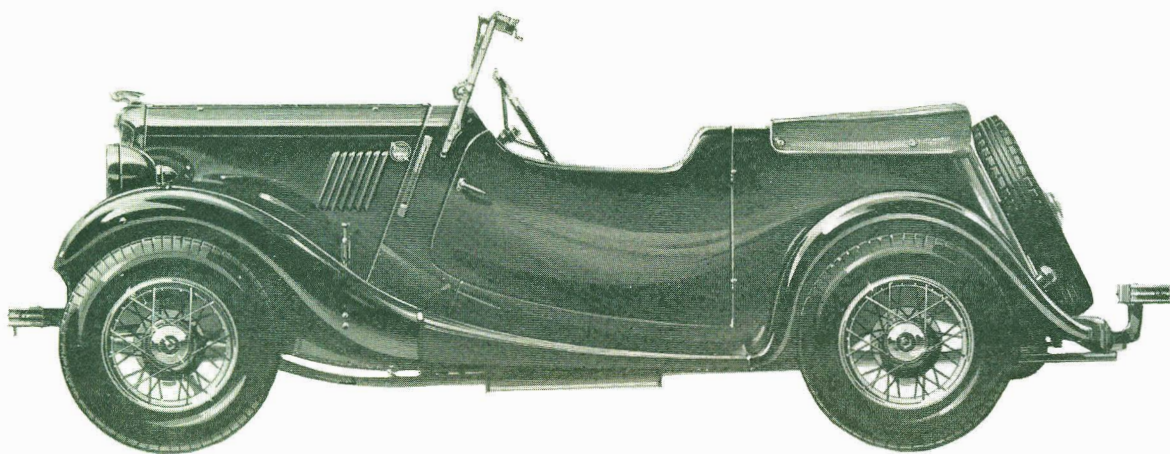


The Morris Eight



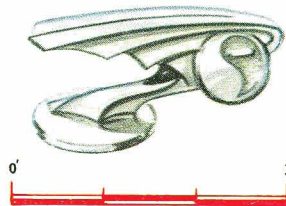
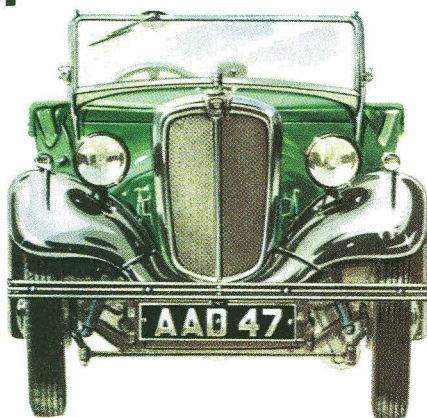
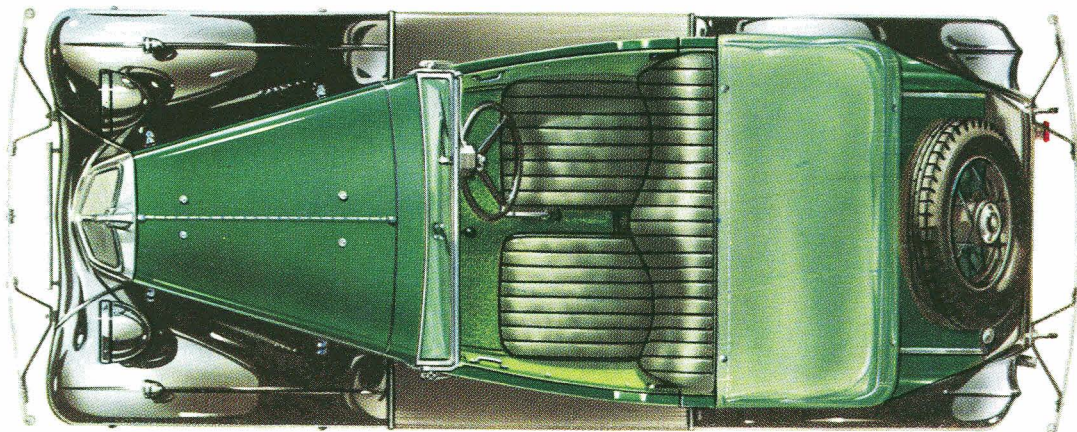
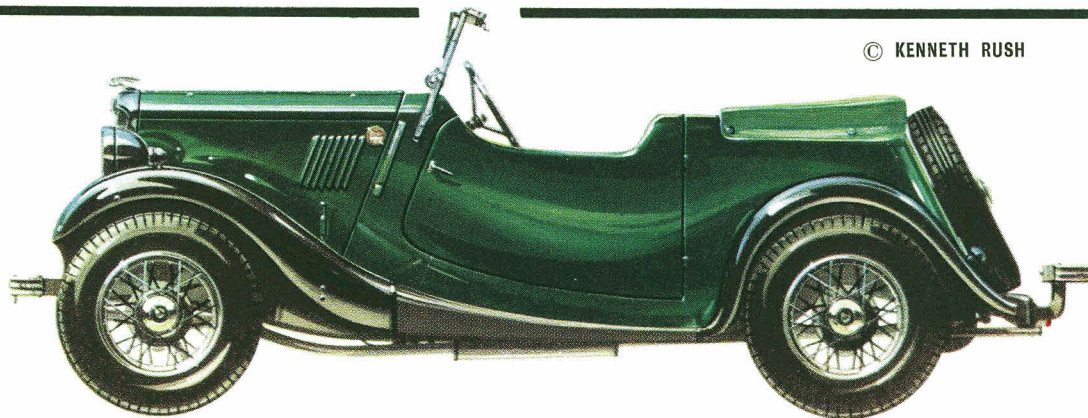
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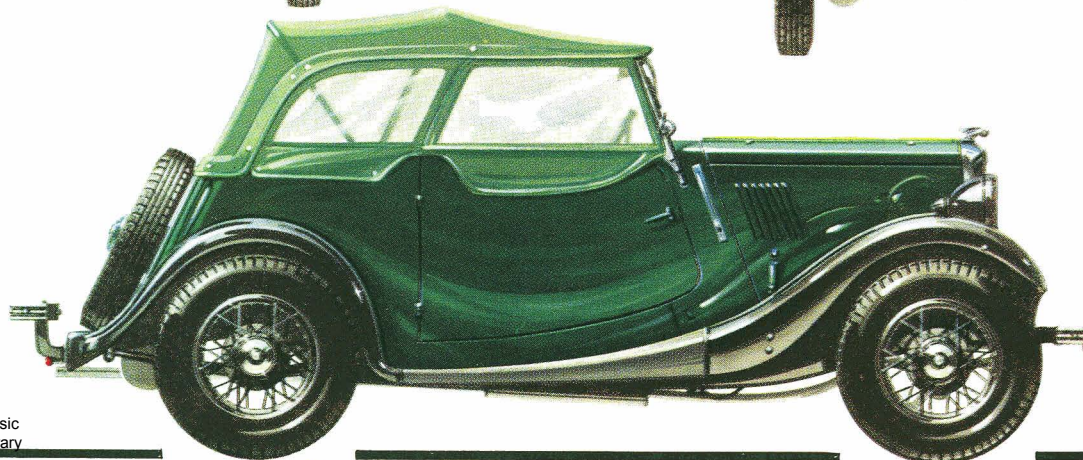
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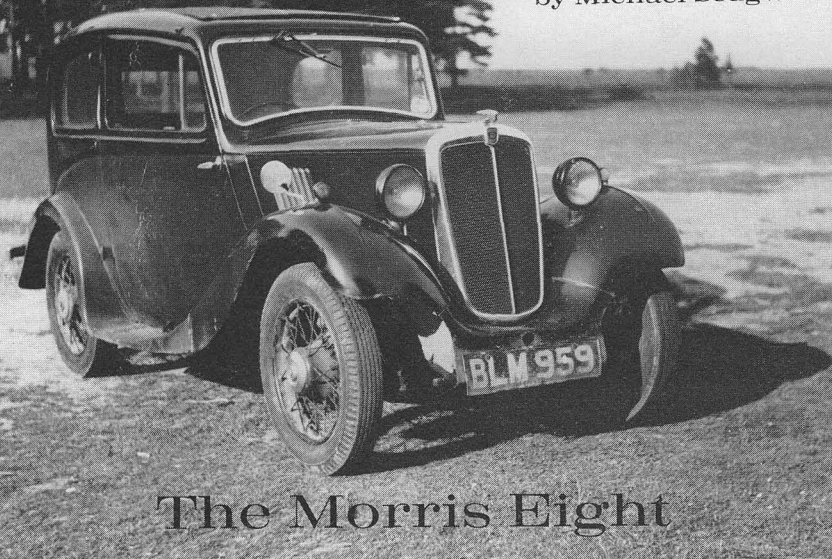
PROFILE PUBLICATIONS



