

# The Morris Eight Marque

A book about the history and happenings of the Morris 8 Tourer Club would not be complete without due recognition of the mighty Morris Eight vehicles, their importation and assembly, and the part they played in transportation of New Zealanders for about 40 years as the New Zealand economy and society developed.

## **Pre-Series & Series I**

The first Morris Eight rolled off the assembly line at the newly completed Cowley plant in July 1934. It was introduced to the public at the Motor Show in October 1934 and was an immediate success. The brand-new Morris assembly line produced the first of their “Specialisation” built vehicles, the Morris Eight with production reaching 139,000 units by March 1937. This accounted for almost 30 per cent of the British domestic market. In mid-1935 the Series designation was adopted across all Morris models and the Eight became the renowned Series 1. Later, those vehicles produced prior to that change became known as the Pre-Series. Initially it was the Pre-Series and then in 1936, with some minor refinements, the renowned Series 1

The Eight was offered in a variety of guises, including a basic two-seater, an open tourer, two saloons (with the option of a sliding “sunshine” roof), a 5cwt Van and also chassis for coach-built use. It was powered by a side-valve four-cylinder engine displacing just under one litre, fed by a single SU carburettor and with a healthy horsepower on tap. The Eight’s three-speed transmission had synchro on second and top. The Morris used coil ignition, a six-volt electrical system and had Lockheed hydraulic brakes, a feature that set the car apart from many of its less sophisticated competitors.

*The strength of the model is appreciated when the competition it faced in the marketplace is considered. The similarity between Morris 8 and Ford 8 (Ford Y) has often been remarked upon – indeed Morris engine designer Claude Baily is quoted as saying “We had a Ford engine so we took it to pieces and measured it up.” Baily was a young and gifted designer/draughtsman when he joined Morris at the old Hotchkiss engine factory – on £5 a week without the privileges like being able to use the lift in the tall building. Years later he was with Jaguar, teaming with the designers of the XK and V12 engines. Assisting him at Morris in combating the Ford menace were machine tool arranger L.P. (later Sir Leonard) Lord and of course the old man himself, William R Morris (Lord Nuffield). Also appearing in 1936 was the Singer 9 Bantam, and if the Morris was like the Ford, the Singer was a mirror image of the Morris*

With an affordable asking price and rugged build quality, the much-loved Morris Eight proved a strong seller throughout its lifespan and some 220,000 were made, making it one of the most popular small cars on the road in Britain before the War



*Series I Sports – Series II Saloon – Series I Saloon*

## **Series II**

Morris restyled the Eight in September 1937. A painted radiator surround and so-called 'Easiclean' disc wheels being the most obvious giveaways, but the engine and running gear remained unchanged. The Series II lasted in production for just one year before the arrival of the more extensively revised Series E and approximately 54,000 of these Series II models were made.

## **Series E**

In October 1938, the substantially remodeled E series was launched. A total of 121,649 were produced up until 1948 – (52,818 before the war temporarily halted production). Initially models featured a four-seat tourer and two and four door saloons. The tourer was not produced after the war.

The new Series E was something of an interim model. The new body followed many of the design lines of Morris new Series M 10, but carried on with the same basic chassis of the earlier series Morris Eights. Instead of being "*The Car You're Proud to Own*", the Series E was now marketed as the "*Modern Car*", which indeed it was. The lack of running boards, curvaceous styling which incorporated an opening boot and a rear hinged bonnet, recessed headlights, and plastics in the interior, made this as state-of-the-art as any other mass produced British small car of the prewar era.

Many of the tried and proven components of the earlier Eights were, however, carried over into the new model. Four-wheel hydraulic brakes were fitted to all models and a beam front axle supported on semi elliptic springs on each side, Bishop cam steering, and three quarters floating type differential were also used to name but a few. The same engine too was used, being a side valve 918 cc unit. However, it was improved for the Series E with a counterbalanced crankshaft and a slightly higher compression ratio giving more rpm and power.



The biggest mechanical improvement however, had to be the fitting of a four-speed gearbox with synchromesh on 2nd 3rd and top gears, thus overcoming the gap between 2nd and top in three speed gearboxes.

## **Series Z Vans**

The Series Z van first entered production in 1940, but using many of the earlier Series II Eight's mechanicals, including the three-speed gearbox. This half-ton rated van was manufactured for Defence and Post Office needs, but post-war were attractive for commercial use and continued to be manufactured until 1953.



