’s given a clue to my age)

Next time I write, I hope that I can report that I have actually done some work and the list of “jobs to do” will be greatly reduced.

Terry Horler (Yate, Nr Bristol)

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While on the subject of Rebels, Andy Morgan is looking for a set of early Rebel hubcaps (though I am sure the later ones would do just as well) and a pair of bumpers, now some of these items may be in amongst the stuff I took to Adrian a year back, have you had time to catalogue the bits yet Adrian?

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Foxes Den

Andrew Norman, our man in Nutley, had a wonderful article written by Ted Connolly published in the May edition of the magazine Classic Van and Pick-up

Four full A4 pages including 10 pictures of his Fox Tandy, described in the article as a "Reliant Fox RV" mention of his Kitten van and his Tempest – which is for sale just now if you are quick.

All that and a plug for the Register as well, congratulations Andrew, and thank you for your complimentary comments about the Register.

Such stories in the motoring press can only be good for the Register, the vehicles, and indeed all of us, as they help to raise public awareness that we exist, which can be no bad thing – well done.

This particular publication has printed a number of articles on Reliants over the years, I seem to remember a Rebel van, prototype possibly, which looked more like a small 1950's Ford Consul, and as so often in my life, I didn't make the time to contact them about it.

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Matters Tempestuous

Martin Seymour is the man to talk to about Tempests, you can e-mail him or give him a ring :-

mjseymo@hotmail.com

This seems as good a place as any to mention the article that John Box had published recently, well, let me be more accurate, David Bowers had published about John and the Mouse that roared, the original Fiat 500 first introduced in 1934, in the June edition of the Automobile.

John acquired DRU 925, a 1938 "Topolino" early in this millennium, while working on the development of a Kitten replacement which Reliant were considering at the time, well, let me get this right, it was to establish design parameters for a new small 4 wheeled car that might have been developed by Reliant, sadly that was just before they elected not to be involved in further vehicle production, and in fact he sold the Topolino last year after lavishing a lot of T.L.C. not to say his expertise on it, making roadworthy a car that had been 'restored' with static display in mind. It did however make good reading, and for once did not credit John with being Chief Engineer at Reliant, as I have read in other articles about him in the motoring press in the past, a title he never claims to have had! I think I am right in saying, correct me if I am wrong John, that he has only ever worked for Reliant and as consultant, and never actually as an employee.

That said the article in 'the 'Automobile' did correctly give him credit for being instrumental in adapting the Sabre Scimitar to take the Rover K-series engine in place of the

Ford unit it previously used, a task he achieved in weeks rather than months I seem to remember. Good publicity nonetheless, keep up the good work John.

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Liege Page

O.K., so I missed the Lakes weekend, the closest event these guys have ever had to Scotland, and I can't even get there. Sometimes you just can't manage to be where you would like to be. Take Paul for example, he was over the pond at the time – a much better excuse for absence than I had, was only few hundred miles away, in fact not even 200 each way, and Paul was a few thousand. Perhaps next year.

By all accounts the event was a great success and Mick and Liz Botterill deserve credit for a well planned event. Long may it all continue.

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Some more comments from your renewal notices

Bruce Jones, Hi Bruce, I noticed when filing some renewal notices in May, that you were hoping to have the car on the road "by summer", now I know you didn't say which summer, but I wondered how it was coming on? I'd love to hear that engine running. Bruce's car is the one with the Reliant BRM OHC engine, one of only two of those engines reputed to have survived.

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Now as you may have gathered, particularly if you have been with us for a few years, your Editor / Registrar is a somewhat unusual character. One omission from his life so far (not one he feels a need to rectify) is that he has never been to a football match. Really he has no interest in the sport at all. So when Adrian Hanwell recently included him on the circulation of the following, it was over a week before, seeing certain politicians with white and red flags on their cars and pushbikes, that the penny dropped – he is a bit slow sometimes you know :- Indeed if he had got this mag out in time the joke would have been more appropriate!

To whom it may concern.

