



# MORRIS MINOR

## "One in a Million"

by Ray Newell and Richard McKellar

## A Father and Son Restoration Adventure

**The Morris Minor was the first British car to sell a million units. As that milestone approached, the British Motor Company (BMC) decided to mark the occasion by producing a limited edition vehicle. Though commonplace today, this was a new concept in 1960. Appropriately named the Minor Million, this unique vehicle was limited to 350 units.**

*Although standard 948cc Morris Minor 1000 two door saloons were used, the Millions were distinguished by vivid lilac paintwork.*

*Other external features included chrome wheel rim embellishers and special 1,000,000 badges which were fitted on the sides of the bonnet and on the boot lid.*

*The interior sported 'white gold' leather seats with black piping and contrasting black carpets.*

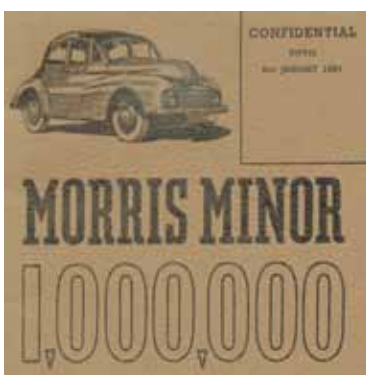
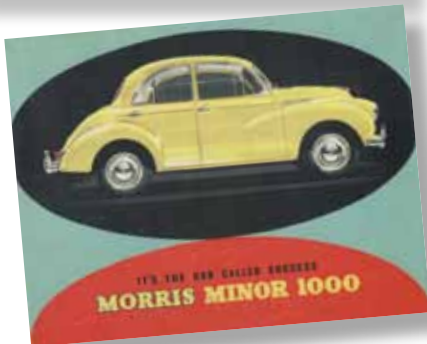
*The actual millionth car rolled off the production line on the 22nd December 1960.*

*The cars were distributed to all the BMC dealers in the UK, so that every showroom had a Minor Million on display for the official launch date of the 4th January 1961. 30 of the 349 replicas were sent to overseas distributors.*

*The car which is the subject of this restoration story, car (1,000,086) was built in Cowley, England on the 13th December 1960, and dispatched on the 22nd December 1960 to Appleyard Limited in Leeds, England.*

*Registered 6936WX, this car spent most of its life in the County of Yorkshire until it was taken off the road in 1978.*

*The car was advertised in 1993 and was purchased sight unseen. Shipped from Southampton (UK), it was imported to Melbourne, Australia using a roll-on-roll-off shipping method. For a number of years the car was used to teach the kids to drive before being restored, returning it to its former glory. Restoration was completed in 2010 by Bill and Richard McKellar.*





**Richard McKellar and Ray Newell have recently jointly published a book titled Morris Minor – “One in a Million”.**

It charts the restoration of a Morris Minor Million to a Concours standard by father and son. The book has just to be released in Australia at the recent Morris Minor National Rally at Port Macquarie. Richard and his family are travelling to the UK in July to launch the book at the Morris Minor National Rally at Knebworth. We catch up with Richard on a few points of interest and some tips and hints on restoring a Morris Minor.

**Advice for Young and Old Players**

Possibly the best advice anyone can have when contemplating restoring a Morris Minor, or any car for that matter, is to join a car club. If a single make club exists consider joining that one. The advantages are many, but the main one is that it will open up to you a pool of like minded members willing to pass on their knowledge, often free of charge. They can point you in the right direction in locating specialist services and local contacts.

**Purchase What You Can** – After an extensive appraisal of the car and before any dismantling, the decision was taken to purchase as many of the necessary parts as soon as possible.

A very long list of parts which needed to be sourced was compiled and the process

began. From the outset it was agreed that where possible we would try to source New Old Stock items (NOS). eBay became increasingly important in our quest. Bidding was fun. Acquiring the parts was exciting but there was the occasional mix-up. On at least two occasions Bill and I discovered we were bidding against each other for the same part. One eBay purchase of some note was the acquisition of a (NOS) Smith’s speedometer still in its original box. It was a ‘must have’ item which still takes pride of place.

**The Point of No Return** – A week or so before stripping the car back to a bare shell, every nut, bolt and screw was

sprayed with Inox or WD40, and all the fasteners were tapped with a small hammer. This process was repeated to ensure maximum penetration to assist removal. This paid dividends in most cases.

**From the outset a detailed photographic record was kept. In this digital age it is much easier to take and store images.**

Photographing each item before and after its removal has the advantage of providing a useful visual prompt, particularly when it comes to reassembly. It also creates an ‘evidence of industry’ record which potential new owners will treasure.





**Paint Stripping** – The plan was to do as much of the work in restoring the car ourselves. The best starting point is bare metal. When all paint is removed you can really see what you have to work with. Even though the paint stripping was going to be a time consuming and laborious process, for me it was going to be one of the best stages of the restoration. I could relax, put my mind in neutral and strip paint. Looking back, I'm sure at times I even achieved a some kind of meditational state, but then again that could have been the effect of the fumes!

