

--SPECIAL EDITION GEARBOX--

---- *No. 3 for 2023* ----

JUNE; JULY; AUGUST 'VIRTUAL' MODEL

COMP PLACEGETTERS

HUNTER MODEL AUTO CLUB INC



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The *Morris Minor* is seventy-five years old this year. **Martin Wainwright** in his book *'Morris Minor, the biography'* called it *'the dead-simple and stone-cheap economy'* British Morris Minor sedan. This little car has been here, there and everywhere on the British motoring landscape and is often spotted on British Television shows like 'Heartbeat' where it appeared as a Panda Police car. It is as English as a cup of tea and we have its story in this Gearbox.



Morris Minor pickup by Saico in 1:24 scale diecast.

-PLACEGETTERS FOR THE JUNE 2023 'VIRTUAL' MODEL COMPETITION-



FROM THE TOP: [Above.]

First – Brian B's Holden Classics

Second – Mark's Dapol models of School Class (Harrow)

-PLACEGETTERS FOR THE JULY 2023 'VIRTUAL' MODEL COMPETITION -

Entry I



2-6-4 Steam Train

Entry C



Entry B

Hornby Intercity

FROM THE TOP: [Previous page.]

First – Ernie's 3801, 4401, 4201 Locomotives

Second – Matt C's 2-6-4 Steam train

Equal Third – Beth C's Hornby Intercity

-PLACEGETTERS FOR THE AUGUST 2023 'VIRTUAL' MODEL COMPETITION -

YELLOW UTES

Entry E



1938 Studebaker

1950 Chevrolet

1980 XD Falcon



1980's JCB Backhoe Loader



Corgi 93187 Street Sweeper

FROM THE TOP: [Above.]

First – Bill Kenchington's Yellow Utes

Second – Matt C's 1980's JCB Backhoe Loader

Equal Third – Paul C's Corgi 93187 Street Sweeper

== SUNBEAM RAPIER – A WELL BALANCED TOURER –



In his book *'Cars we loved in the 1950's,'* Giles Chapman made the following comment about the Sunbeam Rapier, *'...the Rapier was quite popular with sporting drivers who couldn't quite stretch to a Jaguar 2.4 litre but who still wanted up-to-the-minute styling.'* I knew very little about this particular model from the Rootes Group and was interested in why Giles had made this statement. One would assume that the styling of the Rapier, introduced in October 1955 at the London Motor Show at Earl's Court, and a few months before the Hillman Minx, must have been considered up to the standard of other sporty vehicles of that era like the Jaguar. The Rootes Group had owned Sunbeam since 1935, and the new Sunbeam Rapier would be a top-of-the-line model in their new *'Audax'* models with Audax meaning *'bold.'* The body was designed in-house at the Rootes Group headquarters, but with assistance from the Raymond Loewy studios in the U.S.

In the [August 2019 Gearbox](#), we ran an article on the Hillman Minx range and mentioned that it was a popular car in Australia. In 1946, the Rootes Group launched an offshoot company, Rootes Australia, to commence assembling the Hillman Minx at their new factory in Port Melbourne. They were the first British motor vehicle manufacturer to create an assembly plant in Australia. At years end, they were sending out both Hillman Minx vehicles and Commer light commercials for the local market. Rootes Australia put their own *'local'* imprint on the Hillman models including badge engineering for specific Aussie only models. Even by the time of Chrysler's full takeover in 1967, the Minx had remained a viable family car out here till the new Hillman Arrow and Hunter models arrived in 1967.

Classic World wrote a story on the Sunbeam Rapier and mentioned that when journalists write about glamorous sporty coupes that were derived from *'unexciting'* family sedans post WW2, they often refer to Ford's Consul Capri, a two-door coupe based on the Consul Classic and released in the early 1960's. However, by rolling out the Sunbeam Rapier in 1955, the Rootes Group had achieved a family sedan derived sports coupe well before Ford had.