You would have had to be very observant to have spotted the new law that the Government slipped in by the back door recently, but you may well have noticed that many people are complying with it.

For your information, the law reads as follows:-

Drivers who have not passed their driving test must display "L" plates on their vehicle whilst driving.

Drivers who have recently passed their driving test may display "P" plates on their vehicle, if they so wish. Inadequate, or poor drivers must display a flag on their vehicle whilst driving, to advertise the fact.

Drivers who are very very poor or very inadequate, must display more than one flag on their vehicle whilst driving, to warn all other road users to avoid getting too close.

Regards, Adrian.

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Matters statistical

Every year when processing your membership renewals I record the fact that you have renewed, allocate the money to the relevant account, i.e. subscriptions and spares donations. In practice I normally wait till March or April before transferring the spares donations to the spares account.

Then I stop and get on with other things with the intention of going back and up-dating your vehicle details, or answering any questions, or even including any relevant comments within these pages. This is where the problems begin, I really ought to file the renewal notices at that point, rather than leave them on my desk – and I am getting better (I think!). I try to remember to tick the notice when the first stage is complete, and put another line through the tick when the second part is complete, this in a bright felt marker so that I can tell at a glance if any given form has been processed.

So far so good. Where the system fails, and I really do not want to make things too complicated for my simple mind, but many of you, and quite rightly too, take advantage of the fact that you are posting something to me, to send additional information, or ask a question. Now some of those comments you will have seen in the magazine, others require a personal letter or telephone call, and that is where I can fall down, because if, for whatever reason, the response is not made immediately, the paperwork very rapidly gets buried in a pile on my desk – hence the idea of filing them even though they are not fully processed, but the tick and cross marking system makes no provision for those needing further action, and you must by now be aware of the state of my memory – so it is very dangerous for me to try and rely on it.

Right, what has this got to do with statistics? Well, I was beginning to wonder that too! The thing is that I want to understand, apart from working harder, what I need to change in order to be better able to respond in a timely and helpful manner. So I thought some analysis might help – yes I know, seeing an analyst might be a good idea!

The desire to improve things is the motivation, and one of the failings of the database is that it is not particularly good at allowing me to follow the history of a car. It does allow me to make notes, but there is a limit, a couple of hundred or so characters, as to how big those notes can be, and as the years go by, with some notable exceptions, the cars change owners, and I am not able to record many changes of owner in the comments box, so I want to find out what percentage of our cars change hands in a year, how often a year they change, and so be in a position to define the task accurately when it comes to planning the spec for improving the system's ability to cope with these matters.

Because the system does not handle this situation at the moment, and your renewal notices, while they do give a snapshot, do not tell me immediately if there have been any changes since last year – well in some cases they do when for example you add in new details, or delete old ones, but my ability to be able to say, with confidence, who owned a given car at a given time, memory excepted, is not good – and so needs improvement.

Good old card index systems suddenly begin to look attractive!

Now in the Liege Car Club they have an easy time of it, not only are there, at this time, a lot less of them, but the cars hardly ever change hands, I think if we are talking statistics you are looking at less than 10% change in ownership over a 5 or even 10 year period, so you are looking at a figure of less than 1 percent a year. Now with our cars, and this is the point, I really don't know what the comparable figure might be, certainly a lot more than 1 or 2 percent, probably more than 5%, not as much say 20% certainly (ahh, at last, in the 8th paragraph he finally starts to mention percentages! – could this be getting near to a statistical article after all?)

The question, well one of them at any rate, has to be why don't I know? The answer, like many things in life, is not so simple, there are a variety of reasons, and not by any means all down the "the system". For example, when someone leaves without telling us they are leaving, i.e. simply fails to renew, I don't know if they have sold the car, scrapped the car, laid the car up, or even died and no one has let us know. Not unheard of, I do sometimes find out, months or even years later, when the family want to dispose of a vehicle, they get in touch. Though I have to say, from memory, that most of the cars I am asked to re-home when an owner has died, are from the families of Kitten owners who only found out about the Register when trying to dispose of the vehicle, and the vehicle in those cases is seldom already on file.

