

The Original Coronation Rally Californian

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The 'other' Californian, Fame in a box!

Photo: Peter Hurst



Many of you will know of the Corgi Vanguards Hillman Californian which depicts Jack Salter's car which took part in the 1986 Coronation Rally. What you won't know is I beat him by two years and did the 1984 Coronation Rally in my Californian!

The story commenced in 1983 when I started a job in Cardiff. Knowing no one but having taken part in various motorsport events when at University I joined the Welsh Counties Car Club. They were about to hold the first ever historic rally event for cars built before 1967, a significant cut-off as that was the year the Escort came

out and so they weren't eligible to enter. The idea was to bring back the classic days of rallying and for people to get out their old rally cars that had become uncompetitive once the Escort came on the scene.

I marshalled on the first event and vowed I had to get a car of my own for next year's event.

In addition, Welsh Counties organised various clubman's events like autotests, PCTs and twelve-car rallies which I wanted to do. Unfortunately I had sold my Imp and Ginetta and spent my



Peter Hurst's Californian in the 1984 Coronation Rally
Photo supplied by Peter Hurst

life savings on an XR3 which I just couldn't afford to damage.

At the same time my sister decided she wanted a better car than her Californian.

Shortly before I bought the Escort we were an (almost) all-Rootes family with a Humber Sceptre (father), Singer Chamois (mother), Imp and Ginetta G15 (me), Californian (sister) with only my brother letting the side down with a VW Golf.

So it was that I acquired my sister's Californian and set about preparing it. With no eBay in those days, adverts in *Cars and Car Conversions* provided the parts. A full roll cage, uprated suspension with RAC springs and better shock absorbers, a Sport head, exhaust system and twin Strombergs and finally an oil cooler. I even travelled all the way to Scotland to buy a laminated windscreen.

The engine in the car was all but new. Before going in my sister's car it was the family 'spare' engine built from a fully rebuilt short motor purchased from an advert in the *Bristol Evening Post* and for a time was in my first Imp until replaced by a fully rebuilt 915cc Sport spec engine. Apart from having to drill and tap the block for the oil return from the Sport head it was a straight forward swap of bits. It was – and still is – a very good motor and until recently replaced by a BMW unit was still going strong in my present Chamois.

Engine-wise the only thing I didn't get around to doing was rebuilding the Strombergs so the car stayed with the Solex. In fact I didn't get around to rebuilding the Strombergs and fitting them to the engine until 2007!

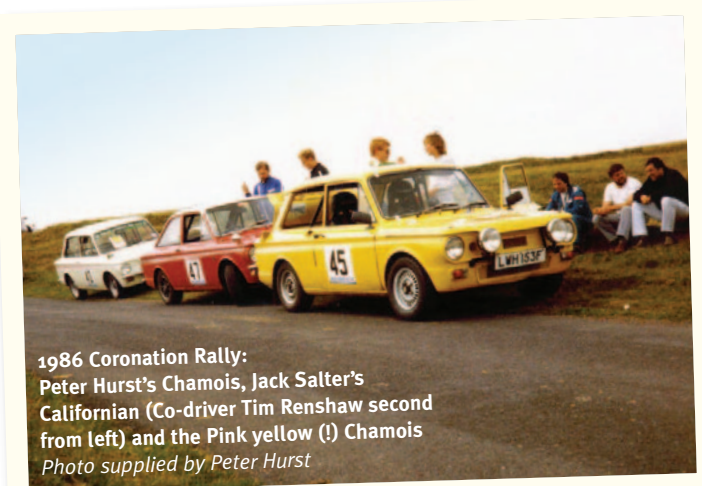
With all the parts fitted all that was left to do was to de-camber the front wheels and fit better Mintex brake shoes.

I can't remember much about my first experiences of driving over Eppynt in 1984 but had a good navigator in Mike Jones who sat in the left-hand seat. He was doing an event the following day in a modern (i.e. quick) car and he wanted to check his pace notes. With him telling me, "Flat over crest" it certainly made the most of the little power I had and the Mintex linings got very hot and started to fade which was very scary.

I still have some paperwork and see I came 9th in class and 33rd out of 60 odd starters but don't know what the other cars were and if any other Imps entered.

In 1985 I was back in the Californian and this time came 1st in class beating a Mini Cooper S and indeed Paul Fowden and the late Hywel Thomas, a renowned navigator, in their Wolseley Hornet.

Unfortunately my Californian wasn't back to do the 1986 Coronation as I had rolled it at a



1986 Coronation Rally:
Peter Hurst's Chamois, Jack Salter's Californian (Co-driver Tim Renshaw second from left) and the Pink yellow (!) Chamois
Photo supplied by Peter Hurst

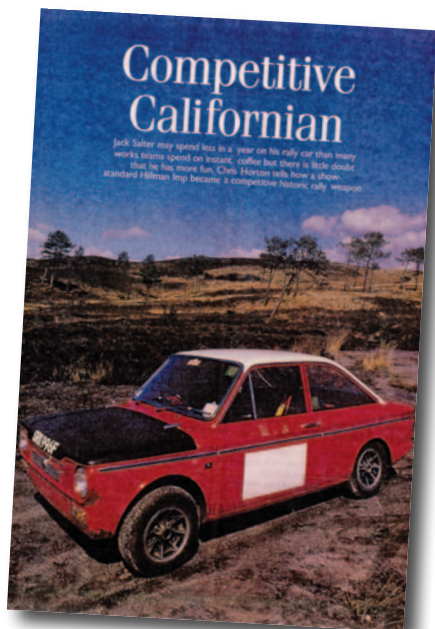
single-stage rally at Pembrey the previous November.

I then bought the Singer Chamois I still own to this day as a non-runner and taking all the mechanical bits off the wrecked Californian transferred them to the Chamois. Obviously it also needed a saloon cage and laminated windscreen. If that wasn't enough work it also required a replacement passenger door as it had been badly dented and with other minor rust repaired with filler I then resprayed it the current white.

On the '86 event as well as Jack Salter's Californian there was the a yellow Chamois of Chris and Jane Pink who had a 998 engine in what I recall was a fully sorted rally prepared car.

Needless to say, I didn't repeat the previous year's 1st in class but came 3rd behind a Renault 8 and the Pink's who came 1st. However, I did beat Jack Salter by one second!

So there you have it. I had the first and original Coronation Rally Californian two years before *Classic Car Mechanics* ran an article on Jack Salter's car (first page of the article reproduced above) and, together with the aforementioned model, made it famous. As the song of the same title said, "It should have been me"!



Peter Hurst's Chamois – which he still owns to this day – in the 1986 Coronation Rally
Photo supplied by Peter Hurst