

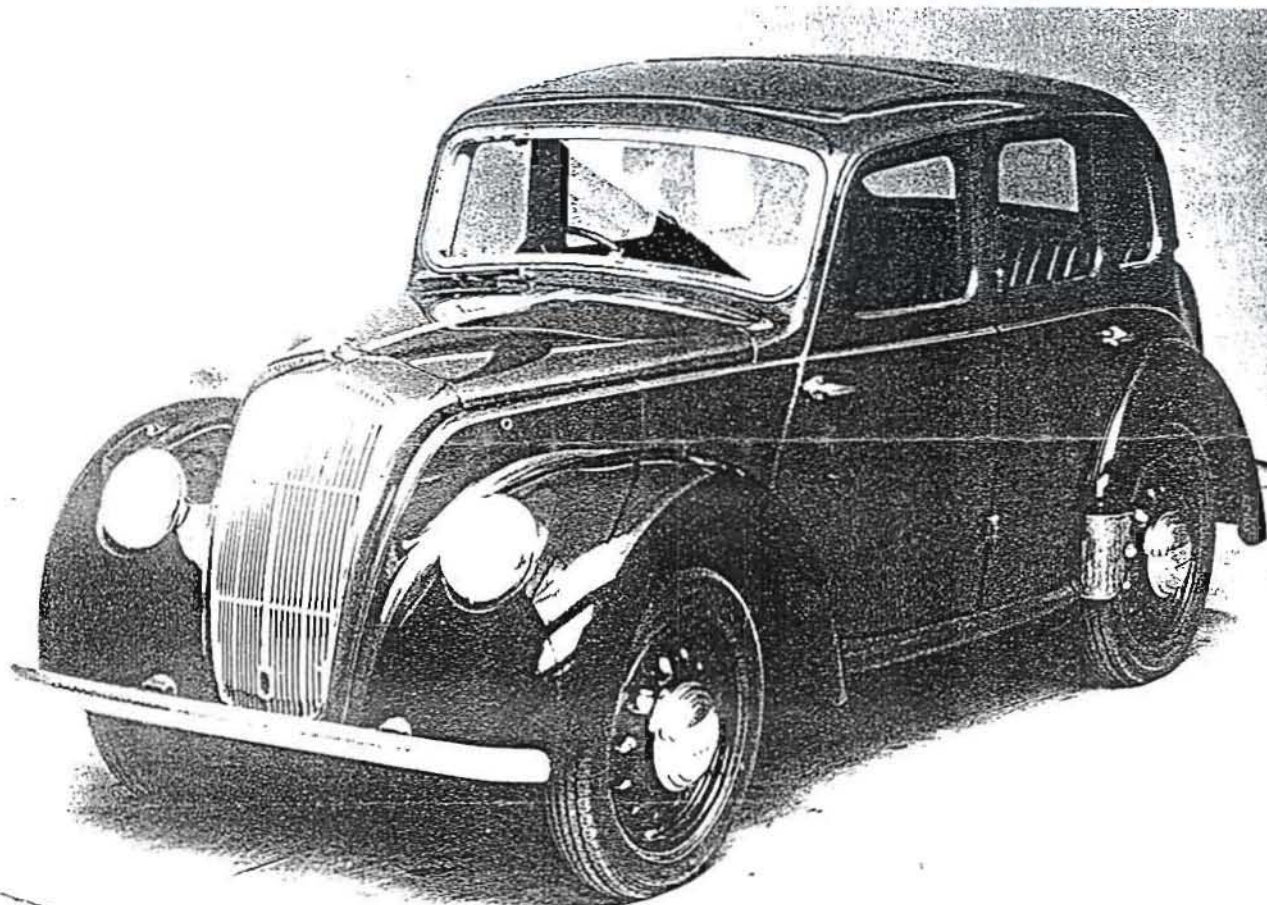
The Classic 'Y'



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The Newsletter of The M.G. "Y" Type Register

A Gerald Palmer Tribute *Special*



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Cars Worth Keeping

MORRIS 8 SERIES E

A 'modern' saloon not yet 40 years old provides economical everyday transport

THE MORRIS 8 has become a legend, just like the Austin 7 and Model T Ford. Everyone seems to have had one, or knows someone who did.