Right, time for a delve through this years renewal notices – of course this is complicated by the fact that, sadly, not everyone who renews actually sends me the form back, and even those who do (the vast majority I should say), do not always remember to complete the update of the vehicle details section!

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Oh well, that killed the better part of an hour and revealed some interesting details, suffice to say I will go through it all again! The interesting thing, and remember this is only based on those who did renew this year, and highlights some of the shortcomings of "the system", also makes me aware of just how many of you have more than one vehicle, also how many of you claimed more than one status for your car(s). Let me explain. I do not have a box for you to indicate if a vehicle is declared SORN, that option did not exist when we set things up, and may explain why some vehicles are described as both "running" and "off road".

There are not nearly as many as I had imagined changing hands, I had just 15 to add on, some of them were on file already, i.e. they had just changed hands from one subscriber to another, I had 11 to remove, sold to undefined persons, or scrapped, and we have "live" records on 193 vehicles. There are quite a lot more than that, but as I said, some folk didn't complete the form fully, and some did not use the form at all, and in several of those cases I know that they still have the car(s). Also, of those still to respond to the reminder notice, I know several who still have the car(s). And then there are the new folk who have joined our ranks since December to be added in there too.

Where does this get us, well, as I said, I went through the forms again, this time looking for how many were "running", and also how many of them were also "off road". Vehicles advised as scrapped are attached to the appropriate record, there are three of them (records for scrapped cars), one for Rebels, one for Kittens and one for Foxes, with a note as to who the last custodian was, and when we were advised of the car's demise.

Of the others, there are 106 vehicles described as running, 36 off road, 18 described as both of the previous options, though that includes a small number described as running and

undergoing rebuild too., 36, see that, the same number as are off road, are also returned as being in the “undergoing rebuild” category! And we have 28 folk who own more than 1 relevant vehicle, most of them have two, but almost a third of them have more than two.

We have 20 associates. I did not do a detailed breakdown, but did note that we have a similar number of Tempest and Liege owners. Of the just 3 Jimps currently with us 2 are in the running and off road categories with just 1 described as being off road. We seem to have just 5 Tandy campervans, that said I was interrupted several times while trying to do the count so I would not want to have to defend those numbers in court!

I guess I ought to go through them again and do separate counts for Rebels, Kittens and Foxes. O.K.’ I’ll do that now....

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Well, that was a surprise, fascinating watching the little ‘gates’ build up, doing it in membership number order had me thinking all sorts of weird things as I progressed through the file. At the end of the day, for reasons of simplicity, I have lumped those described as “off road” and those “undergoing rebuild” in the same category, so for Rebels we have a pretty even split, 14 on the road and 15 off, Kittens are also a pretty even split, 59 running against 53 not, only the Foxes seem to be particularly active with 20 on the road and just 5 off. Those figures obviously exclude all the others, including a running Cipher, the 20 or so Tempests and Liege, (we never did graduate to a “Being Built” category as distinct from “Undergoing re-build”!) the Jimps, Asquiths, and Vantique, and the few specials. Those numbers of course exclude the ones where either no form was returned, or it was, but no indication of current vehicle details were indicated. Yes I probably should just send those forms back, and re-print ones for those who lost the original – but I really do have quite enough on my plate thank you!

Also excluded from those figures are the details of the couple of dozen or so new folk we have signed up since Christmas, they did not get a renewal notice, and yes I could dig their application forms out and draw up the figures, bit it is now 5:00pm, and I have been at this most of the afternoon – I really must get on.

If one was to take the fact that there are details of over 1,000 vehicles on file, and deduct the fact that 70 of them are known to have been scrapped, and a further 122 are known of, but with no current owner’s details, (and it is perfectly possible if not likely that some if not most of them have been scrapped by now) it leaves a pretty big number for which we have no recent data.

So there you have it, I am quite sure that I will live to regret publishing those numbers, as someone will be sure to quote some if not all of them out of context, but these are the facts at the moment.