## **1949 - The End of the Marque**

In 1949, the all-new Morris Minor sounded the Eight's death knell – ironic as the first Morris Eight in late 1934 replaced another Morris Minor which was popular back then. The first Morris Minors did however retain the Series E flat-head, side valve motor, until the newly developed overhead valve motor was introduced in 1952.

## Morris Eight Popularity in NZ

Historical records of Motor Registrations in NZ highlight the popularity of the Morris Eight marque. Over a six-year period from 1935 to 1940, 11.4% of cars registered in NZ were Morris Eights – some 13,772 cars. Also, 23% of cars registered were less than 10 hp, of which over 50% were Morris Eights. (Austin, Ford, and Standard were the competition).

Morris cars had a consistent market share of 17% - of which Morris Eights made up 70% of their sales. The other 30% were in the 10 to 14 hp medium car range.

During that period, 40% to 45% of the market was dominated by the larger more powerful American Fords, Chevrolets and other brands. The English and Continental brands prevailed in the 10 to 14 hp range.

Passenger Car Registrations												
	1935		1936		1937		1938		1939		1940	
Austin	2,338	14%	2,612	12%	3,069	11%	2,596	10%	2,057	10%	506	7%
Chevrolet	2,047	13%	3,238	14%	3,866	14%	3,602	14%	2,653	13%	490	7%
Ford	3,900	24%	5,058	22%	6,235	22%	6,547	25%	4,906	23%	1,933	27%
Morris Eight	1,619	10%	2,655	12%	3,716	13%	2,747	11%	2,324	11%	711	10%
All Morris	2,694	17%	4,004	18%	4,955	17%	3,964	15%	3,436	16%	997	14%
Vauxhall	1,174	7%	1,585	7%	2,257	8%	2,513	10%	2,350	11%	1,186	17%
Total Registrations	16,188		22,703		28,316		25,907		20,905		7,061	
Less than 10 hp			5,088	22%	6,484	23%	5,861	23%	4,501	22%	1,650	23%
10 hp to 14 hp			7,025	31%	8,916	31%	9,042	35%	7,669	37%	3,754	53%
Over 20 hp			10,652	47%	12,496	44%	10,741	41%	8,471	41%	1,589	23%

During WWII years (1941-45), there were minimal imports of cars to New Zealand. In total there were 400 cars less than 9 hp imported over the five years. British vehicle assembly plants changed to making armaments, transport, munitions, etc. and there were no vehicles assembled.

In New Zealand, something had to be done to transport our expanded military. The answer was vehicle impressment from private owners. Many Morris Eights were taken, with fair compensation, for military use during the war years, owners were offered first right to repurchase after the war.

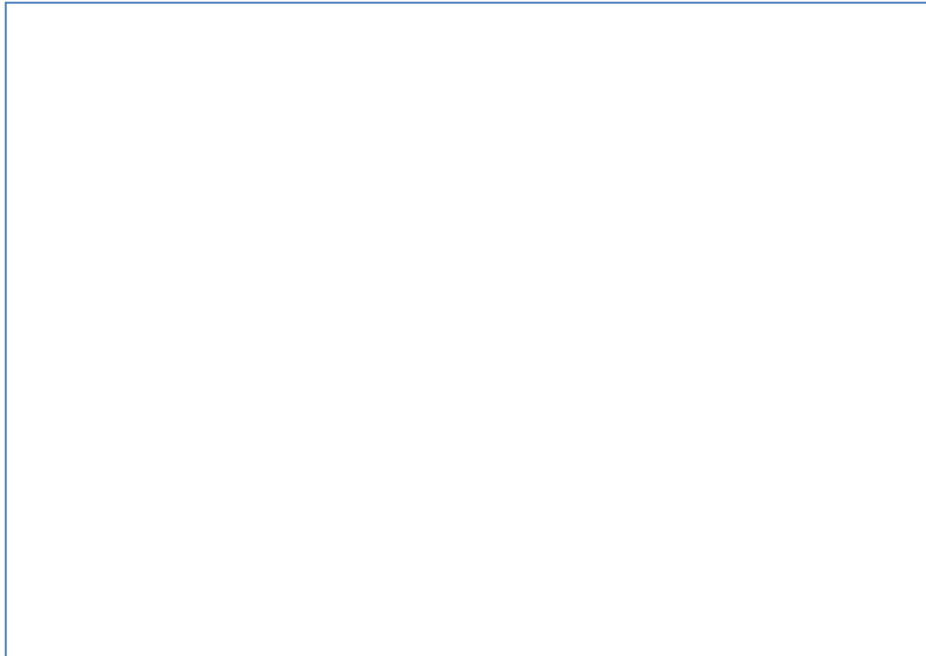
Importation picked up in the post-war period when Morris Eight Series E - two and four door sedans were a favoured, economical, small family vehicle. In the period 1946 to 1949, some 8,802 cars of less than 9 hp were imported – of which 4,188 (48%) were of the Morris marque. (Again Austin, Ford and Standard were the competition). In 1949, 1,665 small Morris cars were imported. Most of these were likely to be Series E, with some early Morris Minors with flat head side valve engines inclusive in this tally.

