

50 Shades of Green

The restoration of 'Greenie' – Preston to Preston Candover

Tim Sears, Bordon, Hampshire

The chances of Demelza, my 18-year-old daughter, driving FBP 679H (*Greenie*) to this year's National weren't great looking back in January when work began to return the car to the road for the first time in over 25 years. Demelza needed to pass her driving test and *Greenie* needed an awful lot of work to become roadworthy.

Sitting outside in all weathers had taken its toll on the Chrysler Imp Deluxe and some serious welding would be needed if she was to be saved. Work began as soon as the



Rear crossmember location needed welding
Photo: Tim Sears

Christmas holidays were over, starting with cutting out anything that wasn't rust-free metal. I had replaced both rear wheelarches way back in 1995 and these were still sound, but all four lower corners, inner and outer sills, heater hose box section and a couple of inches of floor had to go, and after removing the cross member, more holes and rust were found hidden beneath.

Working outside in January and February at least gives you the incentive to work fast in order to keep warm. Everything was progressing nicely until late February, when a back problem put a temporary hold on proceedings. Luckily, this was nothing a few drugs and a prescribed exercise



Rosie and Demelza filling and sanding, filling and sanding, filling and sanding...
Photo: Tim Sears

regime couldn't cure. The forced pause in the welding meant lighter mechanical jobs could be done; new brake, clutch and fuel pipes were made and all the hydraulic cylinders were refurbished. The engine and gearbox were in running order so, while removed from the car, new gearbox seals and a clutch roller bearing were fitted, valve clearances checked and head bolts retorqued (more to check they weren't siezed than a necessary retorque). The water pump was then fitted with new seals and bearings and the dynamo and regulator box replaced with an alternator. A couple of evenings were spent sorting out a few electrical issues, and the mystery of why the windscreen wipers hadn't worked since we bought the Imp for £50 in 1994 was finally solved: the live wire to the wiper switch must have been removed at some point by the previous owner and mistakenly connected to the spare terminal on the ignition switch!

Welding resumed in late March and carried on most evenings through to June. Demelza and Rosie were revising for their A-levels and GCSEs respectively; hiding under *Greenie* was quite a good way to escape from the stress-filled house.

On 2nd April, Demelza passed her driving test and the pressure was on to finish the car. Once the girls' exams were over, they began filling and rubbing down the bodywork (something I am far too impatient to do to any great standard). Demelza also had a go at welding and, all metalwork completed, proved to be quite useful with a spray gun. Half a litre of cellulose which had come with *Greenie* and a litre bought back in the late '90s were just enough to paint the parts which need it. The advantage of this was that if you didn't like one shade of green, you could look at another panel: *Greenie* ended up being 50 Shades of Green. (*Who remembers O'Rafferty's Motor Car? According to Val Doonican that only had 40! GP*)



At last! Demelza's smile says it all
Photo: Tim Sears

Not having time to repair the rear transom, a replacement was found and fitted, along with a new boot and a fibreglass bonnet which arrived from Chris Farren of Fibreclass at the end of June, just in time for some fine spraying weather.

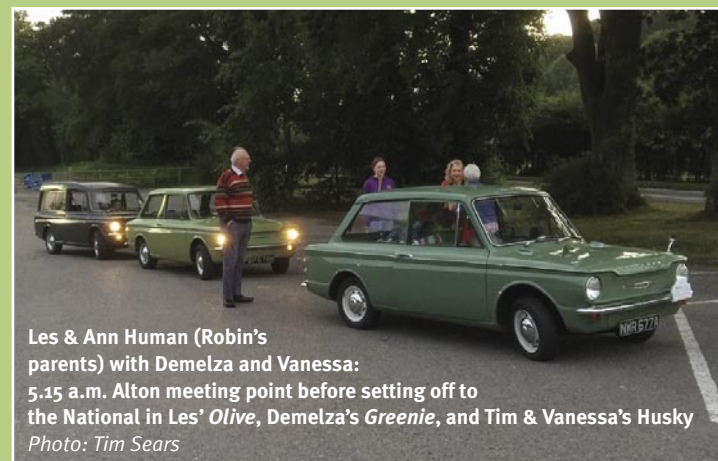
New tyres were DIY-fitted in the garden with our 1930s tyre levers and balanced with a Paddy Hopkirk wheel balancer. Just as a point of interest, I find all my wheel weights while walking around the local roads, where you can often find them near the kerbs left by careless parkers.

