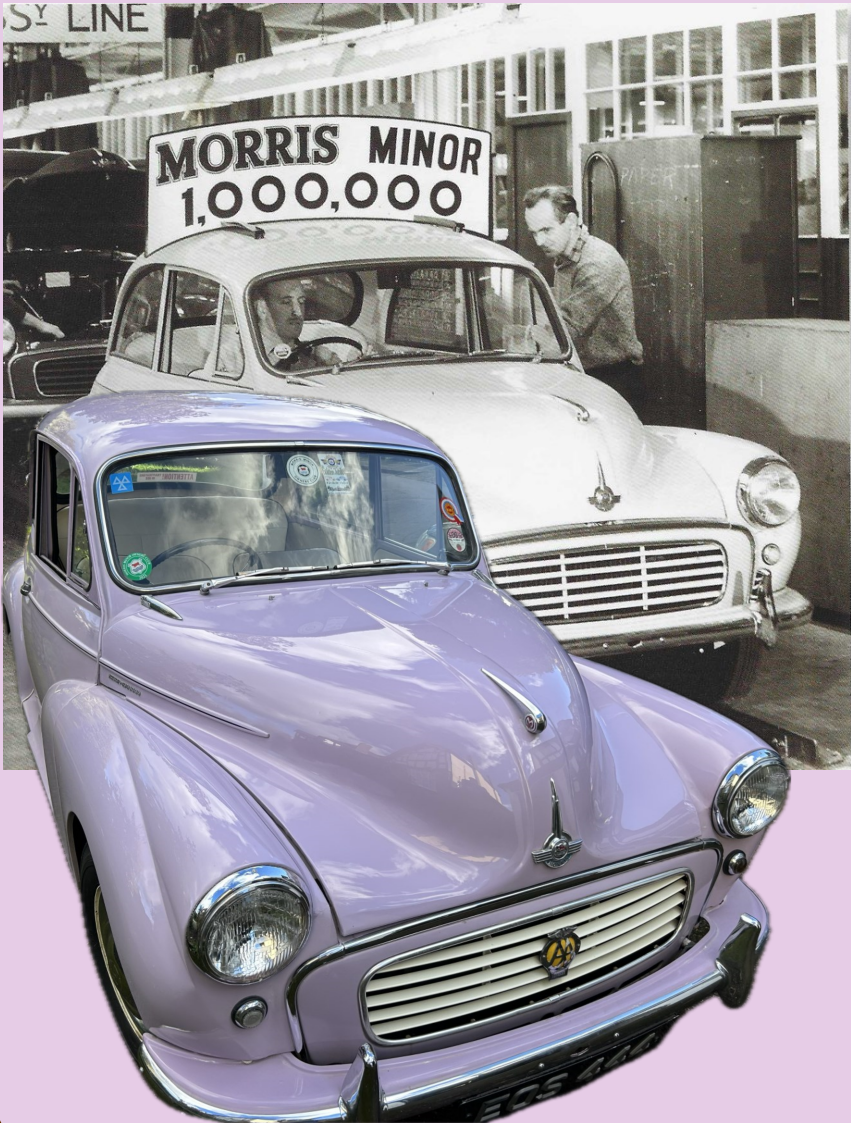


Minor Million Returns to Dorset ***SPECIAL PULL-OUT SUPPLEMENT***

Feb 2024



The Prototype Minor Million Returns to Dorset.

Introduction

Many years ago, when the Dorset Branch was only about a decade old, we came upon an opportunity to undertake a 'club' project. The story begins in 1990 when I was working as an Assistant Engineer in the drainage department of Bournemouth Borough Council. I joined the team in 1986 after moving to Bournemouth from Portsmouth in that year and proceeded to do my bit towards spending about £30m improving the drains in central Bournemouth.

A more recent recruit to the team was a chap named Martin Dover, who lived at Chandler's Ford, near Southampton, Hampshire. He and I soon discovered a common interest in Morris Minors and he had a (working order) dark green 2 door and a Lilac special edition Minor that was worth a "lot of money" but far from working order. He said that he wanted rid of the lilac Minor as he did not have the resources to get it roadworthy. He said that the registration number was worth keeping and planned to scrap the car and sell the number if nobody wanted to buy it. We put together a plan for the MMOC Dorset Branch to buy the car and restore it as a group project. The rebuild was completed and the branch sold the car to one of the members in August 1994. Almost 30 years later the car has now returned to Dorset, more specifically, my garage! No sooner than I had removed the cover – someone walking by asked "why it was that colour?"

