

Imp 50 – Adventures of a Kiwi

Brian Baylis, Auckland, New Zealand



As the May photographs of the Imp 50th party at Linwood and Coventry indicated a real interest in the Imp I decided I simply had to attend the National Weekend at Perth, Scotland on the long weekend of 2nd to 5th August.

Online bookings made, I departed New Zealand on the evening of Saturday 27th July to arrive at Heathrow on Monday 29th at 4 a.m. exhausted by flying Virgin Atlantic from Sydney via Hong Kong. Coffee in a waxed paper cup with 'Slurp' emblazoned on the exterior lacks a certain finesse. As for space, sardines in a tin can have it better. Never again with that mob!

A pre-booked rental car was collected from Eurocar; be warned they tried hard to upgrade the vehicle (and rental fee) and also sell unneeded insurance excess waivers. The latter would have doubled the cost, as it was they wanted to charge an extra £120 for four hours before the pre-arranged pickup time of 10 a.m. Welcome to rip-off England. As for service, I had to ask where the car was and I got a vague wave indicating to take any one from a particular line of vehicles. I chose a white Fiat 500, near

new with 1,400 miles on the clock. All the bells and whistles plus some extra gimmicks, like eco-fuel saving that cut out the engine when stationary. After two roundabouts I picked a quiet spot to read the driver's manual and found there was a button to de-activate that particular gimmick. Driving a modern car is totally different to the Imp and with electric power steering I felt disconnected with the road and had to rely on silly lights that suggested when to 'shift up' a gear, it was a manual five-speed. No mention of changing down, I suppose you flog out the engine before that to save fuel and the environment. Despite its obvious modern comforts the Imp has much better visibility all-round and handles the roads in a way I can tell what is going on. Would I buy a Fiat 500? No.

My first day was to head south to Bishops Walton to visit a previous owner of the Rapier H120 I bought from a subsequent owner and shipped to NZ three years ago. By a series of chances he found me from the following link on the internet www.classiccars4sale.net/classic-car-how-to-guides/servicing-and-maintenance/rootes-arrow-rapier. He was greatly interested in what had happened to the vehicle in the past 16 years since he sold it. It also gave me an insight and reasons for some of the non-standard things I have found as the rebuild progressed. Since its arrival in NZ it has been totally paint stripped to reveal some dodgy bog paper repairs. I really did not need the telephone numbers for the Manchester ladies of easy virtue from May 2005. Probably a bit past their use-by date now anyway. To obtain Compliance (MoT) the rust had to be



Virgin Atlantic:
coffee lacks taste –
and so does the cup!
Photo: Brian Baylis

repaired and inspected by a certified vehicle engineer as the work progressed. It is now at a stage where I have to reassemble sufficient parts to make it mobile for a final check. Once passed it can be registered for use.

From Bishops Walton I headed north to visit friends in Istead Rise and Needham Market before the trek to Perth.

For a visitor to the UK, use of a GPS system is essential and I am thankful I brought a unit from home that had UK maps installed. UK roads have few pull-offs to check a printed road map. Although signposted, trees that block the signs are no help to visitors. It was interesting to travel on A and B roads and I found several places of interest that would have escaped notice if I had been on the motorways.

I arrived in Perth on Friday afternoon and took a quick look at Scone Palace to find our Rosemary and her Irish friends already lined up in the front courtyard. I was invited to join their photoshoot session. The weekend was of course simply superb but I would ask the organisers of future events to supply name tags in the party pack. I brought mine from home and it was a good conversation opener. It was a real treat to meet Franka, the original Imp website creator; to put a face to a name is always nice. As for the vehicles on display, that was Imp heaven, what a collection, from better than new to 'in need of TLC'.

Navigating on the Saturday run to Glenturret I managed to miss an instruction Glenalmond House for my driver. Not good! I remedied that on Sunday morning by re-tracing the route aided by my GPS and found the property. I am most grateful to the housekeeper who allowed me to visit the grounds and house, it stirred some buried memories from long ago. I was equally pleased to visit Linwood where my Imp Sport and the Rapier were built. The current owner has made a real effort to record what the factory was like in its heyday, alas very little remains today.

From the Imp Weekend my route tracked south via the coast to see parts of Scotland and England never visited before. In particular, the countryside near Coniston Water and Whinlatter Forest were so clean and green, quite different to NZ. A quick visit to friends in Nottingham and then on to Rhayader to see Alan and Janice Loveridge, ex-club members. I had an interesting day out with Alan on the narrow-gauge railway from Devil's Bridge to Aberystwyth. From there it was a relatively short drive to Banbury for a Sunbeam Rapier Club meeting and visit to the Rootes Archive Centre. I could have spent a week there, so much history and blueprints for so many parts,



Peter Wormald's
stunning H120 Rapier
Photo: Brian Baylis

and much more yet to be catalogued. I hope it is being backed up with electronic recording in case of damage. The Rapier club members made me feel very welcome and I was asked to navigate for Steven Street in his immaculate H120. I took particular note of where things went so I could get my own



Solving the Paris parking problem – one
Photo: Brian Baylis



Solving the Paris parking problem – two
Photo: Brian Baylis

somewhere near the same standard. The really nice part was being asked to present some of the prizes and give a short speech. I had seen Peter Wormald's superb yellow/green (*Limelight? GP*) H120 at Coventry three years earlier and to inspect it at close range was a real treat.

An overnight stop with Kathy Ludbrook

and Gordon Lister in London was so welcome. But I really must visit again with my tool kit to help out with the maintenance of her cars! As an added bonus I had a second visit to the Heathrow Area Centre meeting.

After just three weeks it was time to begin the journey home, but not from Heathrow. I object to paying £85 to just pass through the terminal; a very expensive toilet stop I may add. Instead, I spent the same on a trip to Paris via Eurostar to see Alain and Ewa Barbou for a few days. And a great time did I have too. Walking along the banks of the Seine on a sunny day was absolute magic. The French have some unusual cars and go to extreme measures to provide parking as shown in the attached photographs.

From Charles De Gaulle Airport on Saturday 24th August I flew home on Singapore Airlines, via Singapore. That airline works very hard to please its customers and really wants them to travel again, not surprisingly they have been voted the best international airline. I may have

been in economy class but the service – including the coffee! – could not be faulted, and I could move around in the seat. I arrived in Auckland, on time, at 10.30 p.m. on Sunday 25th ready to start work the following morning.

Subsequently I have had a call and visit from Mike Andrews, a retired Rootes man from the early days of Linwood. We had a very interesting talk and he took photographs of me with the fleet. For me that was something special. But then, *all* visits by club members are special to us Down Under. All we ask is that you tell us you are coming so we can help with the route planning.

My thanks to all for a special event, 50 years of Hillman Imps and their derivatives. Long may they survive.