

Imp, Left Hand Drive – 1965 Sell Off

By 'M.R.' (former 'Apex' Vehicle Development Engineer),
via Richard Sozanski, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire

Having discovered a quantity of LHD Imps parked in Linwood, Rootes decided to sell them to their employees in the UK. It was rumoured that these had been 'lost' but I am not sure that this was true.

The Coventry area employees were invited to view the cars at the Ryton Factory. The sale terms were, 'as seen' and on a 'first come, first served' basis. In addition the vehicles were sold as 'pre-used' and taxed for six months, and there was no warranty. There were a lot for sale, but I cannot remember the exact number. I thought the offer reasonable, was prepared to take the risk and selected a Balmoral Grey car, EWK 979C. I collected the car on a Monday and drove across the plant to our isolated Research Department.

Through the process of what is now called 'networking', I had already purchased a shop-soiled front carpet from Linwood (on a scrap ticket 2s.6d) and ordered a pair of front headlamps from Lucas (on employee rates). Obtaining a RHD rack and pinion was not an issue as we had a quantity of perfectly good units that had been used on a development programme; it was just a matter of selecting one with acceptable gearing. During a week's lunchtimes and with the use of the workshop and the help of a fitter/tester friend, the pedal assembly, binnacle (changed from kph to mph) were relocated, the RHD front carpet and headlamps fitted enabling me to drive home a RHD car on the Friday. The cars were fitted with the pneumatic throttle and auto choke carburettor.

To complete the work I planned the following: Carry out a service check, modify the water pump by drilling $\frac{1}{8}$ " drain holes into the seal chambers (with early production water pumps we accepted that an initial seal leakage could occur, which in many cases ceased after a while, our 'fix' allowed coolant to drain away thus avoiding the bearings being flushed out (other people were investigating the cause of the problem but that's another story!), replace all the undershield fixings with hex-headed screws, double up the exhaust 'A' bracket, check the automatic choke mechanism for correct operation, check the internal baffle of the heater matrix (a horrible job, most of the internal baffles in the early production heater matrices allowed coolant to flow from the heater inlet connector to the outlet but bypassing the matrix!). Also planned was to seal the vents above the rear window (a constant source of fume ingress) and fit a radio. I decided not to change the windscreen and just hope that it did not shatter, especially when 'her indoors' was driving. The total additional cost was less than £10 with the lamps being

**EWK 979C,
suitably Anglicised!**
Photo: 'M.R.'



the major expenditure at £4,105.

After a couple of weeks or so, and before I carried out my to-do list, the Manager of the engine development section offered me a bench-tested engine (described as “a good ‘un”). So, a Saturday’s effort saw the original engine replaced and



Canadian spec Sunbeam Imp.
Note the Corvair just visible to the left – the Imp’s styling cue
Photo: ‘M.R.’

the other engine compartment jobs done. The works engine absolutely transformed the car bringing back the ‘zip’ experienced in the prototypes.

On a shopping trip to Leamington the windscreen shattered – as feared – and it was a bit disconcerting trying to negotiate the traffic. Thankfully, the outcome was that a RHD screen was fitted completing the Imp’s metamorphosis. *(A little known fact is that toughened screens were handed; if the screen breaks the driver’s side has a clearer zone. LHD cars have the clear zone on the left and vice versa. GP)*

When I eventually sold the car the purchaser was surprised to have two engines, with the original almost new engine on a pallet.

I wonder how many Imp enthusiasts have come across these 1965 converted LHD to RHD Imps?

The green LHD Sunbeam Imp would have been manufactured about the same time as the ‘sell-off’ Imps. In 1964 I was loaned this car by the Toronto Distributor, free of charge (great!). His only request was that we discussed my findings on return. What could I say? Only that it was brilliant! We did not tell them that we had driven out of Canada – Canadian registered car, they waved us through – to the American border. Unfortunately re-entry was refused as we had no US visas, and to get back into Canada we had to be deported – another international incident avoided!

Actually, I thought the car was well turned out and it performed really well. I was not impressed with the rear window prop the car was fitted with, even though it was well made with a chrome finish (fumes!).

On our trip, it was very hot and we did drive on some very dusty dirt, graded roads. Typically the engine compartment became typically Imp-dirty – not a situation the Canadian user would easily tolerate. This and other factors like the selling price (only \$300 less than an established North American sedan, with bench seats!), the heater performance (or lack of), cross-wind stability (ditto), the culture of large spacious cars (note the size of the parking spaces in the photo!), availability of spares, and the sparse dealer network, must have made the Rootes sales team work very hard for their commission on Imp sales.