Originally introduced in 1934 as the perpendicular Series 1, it was in direct competition with the Ford 8 and similar cars. Despite being marginally more expensive, Morris 8s sold well and helped Morris Motors out of the depression. In 1937 the Series 2 was introduced, similarly bodied but distinguished by its painted radiator shell and disc wheels.

These early models had a 918cc side valve engine developing 23bhp and a three-speed gearbox, and were available as two- and four-door saloons, tourers and vans. A total of 218,000 cars were produced.

In October, 1938, the Morris 8 was dramatically re-styled and the Series E was introduced at the Motor Show. Its rounded contours were considered very modern and, although a separate chassis was used, it relied on body stiffness for rigidity.

The same 918cc engine was used, with improved cylinder head and piston design increasing the power to 29bhp, and the car now had a four-speed gearbox.

Production was suspended during the War and resumed in September 1945.

By the time the Series E was replaced at the end of 1948, by the now familiar Morris Minor, over 120,000 cars had been made.

IMPECUNIOUS

Two years ago Miss Jo Moss was an impecunious student, as well as being an old car enthusiast who had not yet passed her driving test. That did not deter her from answering an advertisement for a 1948 Series E, however, and she inspected the car one night in a dark garage.

It was love at first sight and immediately she offered all the money she had saved, which was far below the asking price. To her delight it was accepted because the car would clearly be going to a good home.

The car turned out to be very sound, with original paint and interior, but it hadn't been used for eight years and looked very sorry for itself. Two tyres were bald and the brakes had been removed at some time and left in the boot.

Jo and her boyfriend, who works as a

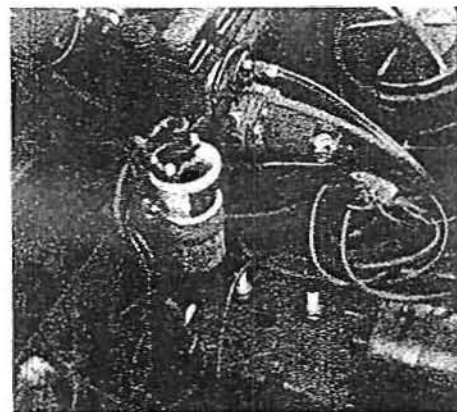
mechanic, installed a new battery, squirted upper cylinder lubricant into the bores and the engine rewarded them by starting almost immediately.

After overhauling the brakes, fitting new tyres and having £30 worth of welding done to the chassis, the Morris passed its first M.O.T. in nearly a decade. By that time Jo had obtained her driving licence and the car became her daily transport. It still is. Her family has no other car. So far she has covered 4000 miles and the car passed its next M.O.T. without question.

ARTIST

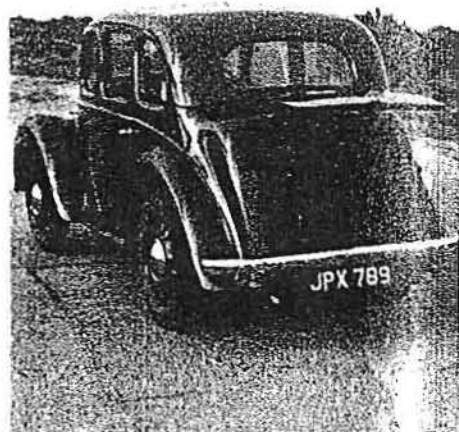
Jo is striving to build up a reputation as a freelance artist and loves the sharp contrast of working on her Morris.

Having a mechanic boyfriend helps, of course, but Jo mucks in and learns as they go along. She is just as at home talking about valve springs as she is mixing crimson lake on her palette. For example, she spent a week cleaning the chassis of her car, after removing all the floorboards, and finished off with three coats of Hammerite paint. To preserve this work she sprays the chassis and springs regularly with a concoction of old engine oil.



