The first Imp Van

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

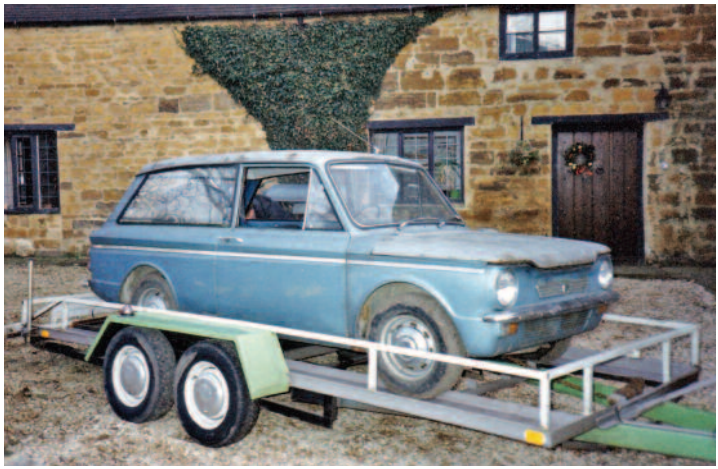
Following on from last month's article from 'M.R.' on the 1965 left-hand-drive Imp sell off comes this interesting missive on the van. Enjoy.

The enclosed photograph must be one of the first taken of an Apex/Imp van. Derek and I had called for a cuppa with my parents while out on the initial 'shakedown' of the newly built prototype. Development work on the van was not as intense as the early Apex saloons – it basically consisted of some engine cooling work, developing the suspension (springs, dampers and tyres) and a wind tunnel test. A low-compression engine was fitted for use with low-grade fuels and apart from increased diameter driveshafts (as fitted to the later Sports) the running gear was basically the same as the Mk 1 saloons.

On the subject of the van engine, at a later time a three-wheeled car (Bond, I think) fitted with the van engine was submitted to the Department for appraisal – I never had the opportunity for a drive. The pleasure of carrying out the performance tests was given to my colleague Maurice E; he reported that its acceleration was comparable to an Imp Sport [due to being constructed of lightweight fibreglass] but negotiating the neutral-steer corners on the MIRA high-speed circuit was a bit of a challenge.

Not many of us in Development particularly appreciated the styling of the van shown, preferring the low-line shape as shown in the second photo. Surprisingly, there was never a great queue for the use of the van at weekends... not good for weddings or taking Granny out. However, on the positive side the van was more stable in crosswinds than the Apex/Imp saloons and

The prototype Imp van. Note smooth roof and less pronounced scalloping behind and above door
Photo: 'M.R.'



Prototype 'Husky'. Lowline styling sadly never made it into production. However, it is now claimed some 20 were made
Photo: 'M.R.'

this was even further improved with a couple of sandbags in the front boot.

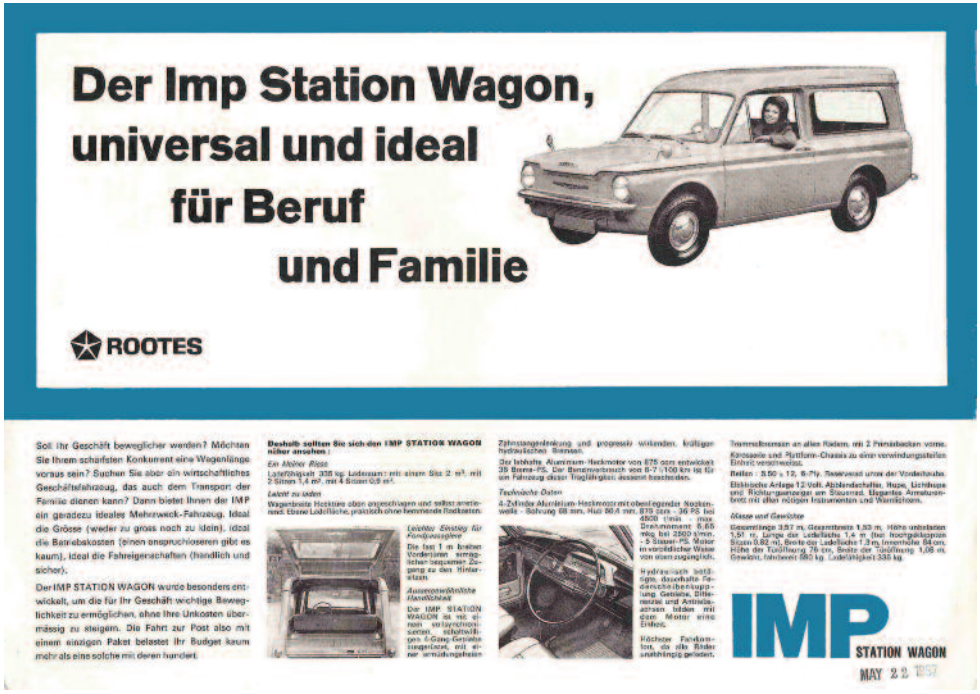
Lord Rootes insisted on the highline roof style. He was adamant that good access should be made for easy access of a milk churn. You should remember that Sir William had started his commercial life selling eggs, and he must have had his potential agricultural demographic in mind, as the last photo shows. Unfortunately no one had the nerve to inform Sir William that the Milk Marketing Board was in the process of phasing out the churn for a bulk collection process!