This idea was in the DNA of the company and *Classic World* wrote, *'Since the Rootes brothers assembled their car-building empire in the 1930s they had been firm believers in badge engineering, platform sharing, brand strategies and other techniques more associated with the modern car industry in order to make their assets go as far as possible.'* The new *Audax* Hillman Minx was a four-door sedan and, as with previous models, continued its reputation as being a solid and practical automobile. At the same time, it was not considered a stylish looking sedan and this is where the two-door pillarless Sunbeam Rapier coupe, and later convertible model, would take the lead with its sports car qualities. So the Series I Sunbeam Rapier was generally regarded as a good looking automobile by motoring journalists and this may also have led to Giles Chapman's above statement.

It had a 1390 cc engine, as fitted to the Hillman Minx but with a slightly higher compression ratio, a Zenith carburettor, revised inlet and outlet manifolds and produced 62.5 bhp or 46.6 kw with a top speed of close to 90mph or 145 kph. Though hard driving fuel economy was only around 24 mpg, you could easily achieve 32 mpg on steady or long distance driving, particularly with overdrive, which with the leather seats and a tachometer, were standard fittings. Vinyl trim was also available. The Rapier could easily accommodate five passengers and had a large glass area for good visibility and an attractive external appearance enhanced by a two-tone paint job and stylish wheel trims.

Interestingly, the Rapier bodies were built by Pressed Steel and then shipped to London to be painted and trimmed by the coachbuilder, Thrupp and Maberly, then owned by the Rootes Group. Thrupp & Maberly were a prestigious company who had previously produced special bodies for Rolls-Royce, Daimler and Bentley. Finally, the vehicles were shipped back to Coventry to be fitted out with the engines, transmissions and running gear.



The above pic, courtesy of Bill K and like a *time-capsule*, shows the three of the Rootes Group's *Audax* models. At left is the Hillman Minx, the Sunbeam Rapier is in the centre and the Singer Gazelle is on the right. Bill stated that these models are somewhat play worn, but in his opinion not sufficiently worn as to warrant restoration. He purchased these models back in 2011 for a little over \$20 each and they would now be 60 + years old. As they would have been a child's toy, they have lasted quite well to be in their current state. **More pics of Bill's Rapier Series I model next.** These models show up an interesting point. Back then they were considered toys, yet today, especially with the price, you wouldn't even consider having them out of a display cabinet.



Rootes, again as part of their DNA, would continue to improve the Rapier by way of cosmetic changes, and/or mechanical upgrades in order to stretch the life span of this model. In 1956, the Rapier had a twin Zenith carbide setup added to bring power up to 68 bhp or 51 kw and then in 1958, the Series II was released and now with a convertible model available. As well, there was the option of a new 1494cc engine known as the 'Rallymaster' that pushed out 73 bhp or 54.4 kw. The grille was redesigned and the previous two-tone paint finish style was changed to a full length flash in the same colour as the roof. **See next pic.** There were interior trim changes, mechanical upgrades and a floor mounted gear lever made standard with the previous steering wheel column set-up now optional. However, the biggest body change was the addition of fins on the rear mudguards, smaller, but similar in style to those on the Studebaker Golden Hawk. Another Loewy Studio influence perhaps!



Factory artwork for the new Series II Sunbeam Rapier advertising.

The Series III for 1959 would see cosmetic changes including a larger windscreen, disc brakes being added up front and a small increase to the front track width. The biggest change was to the engine which had a new eight-port aluminium cylinder head and sports camshaft.

The Series III engine also had an increased compression ratio, redesigned valves, and the twin Zenith carbies were mounted on a new water heated inlet manifold resulting in a power rating of 78 bhp or 58 kw. The Series IIIA Rapier appeared in 1961 with a 1592 cc engine from the Series 2 Sunbeam Alpine with an increase in power to 80 bhp or 60 kw. Plenty of mechanical upgrades were included and a fresh air heater became standard rather than an option, but the convertible was soon dropped from the range. A new shaped Series IV was planned, but it became the 1963 Humber Scepter Mark I, so more cosmetic changes were made to the Series IIIA in order for it to become designated as the Rapier Series IV and that included a move to 13 inch rims from the previous model's 15 inch rims. In 1964 all *Audax* models came with a new all-synco gearbox.