Reliable starting for the 918cc sidevalve thanks to SU carb and electric fuel pump

Shortly after putting the car on the road, Jo and her boyfriend carried out a de-coke. They found that the engine was not original and the bores on the replacement were +0.030in, indicating that the car has done quite a high mileage, so it is remarkable that, cosmetically, it is in such good condition. The true total mileage is unknown.



Modern shape for its time, the Series E Morris 8 has a useful boot (above). Opposite: The car is largely original except for the lighting, including vertical headlamp units far more efficient than the sloping originals. Far right: Note bonnet mascot and windscreen winder in the instrument panel. Main picture: Proud owner Jo Moss.

RELIABLE

The Morris lives in a carport and starts first time every morning. It has proved to be very reliable and has let Jo down only twice. The first time it needed a new coil — a suitable 6 volt unit was bought off the shelf — but the second breakdown was potentially more serious, when one of the halfshafts broke. Fortunately, the Morris Register supplied a replacement for a mere £8. Jo also buys spares at Autojumbles and keeps them for future use.

The car is fitted with the Lucas headlamp conversion, which was introduced during the car's production to overcome the appalling inefficiency of the original type, which were faired into the wings like those of early Volkswagens.

Jo finds the car very practical with its four doors, useful boot and opening windscreen. It cruises at an indicated 50 on the open road, has normal oil pressure and is very economical.

FOREVER

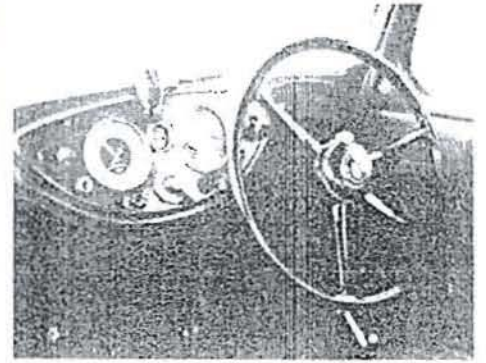
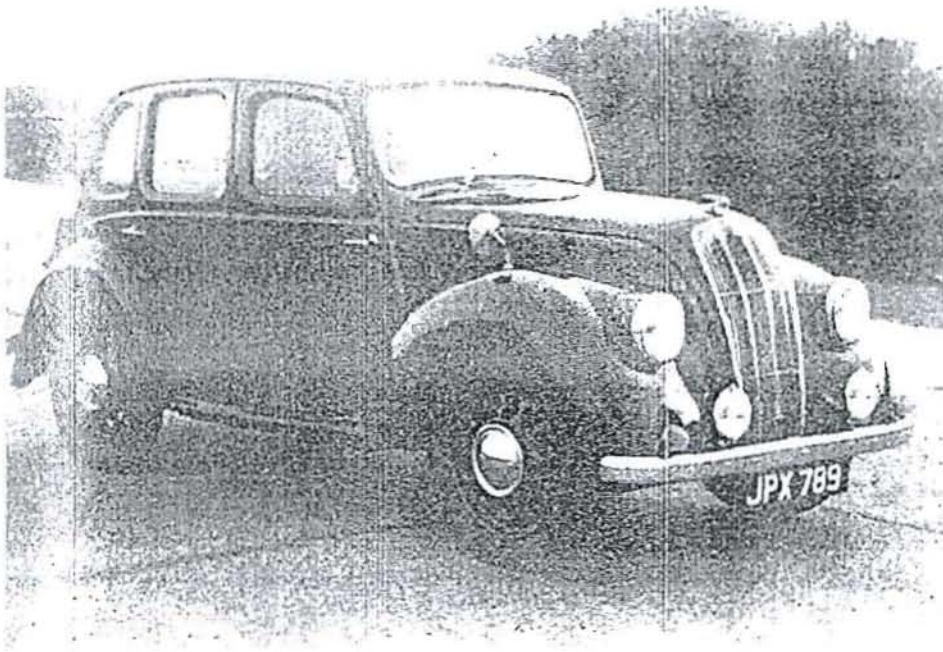
Jo is devoted to her little Morris and will never part with it. She has hankering for a Morgan. 'Just to get it out of my system', she says, but the Morris will be kept polished and still used for motor club meetings and running around. Eventually, the Morgan will pass on but the Morris will stay with Jo forever.

