

# Stella's Road to the NEC 2016

Chris Depledge, Shipley, West Yorkshire

This story starts at the Huntingdon National 2014, when award-winning motoring journalist (and long-standing Imp Club member) John Simister approached me and asked if I'd like to be featured in an article on the restoration of my Sunbeam Stiletto, AKA *Stella*, for *Practical Classics* magazine. Contact details were exchanged, and a date set for early December for John, and award-winning photographer Matt Howell, to come 'up north' to do the story, photo shoot and test drive.

So, on a very wet and blustery December morning *Stella* was driven out of the garage kicking and screaming 'cos she wanted to stay where it was warm and dry. After a late breakfast of bacon butties, Matt went outside to set up his camera and lighting equipment on the drive, while John remained inside warm and cosy taking notes of *Stella's* restoration from Sue and me.

After about half an hour Matt asked us to go outside so we could pose with the star of the story, *Stella*. This was done rather quickly because Matt asked us to remove our jackets, as he pointed out there was no way of knowing which issue of *Practical Classics* the story was going to be in, if it was published at all, and if it was in a summer issue we'd look rather silly with winter jackets on! So, 15 minutes later we were back inside with John taking more notes, leaving Matt to carry on with *Stella*. About three hours later Matt had finished doing the static photos, and was ready to take some action shots.

John, Matt and myself had a short drive to a local moorland area, Baildon Moors, where for the

next hour or so, I drove *Stella* up and down the country roads with Matt sitting in the back of his Ford Focus taking action shots. John then asked if he could drive *Stella* while Matt passengered to take some photos. It was a

weird sensation watching my pride and joy disappear over the horizon, and being left with the keys of a dirty Ford Focus (sorry, Matt). After what seemed a lifetime, but was only about five minutes, *Stella* reappeared on the horizon, much to my relief and I was met by two smiling faces; they both thought she was a great little car. I got into the passenger seat and John drove her back home where we had hot drinks to warm up. John made a few more notes and then we said our goodbyes, as they had been here over six hours and Matt announced he had taken over 200 photographs of *Stella*.

Fast forward to March 2015... and the April issue of *Practical Classics* magazine dropped through the letterbox. To my utter surprise and amazement the front cover was adorned with a picture of *Stella* entitled, 'Stiletto Healed'.

Inside the magazine was a full seven-page feature of words and photos describing *Stella's* restoration. To be in *Practical Classics* was great,



Competition in the top ten restorations was tough  
Photo: Chris Depledge



but for her to be the front cover girl was unbelievable. Surely it doesn't get any better than this! How wrong I was...

Fast forward again to February 2016, and she's in *Practical Classics* once more, little did I realise that because of the earlier article, she was entered into the 'Restorer of the Year' competition 2016, up against 26 other cars, ranging from Alfa Romeos to Vauxhall Carltons. A quick e-mail to Chairman James Henderson to put a post on the Imp Facebook page for me, and I put a post on the Imp Club Forum, asking people to vote for Stella. This clearly worked as I received an e-mail from John Simister in late February, to say she'd made the top ten finalists... we were going to the NEC.

So, for the next couple of weeks, my days off were spent refurbishing her wheels, servicing, washing, waxing and polishing her. With *Stella* looking her best and ready to go to the show on 4th March, there was just time to sort *me* out. (Sue says that's not possible!)

You can imagine my horror on waking up in the early hours of Friday morning to be greeted by four inches of fresh snow! I paced up and down the kitchen, coffee in one hand, cigarette in the other, contemplating whether to set off on the long drive from Yorkshire to Birmingham as the roads hadn't been cleared. Several more coffees and numerous cigarettes later I took the chance and set off.

After a cautious ten miles I reached the motorway, which thankfully *had* been ploughed and gritted, 40 miles later the snow disappeared and the sun came out, and we had a cold but pleasant journey down to the NEC.



Chris's third place was well deserved. Stiletto looking superb  
Photo: Chris Depledge

As you can imagine, *Stella* was not looking her best by the time we arrived, and due to NEC's health and safety rules there is no washing of vehicles allowed within the Centre. Now, there was no way I was going to show her in the dirty state she was in, so I approached some contractors who were tarmac-ing the far end of the car-park and scrounged some water, and proceeded to give her a wash and brush up before entering the display hall, even the contractors came round to compliment her and wish me good luck for the competition.

She was parked between a fantastic E-Type Jaguar and a very rare Triumph Stag estate. These two big bullies were not going to scare our *Stella*. The rest of Friday was spent getting to know the other finalists and their cars.

On Saturday morning I gave *Stella* a final wipe down before the public arrived. The day was spent answering questions about the restoration and receiving compliments on how good she looked. Voting was very busy and a superb Metro is deservedly getting a lot of attention.

During the day I had several visits from Dale, Richard and Graham who were manning the Imp Club Stand in the next hall. I retired to the hotel at 6pm well and truly knackered and almost devoid of voice.

Sue arrived at the hotel about 8pm; she was unable to come down with me on Friday as it was our Granddaughter's third birthday, which I unfortunately had to miss. There will be more birthdays, but possibly not an opportunity to go to another prestigious show like this again!

On Sunday morning I'm out with the duster again, making sure *Stella* continued to look her best. The day was a repeat of Saturday: more voting, more compliments and kind words.

Two o'clock came, the voting has closed and they announce the winner of the Golden Spanner. To our amazement *Stella* picked up a third place, behind the beautiful E Type Jaguar, the overall winner being Metro. To come third place in such a prestigious line up of quality cars is beyond belief and we are very proud of *Stella*.

Chris, Sue and the lovely *Stella* would like to thank John Simister for the idea and the story, Matt Howell for the fantastic photographs, James Henderson for putting details on Facebook and Twitter, members of the Imp Club for their votes and support, and last but not least Dale, Richard and Graham for their support throughout the show.

Thankfully the tears were held back this time, no tissues needed!

*Well done, Chris! And the hat trick is that Stella is also featured in Impressions! GP*

1968 Sunbeam Stiletto

**CHRIS DEPLEDGE**

Chris got two for the price of one, taking home a rotten Chamois to practise on before he started the Stiletto.

**TECH SPEC**

Engine 1750cc 4-cyl VHC    Power 107hp@6100rpm    Torque 52lb ft@3000rpm  
 Gearbox 4-speed manual    0-50mph 4.1sec    Top speed 118mph    Fuel economy 38mpg  
 Weight 1625lb (735kg)    Price new £818    Value now (club) £1050

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Covered for a 45 year old male with full no claims bonus, a clean driving record and no recent motoring offences. £5000+ excess

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RESTORER OF THE YEAR

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