1965 would see the Series V Rapier arrive with its four cylinder engine significantly redesigned and now at 1725cc capacity and pushing out 91 bhp or 68 kw with a dual pipe exhaust arrangement. Also under the bonnet was an alternator and a change to a negative earth electrical system. The new engine meant the Rapier now had a top speed of 95 mph or a tad over 150kph.

Due to poor sales, and probably a result of strong competition from other auto makers with products like Ford's sports models in their Cortina range and even Rootes's own Hillman Imp, the Series V Rapier was discontinued in 1967. However, the Rootes Group turned out a new fastback Rapier model built on the new 'Arrow' platform. Overall, the Sunbeam Rapier had always been considered by motoring journalists as having excellent qualities as far as safety, handling and general performance was concerned and was known for its comfortable and economical driving experience as well as its ease of maintenance.

Finally, **Unique Cars** stated *'See if you can find a better British car from the era, that offered the joys of motoring, could handle a family and represented a genuine day-to-day driving proposition. We doubt you will find better.'*



Two colour schemes in Oxford's diecast models of the Sunbeam Rapier in 1:76 scale.

Dinky Toys made the Series I Sunbeam Rapier models with Meccano Ltd impressed on the baseplate. Those that are well play worn are not expensive on eBay, and nearly all I saw were that way. However, the odd one in reasonable to very good condition will set you back a minimum of A \$150 landed. Oxford Diecast have many colour schemes on their later series of Sunbeam Rapiers in 1:76 scale, including one in Police livery. *See above pics.* Silas Models have produced the 1966 Series V Rapier in 1:43 scale and they are highly detailed, but expensive at around A\$200 - 300 landed. Lansdowne produced the series I model in 1:43 scale white metal and can cost anywhere up from A \$300 landed. *See next pic.* So, happy collecting. *Terry.*



~ Another Ford *concept* that never made it – The Granada Coupe `Concept` ~

Checking out diecast models on eBay often gives up some interesting items. I recently found models of the Ford Granada Mark 1 coupe, a model I was not that familiar with. *See the next pics*. With the big selling Aussie versions of the Cortina range, Ford never released any of their Granada models in Australia.



At top, the real thing. Above, modelled in 1:43 scale.

In the *February 2020 Gearbox*, we ran the story about the **1975 Ford Consul 3 Litre GT** thrashed around the streets by the fictional Police characters in the television series, *'The Sweeney.'* Apparently, many fans of the show mistook this vehicle for a Granada as they were so similar in appearance and the reason being that the Consul was a lower priced, lower specced and badge-engineered version of the Granada. In a later series of the show, the main stars drove a Mark 1 Ford Granada Ghia, and before series 4 ended, they also used a Ford Granada Mark 2.

In the early 1970's, Ford's Granada models were central to their ability to stay around the top for family sized car sales numbers in Britain. Both the Granada, and its lower specced Consul cousin, were manufactured in Dagenham in the United Kingdom and in Cologne in West Germany. The Consul models came in both two and four door sedans, a two door coupe as in the *lead-in pics* and a station wagon. The Granada came in the same four body shapes with two trim levels, the standard Granada and the top of the line GXL.

Ford dropped the `Consul` name in 1975 and continued to call all those models a `Granada` only. Interestingly, the Mark II Granada, released in 1977 and having been redesigned to move away from the earlier models now outdated looks, is very similar to the Australian Ford Falcon, only slightly smaller. *See the Mark II Granada in the next pic.*



I remember the statement often made out here that Ford Australia's 1979 XD Falcon was the first car to be designed in Australia from 'a clean piece of paper' yet just look at the Mark II Granada. Granted the Falcon was larger, but it makes you wonder. I'd suggest that Ford's head office in the U.S still impacted on what both Ford Britain/Europe and Ford Australia put on the road as far as styling trends went.