The moral is, and I realise that in the main I am preaching to the converted, but it is really important, if accurate records are to be maintained, that you complete your renewal notices as comprehensively as possible, and return them with your subscription each year. I should keep that paragraph handy and repeat it when we send out the renewal notices in a few months time!

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Readers Letters

Yes we have had a couple of different postmen this year, but you really do seem to have gone quiet recently.

I have even had days when there has been no post, yes the postman has been seen in the street, but there must have been almost a day a month this year, Sundays excepted, that we have not had any post – very unusual – and so how come my desk is as busy as ever?

Anyway, it is your magazine, use it or you'll hear more from my pen! What you have to decide now is this – was that a threat, or a promise?

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Brian's Diary - June 2006

Last week was both interesting – aren't they all! – and with something of a motoring bent.

On Friday morning I was dropping some things off at Archie's place near Milngavie, no, you don't know Archie, he has yet to aspire to Reliant ownership, and over a tea and coffee with Jeanette and he, the subject of a couple of his old cars came up, and I asked if they were running, as in M.O.T.'d and on the road, and he said yes they were. I was pleased as he had had a lot of bother with the engine on one car in particular, and a lot of work on the other one too – not that he only has two interesting and unusual cars, but those two were the topic of that particular conversation.

He promptly offered to let me hear them running, now opportunities like that do not come up every day, so, even though we both had other things to be doing, I said yes please, and we ventured into his barn like shed where he proceeded, with a little difficulty to coax the engine of the Sizaire-Berwick (a French copy of the Rolls Royce of the day) into life. This is an easier task than it used to be, this particular 1913 example was built without a starter motor, I guess French chauffeurs had strong arms! After much deliberation and thought, Archie has fitted one to make for less strenuous starting. (Can you begin to imagine how difficult that must be? "Just" fit a starter motor to a car that was built without one, a mounting bracket, obviously sturdy, fine no problem, but how do you fit a gear ring to an engine that never had one, is there clearance, do you need to machine a lot off the flywheel, I admire the man greatly – a strong arm he may be lacking, but wow, what a solution). It is one of those engines where you need to pour petrol into it to get it started, it has two small brass cups on top of the engine for that purpose, and while it spat and backfired and stalled a few times, it eventually settled down to a slow steady tickover. It had just passed its M.O.T. last month.

Then to the newer car, a 1926 Bean 12 HP tourer, subject of extensive engine work over the past couple of years or so, he had been badly let down by a number of so called specialists, but he persevered and was eventually rewarded with what we hope will prove to be a good engine. It fired up instantly, with lots of oil pressure and a very crisp exhaust note, good compression there.

So there I was on a hot summers day a few miles north of Glasgow, in the country, listening to two engines which I doubt very much if anyone else on the planet, Archie and Jeanette excepted, would hear that day, indeed this year, if ever. Moving stuff indeed.

Because it was such a glorious day, at the end of a second week of such weather, I decided to take Moira out for a run that afternoon, and when we returned a few hours later, I could not get to my own front door parking space, because someone had parked a very tidy dark green Tempest there. Now it is not every day I come home to someone parking at my door, and I have never before had a Tempest parked there. Moira's immediate response was to give me a hug and thank me for her surprise present (she was only joking) – oh well, she likes them at least, and Andrew Norman and Stuart Vickers both have one for sale at the moment, all I need now are the funds!

I should perhaps mention that the one at the door belongs to Donald Nicholson from Kirkintilloch, the only Scottish resident Tempest as far as I am aware, I think I am right in saying it was the last of the Steve Campbell supplied kit ones, and it had broken down on his way to see me, he was away to get his son to come over and tow the car home – sorry dear!

So, all in all, Friday the 9th of June 2006 was something of a red letter day on the motoring front in my life, and if I do ever win the lottery, we can look forward to a Tempest in the stable!

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My thanks to Jim Smith and his internet connections for the following :-

The burglar

A burglar broke into a house one night.

