

**HUNTER MODEL AUTO CLUB INC**

# --SPECIAL EDITION GEARBOX--

----- *No. 1 for 2023* -----

FEATURING THE DECEMBER, JANUARY & FEBRUARY  
*'VIRTUAL'* MODEL COMP PLACEGETTERS



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**- LOST IN THE 50'S - 2014, OUR SECOND VISIT AND THE USUAL SUSPECTS -**



Entry D



Entry E



Entry H

**FROM THE TOP:**

*First* – Brian B's Missing Reindeer.

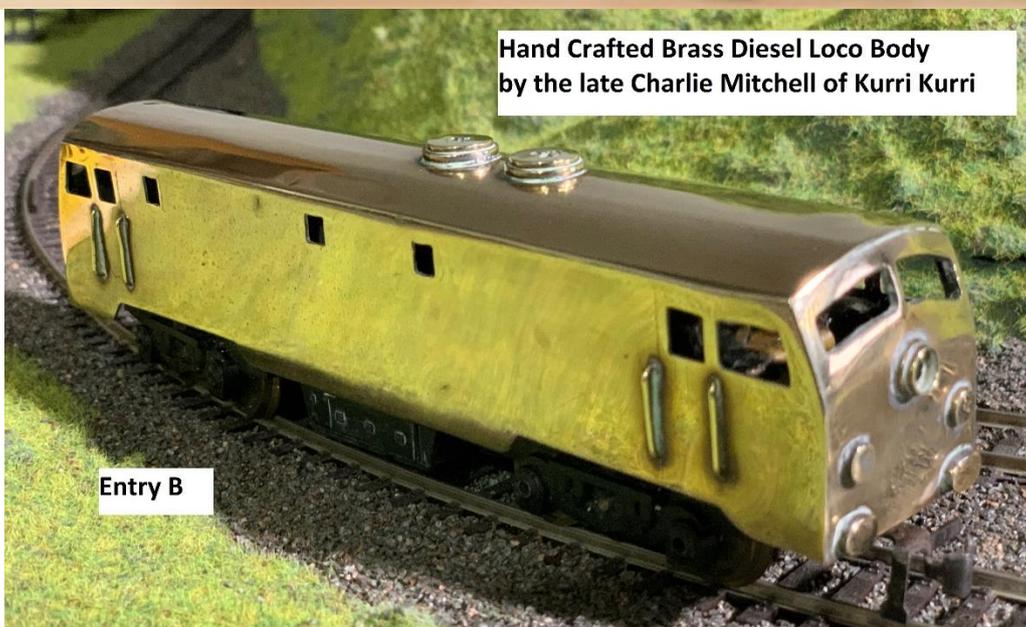
*Second* – Ernie's Christmas Express.

*Third* – Brian F's Santa Photo.

