

STAFF CAR SAGAS



Described as a six-seater heavy staff car, the Model CD was a development of the earlier Model D. staff car - sometimes known as the 'Prairie Schooner' - and was based On the Morris 30 cwt CD truck chassis. It was powered by a Morris EB four-cylinder engine, producing 55bhp from 3519cc, and installed in conjunction with a five-speed gearbox; the rear axles were of the worm-drive type and were suspended on semi elliptical multi-leaf springs, inverted at the rear. The stylish coach-built body was equipped with a full-length folding top, and the vehicle was capable of a maximum speed of 30mph (50km/h). A total of 80 of these 200in (5080mm) long, 2.35-ton (2386kg) machines were supplied to the British Army during 1935/36.

Any talk of military cars inevitably conjures images of spacious limousines, Humbers, Rolls-Royces, Packards, Cadillacs and so on, and whilst there is a degree of truth in this view, it does not represent the whole picture. In Britain, at least, many staff cars were, and still are, comparatively modest, with cars such as the Austin 7 and the later Ruby being issued to junior officers, some even being adapted for use as field

cars. During the run-up to WW2, cars were built for the British Army by Austin and Hillman and by Austin's great rival, Morris, and although most were simply standard civilian saloons, Morris actually produced two specialised military models, the 6x4 CD, which was produced in quantity, and the tiny Wasp, which never passed the prototype stage.

Morris Motors had been founded by William Richard Morris in 1912, although the Company was initially known as WRM Motors. The first Morris car was announced in the motoring press in 1912, with production starting in earnest in March 1913, but both sales and production were adversely affected by the Great War during which Morris manufactured hand grenades, Howitzers and mine sinkers. WRM Motors was liquidated in 1919 and production was resumed by Morris Motors Limited. The famous Bullnose model was re-released in that same year, with sales remaining sluggish until Morris started cutting prices in late 1920. The British interests of Hotchkiss, the French armaments and vehicle manufacturer were acquired in 1923, and Wrigley's of Birmingham was purchased in 1923. It was quickly re-organised as Morris-Commercial Cars Limited, the first British-Owned mass manufacturer of Commercial vehicles. The Wolseley Company was acquired in 1927.

In 1928, in response to Herbert Austin's car for the masses, Morris launched the Minor. Sales were disappointing but it was replaced by the more successful Morris Eight in 1934. By this time, the Company's product range had become unwieldy and sales had started to fall. The factory was modernised in 1934/35 and the range was simplified, the Morris Eight soon establishing itself as the company's best seller. By May 1939, Morris had built more than One Million Cars, the first British motor manufacturer to pass this milestone.

The first Morris trucks to be supplied to the British Army were the 39cwt Model D of 1927, and the 10/12cwt 4x2 Model B of 1929. The Company started constructing purpose made military vehicles in 1933/34 with the development of the 15cwt CS8 series and the 30cwt 6x4 Model CDF; the militarised 30 cwt Model CS11/30 followed in 1935, remaining in production until 1939. By the end of

WW2, Morris Motors, Morris-Commercial and the newly established defence Company, Nuffield Mechanizations & Aero, had between them, constructed 80,000 trucks and 22,000 Bren Carriers as well as building tanks, Argosy amphibians, Liberty tank engines, Bofors guns and aircraft.



Above: Introduced at the 1928 Motor Show, the tiny Morris Minor was intended to take On the Austin 7 as a car for the masses. It was produced in both open and closed configurations but never sold in the same numbers as the Austin. At the time of launch, the engine was a 20bhp 847cc side-valve four-cylinder unit with an overhead camshaft, but in 1931 this was replaced by an engine of the same Capacity but with the camshaft in a more conventional position. Production continued until 1934, by which time total production had reached 86,310, around 75 examples were purchased by the British Army for use as staff cars, some were fitted with a purpose-made military open body for use as a radio vehicle, (photo above), superseding the somewhat more flimsy Austin 7. In the latter application the body had space in a rear locker for the batteries required to power the radio set.



Above: the Morris Wasp was unusual in being a purpose-designed light military staff car. Two prototypes were constructed during 1937, one with a closed saloon body, the other (shown here) equipped as an open-topped tourer. Sadly, there was no series production. These vehicles featured four wheel drive with an auxiliary gearbox and the 8 hp engine.



Above: Some 28 or so of the British Army's Morris Eights were modified in various ways and were equipped with aerial mounts for use as radio vehicles. Note how the body and the canvas hood appear to be more upright at the rear when compared to the civilian tourer, perhaps to provide more space for the wireless operator, and the wheel arch clearance is increased.

Below: In 1934, the Morris Minor was superseded by the all-new Morris Eight, powered by a Morris UB four-cylinder side-valve engine producing 23.5 bhp from 918cc, and installed in conjunction with a three-speed gearbox. Both open and closed versions were produced, the latter seeing military service both as a staff car and, in modified form, as a radio vehicle. The new Eight owed more to Ford's contemporary Model Y than it did to the Minor, and was far more successful than its predecessor, finding favour with 240,000 buyers before it too was superseded. The photograph shows the standard civilian Morris Eight tourer as supplied to the British Army for the liaison role, note the opaque rear side curtains which were standard to all two seaters. Perhaps as many as 250 examples of this machine were supplied to the British Army.

