

A tale of two tail lights

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I don't know about you, but I love driving my Imp. Driving a 1960s car in the 2020s means having to keep up with the traffic, not just literally, but also figuratively. Other road users have certain expectations that an Imp won't always fulfil. For example, pulling up to reverse into a parking space, but the vehicle behind pulls up right behind you because they don't see a reversing light and just can't understand that you're intent on backing into that space. Consequently, I fitted a reversing light some years ago. Likewise, living on the Cheshire plain means early morning fog is an almost daily event in the spring and autumn, so I've also equipped my Imp with fog lights fore and aft.

Now I don't want to sound like a grumpy old man, but why is it that the only choices for after-market rear lights (reverse and fog) nowadays are nice looking, but very poorly made Chinese chromed period looking items, or quality original items at ridiculous prices on interweb auction sites? Frankly, having chosen the former option, I'm fed up with replacing failed units every few years. Then a thought occurred. Original Imp round rear lights seem to be almost immortal, so how do I fit additional Lucas L691 or L692 units to the back of an Imp? (As well as the red and orange lenses, clear lenses were also made for 'sixties cars having reverse lights, either as standard or as an option.) Miraculously, I had a vague memory that Tim Sears had once shown something suitable on the Imp club Forum, or perhaps bookFace? Said items are fibreglass (or GRP – glass reinforced plastic) 'pods' designed to fit under the transom (aka rear crossmember) and accommodate an original rear light. Tim thinks they were originally made by the late Nigel Turner. I contacted Tim and he very kindly had a pair of copies made by another Imper who's 'in the trade', so to speak. So here are said pods, as supplied (Photo 1).

As you can see, the holes for fitting the lamp into are conspicuous by their absence. So the first job was to cover the face of the pods with masking tape and mark out where the holes needed

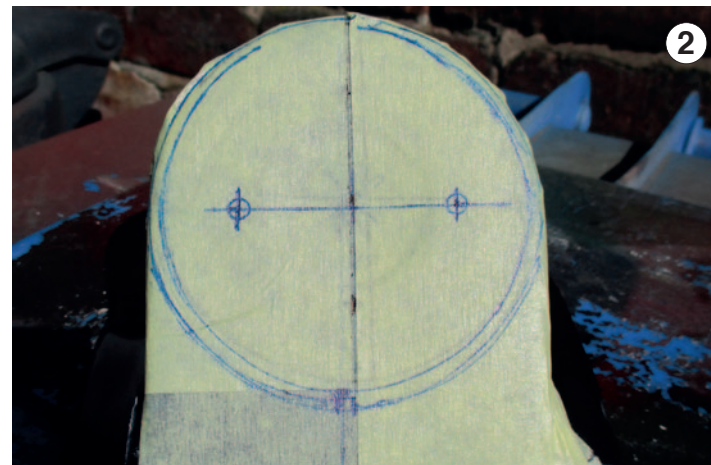
to go (Photo 2).

The holes were made by drilling a very small pilot hole (1 mm diameter) with a hand drill, as you can't go whacking fibreglass with a centre punch! A suitable drill bit was then used at a slow speed in an electric drill to make the clearance holes for the mounting studs. It's important when

drilling plastics, including GRP, to keep down the drill speed and not heat up the drill bit through friction. This results in melted plastic and a bloody awful mess! The big hole in the centre was made with a 'tank cutter' bit of suitable diameter, again with the drill on its slowest setting. I did all the drilling of the GRP out of doors while wearing a dust mask. I'm not aware of any specific health and safety concerns regarding GRP dust, but the history of mankind's encounters with chemicals has been one of life's nasty surprises.

An additional small hole was drilled in the apex of the pod to act as a drain if any rain got inside somehow. Likewise, I also drilled two holes in the back of the pods just big enough for the wires to pass out through (Photo 3).

Then a good clean in the washing-up bowl after all the cutlery and plates had been done. After that,





a coat of Halfords plastic primer from a rattle can. This is wonderful stuff that sticks well to everything (Photo 4).