In total, records suggest about 22,600 Morris Eights were imported and registered in New Zealand.

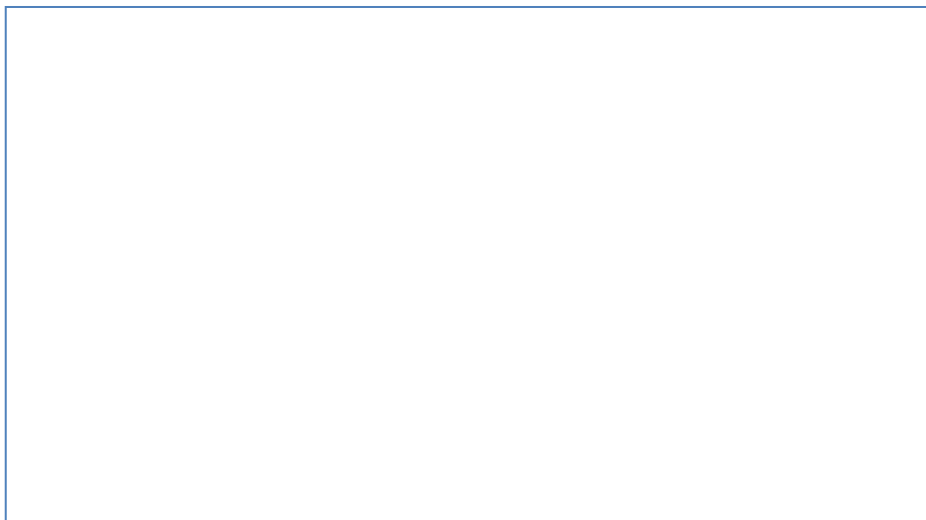
In 2018, a search of the NZTA Vehicle Licensing Database indicated 585 Morris Eights were registered. Agreed, there will be a percentage of these “on hold” because they are under restoration or stored for future attention. Morris Eight Tourer Club members collectively own about 230 Morris Eight cars – 70 sports/tourers/roadsters; 100 Series I & II saloons; 55 Series E Saloons; and 5 Utes/vans. There is a good case for ranking the trusty and popular Morris Eight to be the largest “one make” category of veteran car in New Zealand. The only potential competitors to this claim could be Morris Minors, Mini or Ford Model A.

## Assembly Plants

A book titled "The NZ Morris Minor Story" documents the formation of Dominion Motors by Sir Charles Norwood in 1919 and traces development of the motorcar assembly industry in NZ, with a focus on Dominion Motors Ltd. It has Morris Minors as the main theme but covers other Morris models (i.e. Eights, Mini, etc.).



*Morris Eights at Christchurch assembly plant (Steven & Son's in Ferry Rd)*

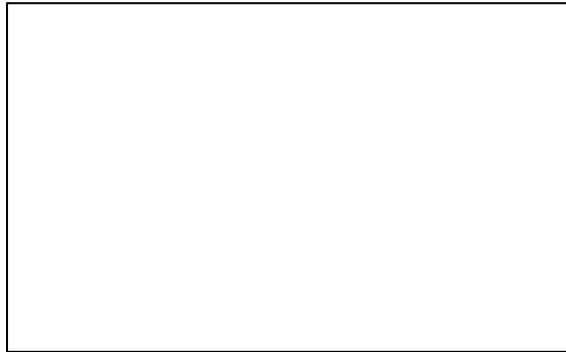
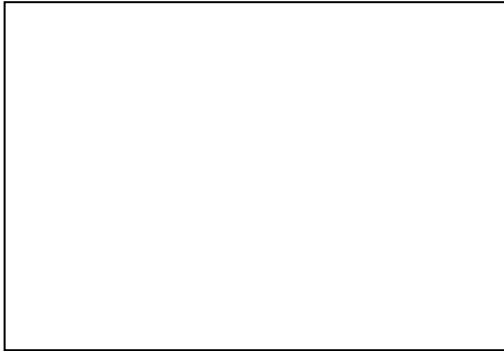


