

The revival of *Fugly* t

Chris Clark

Further to my introduction of my 'new' Stiletto, *Ugly F*, in November's *Impressions* here is the current state of play ...

It all started in mid-September while I was at the Tilford show. I had been toying with the idea of buying a saloon to go with my Stiletto, MSM 27F, for a few months but had been badly let down by sellers or the cars were just too expensive and I was on a budget. Sometime earlier I had been given a Godiva fire pump which by chance used a 930 engine. Having spent a few hours of my spare time and some spare cash converting this into an Imp engine ready to fit I felt it a shame to let it lie around so I had speculatively been on the lookout for a cheap, solid but scruffy non runner to fit the engine to. A car I could use daily and not worry about what happened to it.

A conversation with Brian Sparks while at the Tilford Rural Life Centre classic car show led to him showing me some photos of a green Stiletto for sale in nearby Marlow that if not sold very soon would be going for scrap. Brian advised of the rough areas of the car but it looked in reasonable condition so curiosity got the better of me. Anyway, I reasoned, even if the car was only fit for spares, I could break it to keep the parts for MSM.

Upon turning up, the car was dirty and scruffy looking. It had no wheeltrims on the sorry looking wheels, the interior and half the parts of the engine were piled inside the car and the paint was very flat. However, it had its virtues. It still had its original Sport engine with Sport head along with a small-bore Janspeed exhaust, a brand new pair of coupé screen rubbers and a new water pump so even if it was a 'parts' car, I could get my money back by splitting the car and selling on the unwanted bits. A closer look at the bodywork showed that all four arches had been replaced but to a very 'average' standard and other minor areas of the car had been filled over or were rusting through. The sills had been replaced (with non-Imp sills) and a large patch welded in the driver's side front floor. However, the critical areas of suspension mounts, floor edges, etc looked to be in fairly sound condition. The number plate made me think that it should have been UGL for ugly as the car didn't look particularly pretty in its current condition. Inevitably *Ugly F...* sprang to mind (apologies to those of you who don't like coarse language). So on initial inspection the car was far too good for the scrapman and at the negotiable price mentioned was worth taking a chance on. A deal was struck at a price of around half of what rough Stiletto projects are making on eBay and the car was mine.

Colin Cashmore kindly provided the transportation and soon the car was back home. The tax disc dated from August 1983 so I didn't rate my chances of firing the engine up. After running a jar of petrol to the carbs and a jump off a new battery, amazingly the engine fired up and sounded quite healthy, although its run was short lived due to a fuel feed/fuel pump problem. However, as the clutch was unsurprisingly stuck, I decided to remove the engine and fit my 'spare' 930 anyway. At least the 875 Sport lump will make a useful spare for either car if required.

So I busied myself fitting the replacement 930 hoping that the original gearbox would be OK. Upon removal, I was glad that I had gone to the trouble as the starter ring gear had no teeth

he Stiletto



whatsoever around six inches of its circumference. Strangely the clutch didn't look very old so why the ringgear wasn't replaced at the same time is beyond me.

Upon fitting the new engine, it fired up nicely but the clutch wouldn't disengage to allow the gears to be selected. A week of chasing the problem through the master and slave cylinders got me no further forwards so in frustration I removed the engine to check the clutch over. I gave Colin a call and he came over to inspect it. We couldn't really pin down a specific problem but we changed the clutch for a lightly used item and refitted the engine. We checked the clutch worked before connecting everything up and all seemed well. I fired up the engine and the gears went in. Great. Second time of trying and no such luck, the clutch simply wouldn't disengage. We were at a total loss now so Colin suggested jacking the car up on one side at the rear and starting it in gear. I did this a few times and every time the clutch dragged and would not clear. I then pulled up the handbrake a few times with the engine running and the rear wheel was spinning and hey presto!, the drive freed off! We can only assume some sort of partial seizure had occurred in the gearbox while the car had been laying idle. The problem has not since re-appeared except, even now, in neutral, releasing the clutch will cause the car to move forward slightly due to some kind of drag within the box. However, it otherwise works nicely so I will leave well alone.

I was now one week into the resurrection of a car that had laid idle for 27 years and it now moved under its own power. I was mindful that the weather would close in very soon so now was the time to move onto the brakes. The previous owner who had only had the car for 18 months advised me that the owner before him had replaced all the brakes. A quick inspection soon showed that he had replaced all the brake pipes and the master cylinder but nothing else. Fortunately I had a complete new set of wheel cylinders and shoes in my spares so these were fitted. Initially the brakes worked well but the pedal went soft overnight. After a daily session of removing the wheels and checking the cylinders, bleed nipples, etc the majority of the problem

was traced to joints in the new brake pipes which had not been done up tight enough. However, the fluid level in the reservoir persisted in dropping overnight and this was eventually pinned down by a process of elimination to a faulty servo unit. A replacement was ordered and fitted and low and behold the problem ceased. Three weeks in I now had a car that drove *and* stopped.