**PLACEGETTERS FOR THE JANUARY 2023 'VIRTUAL' MODEL COMPETITION**

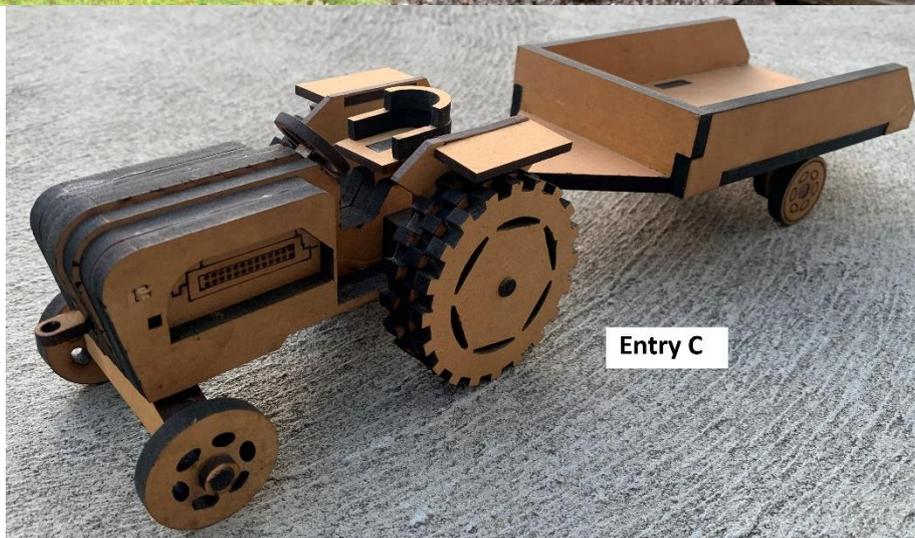


**Entry A**



**Hand Crafted Brass Diesel Loco Body  
by the late Charlie Mitchell of Kurri Kurri**

**Entry B**



**Entry C**

**FROM THE TOP:**

**First** – Mark's Adams M7 Wills White Metal kit from the 60's.

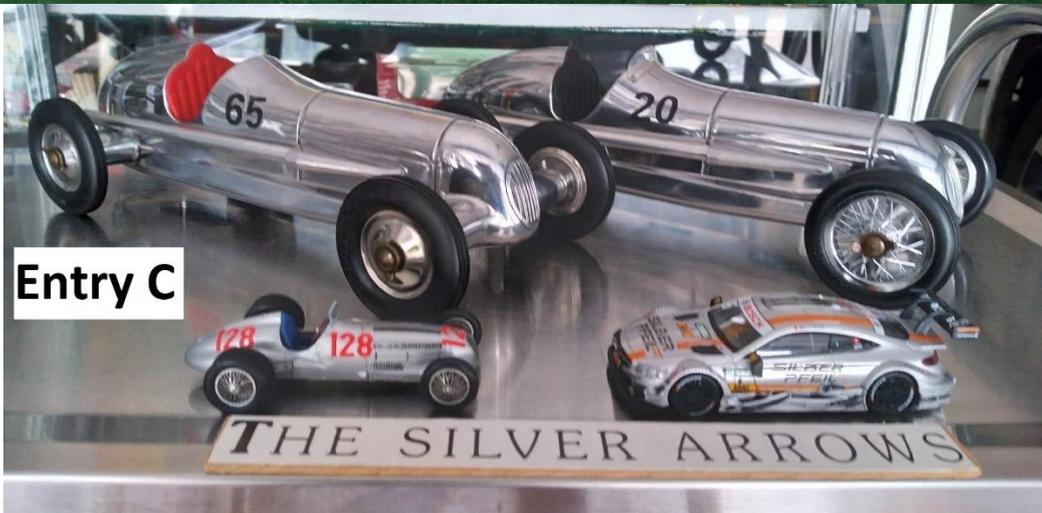
**Second** – Paul's hand crafted brass locomotive.

**Third** – Matthew C's tractor and trailer.

**-PLACEGETTERS FOR THE FEBRUARY 2023 'VIRTUAL' MODEL COMPETITION -**



**Entry B**



**Entry C**



**Entry E**

**Dinky 975 - Ruston Bucyrus Excavator**

**FROM THE TOP:**

*First – Mark's Spitfire.*

*Second – Brian B's Silver Arrows.*

*Third – Paul's Dinky 975 – Ruston Bucyrus Excavator.*

## - Austin A90 - A first-class family model that we rarely see now.



### The end of the Golden Years -

The matter was raised in a British on-line forum about the scarcity of the Austin A90 at car shows. I remember these vehicles as being quite popular when I was growing up with my Pop having owned a pale green A90 up till he passed away. These were the pre-*Pininfarina* designs of the Austin body shells and I have seen them at car shows in England, though they were far outnumbered by the later *'Farina'* models as in the *next pic*. I think they are still an attractive motor vehicle, and for the mid to late 1950's, certainly reflected a time when Austin built stylish sedans.



*A line of mostly 'Farina' styled Morris, Austin, Wolseley, MG and Riley vehicles at a 'show and shine' in England.*

We often hear stories about the demise of British automakers over the years, and none more well-known than that of the **British Leyland Motor Corporation** or **BLMC**. Remember that the Australian division of Leyland was closed down in 1974. This often comes up in Gearbox articles, so I thought I'd briefly elaborate here on what happened.

Most of us have an idea of the many marques that made up their history in the first half of the 20th Century such as Austin, Morris, Riley, Wolseley, Standard, MG and Riley to name a few. Back in 1952 Morris and Austin merged to form the British Motor Corporation, or BMC. Then in 1966, Jaguar merged into BMC and the company became British Motor Holdings, or BMH, and finally Leyland merged with BMH to form the **BLMC**.