*Cars were distributed around NZ by coastal traders and railways.  
This is a lineup of Morris Eight Saloons on the Napier wharf.*

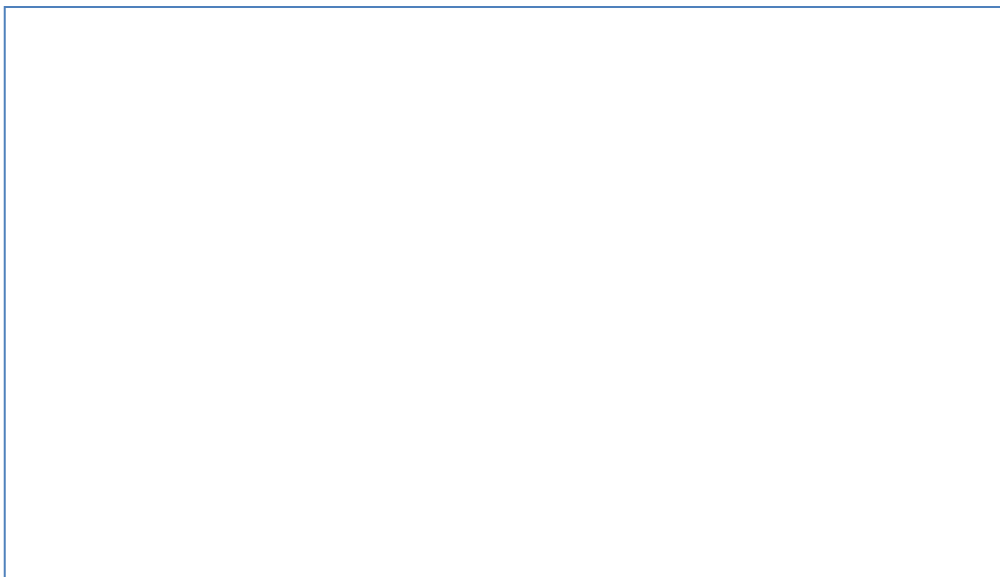
Morris vehicles were popular in New Zealand, and this was exemplified in 1937 when Dominion Motors engraved its name in the annals of Morris motors, by placing \* the first £1,000,000 order Morris UK had ever received. 3,500 cars were shipped to the colony and Lord Nuffield personally visited NZ and then ordered a £40,000 extension to the Cowley; England factory based on future export potential.

Walter Norwood commented: *"The motorist in NZ wants an economical low-priced car. We have a fine roads system; quite as good as England ... petrol costs 2 shillings a gallon. Therefore, the 8hp British car is preferred to the American machine. We sell all cars, but 85% are British."*

Assembly plants were in Newmarket (Auckland), Steven & Sons in Christchurch, and New Zealand Motor Bodies in Petone. NZMB were mainly coach builders for passenger transport, but it was where several well-sided utility trucks were made for local manufacturer Lever Bros Ltd and also a small number of unique coupes, (reported as projects by coachbuilding apprentices).



Many Morris 8s were assembled here in New Zealand. The Kiwi cars followed English practice in almost all respects – although the true export models have 16 inch wheels whereas in the home country cars sit on 17 inch wheels. Significantly, because of tyre size, the circumference of both types of wheel is the same and the differential ratios also deliver an equivalent wheel rpm.



*Series E being assembled at Newmarket (Auckland) in late 1940's*

### **Australian Morris 8/40**

The Australians meanwhile were putting their Morris Eights together quite differently and Lord Nuffield's marketing team named them Morris 8/40. Australian import policies required that only engine, chassis and running gear could be imported with the body coachwork being by local manufacturers. Whilst body types generally followed the UK styles, the 9 or 10 different manufacturers provided many variations. Australian 8/40 tourers (roadsters), from some builders lacked cutaway doors and fold-flat windscreens and featured a top hinge affair. There was also an interesting roadster utility. A few Aussie models have found their way into the NZ Morris Eight Club.