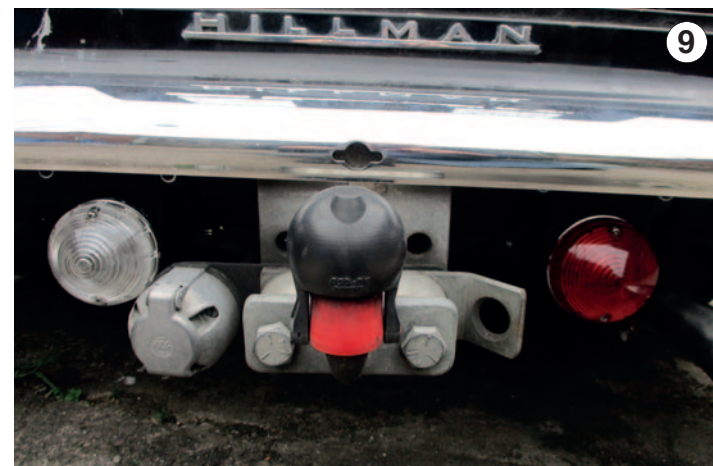
Next, I think I'll mention the other ingredients of this recipe. Two chromed indicator light bases (with bulbs, wires, etc) from my 'stash' of Imp bits, one red rear lens also from my stash and a plain, clear lens purchased from Bob Allan at Imp Club Spares (Photo 5).

I then sprayed the pods black, as that is body colour of my car. Obviously spray yours to match your car... or you may prefer the black look of course (Photo 6).

The lamp bases were then fitted to the pods. (Note there is a right way up for these – a small rectangular slot in the metal base – just visible in the photo – serves as a drain hole and goes at the bottom. 'Not a lot of people know that!' Go and check your indicator and brake light lenses now! GP). I fitted an earth wire to

one of the threaded studs on the bases and passed both wires out through the small holes at the back of the pods. I couldn't find suitably sized grommets, so I sealed around the wires with black RTV silicone compound to ensure a water tight seal and no erosion of the wire's insulation against the cut edges of the fibreglass (Photo 7). The bulbs and lenses were then replaced (Photo 8) and tested. Remarkably for my efforts at wiring, everything worked.

Then came what turned out to be the most awkward step, fitting them to the car. As my Imp is an early one with jacking point 'pegs' – under the transom (which engage in a hole at the top of the car's scissor jack), I couldn't mount them at the outer ends of the transom. Moving them inboard, firstly the overrides got in the way. As I moved them further towards the centre, on the offside the exhaust gets in the way.



Mounting them centrally was a non-starter as I have a tow bar. Also law dictates the fog light must be offset to the right (on a RHD car). Doh! Eventually, the Goldilocks zone was found, with the pods symmetrically positioned and unobscured (Photo 9).

The pods were fixed in position with 'badge tape' which also acts as a gasket once the mounting screws are in place. I had previously drilled a 2 mm diameter hole in the four corners of the flange around the base of the pods. These were used as guides for drilling 2 mm holes in the transom to accept broad-headed self-tapping screws. The holes in the pods were then opened out to 3.5 mm to ensure that the thread on the screws didn't bite into the fibreglass (Photo 10).

Finally the wires were connected up and tested. I earthed the units to the screws in the transom to minimise the number of connections that need to be disconnected when the transom has to come off to remove the engine. Saves time in the long run.

Finally, an image of the finished units working, just to prove that I can now confidently reverse in fog (Photo 11).

If you'd like to do the same, Tim can supply the pods for a very reasonable £25 a pair, plus postage. No connection, just a satisfied customer. Tim's contact details are at the back of the mag under Reading Area Centre. Please note that these are a long lead-time item and he doesn't keep stock, so you'll have to be patient. However, Tim tells me that if more than a few people want a pair he will get a batch made and keep some in stock.