Ford in Britain introduced a two-door coupe model to the Granada range, though an earlier model had been on sale in Europe previously. It was these coupes that were modelled in 1:43 scale that I first noticed for sale on eBay and led me to research Ford's coupe range in the Granada.

Then, in checking out this coupe, I found this great looking Ford '*Granada Coupe concept*' in a *Classics and Sports Car* item. *See the next pic.* Further, this particular concept seems to be almost unknown to many Ford enthusiasts and I couldn't find out if it was destroyed like many concept and show cars, or is hidden away somewhere.



In fact, I could not find out much about this vehicle on the net at all. *Top Gear* on-line made the comment that, notwithstanding the cars that were being hammered in the Sweeney TV series, the Granada was not exactly a sporty or exciting motor vehicle. They went on to say '*Things might have been different if Ford had made this Granada Coupe.*' They thought that it had class and style similar to the BMW 6 series with a touch of Maserati's saloon styling. I agree with these thoughts as this Granada coupe concept vehicle is a nicely styled two-door hardtop that would have easily matched similar coupes in looks in that era.

One thing I did read about this concept coupe was a motoring journalist stating that research has indicated that most buyers thought that four round headlights looked sportier. However, for the Ford bean-counters, it may have been a cheaper proposition to use round headlights if considering that this coupe might eventually go into production. Unfortunately it didn't, and it is a shame I couldn't find more information on this two-door coupe.

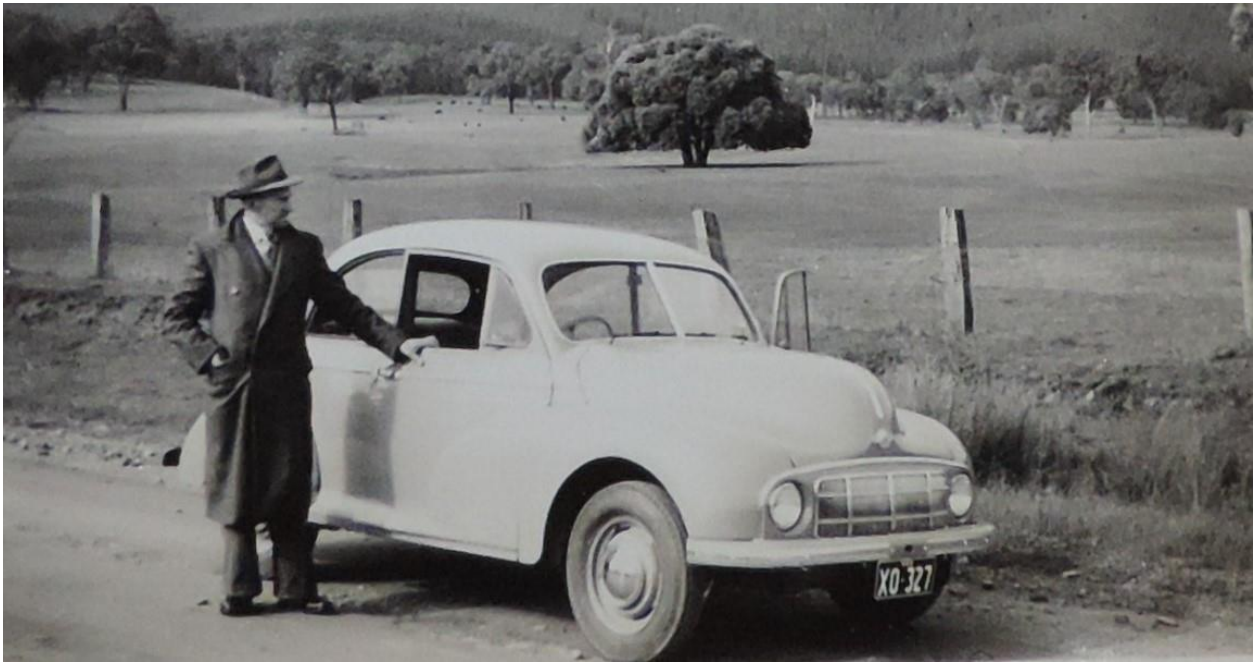
I have often written about concept or show cars and *the next pic* is another great looking Ford show vehicle in my view. It is from an old *Gearbox* article and is Ford's 1963 Thunderbird '*Italien*' fastback show car. The best part is that motoring enthusiasts can still see this absolutely beautiful candy apple coupe today as the powers to be at Ford cancelled the order for its destruction at the last minute, and it was sold off. Like many show cars, it has a long history of being bought and sold till it was taken away and fully restored to original factory specs in 2007 and still appears at many Ford motor shows. *Terry.*