He shone his flashlight around the rooms, looking for valuables, and when he picked up a CD player to place in his sack, a strange disembodied voice echoed from the dark saying,

"Jesus is watching you."

He nearly jumped out of his skin, clicked his flashlight out, and froze.

When he heard nothing more after a bit, he shook his head, promised himself a vacation after the next big score, then clicked the light on and began searching for more valuables. Just as he pulled the stereo out so he could disconnect the wires, clear as a bell he heard,

"Jesus is watching you."

Freaked out, he shone his light around frantically, looking for the source of the voice. Finally, in the corner of the room, his flashlight beam came to rest on a parrot.

"Did you say that?" He hissed at the parrot.

"Yep," the parrot confessed, and then squawked, "I'm just trying to warn you."

The burglar relaxed. "Warn me, huh? Who in the world are you?"

"Moses," replied the bird.

"Moses?" the burglar laughed. "What kind of people would name a bird Moses?"

"The kind of people that would name a rottweiler Jesus."

Getting Technical

Updating to a Ford Fiesta clutch

The latest Reliant Robins were fitted with a Ford clutch which has the great advantage of using a release bearing rather than the carbon pad which is not so prone to speedy wear, and indeed in recent years has had a lot less thickness of carbon in the pad in the first place.

This clutch is available from motor factors everywhere, and is in fact cheaper. There are however several changes that need to be made to your car before one can be fitted. Briefly, the fixing holes on the flywheel are different, so if you are not replacing the flywheel with the latest one, you will need to have the flywheel re-drilled. The bearing requires a modified nose-cone on the gearbox front cover, which acts as a guide, and the release fork (bearing carrier) is different, and is located on the cross tube by roll pins which are differently spaced from the original carrier's roll pins.

All the parts you will need can be purchased from Reliant PartsWorld. (I will need to check that Duncan, I'm not sure they still are, Ed.) A better option perhaps is to see what you can find at a breakers yard or through a dealer who has broken a late Robin. Comparatively few of these Robins were produced though, so you will need a fair bit of good luck...

The re-drilling of the flywheel was done by a local engineering firm (I had 2 done, including skimming for £55) The new clutch has 3 dowels locating it, not 2 like your old one, so another dowel will need to be sourced also, quite easily from a scrap engine. The threads for the lugs are the same, however the clutch cover fixings are metric, so I got 6 from a Ford dealer, and had the new holes threaded accordingly.

Just a brief interruption here, I am firm in my belief that what Duncan is saying is not only perfectly correct, but also good engineering practice – however, and I am NOT recommending this, but it is my belief that metric threads and UNF are a bit like the old Whitworth and UNC ones, in that the number of threads per inch, or mm, is the same, it is the angle or thread pitch that is different, and that it is in fact possible to put the clutch cover on using the old holes with the new metric Allen screws, I don't think there is clearance on the new clutch cover for the bolt heads, so you could not use the old bolts, but you might get away with putting Allen cap screws into the UNF threaded holes in your old flywheel, probably not a good idea though as it will not be as securely attached as it should be, and you would still have the dowel situation to resolve, but I believe a number of folk have done it that way – will any such individual reading this care to confirm, and tell us how long it lasted? Or indeed if I have got it all wrong and what I am thinking of is another alternative clutch altogether? Ed.

Swapping the gearbox covers over is straightforward, though you may (will) need a new gasket too. Assembling the cross tube and bearing fork will enable you to see where the new holes have to be drilled. However they are very close to the originals, so close that in fact I shimmed the cross tube out from the gearbox and used one of the original holes, and drilled one new one. You could completely re-drill the fork and tube at new positions well away from the old holes, making sure you keep the right relative position between fork and tube.

Finally, I'm told pretty convincingly, that these bearings are designed to run in contact with the clutch cover at all times. At least this is how they are set up in Fords, so an alternative clutch lever return spring is available to pull in the opposite direction to the original set up. This can be anchored to a hole in the cable bracket.