THE 1935 PRE-SERIES MORRIS EIGHT TOURER. The car, which was first registered in September 1934, was priced at £120 (bumpers and trafficators £2-10s. extra). Present owner: L. S. Bartlett, Esquire.



by Michael Sedgwick



The Morris Eight

'Cornering, by which we mean a feeling of complete directional control and absence of roll, is almost up to full-blooded sports-car standards' The Motor, 1939

Every family car has its following: the Austin Seven is almost buried beneath the weight of legend, Model-T merits a bibliography, and even Dagenham's Model-Y rates a place in Valhalla as the answer to the fibreglazier's prayer. Yet the humble Morris Eight, the 'Tiger Moth' for two generations of British motorists, is still satirised as the steed of the clueless and as a repository for chequer-tape and 'sporty' accessories. But the little machine gave Cowley a best-seller it had lacked for six unhappy years, and provided the power for the first of Alec Issigonis's technical triumphs, the Series-MM 'Minor', a model regarded in its day as the antithesis of everything for which Series I and its immediate descendants stood. Amateur historians of the Baby Austin are to be found everywhere, but the present writer must confess that after thirty years of intimate acquaintance with the Morris Eight he was unaware until recently that over 47,000 cars were made before the classic Series I designation was assigned to the model.

REACHING FOR AN ANSWER TO LONGBRIDGE

If the Eight did not save Cowley, it provided a boost that was sorely needed. The company's early attempts at baby cars, dating back to the summer of 1928, were less than successful. The overhead-camshaft 'Minor' was better known for what it inspired than for what it did. It served as the genesis for Cecil Kimber's M.G. 'Midget', stampeded Longbridge into offering coupled brakes on their Seven, and stampeded Clyno out of business altogether; but though it offered more performance for the price than did the Austin, it also offered complexity—as witness the maddening dynamo drive. The side-valve '£100' two-seater of 1931 was a historical landmark rather than a commercial *tour de force*, the 1932 long-wheelbase 'Family Eight' could not compete against Standard's 'Little Nine', far less the new generation of Tens from Austin and

Unsung Heroines: £20 worth of pre-Series fixed-head saloon which served the author faithfully through the summer of 1963. (Photo: The Author)

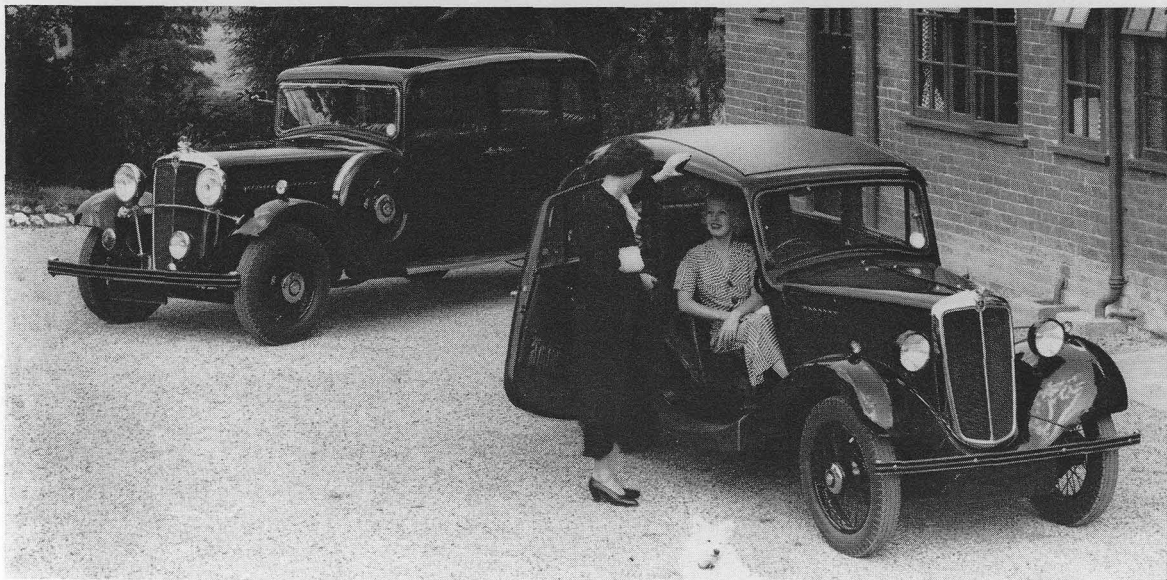
Hillman: and though the last 'Minors' with four-speed synchromesh gearboxes, Bishop cam steering, and hydraulic brakes were worthy little cars, they were no challenge to Ford's new Model-Y, which offered more room, contemporary styling and a 60 m.p.h. top speed, for less money and the same annual tax of £8. In 1934 Morris were plugging 'specialisation'—a word coined by the press office at Cowley to summarise Lord Nuffield's policy of absorbing his component-suppliers and running them as divisions of his industrial empire—but what was emerging amounted to eight models from 850 c.c. to 3½ litres, none of which were best-sellers—and this at a time when Ford had their Eight, Austin their Seven and Ten, and

Rootes the Hillman 'Minx'. Even those comparative outsiders, Standard and Vauxhall, were doing well with their 'Ten' and 'Light Six' respectively.

PRE-SERIES PICTURE

The new package was obviously aimed at the home market—the Colonies bought Chevrolets, and Continental Europe the 1.2-litre Opel and the FIAT 'Balilla'—and it took a leaf out of Ford's book. Rather a blatant leaf, some people considered, though Cowley did not follow Dagenham as closely as Singer followed Morris in 1936, when the Coventry firm's 'Bantam' even adopted Series I's two-tone schemes. The Eight engine was an entirely straightforward affair of 57 × 90 mm. (918.6 c.c.), developing 23.5 b.h.p. Cooling was by the traditional Morris method of thermo-syphon with fan assistance, and a 6-volt electrical system was deemed sufficient right up to the end of production in 1948. The crankshaft, however, boasted three main bearings where the 'Minor' had been content with two. The S.U. carburettor—also a Nuffield product—was fed by electric pump from a five-and-a-half gallon rear tank.