-- Morris Minor - The first British car to reach a million in production --

The Morris Minor is seventy-five years old this year according to an article I read recently. My first thought at that moment was *'good grief, I have been around as long as a Morris Minor, and that is really old.'* My next thought was to come up with a story on the vehicle to go in a Gearbox with some pics of my 1:43 scale models.

Many of us would have had some experience of the **Morris Minor** in our younger days. **Unique Cars** said *'If you were born a Baby Boomer, just into your teens by 1960, it is likely that your family car may have been a Morris Minor.'* Our first car was a Holden, but my father's best mate had a mid-green **'low light'** Morris Minor. It is funny how some things stick in your mind as the one thing I have always remembered was that they brought my Mum and a newborn younger sister home from the hospital in that little car. **The next pic** I found in a family photo album many years ago, and I think it is that same Morris Minor. The term *low light* is because the first series had the headlights set low and inside the border of the grille panel as can be seen in the next pic. Also, note the **plate** in the centre of the bumper bar and just above the number plate. I will mention that later.



When researching the Morris Minor, designed by a young Alec Issigonis who later designed the Mini Minor, I saw the term **'MM'** Minor a few times and wondered where the **'MM'** came from. It was the series type used to designate new the Morris Minor, though it was referred to in-house as the **'Mosquito'** when it was under development. The **'MM'** Minor was to replace the old type **'8'** models post WW2, even though the final type **'8'** Morris models continued in production for a short time after War's end. So you learn something new every day.



The **above advertising pics** show the difference in the front-end structure between the **'low light'** model on the left and the later model on the right.

The 'low light' structure was replaced by a model with headlights in the guards in 1949 for the American market similar to the [previous pic on the right](#). This followed in 1950 for the new four door models and for all models across the range in 1951.

Morris was still an independent automaker between the wars specialising in low priced cars and by the mid 20's, accounted for around 50% of the British market. The model '8' appeared pre WW2, but most motor car production stopped during the war due to Government bans and companies turning to war equipment production. In between Government war production projects, Morris continued in secret to develop a new model car to be released at war's end and a prototype was actually turned out. [See next pic](#).



Alec Issigonis wanted what was then innovative features designed into the 'Mosquito' and that included rack and pinion steering and all-independent torsion bar suspension. Britain's automakers were desperately trying to have new models up and running as soon as possible after WW2 ended, and the Morris board wanted their new sedan on the road by 1949. This meant many of the Mosquito features would be untried, so a few of Issigonis' proposals were dropped. One example being a normal leaf spring set-up at the rear being fitted instead of the independent torsion bar suspension. In any case the Mosquito achieved the overall concept of having a North American style body shell, a spacious cabin, small wheels at each corner to enhance handling, as well as his rack and pinion steering and an independent front suspension, and all built on a lightweight unitary body and chassis.