All in all this is one of those jobs that you wouldn't want to do on a Sunday afternoon when you've nothing better to do, but rather as part of an engine out job, or clutch replacement, it can make good sense. You will hopefully end up with a much longer lasting set-up, and, so far at least, it seems to be a much smoother clutch which is a joy to use. Over the years I have found original clutches invariably develop a judder, especially the Borg and Beck style ones, and the current carbon thrust pads almost seem to dissolve in a very short time.

Duncan Bradford - December 2005

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Reliant 850 head gasket replacement.

Because it is all alloy and therefore head nut torque is low, the Reliant engine does tend to develop cross-gasket leaks quite readily (Spoken by one who has clearly had some unfortunate experiences, Ed.) Just torquing up and checking after 500 miles can be leaving it a bit late – leaks can develop before then.

There are two gasket types: regular and thick, this is for the HE “economy” engine, and is the one needed, I think, (check the engine number on the offside rear of the block ends with an ‘E’)

Sorry to barge in again, but I believe that all the unleaded heads are supposed to need the thicker gasket as they were all re-manufactured, and were skimmed as part of that process, Ed.

You may also need an exhaust flange gasket and maybe a thermostat housing gasket, but only if that is removed (the thermostat cover housing lugs are pretty thin, so don't over tighten the setscrews!).

Although the following method is a bit tedious I have not had problems on any of the 3 Fox engines since I adopted it. It is adapted from the advice of John Wade, a very experienced engine guru from the Scimitar front.

1] Check the head is a free fit by cleaning the studs, especially where they enter the block and on threads, and clean out the stud holes in the head, as leaks or age will probably have encouraged corrosion inside the stud holes, which leads to them binding and giving a false torque reading.

2] Lubricate studs, holes, nuts and washers. Add a smear of grease around the metal rings on the new gasket and fit it.

3] Torque down the head in the correct order to 25 ft. lbs. I work round them going from 15 ft. lbs. to 25, a bit at a time. The three side ¼” nuts only go to 15 ft. lbs. (As should number? Ed, I need to check the details, but they introduced a recommendation about 10 years ago that one of the centre studs, I presume the one that most often gets torn out of the block because there is not a lot of metal round it in there, be only tightened to 15 ft. lbs. Ed.)

4] Leave at least overnight, giving the gasket time to adjust. Then, using a hammer and a block of hardwood, tap the head round each nut before re-torquing again. Finish assembly and run until the thermostat opens. Air locks are sometimes a bit of a problem, so doing the final fill of coolant through the upper carb inlet manifold heating jacket hose is best. Even so

you may need to keep an eye as it heats up, leaving the radiator cap off. You may have to switch the engine off as the coolant approaches operating temperature and the thermostat opens to allow for 'belching'.

5] Allow to cool overnight, remove the rocker gear and re-torque to 25lbs. The Head really expands when hot, so it flattens the gasket quite a lot. You may get another half turn or more on most of the nuts.

6] Best to check again in 500 miles or so.

After years of repeated replacing of head gaskets according to the book, the first one I did this way has now done 15,000 miles over 3 years and counting... Good luck, Duncan

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Tales from Tore June / July 2006

I happen to know that Dick has serious computer problems which have conspired to keep him off line for a couple of months or so. Also Dick himself was in dock for some repairs recently, happily he is back on his feet and driving again. That said the driving has not been plain sailing, a new fuel pump (Dick's Kitten uses a Morris Minor type electric pump, and in spite of his best efforts at cleaning the points, it staggered to a halt once too often last month).

So, not wishing to steal all of Dick's thunder I will say no more and hope that he gets back on line soon. Ed.

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Parts supply

Things are rapidly changing at the moment, that said the value of parts held is higher than it has ever been! A situation has arisen causing the spares fund to become depleted this year, having to re-stock too many expensive items at the same time. My thanks to Duncan Bradford for agreeing to become custodian of the front damper and spring stock, that is a big help.

As sometimes seems to happen, having only sold one pair of front dampers in 8 or 9 months, I decided to re-order, I felt pretty pleased with myself having managed to agree the same unit price for a slightly smaller batch than usual, only to sell the lot within a couple of weeks of ordering them!