The 'Million' Story

The Minor 'Million' was the first special edition vehicle to be produced to mark a motoring milestone. This particular milestone was the achievement of 1,000,000 Morris Minors produced between 1948 and 1960 – *indeed the first British car to reach this production number*. BMC decided to build the millionth car and 349

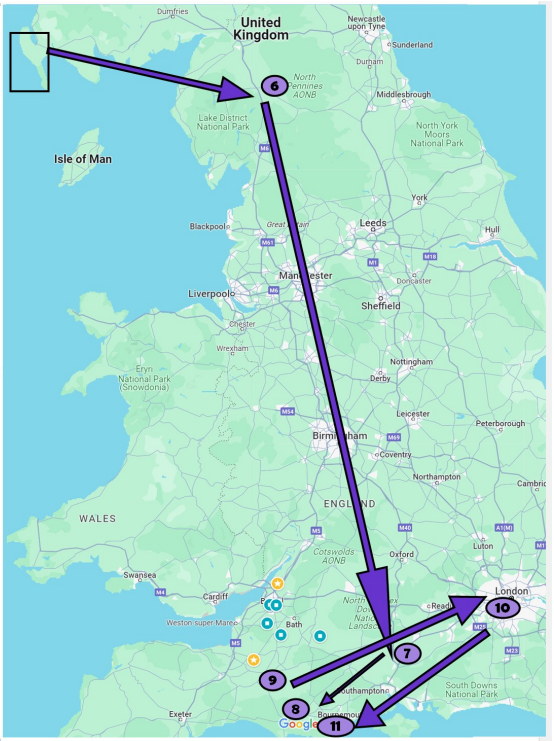
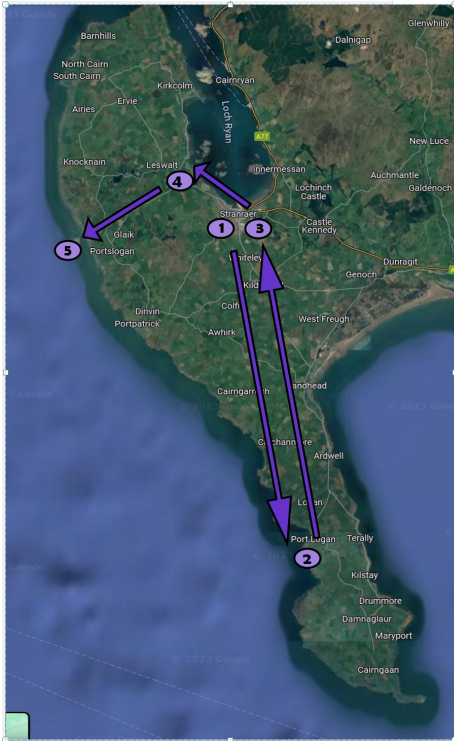


Picture reproduced from Facebook

replicas and paint them in a distinctive shade of lilac. The actual colour was to be the subject of much debate. The management wanted a metallic colour, but the paint experts could not guarantee the durability of such paints beyond about 6 months. An employee of the company called Jack Field

MINOR MILLION EOS 444 OWNERSHIP TIMELINE

				Bought	Sold	Yrs Owned
	First Registration 5/4/61	Mssrs James McHarrie, County Garage	Stranraer		05/04/1961	
1	1st change 25/10/61	A.Hannah, Myroch, Port Logan	Stranraer	25/10/1961	19/04/1966	4.5
2	2nd change 19/4/66	Kenneth Atkinson, Stranraer	Stranraer	19/04/1966	01/10/1968	2.5
3	3rd change Oct 68	William Thorburn, Kirkcolm DG9 ONN	Stranraer	01/10/1968	19/11/1974	6.1
4	4th change 19/11/74	Samuel McColl, Portso Logan, Stranraer	Stranraer	19/11/1974	?	
5	5th change ?	(Log book discontinued)	Leswalt	?	01/06/1979	4.5
6	6th change 1/6/1979	Rod Forrest, Penrith.	Penrith	01/06/1979	01/06/1980	1.0
7	7th change 1/6/1980	Martin Dover, Chandlers Ford, Hants	Southampton	01/06/1980	07/06/1990	10.0
8	8th change 7/6/90	DMMOC (c/o Aubrey Batt)	Bournemouth	07/06/1990	30/06/1993	3.1
9	9th change 11/8/94	Peter Challen, Bournemouth	Bournemouth	30/06/1993	18/01/1997	3.6
10	10th change 18/1/97	Paul Bonner, Banstead, Surrey	Surrey	18/01/1997	05/11/2023	26.8
	11th change 05/11/2023	Brian Wood, Bournemouth	Bournemouth	05/11/2023		



was tasked with the investigation of a suitable colour. Gold or silver was ruled out on the durability issue. Jack had a number of cars painted in various colours, including lime-green, yellow, pink, orange and (of course) lilac. A viewing in the presence of BMC management failed to produce a consensus so they asked Jack to decide.

