

# 50 Shades Lighter

**Demelza Sears, Bordon, Hampshire**

Following on from the *50 Shades of Green* article my dad [Tim] wrote about *Greenie* the Hillman Imp Deluxe back in 2019, *Greenie* and I have had many adventures together, the Preston national being the first of many. Despite having only driven 50 miles in her before, the engine performed well, with the only downside being that it drank oil by the pint, with fumes to match. After a trip to Cornwall in her two weeks later, I'd had enough of the headaches, but as I was off to drama school in London shortly after, I didn't have time to change the engine. Luckily for *Greenie*, lockdown hit a few months later and I had time to give her some attention and change that engine. Surely whatever engine I put in couldn't be worse! Little did I know how wrong I was. I'd opted for one with a Sport head and it did go better than the previous one, but also burnt more oil and churned out more fumes, coining the name 'Old Smokey'. On balance, I decided to put up with it for the time being.

Over the next year she served me well as I took a gap year and drove her to work every day. Working in a petrol station on the A3 meant she got lots of attention from passers-by and Imp fans alike. She never let me down, even with the early morning winter starts. I was sad to leave her at home the following year (2021-2022) as I went back to drama school, but I made the most of her during the holidays.

I finally got round to putting engine No. 3 in: a 930 that barely uses any oil and is just such a joy to whiz around in – I definitely noticed the capacity upgrade from 875 when going up hills! I also got to take her to Margate for a week of filming for the film *Empire of Light*. If you see the film watch out for *Greenie* 53 minutes, 40 seconds in going past in the background! I also took her to London to be in the background of what was rumoured to be a Marvel TV series.

Later in the year I was able to take *Greenie* to her second National after three years of waiting and took her to Goodwood for the first ever track day for both of us. She may have been one of the only Imps out there with a Solex carb, and definitely one of the quietest, but that didn't matter



Goodwood. Demelza: "One of the best experiences of my life"  
Photo: Tim Sears



Demelza welding up holes below rear hatch  
Photo: Tim Sears

to us! It really was one of the best experiences of my life. My clutch had started slipping a little bit shortly before, but it managed to survive Goodwood, finally giving up while on our annual Cornwall holiday a few weeks later. It had been getting gradually worse but one morning on the way to the beach I realised if I didn't turn back, she may not get back under her own steam. Luckily, we made it back to base where my dad and I – along with my boyfriend James, who is yet to be indoctrinated into the Imp Club – whipped out the engine to find the fork holding the carbon release bearing had broken into three pieces. Luckily, there was an abundance of spares to hand, and we were able to get the car back together that day and carry on with our holiday.

Having ignored the scary rust holes around the windscreen and rear window for long enough, my temporary workaround was to take the carpet out and not put anything perishable in the back during wet weather – the looming trip up to Scotland for this year's National meant it was time to get the welder out. I had three weeks of my summer holiday to devote to *Greenie* before the trip, and yet she was still only just about ready to go at about 9 p.m. the night before the drive up. I'd done a few bits of welding here and there for practice but never actually on a car. It's safe to say the results ranged from really bad to very good, mainly the former, but at the end of the day it did the job – and I knew my dad could work his magic on any bits that wouldn't do the job! While I'd have liked to have re-done all the lumpy filling on the rest of the car that I did when I was 17, I only ended up having time to do one side. On the bright side (no pun intended), re-spraying these areas meant the car was now only three shades of green! I'd spent so long prepping her that my dad and I ended up spraying her on a damp, slightly windy day, two days before heading off. I let my dad do the top few coats in case I messed it up, and I'm glad I did as the conditions really weren't ideal. Nevertheless, I was happy with the result, the finishing touch being a set of Revolution wheels that had turned up on Facebook marketplace the week before. The new tyres arrived just in time, fitting them with 1930s tyre levers and balancing them with our old faithful bubble balance. (I only realised recently that this process isn't 'normal' these days)

The trip up to Perth was mostly really good fun with my sister Rosie keeping me company.



