

Practical Classics Restoration Show Reports

NEC, Birmingham, 22nd-24th March 2019

We are fortunate to have several reports from members who displayed their Imps on the stand...

Sandy McNerlin and Joan Westwood, Bromsgrove

Having acquired our Hillman Imp Super on 26th November 2018 with the assistance of former Imp Club Chairman Graham Anderson (see January's *Impressions*) we never expected our Imp to be on the stand at the Restoration Show as well as being asked to write some thoughts down especially as this was my first show.

We were supplied with all the information we needed by Public Relations Officer Dale Bishop and were surprised how easy it was to get the Imp to Hall 3 and into position. The first people we met were Dale together with Richard Sozanski and Martin Parkes. The first thing I noticed was how varied the cars on the stand were and realised what a good opportunity this was to increase my limited knowledge about the Imp.

When I looked at where the Imp Club stand was positioned in Hall 3, i.e. in a corner by a main entry/exit my initial thought was that a lot of visitors would miss our stand but I was wrong as, once the show got going there was a steady stream of visitors from various parts of the UK who were interested in the cars on display. I was happy to engage visitors in conversation but as soon as the questions became technical I passed them on to colleagues Dale, Richard or Martin who comfortably dealt with them. I was surprised at the degree of technical knowledge possessed by the visitors as well as our staff. It was also interesting to listen to visitors' tales of past experiences with their Imps. One chap who was visiting with his 21-year-old son asked me if he could look under the front bonnet of my Imp. The father explained that he owned an Imp when he was 17 and it was the first time he had looked under one since. He had suffered a serious accident in his, the impact being at the front nearside which not only damaged his leg but caused the car to burst into flames. The other car in the accident was against his offside and the nearside exit was blocked but

somehow he made his way through the other car saving the occupants lives as well. The simple act of lifting the bonnet on my car had allowed the father to describe the event to his son and relive a traumatic event.

Talking to different people can prove what a small world we live in – I was idly chatting

to a Polish chap and he was telling me that he played in a band along with Richard (on our stand) and they played at Polish clubs all over England. As I was born in Redditch and was aware of the town's Polish club I asked him if he had ever played there and his answer was that he *lived* in Redditch. As I had Polish neighbours when I was young I asked him if he knew them which he did and could relate each family member. He was also able to tell me of how he came to live in Redditch after his family had to flee Poland during the Second World War, fascinating stuff!

My favourite car on the stand was Martin's rally spec Imp which took me back to 1970 when I was 25 and working as a draughtsman. My boss came to work in his Hillman Imp which he rallied and was multi-coloured complete with the white number squares on each door. It also had what I remember as Town & Country tyres; the engine sounded great and when it came up for sale I had been desperate to buy it but was short of the 'readies' so had to miss out on what could have been a new career as a rally driver!

My final 'first impression' (if that's not an oxymoron!) may be obvious to most people but not to me as a new Imper and that is that it appears to me that the Imp has a lot going for it and can be used by owners with a bit of imagination.



Dale Bishop admires Sandy McNerlin's Super
Photo: Nicola Sephton



Excellent variety of cars on the stand
Photo: Richard Sozanski

Martin Parkes, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands

I was at the Classic Car Show last year when Richard asked if I would like to display my Imp on the club stand at the Restoration Show in 2019. Of course, I jumped at the chance and now can't believe it has come and gone so quickly. I'm also responsible for organising the Owen Motoring Club (OMC) stand at the same show so it was altogether a busy but enjoyable four days. Luckily Richard and Dale didn't need the cars until Thursday afternoon so that gave me plenty of time to sort out the cars and equipment for the OMC stand in the morning having transported my 'green thing' on a trailer to the NEC. Unfortunately, the two stands were quite a distance apart with OMC's in Hall 5 and the Imp Club's in Hall 3.

After lunch I drove the Imp around the perimeter of the NEC to the entrance door to Hall 3 where I then helped with the Imp Club equipment, etc. Once everything was in place it was a quick car polish and then back home for a few beers!

The next three days I spent mainly on the Imp club stand answering questions about my car and doing my best to provide answers on the other cars and our club as well as popping back to the OMC stand to make sure everything was running smoothly there. Lots of interest was shown in the two tidy BMW motorbike-engined Imps, which I must admit looks a good conversion to perform.