The later mergers and restructuring were mainly due to Harold Wilson's Labour Government introducing the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation in 1968. This was the result of the Government's interventionist industrial policy that was required as a means of alleviating the weak management structures and the recalcitrant industrial relations environment that plagued many British manufacturing companies at the time, as well as a failure of ingenuity in securing overseas markets. The intention was to create companies that would become British industrial innovators and start to compete worldwide in various fields specifically with the use of new technology.

Importantly, this was intended to take place through mergers rather than by Government nationalization. **BLMC**, as a new entity, now employed 250,000 workers and produced around 40% of all British motor vehicles at the time. For British Leyland, as with many other companies, many factors came into play that would lead to their eventual demise including the 1973 oil crisis. This came about as a result of the Yom-Kippur War and the United States support for Israel.

Oil supplies from the middle East were cut dramatically to countries such as the U.S. Britain, Europe and Japan and this raised oil prices and impacted adversely on industry including Leyland leading it to become partially nationalised by the Government in 1975.

With Leyland still struggling, the Labour Government promised a 1 billion Pound bailout on top of previous financial aid, but when the Thatcher Government came into power in 1979, and with Leyland having dropped its share of the British auto market to around 15%, that became a real dilemma for the new Government. Then came the world-wide recession of the late 1970's, massive wage hikes demanded by the unions as well as strikes and a failure by Leyland management to allow a sell off, or at least a partial sell off of the company.

However, a restructuring of the company was undertaken and knowing that 'politically,' Leyland had to be saved, 900 million Pounds was injected into Leyland by the Thatcher Government. British Leyland, was later renamed as MG Rover, but the end was inevitable, and they were declared bankrupt in 2005. MG became part of a Chinese group, and Jaguar and Land Rover, previously purchased by Ford, were sold to TATA Motors of India in 2008 as a result of the Global Financial crisis so that today, the Mini, Jaguars and Land Rovers are still made, but by different owners.



**1956 Austin A90 in 1:43 scale white metal by Lansdowne.**

*Now, back to the Austin A90 and its successors.*

With the introduction of BMC's new range of Austin cars, being the A90 Westminster which replaced the A70 Hereford, as well as the slightly smaller A40 and A50 Cambridge, they had a new body style even though some said it was a bit on the dull side. However, they utilised unitary construction, which was a big improvement over the previous body on chassis models. At the same time, these models would be the last Austin branded BMC cars to have a separate body style to other BMC products. Interestingly, the A40 and A50 models and the new A90 had almost identical bodyshells to look at, but only the door pressings were shared.

The Longbridge produced A90 was released in 1954 and was powered by the new BMC Morris designed 'C' series 2,639cc straight six cylinder engine with a single downdraught Zenith carburettor and a power rating of 85bhp or 63kw. It was driven through a four speed manual gearbox with a top speed of 86mph or 138kph. This was later updated to an overdrive version. The A90 had an independent front suspension of coil springs and wishbones and a half-elliptic sprung rear end with an anti-roll bar. Brakes were by a four wheel drum system.

**Giles Chapman** in his *cars we loved* books said, *'This range of models was a major step up from their predecessors in most important areas. They were both decent to drive and also built like tanks, and so provided plenty of satisfaction as family cars to the middle classes, even if the equivalent Ford Consuls and Zephyrs probably had the edge on them for both modern style and driving pleasure.'* **Autocar magazine** indicated that the A90 had achieved a happy mix between comfort and the stability needed for high performance.

Strangely, though maybe not for BMC thinking, the A90 soon went up against the new **Morris Isis** that had the same running gear but a different body. So *'economies of scale'* as far as BMC were concerned, only applied to the underpinnings of their sedan designs and not car body production. Not the best way to sustain cost advantages in overall vehicle production.

Longbridge turned out over 25,500 A90s before it was updated in 1956 as the A95. *See next pic* of a BMC factory ad for the A95. This model was sleeker and 11 inches longer in the body and built on a wheelbase that was extended by two inches. The engine remained the same 2.6 litre unit but was upgraded to 90bhp or 67kw. The restyled A95 had a longer smoother tail with a wraparound rear window, new grille, new wheel trims, and different side decoration styles.