Peak District stop on the way to Yorkshire  
Photo: Tim Sears

Although we followed my parents [Tim & Vanessa] in the Husky, half the time their indicators weren't working, and the other half was them making late decisions, so I was glad Rosie was on it with the navigation! *Greenie* was as good as gold on the first stretch of our journey which took us up to Yorkshire for a few days. However, about



The Sears convoy cross the border en route to the National  
Photo: Tim Sears

30 miles into the second stretch of our journey which would take us to Edinburgh, the passenger-side wiper suddenly stopped, catching the other wiper on it. Luckily, I was able to pull over immediately (my first concern being the wiper motor burning out) and untangle them. There was a car between us and my parents, so they didn't know where we had stopped, but after they'd tracked us down, my dad initially seemed to have managed to get the wiper working again. However, we soon realised it wasn't something that would be a quick fix. After disconnecting the problematic wiper, we were able to carry on with just my driver's side one (that's that important one after all!) and got to Edinburgh in one piece for our last overnight stop before the National.

The next day, I hung around Edinburgh with James while my family carried on to Perth to set up camp, before meeting up again at Knockhill Circuit. My dad was jealous that I had got to go round Goodwood the year before, so this year was his turn to take *Greenie* round. James took the first turn at being passenger in *Greenie*, but I didn't mind as Scott Clements very kindly took me round in his rocket ship – I mean Clan - and I picked up some tips for next time I get to drive round! When I took over from James as passenger in *Greenie*, my dad didn't feel the need to be as careful, consequently ending up in the gravel on the hairpin bend after narrowly missing the post.

The following morning was taken up with the time-consuming removal of the dash in order to get to the wiper box. Thankfully, Scott had picked up a complete wiper assembly for me when



*Greenie* and the Husky, Knockhill track day  
Photo: Tim Sears



Dawn Blunt presents Demelza with Young Club Member's Imp Award  
Photo: David Scott

he popped home to get his Clan to take to Knockhill.

After seeing the forecast for Saturday, we decided it would be the best time to visit Scone Palace, which looked to be a popular decision as we bumped into lots of Impers there.

Sunday's 'Show & Shine' was the highlight of the National for *Greenie* as she picked up the young Imper's award. I was very proud even though there were few entries in this category.

We decided to brave the motorways for the majority of the way home, and yet it still ended up taking us 17 hours – although that is one hour quicker than our journey home ten years

ago! With a couple of long breaks, one for an early lunch as we watched the Lionesses' penalty shootout and a two-and-a-half-hour stop in Banbury, the 17 hours flew by.

Six days later we were off to Cornwall for our yearly visit, the mere 220-mile trip down had never felt so short. Bob Blackman had tipped us off about a car show in Fowey one afternoon, so we entered *Greenie* at the last minute. What a great time she had meeting lots of smiling people who were really pleased to see an Imp. As part of the show, the cars were paraded around the town; there must have been thousands of people watching and *Greenie* got lots of lovely comments as she drove by, including, "Look, a proper car!", "That's my favourite" and "That's cool". Considering we were following a line of Jaguars including an E-Type we thought that was quite high praise.

On the bank holiday weekend we travelled to the Wadebridge showground for an antiques fair and car show where we were joined by Cornish Impers Bob Blackman and Sarah: Sarah in her lovely Mk2 Deluxe and an Impless Bob in his Peugeot 205.

By the end of August, *Greenie* and the Husky had covered nearly 4000 miles between them in just over a month. Both were running Solex carbs and points and didn't miss a beat. I really do get so much joy from driving *Greenie* and now that her insurance is £250 down from £1300 in the space of four years, it really is a no-brainer! Hopefully the prices will stay down for the Young Impers yet to come, so we can Keep the Imp Alive as they say!



*Greenie* much admired at Fowey classic car show  
Photo: Tim Sears