

The Hot Wheels Legends Tour

James Williams, Leicester

Many of you may know my 1976 Caledonian, *Rosie*, from the Nationals I've been attending since 2008. I've been lucky enough to do some awesome things with this little car since buying her 13 years ago! *Rosie* was my first car and used as my daily transport, for travelling the UK to shows and for holidays to many destinations including Scotland, Wales and the Isle of Wight. Since having a family *Rosie* has now become my show car.

I always wanted my car on the front cover of a magazine and have been so lucky to have achieved this on two occasions, but little did I realise the best was yet to come.

Growing up I was always a big fan of Hot Wheels and spent many hours building and sending the toy cars around the orange track. I had seen on social media that in America they were hosting a competition where the winner would go through to a grand final and they would compete to have their car made into a Hot Wheels car and sold around the world.

With the difficulties of 2020 and the cancellation of all shows, Hot Wheels decided to bring the tour over to the UK. Although it was being done virtually online and I had limited time, *Rosie* was driven out of the garage, the interior quickly put back together and I shot the required four-minute walk-around video required to enter.

A couple of days later I received an e-mail from Hot Wheels saying I had made the top 20 for the UK and the cars would be judged live on Facebook. The judges would include two of the designers from Hot Wheels, Ben Collins ('The Stig'), Magnus Walker (a car collector with a love of Porsches), Alex (from *Car Throttle*) and Becky Evans (online presenter).

The live show began with the presentation of all the cars I would be competing against. These included some promo cars from Forge Motorsport and their race MK1 Golf, Meguiars UK's Renault 5 GT, *Players* show and their newly built Escort RS and many other great cars from the UK scene.

The judging began with the Golf which they loved, but next up was *Rosie*. It didn't start well as the host had no idea what an Imp was! The judges however gave *Rosie* glowing reviews, loving the size, stance and interior with one joking, "She's already small enough to be a Hot Wheels and a cast wouldn't be needed!"

When it came to the results each judge could pick their top three and the winner would be the car with the most votes. It wasn't the best start as Magnus Walker didn't put *Rosie* in his top three, but Becky Evans then chose the Imp as her Number One. The Stig left the Imp out again and it wasn't looking hopeful as the Golf MK1 was proving a popular choice. However, the next two judges both placed the Imp Number One and the last judge put her as Number Two meaning *Rosie* had won the UK Legends Tour, with three out of six judges placing her first. We had made the final!

I awoke the following day to find two e-mails: Hot Wheels congratulating me and asking for a statement for their social media pages and another from *Car Throttle* wanting to shoot a video the following Tuesday (another day off work). *Car Throttle* had hosted the UK Virtual Tour and are



James Williams' 1976
Caledonian – embodiment of
what a personalised Imp is all about
Photo: Chris Frosin



the static shots and interview. I even let the presenter Alex drive, probably only the 5th person to drive her in the 13 years I've owned her. It was a great experience and the shots they showed me looked brilliant despite the awful weather.

The next week a PA from Hot Wheels UK interviewed me and subsequently promoted the story in the press. I did an interview on BBC Radio Leicester, had an article in the online version of *The Leicester Mercury* and even made *The Sun* newspaper! The *Car Throttle* video was released and has been viewed by over 300 thousand people! (www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhZgSvo5o98&t=5s or simply type 'The Coolest Project Car You've Never Heard Of' into the YouTube search box.)



Interior: the longer you look, the more little personal touches you notice. Nice
Photo: Chris Frosin

a YouTube channel with three million subscribers to their *Top Gear*-style videos.

The day after the final was spent putting the Imp back together and giving her a good wash! I even made a box for the parcel shelf out of a cardboard box to hide some wires I had moved during lockdown and carpeted it at work the next day. It did the job!

We filmed at our local sailing lake where I used to sail with my dad. It was pouring with rain so we squeezed the Imp undercover to do

celebrity judge rapper Snoop Dogg! I was hopeful of the fact that nobody knowing what a Hillman Imp was would work in my favour as one of the judging criteria was Authenticity. Speaking to some of the other finalists I then discovered that all of the American cars competing would be at Jay Leno's garage. I kind of knew then my chance of winning was gone as who would pick a car on video over seeing a car in front of you in the metal?

I still went into the final with excitement and some hope. I was car number six in the line-up and the judges gave me some good comments with Snoop Dogg saying, "I think it's nice, detailed very well, wheels, interior, paint job. It's fly." Apparently Americans use the word 'fly' to mean 'it's great'. Jay Leno added, "I love the whole feel and look to it." The head designer at Hot Wheels gave me hope when he said, "I love quirky European builds and this one is sick." Er, that also means 'great'.

When it was time for the judges to announce their top three unfortunately none of them picked a car outside of the US. The winner was announced as a Pontiac Trans Am. Built to race it's a stunning car and beautifully engineered – though it's a shame Hot Wheels already make a Trans Am!

Despite not winning the final it has been an amazing experience especially getting as far as I did. I love showing *Rosie* off and this has put the Imp out there for so many people to see. I've read so many comments, 90% good (with, so far, 850 comments on the YouTube video alone) from people around the world with Imps that have been inspired by *Rosie*. Many are now looking to restore or buy an Imp of their own.

Hopefully it's made a lot more people appreciate these awesome little cars and who knows, it may have opened up the designer's eyes at Hot Wheels to make an Imp in the future.

Well done, James. An amazing achievement and fantastic publicity for the Imp. GP



James and Rosie
Photo: Chris Frosin