The first series of the Morris Minor, the *MM*, ran from 1948 to 1953 and was almost a clean-sheet design according to *Classic and Sports Car* magazine. In relation to the engine though, and like some other componentry pieces planned for the Mosquito, Issigonis' idea for a more futuristic powerplant, that being a water cooled flat-four engine, was another feature that didn't make it into the *MM*. The engine used was the old fashioned 918 cc side valve 27 bhp (20 kw) four used in the Morris '8', yet this little power plant was still a reliable engine and was all that the Morris Minor really needed for driving conditions in that era. In any case, most of the competition's vehicles were still using side valve engines then. The other thing was that with Morris' merger with Austin, they then had access to the 'A' series engines in 1952, with the new *Series II* Morris Minor being fitted with the Austin 803 cc engine then.

The new *MM* had a top speed of a tad over 60mph or 100 kph and was soon noted for its excellent fuel economy of around 40 mpg or 5.9 litres/100 km. Motorways were non-existent in Britain at the time and any out of town driving was mainly at around cruising speeds of 45-50mph (or 70-80 kph) on what passed then for main roads and the little *MM* provided excellent road holding and ride under these conditions. In fact, most Brits saw the Morris Minor as being ultra-modern compared to those pre WW2 vehicles still on the roads then.

Though the new *MM* had a wheelbase three inches shorter than the old Morris '8' it was 4 inches longer. But one unusual fact I found very interesting related to the [plate](#) in the centre of the bumper bars I mentioned above. So let's go back to the original design board that led the Cowley plant to have started tooling up for production as early as 1947. By then though, Issigonis was not happy with the looks of the outer body shell.

It is said that he had the car cut in half lengthways, and then moved the two pieces apart slightly till he felt it looked more balanced. This resulted in the final production body being four inches wider than the prototype. As much as this gave a wider interior space and ultimately, better handling potential, it created some body shell production changes and adding two inch strips to the floor pan halves either side of the transmission hump. It also meant that Morris had to cut in half the original one piece bumper bars that had already been produced, and having a four inch [plate](#) bolted between the two pieces, front and back. Of course, later bumper bars were altered for production.

The Morris Minor was produced initially as a four-seater sedan in two door format and this was followed by a four door sedan in 1951 as well as a two door convertible. Of note, around 30% of all sales of the Series I or 'MM' Morris Minor were the convertible model, though these would cease production in August 1969.

The Series II Morris Minor commenced in 1952 with the change over to the slightly more powerful 803 cc Austin engine as mentioned above, and included Austin's gearbox, driveshaft and differential. The timber trimmed station wagon or Estate, known as a 'Traveller,' commenced production in 1953 followed by a panel van and pickup model. **See next scale model pics** for examples of the vans. The Traveller had an external structural frame of timber, being Ash, and two side hinged rear doors which made it very versatile for family use and goods carriage. The panel vans were also very popular for the large British Post vehicle fleet.



Examples of the Morris Minor 6 or 8 cwt Van modelled in 1:43 scale diecast.

In 1956, Morris added a 948 cc engine and the vehicle was renamed as the *Morris Minor 1000*. Though it now had a curved one-piece windscreen and larger rear window, it was almost the same externally, but importantly, it now had more headroom for tall drivers because the front seats were lower when in the 'full down' position. The engine was upgraded to 1098 cc in 1962 and this became the 'V' series Minor 1000. Between 1948 and 1971, over 1.6 million Morris Minors were produced and that included around 325,000 panel vans and pickups. A few more points about the Morris Minor are that 500,000th Morris Minor was built in 1957 and the millionth model in 1961 which meant the Morris Minor was the first British car to achieve this outcome. The last sedan was built in November 1970 and the Traveller and commercial models ceased production in April 1971.



British Police used the Morris Minor in both sedan and 8 cwt Vans, here modelled in 1:43 scale diecast.

Some motoring historians have said that the Morris Minor was really an outdated design for most of its life, however today it is still regarded as a loveable motoring aficionado's car. As 'outdated' as it has been suggested by some, it proved to be a reliable little automobile, not only for family motoring but for commercial use as shown with the massive number of Panel vans and pickups used throughout its life span in Britain and overseas. *Terry.*