Just prior to the end of A90 production, BMC introduced a higher powered version called the A105 on the same platform. The 2.6 litre engine had twin SU carbies producing 102bhp or 76kw. However, with the transformation of the A90 into the new A95, Austin also generated an even faster and more powerful version of the A105 with the same longer A95 body and a top speed of 96mph or 145kph. It had an optional automatic gearbox and two-tone paint schemes. Both the A95 and A105 received a floor mounted gear lever option in mid-1958. A re-badged model, the Vanden Plas version, was also produced, and being a top-of-the-line marque, had the full wood panelling features and a leather tailored interior.



*At left an Austin factory ad for the 1956 Austin A105 and an updated model in Police livery at right.*

The A95 and A105 were discontinued in 1959 with the introduction of the **Farina** styled A/99 models with around 28,000 A95s leaving the Longbridge factory together with around 7,000 of the A105 models.

**For the collectors**, the Lansdowne models of the A90 and A105 in 1:43 scale white metal, unfortunately, can cost up around A\$300 landed. They also produced a limited run of 120 models of the 1958 A105 models as a special release for the Maidenhead static model club with some occasionally appearing on Ebay, but again, they are very expensive. Dinky also made the A105 sedan in large numbers. Budgie made the A95 station wagon models in their 'Miniature' series and in what I believe to be 1:64 scale. *Next pic* is Lansdowne's A105 Vanden Plas model. *Terry.*



## - MARKS HOVERCRAFT STORY -



On the 24th July 1965, British operator Hovertravel took delivery of their first SRN6, placing it into service in the Solent area on the route between the Ryde Transport Interchange on the Isle of Wight, and Southsea. [Saunders Roe Nautical 6, built by Saunders Roe at East Cowes.] This route was particularly well suited to hovercraft, as the tidal conditions of the surrounding coastline made berthing ships difficult, as well as a high volume of traffic. By 2012, Hovertravel had become the oldest hovercraft operator in the Western world, continuing to operate the same route.

In the 1970s hovercraft were very popular and toy company's saw a market. Both Dinky and Matchbox made the SRN6. Matchbox even made one for those with less pocket money to spend it was in the smaller 75 series.



These hovercraft are still quite easy to find and they are not that expensive. I picked up a blue one by Matchbox for \$5. So, at this price repainting it to the orange I wanted was not going to affect its value.



**Survivors:** The original SRN6 Mk1(009) is currently on display at the Hovercraft Museum in Lee-on-the-Solent, Hampshire, England. With 22,000 hours of service over a 20 year period, it is the world's most extensively operated hovercraft. The museum has several other SRN6 hovercraft on display or in various states of restoration. One is operational and occasionally used for demonstrations.



As with all forms of travel the hovercraft had its tragedies. In March of 1972 one was on a journey from Ryde on the Isle of Wight to Southsea in Hampshire. This would normally take 9 minutes but on this day weather conditions were not great for hovercraft with gale force winds and rough seas. The pilot took it slower than normal because of the conditions, but just short of Southsea it dug into a wave and crashed. There were survivors, but also 5 people lost their lives.



With the range of colours and models of hovercraft out there and their low prices they would make an interesting display in anyone's collection. I could be biased as I grew up with hovercraft on the Isle of Wight. I hope this article has convinced some of you to take a second look at the Hovercraft. *Mark.*



*Photo of an SRN6 coming into shore.*

## ~~ BIGGER BITS AND PIECES - ROVER P4 ~~



We have had articles on Rover before, but none were about the Rover P4 models presented to the public in 1949 as their first all-new designed automobile post WW2. In researching information for Gearbox articles, there is often an *interesting angle* on new model cars to come out of the automakers factories. Rover's owners, Maurice and Spencer Wilks, wanted to be part of the rapid need for automobiles at war's end, but were restrained financially and this meant the P4 would still have to retain many of the pre-war architecture, and even some old-hat design cues.