This machinery lived in a robust double box-section frame—unfortunately the side-members were drilled in the interests of lightness, and these holes collected dirt, thus contributing to fractures in old age. Conventional semi-elliptic springs were used, with Armstrong hydraulic shock absorbers in lieu of the friction type found on 'Minors'. The braking arrangements were more advanced: Morris had been using hydraulics since 1930, and thus the Eight, with its eight-inch drums, offered more effective retardation than either Austin or Ford could claim. The handbrake (with 'instantaneous adjustment from the driving seat') was cable-operated, and worked on the rear wheels only. The new car was longer and wider than the standard 'Minor', with a foot extra of wheelbase, and three inches more track. This made for more room and greater stability: the high and narrow four-door 'Minor' on the optional 7 ft. 7 in. wheelbase had been more than a little top-heavy. Realistically, Cowley fell into line with Dagenham by reverting to a three-speed gearbox. The ratios (5.375, 9.729, and 17.13 to 1) were



The Two-Car Family, 1934: this combination (pre-Series 8-h.p. fixed-head saloon and handsome 2½-litre Twenty Oxford with free-wheel) was the one favoured by the author's own family in the later 1930s. (Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)

wide, but they suited the Eight's function as a family runabout, second being particularly useful in suburban traffic, and much appreciated at a time when the 30 m.p.h. speed limit was coming into force. The top two ratios were synchronised, and selection was controlled by a long and whippy central lever which 'came well to hand', though in old age it suffered from float, and had to be firmly grasped in anticipation of a change of cogs. Six-stud Magna wire wheels (with the fashionable chromium-plated hub caps) replaced the three-stud type used on the 'Minor', though the Bishop cam steering gear was retained. Left-hand drive versions were listed for export markets.

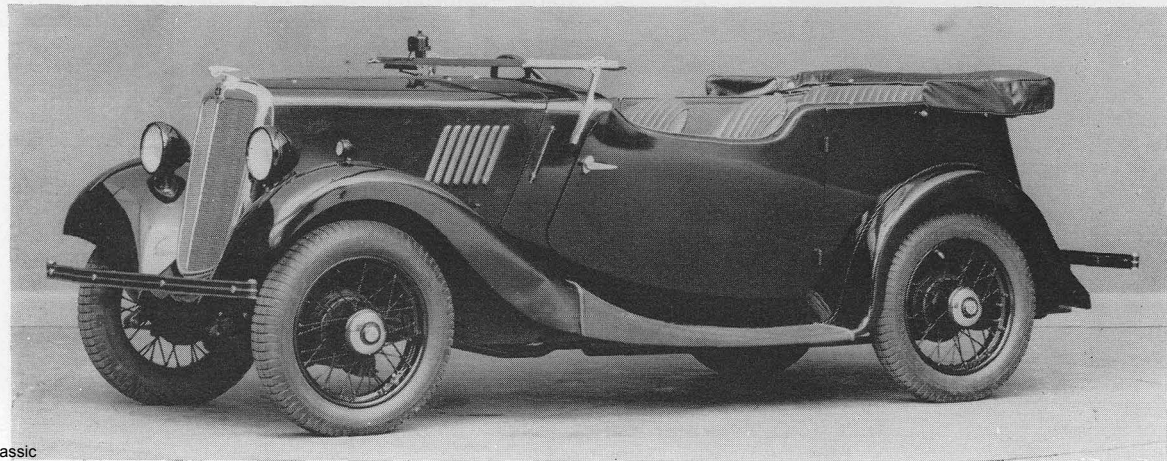
The 'office' was the most individualistic part of the car. Gone was the central accelerator pedal, supplanted by a right-hand roller-type linkage, of which more anon. The ergonomes must have had a field day with the instrument panel, which emerged as a sort of 'Gibson Girl' waist flanked by two immense and apparently bottomless cubbyholes. Within the 'waist' lived four tiny dials—a drum-type speedometer, a fuel gauge, an oil pressure gauge, and an ammeter

(they were generous in those days), together with knobs for starter and choke. A hand throttle was added later. Controls for horn, dip-switch, and semaphore-type trafficators were mounted in the best Gallic fashion on a stalk to the right of the steering-column, an arrangement that was widely praised. The trafficators, be it said, had been pioneered by Morris in 1933, and were standard equipment on the sliding-head saloons and extra (at £2 10s.) on the other models: they were flush-mounted but not self-cancelling. The driver, however, was kept apprised of any vagaries by two tiny mirrors set in the top corners of the windscreen—the present writer was unaware of the significance of these lilliputian orbs of glass until he studied the Morris catalogue! Both the five-lamp lighting set and the electric wiper—attached, of course, to the top of the openable screen—were unusual refinements in this price-group.

If the styling aped Dagenham, the bodies were really roomy—'as big as an ordinary Ten', trumpeted Cowley's publicity. On the closed cars, two-toning was applied, the colour separation following a curve aft of

A Sporty £120's Worth: a 1935 tourer as it left the works—one of the handsomest British utility vehicles of its day. The bumpers and trafficators were extra, and with the screen folded flat the wiper motor must have represented quite a lot of drag.

(Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)



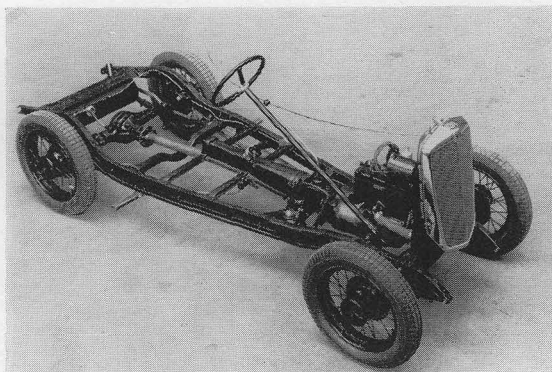
the front doors. The radiator grille, for all its honeycomb treatment, was a dummy, the filler cap being under the bonnet. More important, Morris recognised the demand for an open version which would look sporting even if 60 m.p.h. represented the limit of its capabilities. Alongside the spinsterish and square-rigged 'chummies' of Longbridge, the streamlined Eights (the two-seater was a true fastback) with cut-away doors and fold-flat screens suggested operational trainers for the M.G. which in fact they were. Sales were impressive despite a trend towards fugboxes that had all but ousted the open tourer from the catalogues of other mass-producers. Twenty thousand found customers in the first three years. By late 1935 Ford had taken the hint and added a tourer to their 10 h.p. Model-C range, while open models obviously inspired by the Morris were available on the 8 h.p. Standard and Austin chassis by 1939.

Catalogued styles were the two-seater, the tourer, and two- and four-door saloons with or without sliding head. Inevitably there was a commercial version with a carrying capacity of 5 cwt., while the individualist was offered a bare chassis for only £95. Prices of complete cars ranged from £118 for the two-seater up to £142 10s. for the four-door de-luxe saloon.

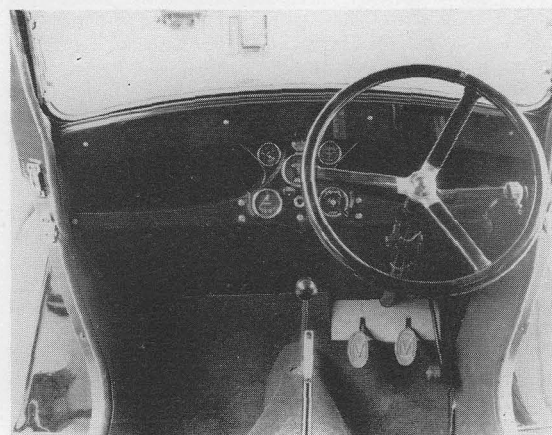
PRESS REACTIONS AND PERFORMANCE

In those insular days, even a commonplace car with no global aspirations could attract rave notices, and the Eight was no exception. 'Its directional accuracy for a car of this size', observed *The Autocar*, 'is good'—a comment which may startle those whose acquaintance with the type dates from later years, but which makes sense when viewed against the background of Henry Ford's obstinately-retained transverse suspension. The excellent second-gear performance was praised. The *Light Car* summarised the saloon as 'a thoroughly likeable car, representing excellent value for money, and being ideally suited for people who want good performance and roomy accommodation at strictly low cost', sentiments echoed by the *Practical Motorist*. This magazine must have sampled one of the earliest examples with no hand throttle, as its tester found warming up a tricky process—which it was. Also noted was the characteristic carburettor roar. Performance was respectable—at a time when a baby car was expected to cruise at 35-40 m.p.h. and stagger up to 50, the Morris recorded a mean maximum speed of 58.06

The Fruits of Specialisation, 1935: Series I chassis taking shape at Cowley.
(Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)



Anatomy of a Best-seller: the box-section frame shows up to advantage in this shot of a very early chassis, identifiable by the 'Morris Eight' on the badge. Notice the liberal drilling at the forward ends of the side-members. (Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)



Earthbound Tiger Moth—or what three generations of novice motorists have cut their teeth upon. The wasp's waist made for plenty of stowage room at the price of 'postage stamp' instruments, the right-hand stalk for ancillary electrics would have attractive rave notices had it hailed from Gaul, and the roller-type accelerator pedal required discreet handling.

(Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)

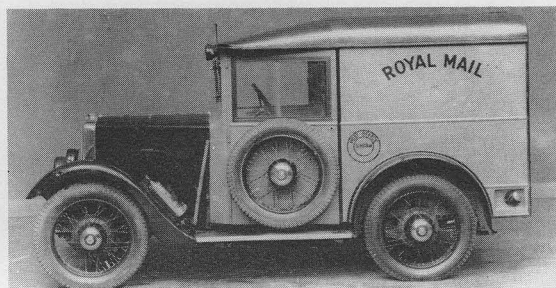
m.p.h., with 35 m.p.h. available on second, accelerated to 50 m.p.h. in 37.4 seconds (or 32.6 seconds in two-seater form), and returned fuel consumptions of 38-45 m.p.g.; figures which put the overbodied Austin 'Ruby' in the shade, and were comparable to those of the Dagenham Ford. It is perhaps significant that within a twelve-month Sir Percival Perry had adopted Nuffield tactics and slashed the price of the 8 h.p. Ford 'Popular' saloon to a flat £100. By the latter part of 1934 Morris Eights were coming off the lines in quantity, ten thousand being sold in the first four months. The 70,000 mark was reached after fifteen months—roughly double the demand for the model as estimated by Cowley. The 100,000th was on the road by July 1936, and the quarter-million mark was reached in the latter half of 1938.

ONE, TWO AND 'E'

In the meanwhile quite a lot had happened, and not only to the maker's slogan, which had changed from a non-committal 'The Car You're Proud to Own' to a firm statement—'The Modern Car'. The Morris Eight was modern, and outwardly the customers were getting the same machine in August 1937 as they had nearly three years previously. In fact, there were differences.



Military Morris: Servicing a brace of 1935 tourers for the Royal Corps of Signals. The 'comps' and Middlesex number plates were regulation wear, and DMC 44's L-plate is apposite on the perfect learner's car. (Photo: Imperial War Museum)



Half-and-Half: to the uninitiated it is a Morris 'Minor', but this 'special' for the General Post Office incorporates a goodly proportion of Series I components. This one dates from circa 1935: the last ones had Series II's easy-clean wheels. (Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)

The summer of 1935 had seen the abandonment of yearly models in favour of 'Series', and by July a new line of Series II side-valve cars embraced everything from a redesigned 1.3-litre Ten up to a 3½-litre '25' priced at a competitive £280, though using only two basic types of chassis and four bodies. The Eight, first-fruits of the new policy, was redesignated Series I, at the same time acquiring Hardy Spicer universals in place of the old fabric type. The curious 'insect' on the dummy radiator cap, hitherto blank, now bore the figure '8' on an enamelled background, while the radiator emblem read 'Morris 8' instead of 'Morris Eight'. Other improvements had already been incorporated in pre-Series days: these included a flexible steering wheel replacing the solid type, trafficators mounted behind the doors instead of in front of them, and the provision of a hand throttle. Otherwise Old Faithful went marching on, with the same body styles at the same prices, though buyers of the open cars (which were never two-toned) could have them in blue as well as red, green, or black, and plain black was now available on all saloons instead of on the de-luxe versions only.

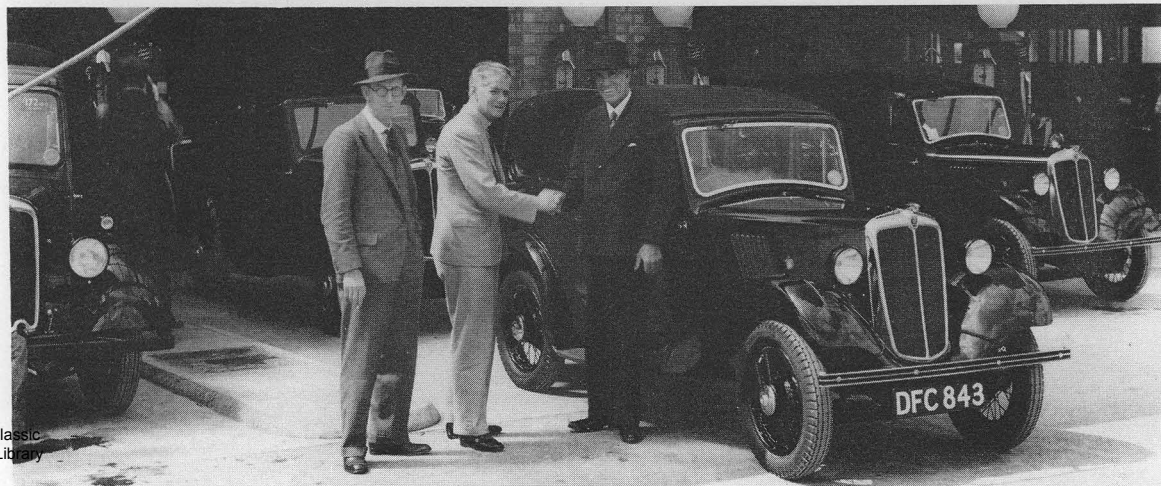
For 1938 the bigger Morris appeared in Series III form with overhead valves, painted radiator shells, and single colours: easy-clean wheels had already been adopted at the beginning of 1937. The Series II Eight inherited the three latter features, though wings remained black; but the 918 c.c. side-valve engine was unchanged, as were other aspects of the design. Prices were increased all round—the de-luxe saloons cost only £6 10s. more, but their fixed-head counter-parts carried a higher increment.

If in 1934 Morris were ahead of their competitors, they were now beginning to fall behind. True, the Austin Seven was played out and the 900 c.c. 'Big Seven' introduced to boost falling sales had proved an inadequate answer. FIAT were selling a lot of their 570 c.c. 'Topolini', though these were two-seaters pure and simple, and Singer's overhead-camshaft 972 c.c. 'Bantam', which closely resembled Series I in styling and had acquired the fashionable pressed-steel wheels at the same time, was hardly one to set the Thames on fire. Ford's restyled Model-Y at £115 was, however, a formidable challenger for all its mechanical brakes and transverse suspension, and Standard had a 1-litre Eight with independently-sprung front wheels on the stocks. There were also rumours of something new from Longbridge, though this was not to materialise until well into 1939.

Cowley was not to be left out of the race, and their new Series-E was unveiled at Earls Court in October 1938. In many ways this was the mixture as before, though a counterbalanced crankshaft and improved manifold helped to boost output to 29.5 b.h.p. at 4,400 r.p.m. with 5,000 r.p.m. possible on the indirects. The chassis was basically unchanged, and in fact was fractionally shorter, if wider. The main mechanical innovation was a four-speed gearbox with synchromesh on second, third, and top, and respectably-spaced ratios. But stylewise it was unrecognisable.

