

My Husky — My Joy.

(Not a dog but a Hillman vehicle)

In 1969/'70 it was decided a second family car was to be bought. It should be small and suitable for me to use with the children. I felt very lucky and spoiled because not many people had two cars in those days.

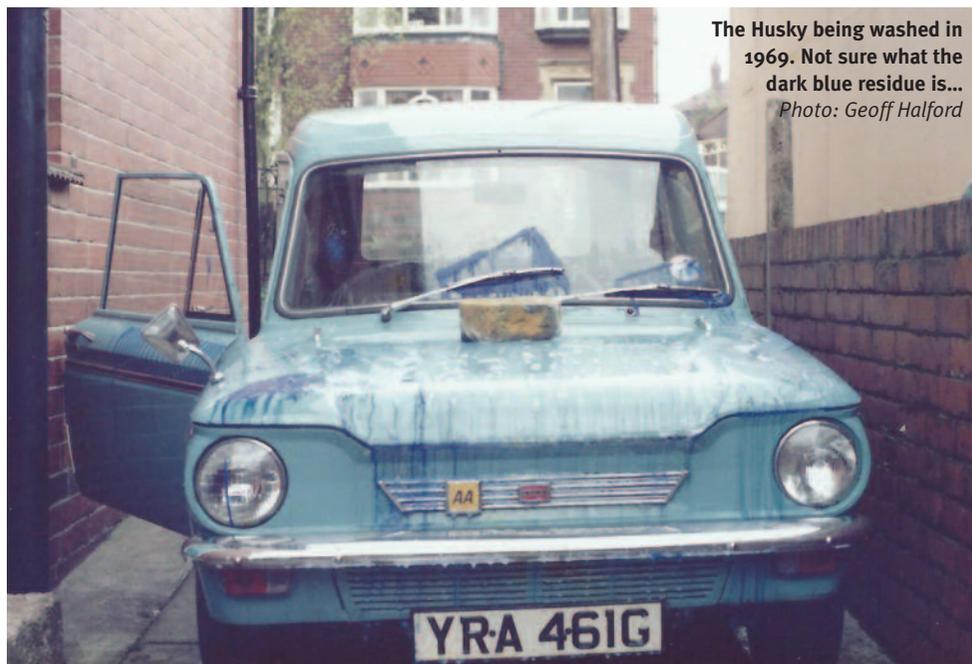
My daughter was then a baby. New on the market was the first portable pram; this would be a wonderful thing for us. Although it was bulky, clumsy and heavy, the body and hood came apart from the wheels and there was a carrying handle which folded. It was a monster compared with prams of today and nowadays only royalty use the original type of luxurious carriage prams.

We decided a Hillman Husky would be ideal. We bought a demonstration model from Brockhurst's, the main Hillman dealer in Sheffield. I can't remember the price we paid, but since our new detached house cost £7,500 I expect it was under £1,000.

I loved the Husky at first sight because she was a beautiful blue (typical woman reaction!) and being small was easy to park (parking was not my strong point). The boot was her main asset, large, deep and high with a back door which lifted high so I had easy access. The roof was flat so the vehicle looked like a cross between a car and a van. There were few Huskys on the road so she was distinctive because of her shape and colour. She looked proud and I was proud of her too.

We had her for years – she became part of the family and was a proper little workhorse. Those days even expensive cars had quite simple engines so mechanically-minded owners could do many repairs themselves. Today, even the smallest cars are full of electronics and a jumble of wires beneath the bonnet means a garage is required for any repair.

The days of 'swinging' a cold engine to start were over, but the hand choke had to be used for



The Husky being washed in 1969. Not sure what the dark blue residue is...
Photo: Geoff Halford

this. There was a ‘knack’ to using the Husky’s choke. Too much would result in the carburettor flooding, necessitating a wait before making a second attempt. Not enough and the engine would not start. In short I found the choke difficult and temperamental. My husband didn’t believe me but he was very generous and said I could use his new car the next day so he could assess and test the Husky’s choke.

On the way to town the next day I noticed the brand new car had only covered 400 miles. Although I was very careful with it I had to park in a very new fangled thing called a multi-storey car-park. I managed to park it OK and locked it. I put the keys in my handbag but left the car-park ticket in the car. *The car was stolen!* Very fortunately it was found two days later, very muddy on the outside. The number plates were missing but the car was undamaged except the boot floor which was scraped. The odometer now showed about 480 miles. It was found on a country lane, beside a reservoir on the Manchester side of Sheffield. The Police reckoned it had been to Manchester to do a robbery, a safe had been responsible for the boot damage, the number plates were either in the reservoir or retained for another job. Thereafter the police kept a record of our registration number and we had to carry a letter in the glovebox verifying we were the true owners of the car. And the Husky’s choke? Yes, it was found to be faulty.