Perhaps it's because I'm still new to Imps but I love listening to other people's memories of these cars and still can't believe just how many people had them as cars in their past. There were lots of nice comments about my car during the show, which makes all the hard work that I did in renovating, preparing and modifying it worthwhile.

I'll finish by thanking Richard and Dale for inviting me to be part of the stand and for their hard work over the four days, it was a shame we were tucked away in the corner of the hall but we still had lots of visitors, such is the popularity of the Imp.



Pete Gardiner's Chamois Coupé. This car used to belong to Editor Grahame back in the early 80s. Recently converted to BMW power
Photo: Richard Sozanski

Nicola Sephton, Wolverhampton

It's been 29 years since I last wrote in to *Impressions*. I was a 14-year-old girl back then who had just bought her first Imp to restore. I've just turned 43 and am still tinkering with Imps. I was very proud to be asked to display my 1973 Hillman Imp Super at the Restoration Show at the NEC on the Imp Club stand. You may have seen my metallic brown Imp at National, affectionately known as *Mr Hankey*. It was a solid project I bought in 2014. I did all the work and built an L4 engine, then finally last year got the respray done. I'm still working on the interior but that should be finished soon.

I spent two days before the show tidying a few bits up and repainted the grille and on the Thursday dropped the car off at the NEC and helped Richard and Dale set the stand up. It was then I noticed my front number plate had dropped and was pointing towards the floor. "Oh well," I thought. "I



Martin Parkes' well known Super
Photo: Martin Parkes



Nicola Sephton's Super
Photo: Nicola Sephton



Pete Gardiner's Imp Van, modifications include four-headlights and BMW motorbike engine
Photo: Richard Sozanski



Nicola Sephton
Photo: Charlotte

can't sort it now, it'll have to stay like that."

On Friday I met up with my friend Charlotte on the train at Sandwell and we went into the show for the day. The club had five Imps on the stand. BMW-powered van and Chamois Coupé, a Magenta Imp Super, R-reg, owned by Sandy, my Imp Super and Martin's famous Imp racer that had earlier appeared on *Heartbeat*. I could not believe the interest in our little cars, we were tucked away up the corner yet so many people were coming over with tales to tell.

We popped over to the Rootes Archive stand and spoke to ex-Rootes employee Richard Loveys who was selling signed copies of his *Rootes Group* book; I purchased a copy and wished him good luck with his book.

There were some good Rootes stands at the show, the Sunbeam Alpines being one of my favourites. I'm also a Mazda MX5 owner; I visited their stand and admired their display of Mk1 MX5s. I also had my photo taken with a

huge Michelin man. We spent a good few hours around the show and then sneaked over Resorts World for a Nando's.

I can't go to a show without buying something so I treated myself to a mat to lie on when I'm working on the car, my back and knees are starting to suffer now.

Friday came, I went on my own for the afternoon and sat on the stand for a while and chatted to a few folk. One chap told me that setting up the camshaft with shims is dead easy. Well, maybe it is if you're a mechanic. My reply was they are a pain in the rear and I *hate* doing them. Again plenty of folk coming over and looking at the cars. About 5.30 p.m. we packed up and then joined the greatest traffic jam ever out of the NEC, with classic cars everywhere.

Another great club stand, a credit to Richard and Dale. A great start to the classic car shows for 2019, indoors and out.



BMW engine in
Pete Gardiner's Chamois
Photo: Nicola Sephton

And a footnote from Dale and Richard...

With what's been already said all that remains is to say a BIG THANK YOU to the following owners for bringing their cars and sacrificing their time for the Imp Club.

Martin Parkes	1965 Oasis Green Hillman Imp Super
Nicola (Nik) Sephton	1972 Gold Super Imp
Pete Gardiner	1970 Polar White Imp Van powered by a BMW 1200 cc motorbike engine
Pete Gardiner	1968 Metallic Turquoise Chamois Coupé powered by a BMW 1100 cc motorbike engine
Sandy McNerlin	1976 Magenta Super Imp.

We have to especially thank Pete for stepping in at the last moment namely three days before the show and bringing the second vehicle to show as unfortunately a young member had to pull out at the last moment due to a genuine unforeseen problem.



All too soon it was over
and the Imps left to join the
massive classic car traffic jam
outside the NEC
Photo: Richard Sozanski