Early July and *Greenie* was ready for the road. Now came the tricky bit: insurance. After contacting standard and classic car specialist companies I found a reference to classic cars at Peter James, who were trying to attract young drivers. After speaking to Trevor Keefe, a quote for £1,300 was obtained. This was the cheapest we had received and included breakdown cover, so we accepted it with some relief.

So, with three weeks to go before the National, *Greenie* and Demelza hit the road. Despite a few teething troubles (namely intermittent ignition leads and both door mechanism bars failing due to rusting through) we made the decision that the pair were up to the 270-mile drive to Preston. They were both to have some support on the journey as we were also taking our Husky and following

Les & Ann Human in *Olive*, their early MK1.

Being in no rush, and with Demelza having driven just 50 miles since passing her test, we set off early on the Tuesday morning, heading for an overnight stop at Newcastle-under-Lyme. A non-motorway route saw us travel north from Alton (the site of



Les & Ann Human (Robin's parents) with Demelza and Vanessa: 5.15 a.m. Alton meeting point before setting off to the National in Les' *Olive*, Demelza's *Greenie*, and Tim & Vanessa's Husky
Photo: Tim Sears

next year's National) to Newbury, Oxford, Southam and Coventry, where a visit to the National Motorcycle Museum gave a welcome break. The journey from Coventry to Newcastle-under-Lyme was a slow one with the volume of traffic and roadworks resulting in us arriving mid-afternoon.

After explaining to a confused receptionist at the Travelodge where we were staying that we really did want to swap to a smaller room overlooking the car park, we changed rooms and settled in. A pleasant evening with Les & Ann was spent talking over a range of topics from the history of Alton to all things mechanical and previous journeys in our Imps, until six tired Impers turned in for the night.

On Wednesday morning, we set off on the relatively short drive to Preston – short in distance but not in time. After only a few hundred yards, Demelza flashed *Greenie*'s headlights signalling a problem and we all stopped. One of the windscreen wipers had seized, and after an hour or so after trying unsuccessfully to free off the seized spindle the rain stopped and we could carry on our way.

After a quick stop for Les & Ann to book in at the Ibis in Preston, we finally arrived at the National venue. Apart from the issue with the wipers, all the cars had behaved IMPeccably: *Olive*, probably

the oldest Imp at the National, driven by Les, at 81 probably the oldest Imp driver; *Greenie*, having just returned to the road after 25 years with Demelza, 18, one of the youngest drivers; not forgetting our Husky, saved from being scrapped in 1998.

Another excellent National followed, with Demelza driving us to Blackpool on the Friday, followed by Pippa Oakes, also driving an Imp. (Pippa is the daughter of Dave Oakes, long-term member from the Oxford Area Centre.) Pippa also passed her driving test this year. The sight of two 18-year-old girls parallel parking two Imps in a space only just big enough to accommodate them in may never have happened – or happen again – in Blackpool and was a great sight.

Soaking the seized wiper spindle in WD40 sprayed down a spare bottom radiator hose to prevent it running away, meant that, with the careful assistance from a pair of mole grips, the wipers moved once more – we no longer had to wait for dry weather to drive home!

Setting off home at 5 a.m. meant the roads were thankfully very empty as we navigated around diversions. Once on the planned route again, we saw some incredible sights, coming across everything from power stations looming over the bijou Imps, to Kennleworth Castle.

After stopping in Banbury for lunch, and traveling a further 30 miles, Les realised we needed a longer break than we'd thought. Stopping at the Oxford services for a nap before heading off on the last stretch of our journey also gave us the chance to pick some blackberries for a light snack. As we were picking the blackberries, Demelza spotted what she described as a suspicious-looking youth taking an unusual interest in the Imps. It was only when he came to speak to us that we realised it was in fact Dylan Oakes, a fellow Imper and brother of the aforementioned Pippa, who had returned home from the National to Oxfordshire the previous day.

Two hours later, we continued on our way, and after saying a fond farewell to Ann & Les at Preston Candover, finally arrived home at 7 p.m., 14 hours after embarking on our journey. Our satnav told us the quickest route would take five and a half hours, but that would be boring!



Pippa and Demelza with their Imps, Blackpool
Photo: Tim Sears