I don’t remember having much trouble with the Husky but a couple of frights stick in my mind. Once on the school run, on a quiet suburban street, I was going uphill when there was a terrific bang and the car lifted from the road for a split second. I was shocked. It transpired that somehow or other the exhaust, which was old by then, had broken off, stood upright and lifted the car.

Another time, returning home on a dark winter’s night having been to a cookery class with a friend there was a terrific crash as we turned a corner. I drove very gingerly the short distance home but the car seemed perfectly normal. We found our cookery efforts were all unharmed in the back of the car but all the tin baking trays were missing. I then remembered I had placed them on the roof while sorting out the cookery masterpieces, their departure was the crash! I must admit to using the flat roof a lot in this way and later lost all the family toothbrushes when they slid off the roof onto the road though I honestly can’t remember putting them on the roof!

The latch on the back door could be tricky. If undone, goods at the back of the boot could drop out. This happened once when the boot was full of groceries for me and a friend with a large family. The door jumped open when we were crossing traffic lights on the busiest of roads. The Sunday joint rolled onto the road but luckily we had just cleared the traffic lights so it survived and was retrievable.

Another day I was driving merrily along thinking, “This engine’s noisy today,” when motorists started flashing and waving at me. I stopped and discovered the backdoor reaching to the sky.

The Husky moved with us from Sheffield to London for almost five years and then back to Sheffield. While down south we lived at Tattenham Corner (of Derby fame) which was by Epsom Downs, far from the city although London was within easy reach. I was not an adventurous driver although Geoff approved of my driving. I would drive to Kingston, Croydon and Sutton though I didn’t drive the Husky to London. When our time in the south was over I had to drive her back to Sheffield. I refuse to travel on the M1 so we came back on the A1. I had to negotiate a busy North Circular although I didn’t mind that as I knew this route well. Back then the M25 was still a fantasy. We travelled in convoy as far as possible, Geoff with the children, me with the Husky, loaded with

the birdcage, tropical fish tank and various long-handled brushes and mops which wouldn't fit on the other car. The journey went well, in fact I enjoyed the drive until we reached Sheffield. I knew about a new road called The Parkway but I wasn't told there was an enormous roundabout at the end of the road. To make matters worse it was now Rush Hour. Nevertheless we managed it well, but nowadays there are traffic lights there which make it easier.

We arrived at the new house. The fish were travel-sick and had lost most of their colour. Once the tank was reconnected they recovered.

We were astounded by our son Peter when he was 16 approaching 17. "I had my eyes tested by an optician in town – I need glasses for long-distance." He had been practising reading number plates from a distance and realised he needed new glasses before his driving test, the optician had confirmed this. Complete with new spectacles the driving test was passed first time in the Husky.

The Husky now had three drivers, which was so useful. Peter went out in it with friends a few times; I didn't worry because neither the Husky nor Peter were 100 mph showoffs.

I remember I went to town for a day's shopping spree with my sister-in-law and her family, 15-year-old Wendy promising to make a shepherd's pie for our return. Shopping done, I returned exhausted but weary, so thankful for Wendy's cookery skills. I opened the door but there was no aroma of cooking. Instead the kitchen was full of steam and wine bottles being sterilised. At the sink stood Peter holding a white-faced Wendy, her bleeding hand under the cold water tap. She'd



When Marjorie saw this photo she was stunned
Photo: Graham Dewhurst

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been bitten by a friend's guinea pig which was in our care, and couldn't possibly cook in this mess which was true. Peter was out of favour but I was grateful he could take Wendy in the Husky to the surgery while I cleared up the mess and started the meal.

It was time for the Husky to go. When it was no longer needed for prams it was so useful for many things. But now sometimes an occasional person would say, "Marjorie, why don't you get a *proper* car now?" Or, when I was dressed for a special function at the Grand Hotel, someone would remark, "You're never going in *that* thing, are you?" The Husky was not shabby, but it was no vehicle for a *lady* in their eyes. In her old age she started to attract more comments such as, "You should keep that, it'll soon

be an antique." (This was impossible of course – we would be cluttered with cars.) Meanwhile, I had inherited my mother's small, newish Ford car, and Peter who was going to Nottingham University needed a car with a larger engine. I don't know how much we got for her, not very much I would imagine, but I remember being happy with the sale. The man who installed a burglar alarm on our house, whom we saw occasionally, bought her for his son who wanted to be a mechanic, the plan being he would do the repairs and generally use the car to play with. Later we saw the Husky at the Jaguar garage where he was now a mechanic. The last sighting of her was much later, in a Peak District car-park. "Look! It's our Husky!" I cried and sure enough it was.

Very recently Peter visited me and announced, "I've got a surprise for you." He then held up an A4-size photo of a very youthful looking Husky. "It's our old Husky, YRA 461G." I was so amazed and asked him where he found her, "I always knew she wasn't meant for the scrap heap." I have since seen her current owner's manual packed with photos of the Husky's restoration. I am so pleased the Husky is giving Graham so much enjoyment, long may it continue.