The motoring site **Driven To Write** said *'By the outbreak of the second world war, the Rover motor company was established as the purveyor of finely engineered, upmarket driver's cars of quality and bearing, favoured by the establishment and by what might have been termed, the professional classes. Dignified, conservative, but by the time hostilities had ceased, somewhat old-fashioned in design and execution.'*

On the other hand, the chief engineer who designed the P4 for Rover, Gordon Bashford, was quite innovative in his ideas even if Rover retained the separate body on chassis structure for the P4. The unitary bodyshell was a reasonably new development for automakers and Rover's use of their pre-war architecture was a better choice financially for this small vehicle producer. Also, if you can see something familiar in their body styling, you should not be surprised to know that the P4 displays shades of one of Studebaker's post WW2 vehicle appearance. So here is the *interesting angle* on the P4 design. Bashford, as well as the Wilks Brothers, were inspired by Raymond Loewy's styling of the 1947 Studebaker Commander range and this can be seen in *the next pic* of a 1947 four-door model.



I read that Rover purchased a Studebaker model for evaluation and **Classic World** stated, *'... even going so far as to use the body of an imported Champion to disguise a chassis on test – creating the well-known 'Roverbaker' mule.'* Check out the general silhouette of the body shell as well as the thick 'B' pillar and the rear suicide doors. However, for the first model release of the P4, designated as the Rover 75, Bashford incorporated a large spotlight in a thick chromed surround right in the centre of the grille. It became known as the 'Cyclops Eye' model though it was dropped in 1952 as that feature may have been creating some cooling issues. *See next pic.* An important part of the design was the use of aluminium for the doors, bonnet and boot lid as steel was still in short supply in that post WW2 period in Britain. The P4 was first shown to the public at the 1949 British International Motor Show at Earls Court and was subject to praise by motoring critics as far as appearance and build quality was concerned.



At the time, other vehicles available for potential Rover buyers would have been Riley and Humber models, though they would more than likely prefer the higher quality of workmanship seen in the Rover product. However, you often read some funny things in researching automobiles and **Classic World** also wrote that, *'The Ford Zephyr and Vauxhall Cresta were too racy for the sort of person who craved craftsmanship..'* To top that off, even **Classic and Sports Car** on line wrote, *'P4s embody what we used to think of as peculiarly British values of dignity and endurance.....rest assured that P4 man would not have been seen dead or alive in a Vauxhall Cresta or a Ford Zodiac.'*

Replacing the P3 Rover models, the new series of rear wheel drive vehicles by the Rover Company would be factory designated as the P4 and would remain in production till 1964, however, owners would know their vehicles by the various model designations such as the first release Rover 75, and following releases such as the Rover 90, 100 etc. The P4 now had a large boot compared to the pre WW2 models and was built on a wheelbase of 111 inches or 2.819 metres and was 178.25 inches, or 4.527 metres long which is pretty close to 15 feet.

The first iteration of the Rover 75 for the 1950 model year was fitted with a 2,106cc overhead valve straight six cylinder engine that had a power rating of 75 bhp [Rover 75] or 56 kw driven through a four speed manual gearbox. It was replaced in 1955 till 1959 with a 2,230cc engine with a power rating of 80 bhp or 60 kw. Overdrive became an option from 1956. Not only did Rover carry the P4 model for an unusually long period compared to other auto makers, and probably a bit too long, they also threw in many other models with different sized engines over the life of the P4. In 1953 they introduced the Rover 60 with a 1,997cc four cylinder engine of 60 bhp or 44 kw as well as the Rover 90 with a 90 bhp or 67 kw 2,638cc six and both ran through to 1959. This strategy continued with more powerful engines and the final model was the Rover 110 that ran from 1962 till 1964 and was powered by a 123 bhp or 92 kw 2,625cc six.

So perhaps the 1958 release of the P5 series should have seen the P4 replaced, yet it carried on till 1964. Even the P6 series had commenced production in 1963. At the end of the day, Rover only turned out 130,000 P4 automobiles over nearly fifteen years, yet I suppose they were really only intended to fill a niche market that consisted mainly of the so-called professional class who didn't want to be seen as being too pretentious. The P4 has been well modelled and mainly by Vanguards in 1:43 diecast as in **the next pics**. Terry.