FURTHER READING

'The Morris Motorcar 1913-1983', by Harry Edwards, published by Moorland Publishing at £14.95.

THE CLUB

The Morris Register, c/o Mr. A. Peeling, 28 Levita House, Chalton Street, London NW1 1JJ.



Gerald Palmer

Designer whose Jowetts, Rileys and MGs epitomised British style in the 1950s

GERALD PALMER, the motor car designer who has died aged 88, liked his machines to have comfortable seats, graceful lines and throaty acceleration; had Palmer himself possessed a shade more torque, a touch more ambition, he might have become as famous as his rival Alec Issigonis, the creator of the Mini.

Palmer's designs included the Jowett Javelin, the MG Magnette and the Riley Pathfinder, names which now evoke a vanished era of British motor manufacture. It was an age when car interiors smelled of leather, transmissions whined and, as Palmer would recall, "few of us ever worked to a budget".

Palmer designed his roadsters in a back office little bigger than a privy, but many of his machines are today regarded as classics, and his name commands widespread admiration among car aficionados.

Gerald Marley Palmer was born in Rhodesia on January 30 1911. His father was district engineer of the Beira, Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railway, based in Umtali, Southern Rhodesia. He bore special responsibility for the track from Salisbury to the Portuguese East Africa coast — an important supply route during the First World War.

The young Gerald thus acquired access to uncooperative engines and soot-caked mechanics. As the district engineer's son, he discovered the pleasures of riding through the bush on manual trolleys pumped by beskirted local boys.

He also learned to drive the family's 1912 Austin 20. By the age of six he was able to start the Austin — no small task. Young Gerald was fluent in Mashona, became a voracious reader of mechanical and engineering magazines, and was chaperoned by two servants, Lazarus and Sixpence. It was an idyllic childhood and not even the arrival of a formidable housekeeper called Mrs Hodgson (the grandmother of Ian Smith) could cloud it.

A shortage of family funds denied Palmer a university education. Instead he sailed alone to England in 1927, staring in surprise at the terraced houses of Southampton as the Union Castle liner docked. He was to seek an apprenticeship and soon found a position with Scammell Lorries of Watford.

In his spare time, he and two friends built a small sports car, the Dero. It was a rakish convertible but a commercial non-starter; yet the Dero did give Palmer the career break he needed. The prototype was seen by MG and Palmer was offered a job at Morris Motors.

Before leaving Scammell he had met Diana Varley, in the drawing office. She was a noted beauty and the granddaughter of an associate of Faraday. Her engineering background made her a perfect partner for the work-

obsessed Palmer. They married in 1939.

With the onset of the Second World War, Palmer was assigned to the setting up of a production line for Tiger Moth training aircraft. He also repaired shell-damaged RAF aircraft and served in the Home Guard, alongside a veteran of Omdurman.

But his most important contribution to the war effort was to perfect, with Professor Robert Mackintosh, a portable anaesthetic device for use in the battlefield. The Oxford Vapouriser was still in use in the Falklands War and is credited with saving many lives.

In 1942 Palmer was lured to Jowett, a small company in Bradford, Yorkshire, to be its chief designer. He was asked to design a new family saloon, and by the end of 1944 a prototype Javelin was roaring around the Dales. It would become one of the most popular cars of the post-war period.

The Javelin had good road-holding, streamlined looks, a prominent bonnet, and as much room (it was joked) as the Lyceum. It was a true driver's car, and had Jowett

been a bigger company it could have been an international success.

In 1949, his reputation enhanced, Palmer moved back to Morris, there to work on MGs, Rileys and Wolseleys. Although his inspirations were Italian, the look he created for the Magnette and Pathfinder and Wolseley 4/44 epitomised middle-class British style of the 1950s; emerging from the gloom of the war, nudging towards modernity but retaining a hold on classic taste. His cars evoke Canasta evenings and gin and French and the Great North Road.