There really is no predicting the demand for such items. I had hoped to move on from having to get people to pay a deposit and then wait while we had them made, and I did, but doing so spent a major part of the remaining fund. Obviously that money was recouped quickly in that instance, but I felt it might be prudent to have more made right away – too many people 'suddenly' discover they need such parts, and their car can be off the road until the parts are supplied. It's all guesswork really, thankfully, in the main, educated guesswork.

On the Rebel front John Blagburn has recently bought some Rebel bits from the factory, the one of note being the rubber petrol filler pipe, the straight bit that goes between the filler neck and the tank – yes in those days they made the bend on the metal pipe that comes out of the tank, not like those simple tanks they fit to Kittens and Foxes! "Hose filler tube" is the official description, and 6704 is the part number, as in your Rebel parts book, and they actually

recognised the number! John, having bought a batch to save on minimum order charges and postage, can now do them for £4 each plus postage
Thanks for the update John.

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More snippets from the net:-

Martin Seymour was asking about camshaft profiles, he is aware that there were a number of different ones used by Reliant over the years, never mind all the tuned ones that are available, and he is trying to find out more about them, thus :- “if anyone has a spare cam lying around their garage somewhere, can you measure (with verniers) what the height of the lobes are for me. It would be greatly appreciated.”

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Sales and Wants

For Sale :- Andrew Norman's Tempest, this is the first one built by Ian Foster and John Box, as seen on the publicity brochure. £4,500 will secure you this wonderful piece of most British motoring heritage. Nutley in East Sussex.

For Sale :- Reliant Fox, no MOT but good condition, brakes done, good engine, almost ready for MOT. Offers to Norman

For Sale :- Reliant Rebel estate 1972 (Tax exempt) 850cc engine, 4 speed with overdrive! Super seats, 'new' tyres etc etc,. Many extras, tow ball £450 Tony

Tony also has a Fox for sale, talk to him if you are interested.

For Sale :- Reliant Rebel estate. Brakes, 850 engine and steering good, windows out for respray, rear bumper missing needs headlamp bowls to complete. Offers about £150. Contact George Lawrie

For Sale :- 750cc Reliant engine and early Rebel gearbox with remote gearchange. Offers to Mike Hine.

For Sale :- Alan has a number of those wonderful ceramic magnets that a number of us use to improve the running of our engines, they are available from Alan for just £12 delivered, ring him for details

Looking for a new home is Pete Staniforth's tired Kitten , it is not on the road, and is in need of a lot of TLC, he is in Shoreham-by-Sea in West Sussex.

Epilogue

Well, you may be interested to learn that in response to me sending out all those reminders about a third of them have replied to date. Of those, 70% have renewed, so it was certainly well worth the effort and cost of the exercise, and while we did pay less money to the F.B.H.V.C. this year than last, in spite of the increase in their fees, it was not as drastic a drop as I had feared when I began this edition.

With almost as many Kittens that belong to our readers off the road as on, and less than half of them actually undergoing a rebuild I have to wonder just what the future holds. The one part that I am asked for, and have difficulty supplying, is upper wishbones, but I do not know the split between people needing them for a rebuild compared to those who have had a failure and need one to keep a car on the road – my impression is that they are needed more to keep cars on the road.

So, the question I am asking myself is this; is there anything more I could or should be doing to help keep those wonderful wee cars on the road?

I honestly don't know the answer to that one, though I do know I am not physically able to do any more than I currently do. Should I actively encourage more articles on rebuilds within these pages? Yes I know we have covered almost every aspect of doing a body off rebuild in the past, but the majority of our readers were not with us then, and the take up of copies of the early editions has been slow of late.

Food for thought, and I could of course re-print some of those early articles from a decade or so back, or perhaps the odd article from some of you re-builders / restorers out there – how about it chaps?

Till next time take care, may you have happy and trouble free motoring, oh and don't forget to use that grease gun.

Brian

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