They would have special chrome wheel embellishers and white leather upholstery. These special cars would be distributed among the extensive worldwide dealership network that existed at the time and the cars used for publicity and as demonstrators prior to being sold off. Indeed, some remained in the dealer's showrooms for many months as the lilac colour probably proved a bit too much for some potential customers to live with. The story gets a bit complicated now, as the passenger models had a separate numbering system to the commercials (vans and pick ups). Whilst the *total* number of units was coming up to the magic million, the passenger car numbers were only in the 880,000's. The plan involved allocating the number '1,000,000' to the actual millionth vehicle and the subsequent 349 2-door saloons numbered: 1,000,001 to 1,000,349. It is believed that the 'Millionth' vehicle is actually the millionth Minor off the production line, but as far as the others go, their production dates vary between 14-21 December 1960.

EOS 444

The story of this particular car, EOS 444 (1,000,330) however, began about a month earlier than the others, in late November 1960. The chassis number stamped on the bulkhead is 881,386 and it started out as an ordinary 2 door saloon. It was the first one to be sprayed Lilac and was prepared as the 'prototype'



The Million being delivered in 1990

Million and is the actual car you see in the publicity photographs. It is believed that due to the finalising of the details, the interior was trimmed in white vinyl – this being the only difference to the other 349 cars – which were fitted with white leather interiors. Bizarrely, this chassis number was re-allocated to another 4-door vehicle, so there was (or may be still is!) another

Minor with the same chassis number out there. So whilst the Minor Million a fairly unique car, this one is totally unique!

So, to continue the story of 'our' Minor Million we return to 21 December 1960 when it was despatched up to James McHarrie (Stranraer)Ltd, County Garage,



Work commences at Aubrey's

Street, Stranraer – just outside McHarrie's showroom. A little more searching revealed that the building is still there but is now a Tesco supermarket store.

Stranraer and given the local registration number EOS 444. I did a bit of on-line research and found a photograph of a sixties Leyland Titan bus which just happened to be passing through Charlotte



The First 30 Years

We have the original buff log book for the car – which reveals the details of previous owners – the first of which was a Mr (or Mrs) A. Hannah of Port Logan, at the southern end of the Stranraer 'peninsula'. The car was registered to them on 25 October 1961. They appeared to own it for nearly 5 years before selling to Kenneth Atkinson back in Stranraer who kept it for 2 ½ years prior to selling it to William Thorburn in Kirkcolm a few miles north of Stranraer. It then travelled south west to Portslogan (on the west coast) to its 4th owner Samuel McColl at the end of 1974. They kept it for another 4½ years until June 1979. It was then, it was spotted by a Morris Minor enthusiast, Rod Forrest who had been visiting Stranraer on business. He knew about the Minor Million and spotted a lilac Minor driving around the one-way system. Later, he noticed it parked up in the town and having confirmed that it was a 'real' Million, he waited patiently for the owner to return. Eventually, a young lady arrived with an armful of shopping. She had borrowed the car from her father and they lived in a village called Leswalt just outside Stranraer. Unfortunately, this owner does not appear to be recorded in the old buff log book. However, Rod followed up the investigation with one of the employees at McHarrie's who remembered having the car at the dealership. It was confirmed that the car was not only a genuine 'Million' but was also the oldest one having been built 3 weeks before the others. The owners weren't prepared to sell it, but Rod persisted and persuaded them to part with it if he could source a later Minor in better condition.

Ten year old Graham Wood checking the interior

He eventually found a 1970 Trafalgar blue 2 door which turned out to be an ex-police panda car with a zip in the headlining. Rod lived in Penrith at the time so an arrangement was made for them to meet in Dumfries to do the swap. The deal was done and as Rod says “the test drive was completed and the happy owner of a far less rusty Minor departed back to the far flung extremities of Galloway.” Rod then set about making an objective assessment of his new acquisition and discovered the substantial quantities of rust. Rod had decided that as he was due to make a trip around the world in one of his Riley RM’s he reluctantly decided to find someone else to take on the challenge of rescuing EOS, so at least it was diverted from an inevitable trip to the scrapyards.

Rod had a brother called Guy, who worked at the Ordnance Survey office down in Southampton. One of Guy’s colleagues was one Martin Dover who expressed an interest in the car. Martin acquired the car sometime in 1980 and dry-stored it for about 10 years. Sadly, he never got around to doing any restoration to the car. He then changed his job to work at the Borough Engineers’ Department of Bourne-mouth Council where our paths crossed...