Next it was down to checking/fixing lights, the horn, new wipers, etc and finding a decent set of tyres as the 27-year-old-plus 12" tyres on the car were past their best. A set of Minilite style 13" wheels and tyres came my way via a chance enquiry to Tim Sears (thanks Tim and Dave!) and I refitted the bits of carpet that came with the car and the original seats. Again Colin came to my rescue and spent a day fitting a front rad.

So with some trepidation the MoT was booked at Editor Grahame's favourite MoT station in Addlestone. When I rang to book it in the chap asked what car was it for to which I replied, "A Sunbeam Stiletto." He retorted, "Surely it's not a year since we MoT'd that," referring to MSM of course. He was quite right as it had only been five months since he had tested MSM. The first drive of UGF – now renamed a slightly more PC *Fugly* – on the short journey to Addlestone was very favourable. The gearbox and ride were smooth and the car is quite quiet. It did start to overheat after a few miles but then settled down after a brief stop and the brakes were pulling to one side slightly as well. Sadly, the car failed the MoT on worn kingpins, insufficient welding to the patch in the floor, leaking front shock absorbers and a brake imbalance on the front. However, I wasn't too upset by this result. So it was back to the driveway and the socket set ...

The brake imbalance was eventually traced to a leak from one of the unions on the master cylinder and a neighbour re-welded the patch in the floor which left the king pins and shock absorbers to sort out. I asked Colin to do the kingpins for me as I don't have the knowledge or equipment to tackle this type of job. However, 43 years of rust would not let me unbolt the bottom shock absorber mount on one side so I removed the front wishbones complete and rushed these off to 'Ashford Automobiles'. Needless to say the service was excellent and overnight a new pair of 'de-cambered' kingpins were fitted together with removal of the offending seized shock absorber bolt. The front springs had also been shortened a little to lower the ride height. Everything went back on the car nicely along with a new pair of front shocks from my stockpile and I rang the MoT test station to re-book exactly a week to the day since the car had failed. I was really pleased with the lowered front end, it just makes the car look so much better. A ten-minute re-test ensued and although there was still a slight imbalance on the front brakes and a list of advisories as long as your arm, I had the all important 'pass' certificate.



The next morning saw me on the train, destination my local DVLA centre at Wimbledon with V5, insurance certificate and MoT – ink barely dry – in hand. A five-minute transaction ensued and a change of class from ‘PLG’ to ‘Historic’ and I had my free tax disc. I couldn’t wait to get home and take *Fugly* for a spin. After a 27-year absence, *Fugly* was back on the road at last.

My first port of call was ‘Ashford Automobiles’ to take Colin for a run. The car ran lovely although I was still not 100% happy with the brakes; this was later traced to some remaining air in the pipe on the left front. Once bled this has been fine.

Since the initial four weeks frustrating ‘slog’ where the car fought me with every attempt to repair it, I have fitted new carpets, extra sound deadening, heated rear window, stereo, alarm, new front seats, spotlamps, front spoiler, new sun visors, an oil pressure gauge and clock. I’ve even given it a polish which made no end of improvement to the previously dull paintwork.

Future jobs include replacement doors to replace the rusty ones currently on the car, a few

small bits of welding, fitting a 930 water pump to cure overheating in slow-moving traffic, replacing the ‘demented spaghetti’ seatbelts with some new inertia reel units and some other minor body repairs.

I am really pleased to have returned this car to the road on a tight budget and it is lovely to drive, even if a number of the parts used are ex-Triumph Dolomite (guess what other make of classic car I own!). Wherever I go people come over to talk to me about it, it is just so different from bland modern cars.

According to websites, UGF 876F was registered on 18/4/68 in South West

London, possibly around the Wimbledon area – anyone know of a dealer that existed in that area? It appears to have lived most of its life in Norfolk before travelling back down south at some point. The seller of the car told me that he rescued it from a back garden in Maidenhead. How long it lived here I am not sure but I would assume it was this owner who repaired the bodywork and resprayed the car. The logbook shows only three previous owners and this tallies with the history. The speedo shows 77k miles which seems genuine.

And why the name *Fugly*? My mother-in law told me about a friend of hers who rescued a dog from the Australian equivalent of the RSPCA. She said that she took pity on him because he had a lovely nature but was not the prettiest of dogs in the pound and she knew he would never find a new home so she adopted him. However, due to his looks she called him *Fugly* – a true story. A bit like UGF, not the prettiest but interesting, full of character and fun to own.

And as for MSM, she is now sulking at the months of attention lavished on her younger sister and the front brakes have seized so now is the time to fit the front disc conversion I have.

Thanks to Brian Sparks for the tip off, the Cashmores for having yet another Imp outside their house for a week, Colin for all his help and Tim and Dave from Reading for the wheels and tyres.