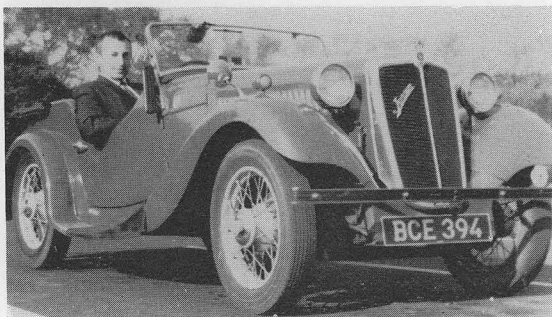
The extra width had been well used, and running boards dispensed with into the bargain. Further, the engine had been moved forward in the frame, and bodies were roomier than ever, with an elbow width

Six Figures: the place—Cowley. The time—July, 1936. The car—a Series I four-door saloon. Lord Nuffield might well look pleased as he hands over the 100,000th Eight to be produced since September, 1934. (Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)



of 47 inches at the rear. The old-fashioned luggage grid was supplanted on the saloons by an integral boot with a capacity of $5\frac{1}{2}$ cubic ft., which also housed the spare wheel. Doors were rubber-sealed, the front seats had steel frames, and the trafficators incorporated a self-cancelling device. Even the traditional dash had given way to a plastic-framed affair with two large central dials. Front-end styling was little short of revolutionary by British standards: not only had Morris adopted an alligator bonnet and curved and barred grille, but they had set the combined head-and-side lamps in the front wings, a practice not followed by any other British mass-producer until 1947. Unfortunately only the top of the bonnet opened, so that the dipstick was inaccessible, but taken all round, Series-E was a lot more car than any of its predecessors, and it cost no more than the superseded Series II. The same body styles were listed, though a single shell was now used for both open models: Harry Edwards, the Morris Eight historian, has never seen a Series-E two-seater and it is doubtful if any were made, at any rate for the home market.

Series-E has always felt a trifle overblown to the present writer; most of Series I's engaging noises-off had been soundproofed out of business, while it shared with the integral-construction Series-M Ten the failing of over-flexible gearbox mountings, rendering re-starts on steep hills an uncomfortable game of 'first catch your gear lever'. But it certainly handled better, and *The Motor's* comment reprinted at the beginning of this Profile is not untypical of contemporary reactions. The late Laurence Pomeroy—who did not suffer bad cars gladly—wrote in 1939 of 'the great pleasure it gave me to handle, and of the long-distance runs that I did without in any way feeling that I was being racked on a bouncing, underpowered baby'.



West Bromwich Accent: Jensen's idea of a Series I sports four-seater was pleasing but it was also a lot more expensive than the standard model, and lacked the latter's elegant simplicity.

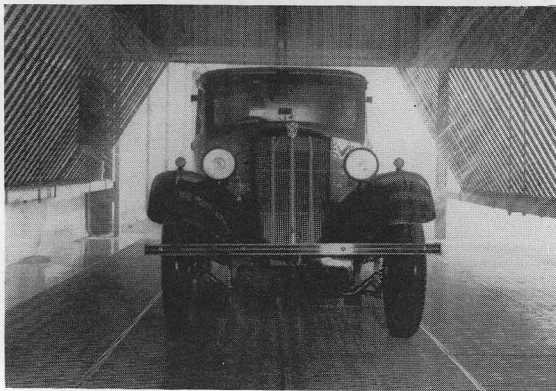
(Photo: P. Sanders)



Improving the Breed? Two views of the 1938 Series II tourer. Below: in original guise, competing in a pre-war J.C.C. Brooklands Rally. Above: as it is so often seen in old age, with a plethora of lamps, and a polished radiator shell. It is sometimes hard to tell a Series II from an artificially 'up-rated' Series I.

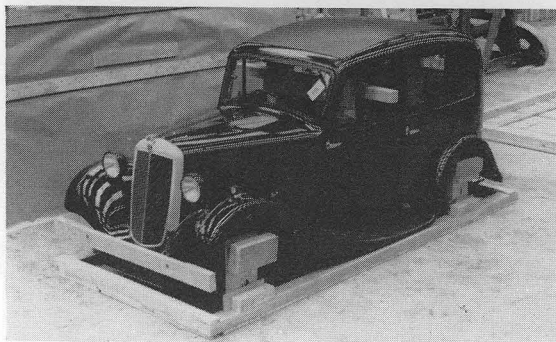
(Photos: Montagu Motor Museum, and the Author)





The Water Torture: A Series II saloon undergoing a routine part of the pre-delivery check at Cowley, 1938.

(Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)



'British Made-For Empire Trade'—ran one of W. R. Morris's catchier slogans in Bullnose days, and the Eight more than upheld this motto. A Series I four-door saloon, partially knocked down for export, poses in the Morris Industrial Exports building at Cowley.

(Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)



Eight Horses to Monte Carlo: there was no equivalent of the B.M.C. Competition Department in 1939 but Series E received its baptism of fire in the last pre-war Monte, when M. N. Mavrogordato (left) drove this two-door saloon into 59th place.

(Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)

Nor did the four forward gears give that unhappy impression of 'three bottoms and one top' found behind many an illustrious British radiator in the 1930s. Fuel consumption was unaffected by the extra weight, and the additional ratio worked wonders with the acceleration figures—a Series-E four-door saloon took only 33.2 seconds to reach 50 m.p.h., as against the 46.1 seconds required by a similarly-bodied Series I tested in January 1937.

Meanwhile the vans had continued without change since the advent of Series I in June 1935: they were not upgraded to Series-E specification until 1940, and then only with some differences. Rather naturally a simplified grille was used, the headlamps stayed on top of the wings, and three forward speeds were deemed sufficient for Series-Z, as this new variant was termed.

AFTER THE WAR

Most British manufacturers reinstated their better-selling 1939-40 lines after VJ-Day, and Morris were no exception. Only the Eight and Ten survived hostilities, and the former reappeared only in closed form and in a Ford-like black—the alternatives of platinum grey or green did not figure in the catalogue until the end of 1947, and even then there were compensating deprivations—henceforward buyers could have a sliding roof only if they were content with two doors. Prices were inflated—a two-door saloon which cost £139 in 1939 now retailed for £314 (for those lucky enough to be at the head of the queue), and by 1948 the list price was £384. In spite of this, more than 60,000 were sold in the first three post-War seasons.

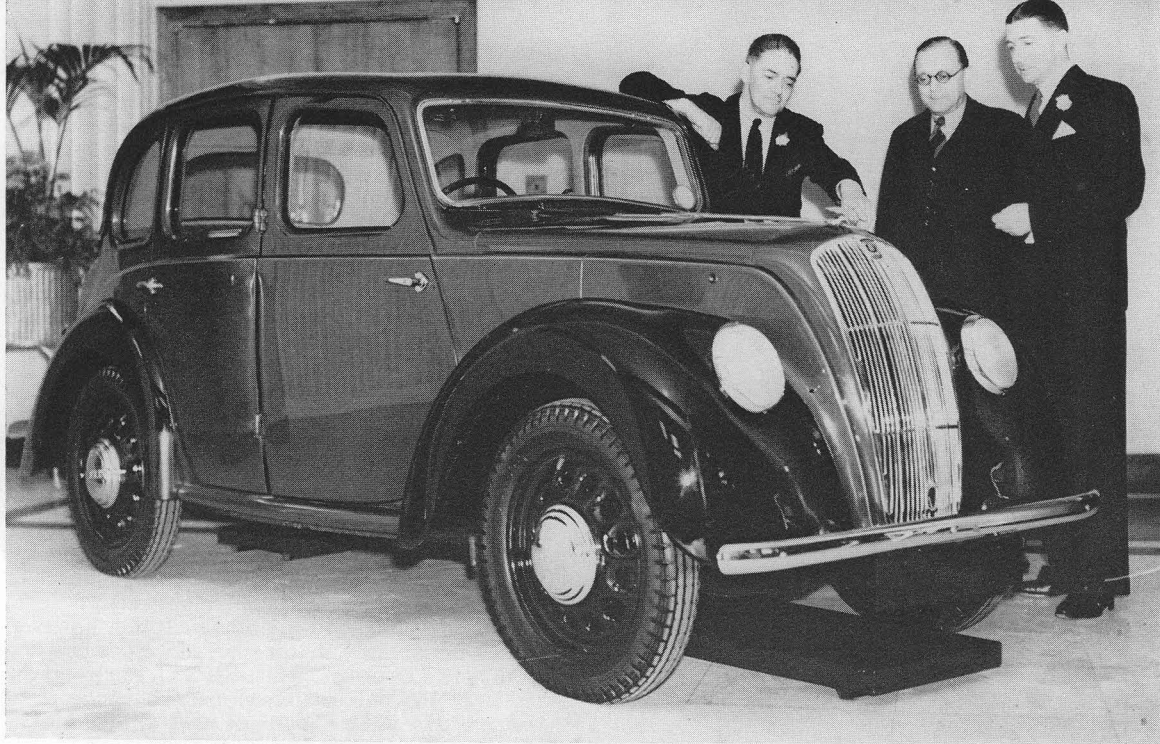
The Z-series van was also revived, while there was now a Wolseley Eight with pushrod-operated overhead valves, a de-luxe specification, and conventional front-end treatment. Lord Nuffield chose one of these as his personal car, and drove it daily for fifteen years. It cost £461. All this was, however, swept away at the memorable Exporter's Salon (Earls Court, 1948) when British motorists were allowed to see what they could not buy. All the Morris exhibits were brand-new, and the star (almost of the whole show, despite the rival attraction of Jaguar's XK120) was the Issigonis-designed Series-MM 'Minor' with unitary construction, torsion-bar front suspension, and rack-and-pinion steering. Under the bonnet was our old friend, the 918 c.c. side-valve unit, now with (on paper) two-and-a-half fewer brake horses, and finding it all rather hard work. The unburstable little engine, of course, bore its burden manfully, and it helped launch yet another best-seller—this time an International one.