In 1952 Palmer became chief engineer of the newly amalgamated British Motor Corporation, but the higher he rose in business the further he was taken from the design table. His modesty, combined with that bloody-mindedness typical of engineers, equipped him ill for the executive life and in 1955, after Issigonis had been tempted back to Oxford, Palmer was fired.

The excuse given for his departure was minor faults on the Wolseley 6/90, but in truth he had been knifed by more worldly men.

He ended his motor design

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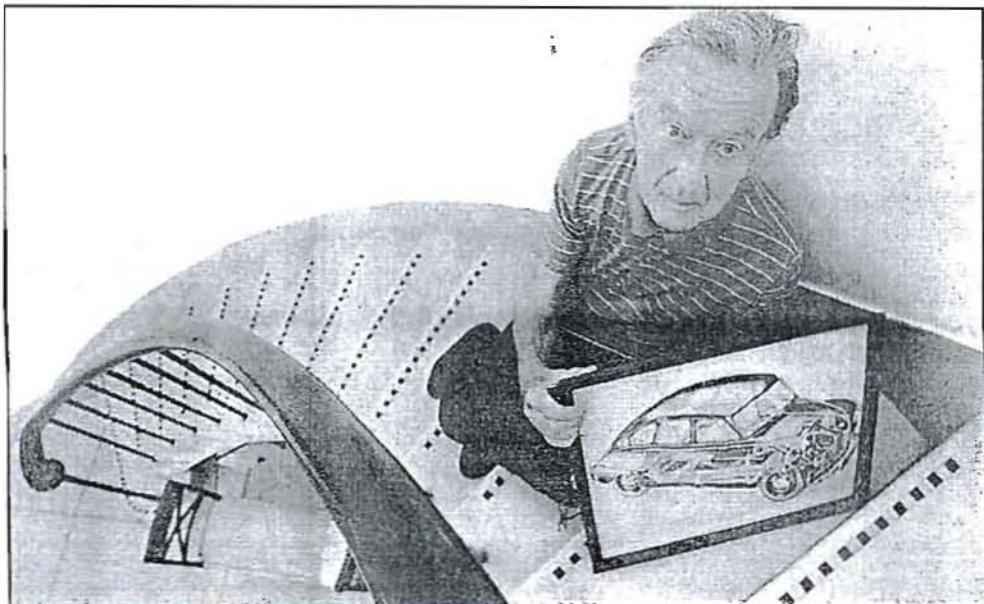
career with 17 years at Vauxhall, but by then there was less room in the industry for individual engineering brilliance.

In terms of riches and acclaim, Palmer was born a generation too early. While many of today's motor car designers are well paid and well known, in Palmer's day they were regarded as enthusiastic boffins who did not need much encouragement. There were compensations: designers decided every aspect of a car, from its sub-frame to its petrol cap and ashtrays.

Repeatedly in his career, he produced designs which were ahead of their time. Repeatedly, the British car industry failed to capitalise on his flair.

Palmer continued to draw designs into his eighties. Almost to the end, he lived in the house he had designed on the outskirts of Oxford. Last year he published an autobiography, *Auto-Architect*. He stopped driving at about the same time, on his doctor's strict orders, after he ran his almost new Vauxhall Corsa into his garage wall. "Ridiculous," he muttered.

