

## **Lord won't you send me a Mercedes Benz?**

Well no, I was actually planning on telling you a little about Leonard Lord, the man responsible for the Morris Eight. A tough and unpopular man, he was born in Coventry and rose to become recognized as perhaps the outstanding figure in the British motor industry in the 1930's. He worked as a draughtsman at the Coventry Ordnance Factory during WW1 and taught night classes at the local Technical College in the evenings. He was known for his temper, ambitiousness and cheekiness. Next stop was Daimler and then most importantly to us, in 1920 he joined Hotchkiss who were making engines for Morris. As an aside, Hotchkiss was a Coventry subsidiary of the French engine builders. Morris bought the business in 1923 and that is why your Morris Eight engine has French metric threads with Whitworth nuts. The factory was essential to the war effort making artillery for the British military. Morris attracted Frank Woollard from Wrigleys who were making Morris front and rear axles as well as gearboxes. I mention Woollard here as Morris employed him to reorganize Hotchkiss as the engine branch of Morris Motors. He developed the automatic transfer machines for engine block manufacture. In practice the performance of this equipment was hampered by the lack of development of the technologies required. His book on *Mass and Flow Production* is as a 'rare insight' by an engineer who 'pioneered automation and its application to the British context'. With Woollard's flow production methods and Lord's forte in production he came to Morris's attention. He was moved to Wolseley in recognition of his technical and managerial ability. He was responsible for the new engine developments which culminated in the engine for the new Morris Minor. He did so well that Morris moved him to Cowley. After differences of opinion with Lord, Oliver Bowden was moved to Wolseley, followed by Miles Thomas who worked at both Wolseley and the Morris Commercial factory after being told by Lord that big as Cowley was 'it wasn't big enough for both of us'. One of his typical remarks was, 'If the door isn't open, then you kick it open'.

In the early thirties, Morris gave Lord £300,000 and instructed him to rationalize the business. By 1934 Morris had the largest and technically most advanced factory not only in Britain, but in Europe. It had a capacity of 100,000 units a year, greater than the total production in Germany and two thirds of French output. Under the direction of Lord, a new product policy was devised. His team designed a new car, the Morris Eight, which was much superior to the ill-fated Minor. It instantly became popular and within four years had sold 200,000, becoming the best-selling car in the years up to 1940.

Lord had promised to stay at Cowley until Morris regained market leadership of the motor industry and that he would only consider leaving after one year of peak output and profits. Each year Lord only asked to be paid whatever Morris thought he was worth. Each time, he thought that Morris underestimated his value. The crisis came in 1936 when Morris asked him to take over the entire Nuffield empire, including Wolseley, MG and Morris Commercial. This time Lord asked for a share in the business and Morris would not agree. He decided to resign and after many attempts at a reconciliation, Morris gave him a cheque for £50,000. A year later he returned to run Morris's Special Areas Trust for £10,000, double the salary he had

paid him as Managing Director of Morris Motors. Miles Thomas who eventually became Managing Director said that 'the stain and anger of the split hung heavily on Lord' and he threatened, 'Tommy, I'm going to take that business at Cowley apart, brick by brick'.\* In 1938 Lord became Works Director at Austin, and by 1945 he was Managing Director and Chairman. He had a rough manner and soon galvanized Austin into a force to be reckoned with. In 1951 Morris approached him about a merger with Austin which became a takeover of Morris. In 1952 the British Motor Corporation came into being and Lord fulfilled his threat to take the place apart. He criticized and humiliated the Morris directors and Morris Motors on public occasions. He stepped down in 1961, was made Lord Lambury, 'Lord Lord would sound bloody stupid' he said. He died in 1967.

\*Brick by Brick is also the title of the book by Martyn Nutland, "Leonard Lord, the man who made the Mini".

The photograph and much of the above text has been found in "The Motor Men" by Peter King. Published by Quiller Press, 1989



Lord worked for both giants of the motor industry, Morris and Austin, and eventually presided over their amalgamation.