With the Nuffield-Austin merger even this link with the past was to be broken. In August 1952, four-door 'Minors' were coming off the lines at Cowley with 803 c.c. pushrod engines of the type fitted to Austin's A30, and by the end of the year the side-valve unit had been phased out. The vans lingered on into 1953 before giving way to 5-cwt. commercial versions of the Series II 'Minor'. The Morris Eight, Britain's family hack since the days of Hore-Belisha and his beacons, had passed into history.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

Though the Morris could be made to go fast—and sound a lot faster with an abbreviated exhaust system—it found little favour with the home tuner. Quite a few examples acquired Derrington alloy cylinder heads: some Morris Eight-based specials took part in competitions both before and after the War, and there was a Norwegian entry of a two-seater (according to some reports, this was an earlier 'Minor') in the 1936 Monte Carlo Rally. M. N. Mavrogordato drove a Series-E two-door saloon (GJO 58) into 59th place in the 1939 event.

Nor did many people avail themselves of what the catalogue termed 'an exceptionally well-equipped chassis' to build their own special bodywork. Cunard exhibited a handsome four-seater drophead coupé at the 1934 London Show, and by the following January



Growing Up Gracefully: Lord Nuffield points out Series-E's generous proportions and characteristic 'bug-eye' headlamps at the Stewart and Arden showrooms, Berkeley Square, October, 1938.
(Photo: Radio Times Hulton Picture Library)

Jensen had a sports four-seater in production at £165. This followed the lines of their well-known version of the Ford V8, with the radiator lowered by three inches; about a hundred were made and two are known to survive. About the only other special-bodied variant known is an Australian derivative of Series-E (marketed in the Commonwealth, for some obscure reason, as the '8-40'); this carried coupé-utility bodywork made by Chrysler-Australia in Adelaide.

The Army's standard light car in World War II was, of course, the Austin Eight, but in 1935/6 the Royal Corps of Signals replaced their 'wireless' Austin Sevens with Series I Morris Eights. These were to all intents and purposes standard tourers, minus the bumpers, and differing from the civilian product only in their 'cross-country' tyres and vacuum fuel feed. These were still being used in 1939. Sheffield Police were also operating open Morris Eights in 1938.

Commercial variants were, of course, commoner, while the engine was adapted for marine use under the name 'Vedette'. In New Zealand, a number of chassis were fitted with flanged wheels for use as railway inspection cars. Oddest and most complex of all the Morris Eight derivatives were, however, the so-called 'G.P.O. Minors', made in two forms: the 'internal' type with Morris bodies, and the 'externals' with Duple coachwork and raked windscreens—the regular transport of telephone linesmen. They descended from earlier 'Minors' used by the Post Office, and were made in batches from 1935 to 1940. Basically the ingredients were 1934-type 'Minor' chassis and axles, wedded to Series I and II 8 h.p. engines and gearboxes. Steering wheels and instrument panels were 'Minor'; and the radiator, curiously enough, was that used on private-car models of that type, and not the flat type found on 1934 5-cwt. vans. The starter button was neither on the floor (as on the 'Minor'), nor on the dashboard, in the

steering-column. 1938 and later examples had easy-clean wheels. After the War, of course, the G.P.O. transferred its allegiance to Series-Z, but the old hybrids continued in service well into the 1950s.

SEEN FROM THE DRIVING SEAT

Reduced to analytical prose, the Morris Eight is not an exciting car, nor, for that matter, is it a bad one, as so many purists have insisted; and it was certainly not lacking in character, especially in old age. The present writer once found himself attacked for calling it the perfect pre-O.C.T.U., but he maintains that this is a fair assessment. Driven as it was intended to be driven, it was viceless. It had a sweet clutch, far removed from the perils of the Austin Seven with its sixteenth-of-an-inch travel: it had adequate hydraulic brakes: it was simplicity itself to drive, with effective synchromesh and a very easy gear change, provided one did not get one's sub-variants mixed up, and inadvertently select reverse on the three-speed Series I and II: and it would stand limitless punishment. One of our family hacks (JB 5471) was described as 'lubricating itself admirably on white metal', and ABL 521, the 'company car', served right through the War in the hands of executives accustomed to more powerful machinery. It never complained, though one suspects that it received at least one exchange engine during its term of service.

Series I, certainly, had some engaging quirks. Cockpit drill, especially in pre-hand throttle days, could be diverting, as both starter and choke had to be held out by main force, and a certain amount of 'jiggling' was always necessary to keep the engine turning at the first traffic light of a cold morning. This process was not helped by a very sensitive accelerator, which grew trickier as the pedal surface wore smooth and the grommets disintegrated, so that Austin Seven-like jerks were not infrequent. A nail-file did the job



Modern Office Block: Series-E had an infinitely tidier and more ergonomic layout than its predecessors, but somehow most of the character had gone. (Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)