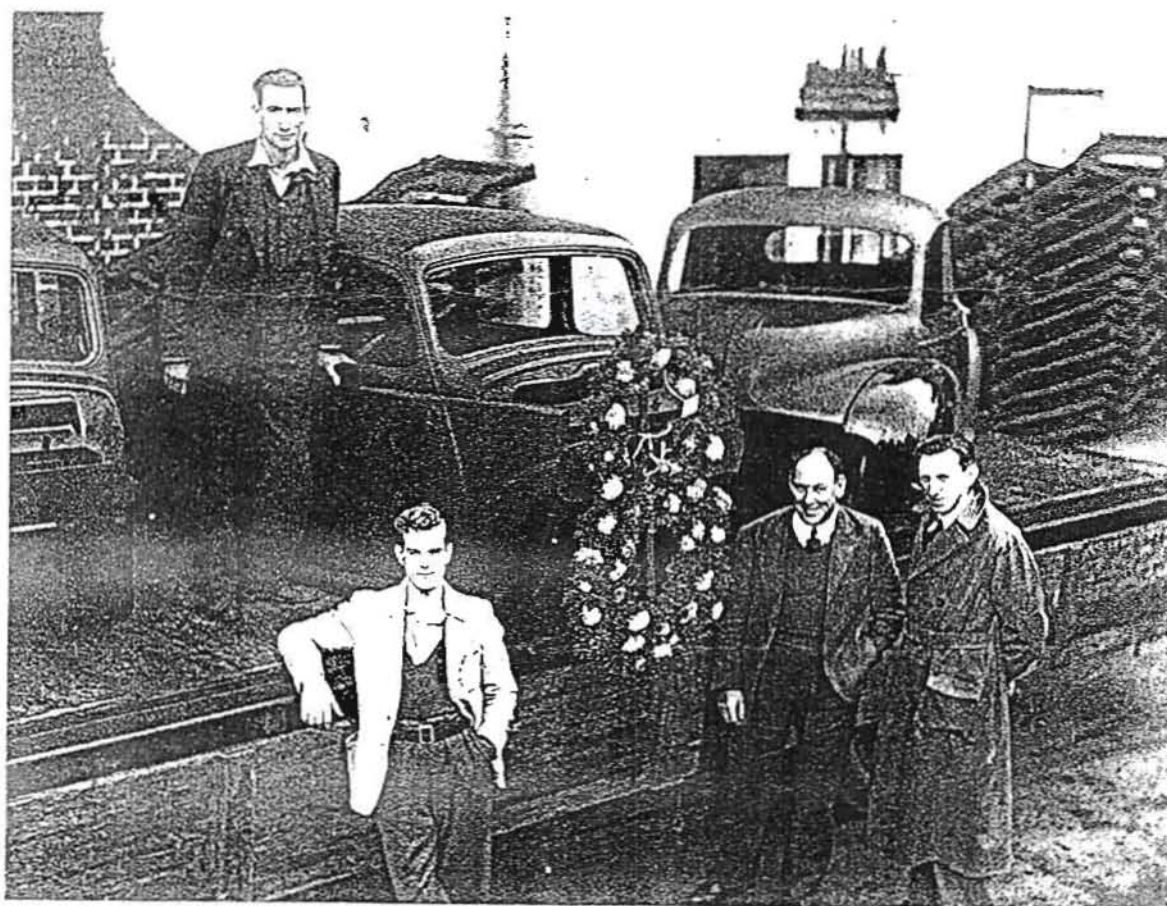
His wife died in 1989; he is survived by their daughter.



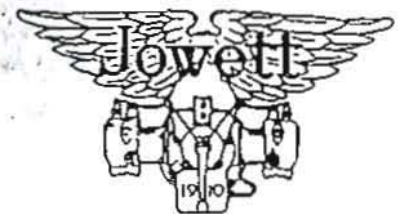
Palmer, at 86, with one of his original design drawings for the Jowett Javelin



Good road-holding and plenty of room: a Jowett Javelin Standard, 1953 vintage



Above: completion of the very last Morris Eight Series E bodyshell.



Mr Gerald Palmer, the actual designer of the Jowett Javelin.



Gerald Palmer arrived at Cowley in 1949 to look after Riley and Wolseley new-model design, but also produced the MG Magnette ZA and several stillborn projects with which Len Lord did not agree¹

You may be able to obtain Gerald Palmer's
autobiography, *Auto-Architect*,
from David Hague,
Hampshire,



Credits and acknowledgements for this Special Issue are due to:

- p.1, p.5 (lower), p.6 (lower)?, p.7: from *Morris Minor* by Paul Skilleter.
pp.2 & 3: from the March 1987 issue of *Practical Motorist*. (Many thanks to the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu for providing the photocopy.)
p.4 & p.5 (upper): from the *Daily Telegraph* obituary of 19th or 20th July 1999 (via Gary Mills).
p.6 (upper): from a Butterworth & Pilkington Ltd. calendar.
p.6 (lower): possibly from *Cars of B.M.C.* by Graham Robson.