The Rebuild 1990-1993

In 1988, I had recently finished working on our 1957 four door Minor (the first time round!) and got persuaded to buy another ‘project’ in the form of a derelict, but rare 1954 Split Screen Traveller, that I didn’t know I needed at the time. I had tactfully decided to keep this new project untouched for the time being, having spent most of my spare time over the previous 6 or 7 years repairing the 4-door. I would occasionally push the Traveller out of the garage, sweep up the falls of rust, then return it to its resting place. I considered buying the Million myself, but having not one, but two pending full rebuild projects was a bit too much to contemplate – even for me! I remember discussing the matter with a few club members at the time and we came up with a proposal to buy it as a club project, sharing our time and various skills to get it restored. The Branch Committee at the time agreed to put up some money to fund the project and there were 10 ‘shareholders’ and between us we raised the £700 asking price. The Branch Chairman at the time, Aubrey Batt had kindly offered to host the initial part of the project at his house in Oakdale, Poole. The car was duly delivered there complete with two new wings, which were part of the deal, on 26 June 1990. Work commenced shortly afterwards. We managed to beg/steal/borrow a lot of the parts needed for the car. Various panels, such as doors, boot lid etc were donated (or sold to us very cheaply) and I had a neighbour who was happy to rebuild an engine and gearbox for us for next to nothing! One of our members (and Chairman ‘in-waiting’), Chris Atkinson did most of the welding work – which took quite some time! The car was then delivered to my garage in early 1993 where the respray and final fit out was completed.

Back on the Road after 18 years

First time out at Merley Classic Car Show 1993



NEC Classic Car Show Nov 1993

The car was shown at a couple of club

events and shows in 1993 but as expected, the car had out-lived its original reason for being purchased by the Branch. I needed my garage space back so I could get on with the Traveller. We decided to sell the car and one of our new

Branch Members, (who just happened to be my boss at the Council) Peter Challen, showed an interest. The highlight of their ownership was the appearance of the car at the NEC Classic Car Show in November 1993. However, they decided not to keep the car and subsequently passed it on to a Paul Bonner who lives in Banstead, Surrey in 1997. Paul joined the 'Million' Register

of the MMOC and showed the car at several of the Million gatherings over the next 27 or so years. Laurie Blewer and I had tried to persuade Paul to bring it to our Beaulieu 'Moggyfest' show in 2022 which was a 'Million' themed display celebrating the 61st anniversary of the introduction of the car in 1961. (We were a year late for the 60th due to Covid!). We knew it would be a 'big ask' and understood that it was a bit too far for him to drive it. We resolved, there and then that one of us ought to try to buy it back if it ever came up for sale!

Be Careful What You Wish For!

So, there I was, one Saturday afternoon - innocently working away in my garage in early November 2023, when 'eagle-eyed' Laurie Blewer spotted the advertisement in the latest edition of *Minor Matters*. He agreed to come with me and have a look at it the following day. Paul had certainly looked after the car during the period of his ownership and handed over a file stuffed with tax-discs, MoT's and copious receipts for parts and work done on the car. Needless to say, the deal was done and I arranged for the car to be transported back to Dorset. I was quite relieved that the car was in good condition, as I didn't really want another 'project'. There are, as with pretty much any classic car, things which could be



done to improve it. I have a serious aversion to cross-ply tyres. The ones on the car look fairly new but will have to be replaced in favour of some new radials which tend to allow you to steer the car where you want it to go, rather than where *it* wants to go! A legacy from the 1990's rebuild was the selection of keys needed

to operate the doors, ignition and boot. I think the passenger door was replaced with one from a later Minor, so it has a lock (which I don't think was present on

pre '64 cars). So I have invested in a matching lock set so it will have a single key for doors, boot and ignition. The front seat supports were a bit perished and saggy so they have now been repaired. The rest of the interior could do with a bit of a freshen up and some of the vinyl covering needs to be re-glued. At the time of



writing, I have invested in a colouring and repair kit so hopefully I can improve the appearance of the interior. I will keep the trafficators, but fit them with the modern flashing bulbs which make them more visible. The jury is out on whether I will attempt to fit some discrete orange flasher lamps under the bumper or somewhere. It is also the only car I have owned for some years that doesn't have seat belts – so that may involve some soul searching. Generally, the plan is to keep it as original as possible.

So, as the latest custodian of the unique prototype Minor Million, we intend to keep it in our collection for as long as possible and take it to as many of the classic car shows as we can. I guess I'll have to get used to being asked...

"Why is it that colour?"

Brian and Jacky Wood (Dorset MMOC)