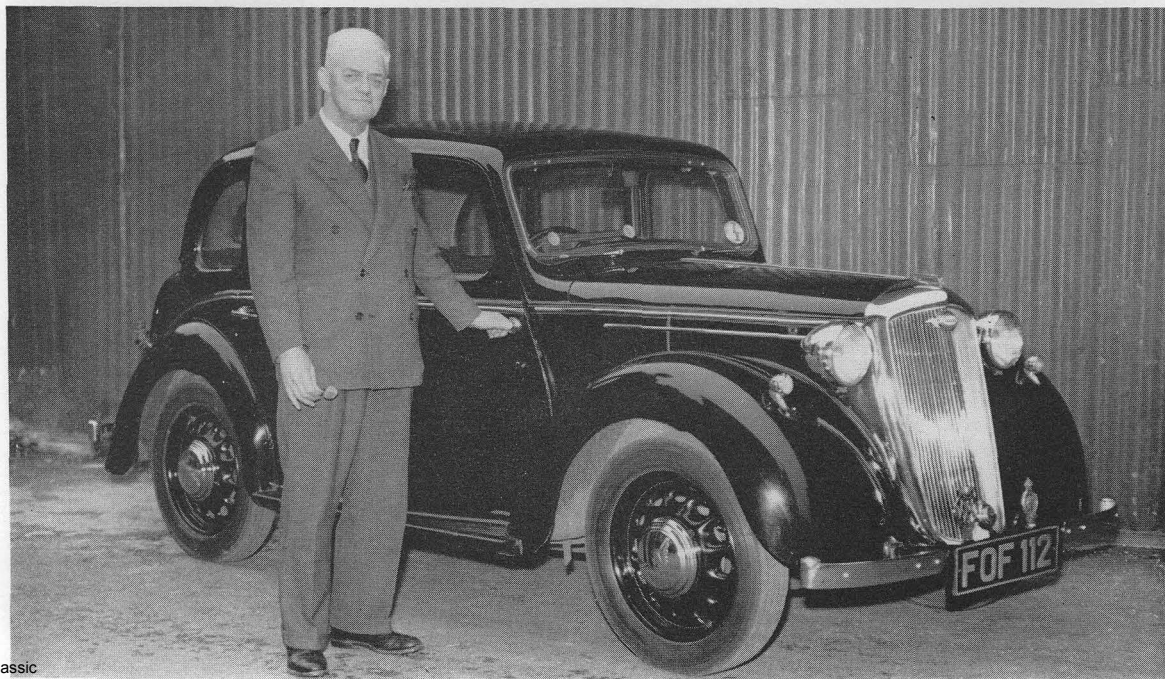
just as well as the rather bent-wire ignition key, with the consequence that the presence of a communal Morris Eight led to an increasing local interest in manicure. The handbrake had (apparently) two 'on' positions, the second involving the use of both hands and a foot braced against the door to release it. Ride was distinctly pitchy: on one particular car, a 1936 tourer, the spotlight (not a factory extra) had to be screwed up tight at regular intervals unless one was to be regaled with a grandstand view of telegraph poles at

night. The back seats, especially on the tourers, were uncomfortable and accentuated the hard ride. Oil pressure was a standing joke: the handbook specified 30-60 p.s.i. at steady speeds, but few latter-day owners expected this. The writer's 1935 fixed-head saloon (BLM 959) gave a regular 15 p.s.i., but normal readings were negligible—not that this worried the tough little engine, and most hacks were considered safe for an indefinite period provided that the needle moved sluggishly off its bed once the unit had reached working temperature. They were, too—one seldom hears of spectacular blow-ups, commonest causes of disaster being corrosion in the side-members and at the rear of the body, rusted spokes in the wheels, and, on the open models, doors which flew open—Woolworth gate latches were a wise modification. The screenwiper motor went about its work within sight, sound, and smell of the driver, and was quick to reach near-incandescence.

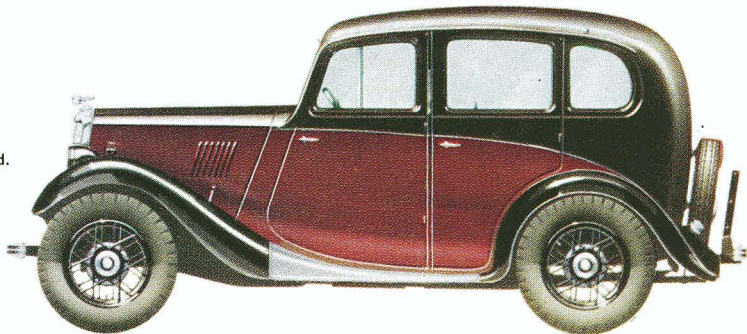
The animal's sound-track, likewise, was peculiar. For its time, it was not noisy, and a well-tuned engine does not sound obtrusive even today, albeit the sight of it rocking gently on its four-point 'improved equipoise' rubber suspension might alarm those nurtured on products of a later era. It did, however, possess a throaty carburettor roar, suggestive of a dog with digestive disorders, while the S.U. pump on the far side of the bulkhead furnished an *obbligato* of demented ticking. One soon got used to this, for the component was trouble-free.

The Morris Eight certainly worked: it could be cruised all day at a steady forty-five, and on a 5.8:1 compression ratio it was not fussy as to diet. A Series I tourer known to the writer gave a regular 47 m.p.g. throughout the Suez Crisis, and even his own tired example, bought for £20 in 1963, returned 42 m.p.g. over 4,000 hard miles as sole transport. The only work carried out amounted to the replacement of two of the

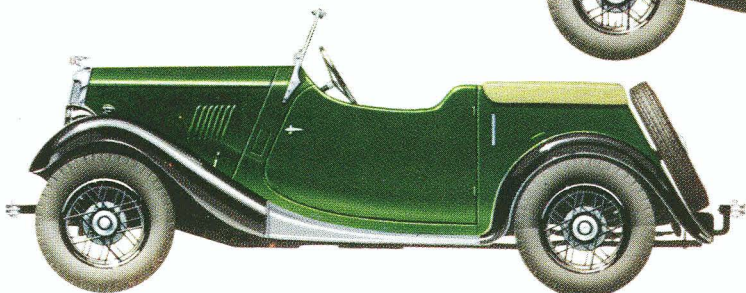
Le Patron's Favourite. Lord Nuffield in 1955 with the first of the Wolseley Eights, intended for the 1939 Motor Show, but not put into production until 1946. For all the traditional Wolseley styling and separate headlamps, the affinity with Series-E is unmistakable. (Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)



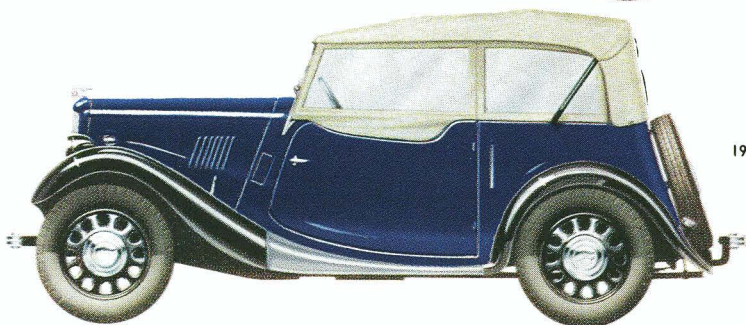
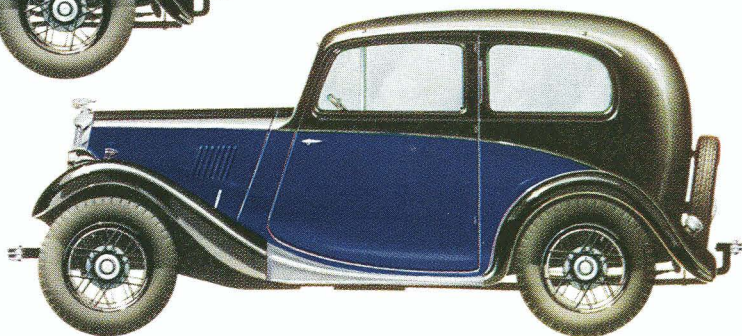
1935 pre-Series 4-door Saloon with sliding head.
(Price: £142 10s.)



1935 Series I 2-door Saloon. (Price: £120;
bumpers and trafficators £2 10s. extra.)

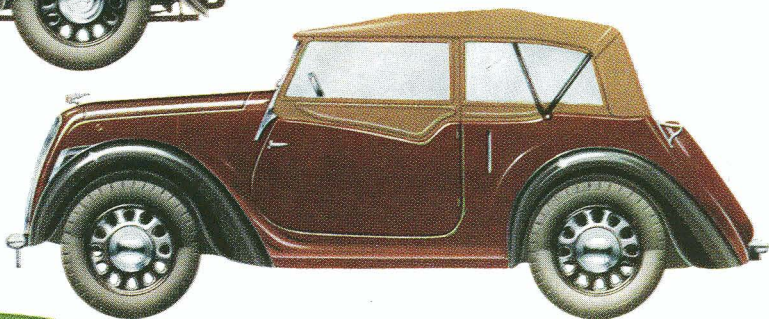


1935 Series I 2-seater Tourer. (Price: £118;
bumpers and trafficators £2 10s. extra.)



1937 Series II 4-seater Tourer. (Price: £128.)

1939 Series 'E' 4-seater Tourer. (Price: £135.)



1939 Series 'E' 4-door Saloon with sliding head.
(Price: £149.)

End of the Line. Series-E might have given way to later designs, but the Series-Z van went marching on. This is Martin Walter's 'Utilecon' version, 1950. Note the simplified grille and separate headlamps.