## -LOOKING BACK - THE AUSTRALIAN AUSTIN 1800 UTILITY-

*The following article is a look back at Bill's story on the Aussie Austin 1800 utility. Terry.*

Holden arrived in Australia in 1948 and was billed as the "All Australian Car". It was very popular, but most Australians were still buying British designed cars. **In 1950, British cars accounted for 70% of all sales in Australia.**

Holden released its first ute, the 50-2106 (FX) in 1951 and two years later brought out the facelifted FJ model. Against the Holden, Austin had the A40 and A55 utilities, which were built in small numbers under license by outside factories. BMC released the Morris Oxford utility between 1950 and 1954 and being a four cylinder was never a big seller against the Holden which had six cylinders. BMC also released the smaller Morris Minor utility in 1950 and by 1955 it was the only ute on offer from BMC and continued in production until 1962.

The 1960's was a period of major change for BMC with the introduction of Alec Issigonis' mechanically advanced front wheel drive cars of the Mini, 1100 and 1800. The 1800 was the last and was released in November 1965. In August 1965 the Australian arm of BMC submitted a design feasibility study for a utility version of the Austin 1800. Following on from this study approval was given to the design and building of a prototype ute for durability testing.

The feature of the ute from the start was that it would have an integrated chassis for the rear end, rather than having a monocoque design like the sedan cars, so that it could be offered in a variety of body styles including panel van and flat tray versions, as well as a bare cab/chassis version. The prototype was taken on three trips, each around 10,000 miles (16,000 kms) to Charleville in Queensland. The first trip revealed a number of weaknesses in the body, particularly the new rear sections.

A second prototype was built for the second trip with improvements to the suspension and was accompanied by the first prototype for comparison. The second trip proved a problem with the new suspension arrangement on the second ute and was scrapped.

For the third trip, the original prototype remained with the original set-up but with some modification. This trip proved successful and paved the way for the production of the Austin 1800 utility to proceed with little variation from the first prototype.

The launch of the Mk1 1800 utility came in July 1968, some three months before the release of the Mk2 sedan, with the Mk1 utes continuing on.



The utility came with a tray larger and deeper than its competitors, a pay load of over half a ton, a low loading height of 22 inches (56cm) and a fully independent Hydrolastic fluid suspension with torsion bars at the rear. The East West Engine gave the passenger area extra room too.

In order to minimise tooling and production costs most of the panels not shared with the sedan, apart from the exterior tray panels, were of ribbed or flat design.

The 1800 utility had a 4 cylinder OHV engine of 1798 cc capacity. The Mk1 produced 82 bhp, whilst the Mk2 produced 87 bhp. It came with either 4 speed manual (all synchro) or 3 speed Borg- Warner automatic transmission, power disc brakes and a bench seat. Only the automatic versions could be truly classed as a three seater due to the intrusion of the floor mounted gear lever with the manual transmission version. The Mk2 1800 utility was released twelve months later and discontinued in late 1970.



The 1800 sedan was replaced early 1970 by the locally designed Tasman and Kimberley range. Whilst two Tasman utes were built, with one being crash tested by Ford in Victoria, they were never considered for production. This was most likely due to their poor sales with reportedly only 2,331 utes being sold which was well below the 10,000 anticipated sales in 1965. Of these sales 1,564 were the Mk2 and included 120 being automatic. It is estimated that there were 60 to 70 Mk 1 automatics.

Much of the low sales of these utes could be put down to their poor marketing. It is claimed that relatively few utility buyers knew of the existence of the Austin 1800 ute.

Even though the utes had an excellent load carrying space and the fact that they performed reasonably well under load, the idea of an 1800cc four-cylinder engine ute was not what the market of the day wanted, having been brought up with Holden, Ford and Chrysler type utes with both six and eight cylinder engines.

In addition, there was an ingrained distrust of the front wheel drive system for a ute.

Whilst Vanguards/Corgi have produced models of the Mk2 Austin 1800 sedan and Trax have recently released the Austin Kimberley sedan, no mainstream model maker has mass produced a utility version. However, Jim Hyland of Aussie Model Creations (AMC) did produce a 1/43 custom built one off model of the Mk1 ute in 2006 as shown in *the next photo at left*. Also as shown in the *photo below at right*, is Graeme Ogg's 1/43 version of a Mk 2 ute.



*Bill Kenchington*

(Reference material courtesy of 'BMC Experience' and 'Restored Cars' magazines)