Derek (admiring the van in the picture!) was a good friend and colleague, but he did infuriate me, for while discussing an idea he would stop scribbling and hand you a perfect 3D drawing of the part. When he eventually departed from Rootes he became a Development Manager for Lotus. Lotus drivers/testers would not work during the weekend and on the odd occasion I would 'moonlight' for Lotus at MIRA, using my Humber pass (naughty). We had two disastrous weekends – the first incident was concerning the Lotus Cortina. During one particular week I had observed his people carrying out standing starts and it crossed my mind that they were being a bit cautious, and then Derek asked if I would give him some time at the weekend. Rootes' standing start procedure was to increase the engine rpm with some vigour and then move the clutch foot directly sideways – so this is what I did with the Lotus. 30 minutes on and the crown wheel and pinion failed. We fitted a replacement and within the hour that too failed – so basically we had spent a morning changing differential units and that was that. Evidently Fords were not too happy with the Rootes test method but they did subsequently introduce a design change to the differential!

The second Lotus test could have ended in a much more serious manner (and it put me off Lotus for a long time!) Another 'moonlight' arrangementm, this one involved high-speed work on the MIRA circuit. The car's styling was reminiscent of an Elan, it looked okay, and was very quick. Derek drove and I was observer on the first familiarity lap. When we entered the second banked corner the chassis failed between the wheels and grounded with a lot of noise and sparks. Thankfully there was no harm done, no fire or rolling. Neither of us had realised that the chassis section was constructed of 2x2 inch thin-wall tubing. Thankfully Lotus use smart chassis designs now.

Back to Apex vans. Our Department built a second van/Husky prototype, this one with the low

We all know how well the Husky turned out in the end, a very underrated car, having all the Imp's virtues with added load carrying capability. Less well known was the 'Station Wagon' for the German market, 'For business and family'. *Supplied by Steve Yates*



roofline (in the second photo) – a more attractive shape but admittedly not very practical for a van. Because of the directive to go with the high roof model no serious development was carried out on this. It was eventually sold to our engine shop foreman who made it into a very desirable vehicle. I thought this lowline Husky was the only one produced so I was very surprised when I was asked to collect an Imp Husky for my friend from a registration plate number dealer. No, it must be a mistake I thought, but sure enough there it was. Someone told me later that about 20 of this style were made and as the song goes, "Don't know where don't know when". As we all know, the productionised Husky was little more than a Van with windows and a rear seat.

The intended role of the Imp van was delivering (soon to be obsolete) milk churns! *Photo supplied by 'M.R.'*

And now, also from 'M.R.', a little quiz...

quiz

And now, you Imp experts, it's Question Time! Have a look at the photo opposite.

Background

Location:	Norway
Year:	January 1963
Ambient Temperature:	Southend –18°C. Tynset, Norway –42°C
Vehicle:	Pre-production Imp
Reason:	On test: Heater Interior Warm Up
	Cold Engine Start
	Cold Start and Drive Away Ability

Other information

The vehicle is fitted with a Southwind fuel supplied heater to warm the incoming saloon air – basically a big blow lamp, mounted on the fuel tank, to pre-heat the incoming saloon air and tungsten tipped tyre studs.

Question 1. What has the Carburettor Engineer in his mouth? (It's not a fag!)

Question 2. What is 'M.R.' doing? (No, not asleep or been run over)

Question 3. What is the large silver dome near the oil filler cap?

The Prize

The prize is two tickets to the **Practical Classics Restoration Show** at the NEC Birmingham on 12th and 13th April (see ad in the centre of the magazine). **Send your answers to the editor by noon on 8th April by e-mail.** The winner of the most correct answers will be able to pick up their tickets on the door. In the eventy of a tie the person whose e-mail arrives first will be the winner.

Answers will be revealed next month.