(Photo: Martin Walter Ltd.)

tyres, and a certain amount of patching-up of the wiring with insulating tape.

The Eight has suffered, like many worthy and undistinguished cars, from its solid virtues. Its uncompaining ordinariness made it a part of the landscape: born into an uninspired era, it offered, not inspiration, but simple daily transport in a land of good roads and high taxation. It had all the gimmicks—the dummy radiator, the low gear ratios, the two-tone finish—so despised by supporters of the nascent V.S.C.C., while the open models possessed the faintly bogus 'sportiness' that was one of their principal Aunt Sallies, along with bonnet straps, soup-plate instruments, and stoneguards. But for all the chequer-tape merchants who once made Series I their hallmark, there are hundreds of these cars still in service. No wonder a lively cult is growing up around them.

© Michael Sedgwick, 1967

The author wishes to express his gratitude to Mr Harry Edwards of the Morris Eight Tourer Club and Messrs. Lytton P. Jarman and R. M. Knox of the Bullnose Morris Club for invaluable help in the preparation of this Profile.

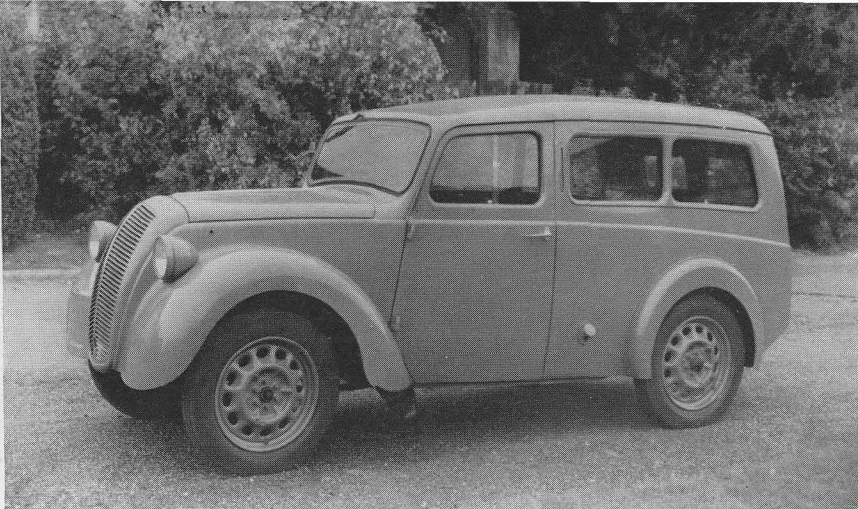
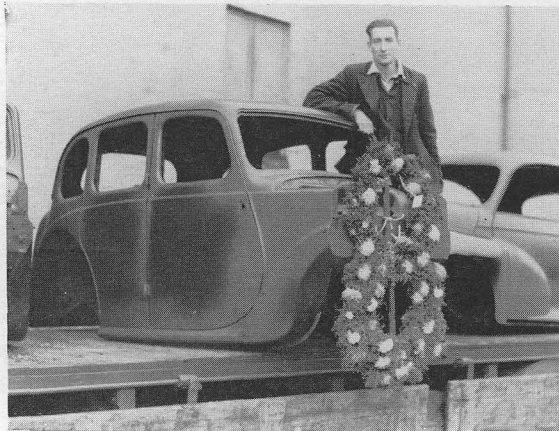
SPECIFICATION: MORRIS EIGHT, 1935-1948.

Chassis: Double box-section type.

Cylinders: 4, in line, monobloc, detachable head, 3-bearing crankshaft. Compression ratio (pre-Series, Series I, Series II) 5-8: 1 : (Series-E) 6-5:1

Family Hack Emeritus. A laurel wreath for the last Series-E body as it leaves the Pressed Steel factory in 1948. Behind can be seen the shape of things to come—the shell of an Issigonis-designed Morris 'Minor', which would bear the immortal 918 c.c. engine for some years to come.

(Photo: Morris Motors Ltd.)



Valves: Side, L-head. Chain-driven camshaft.

Bore & Stroke: 57 × 90 mm.

Capacity: 918.6 c.c.

Horsepower: R.A.C. Rating, 8-05. Output (pre-Series, Series I, Series II) 23.5 b.h.p. at 4,000 r.p.m.: (Series-E) 29.5 b.h.p. at 4,400 r.p.m. (Series-Z) 27.5 b.h.p. at 4,400 r.p.m.

Pistons: Split-skirt light alloy, 3-ring type.

Lubrication: Full pressure, by gear-type pump. Sump capacity 5 pints. (pre-Series); 6½ pints (Series-E).

Cooling: Thermo-syphon, with fan. (Series I, Series II). Radiator capacity 15½ pints.

Carburation: S.U.

Fuel Feed: S.U. electric pump from rear tank. Capacity (pre-Series, Series I, Series II, Series-E) 5½ gallons, (Series-Z) 6 gallons. Vacuum feed on Army-type tourers (1935/6) only.

Gearbox: In unit with engine, central change. Three speeds, with synchromesh on 2nd and top (pre-Series, Series I, Series II, Series-Z): four speeds, with synchromesh on 2nd, 3rd and top (Series-E). Ratios: (pre-Series, Series I and early Series II) 5-375, 5-729, and 17-13 to 1. Reverse 22-84 to 1; (late Series II and Series-Z) 5-29, 9-57 and 16-85 to 1. Reverse, 22-466 to 1; (Series-E) 5-286, 8-14, 12-158, and 20-88 to 1. Reverse 22-46 to 1.

Clutch: Single dry plate.

Transmission: Shaft and spiral bevel. Fabric universals (pre-Series) : Hardy Spicer type (Series I, Series II, Series-E, Series-Z).

Ignition: 6-volt coil. 14 mm. Champion L10 plugs.

Lighting and Starting: 6-volt Lucas.

Brakes: Foot, Lockheed internal-expanding hydraulic on four wheels; 8-inch drums: hand, cable-operated on rear wheels.

Suspension: Semi-elliptic front and rear, with Armstrong hydraulic shock absorbers.

Steering: Bishop cam.

Wheels: Magna detachable wire (Pre-Series, Series I): pressed steel (Series II, Series-E, Series-Z).

Tyres: 4-50 × 17 (5-25 × 16 available for export).

Dimensions: (pre-Series, Series I, Series II) Wheelbase 7 ft. 6 in. Track 3 ft. 9 in. Overall length 11 ft. 9 in. Overall width 4 ft. 6½ in. Overall height 5 ft.

(Series-E, Series-Z) Wheelbase 7 ft. 5 in. Track 3 ft. 10½ in. (Series-E) 4 ft. 0¾ in. (Series-Z) Overall length (Series-E) 12 ft. 0 in. Overall width (Series-E) 4 ft. 8 in. Overall height 5 ft. 2 in.

Weights: (pre-Series, Series I, Series II) 2-seater, 13½ cwt. 2-door saloon, 14¾ cwt. Van, 11 cwt. 2 qr. 18 lb. (Series-E) Tourer, 14 cwt. 2-door saloon, 15¼ cwt. 4-door saloon, 15½ cwt.

Prices: (pre-Series and Series I) £118-£142 10s. (Series II and E 1938-39) £126-149. (post-war Series E, 1946) £301-£339. (Series Z, 1940) £129.

Model Currency: pre-Series models, September 1934—June 1935.

Series I: (cars) June 1935—end 1937 model year: vans to end of 1939.

Series II: 1938 model year only.

Series-E: 1939-1948, model years.

Series-Z: 1940-1953.

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