Before starting, we put on goggles, gloves and overalls, and had buckets of clean water and a hose on hand. Much care had to be taken whilst opening the container as pressure would build up and the stripper would almost want to leap out over you. Paint strippers are stimulated by heat... and at the time it was the middle of an Australian Summer. Before applying the stripper the surface was 'roughed up' with some very coarse sand paper. The stripper was applied by brushing it on in very thick strokes to a depth of approximately 4mm deep. A skin would quickly form on the top layer of the stripper, trapping the gasses underneath. This allowed the chemical reaction to take place. The stripper was very effective and removed many layers of paint in one application.

Starting with the roof, we worked around the sides of the vehicle and down to the engine bay. With so many nooks and crannies, this proved to be the most difficult area to strip. After this was done we moved



to the inside of the car and dash area. Within a day or so the upper section on the car was completed.

**Stage two** of the metal preparation was to wire brush the metal to clean away any residual paint and provide a good 'keying in' surface for the sealer / rust protector. The best tool for this turned out to be an electric drill with a wire brush in the chuck. Countless wire brushes were used and wads of steel wool were pressed into service for the harder to get at places. This action made the metal glow like the metal on the edge of a knife!

**Rust Panel Replacement** – After assessing the condition of the underside, an order was placed for a range of rust repair replacement panels.

Outer sill sections were cut out with a small angle grinder, new metal sections were folded up and welded into place. This was followed by lower door hinge pillars, inner wing and chassis leg sections. The new metal and welding took about two days to finish. When completed, an angle grinder was used to grind the welds flat. To finish off, a very small amount of body filler was used before etch primer was applied to provide protection over the joints. Additional jobs included cutting out the rusted bottom sections of the doors and replacing them with new metal. Extra holes for aftermarket accessories in the firewall were filled with weld and filed flat.

**Wheels** – One of the delights of the Minor Million is the colour scheme. Being a designer by profession and considering myself to be a man of great taste and style,



I consider the relationship and harmonious contrasts in colour between the Old English White wheels, the Lilac body colour and chrome wheel embellishers to be just perfect. Joking aside, it really is a nice colour combination. Getting the wheels prepared and finished perfectly was of great interest to me. An added bonus was that doing this job was a welcome departure from the welding and the relentless removal of paint and underseal.

The starting point was to get the wheels repaired and made true.

Undercoating the wheels was done using Tetrosyl, spray putty/undercoat. The Old English White top coat was applied the next day. Like the lilac top coat, the BASF Spartain Acrylic lacquer paint system was used. This system is ideal for the home restorer to use as it can be applied easily and it dries within minutes.

**Home Invention** – In order to paint the wheels a special portable wheel painting station was made. This consisted of a 'Work Mate' workbench and a Morris Minor swivel pin and stub axle. With this clamped firmly in the 'Work Mate' workbench, the wheels could be spun as the paint was applied. This home produced invention was a rare stroke of genius, even if I say so myself. It made light work of painting the wheels. Later, tyres and tubes were fitted. Wheel weights were put on the inside of the wheels (they are usually on the outside) in order to give the wheel a cleaner line. This is a good tip for anyone restoring a vehicle especially if they are hoping to enter it in Concours competitions.



**Etch Primer** – Before applying any etch primer to the car, one last ‘sand’ was required. Using an sander with a flat wheel and sanding discs every inch of the car was carefully sanded one last time. Preparation is, of course, all important and care was taken to wipe the car down with Prepsol to remove any traces of contaminants that might interfere with the bonding process. The etch primer was applied with a low pressure gun and administered by spraying full wet coats. It dried in less than twenty minutes. The car was sprayed inside and out including the engine bay, floor, boot area and the under dash area. The transformation was amazing. The outer panels – doors, bonnet, boot wings etc. were sprayed at a later stage.

The spraying of the etch primer highlighted a few problem areas, particularly in the engine bay and on the firewall. A small skim of body filler was used to fill the offending areas. The filler was able to be sanded flat within a few hours of application. With the edges feathered and cleaned off with Prepsol, each area was given a couple of build up coats with etch primer. During the stripping back to bare metal process, all the seam sealer and proof coat that had been generously slapped-on during production at Cowley was carefully removed from the joints.

The aim was to have the perfect firewall and engine bay. Great care was taken to apply carefully metered designer seam sealer in the required areas to good effect.

The large hole in the back of the battery tray is a legacy of the Rotadip

rust-proofing process which ensured the bodysells received adequate anti-corrosion treatment back at the factory. The condition of the metal of this body, and the fact so many Morris Minors have survived in greater numbers than other vehicles of the same vintage, stands as a testament to the success of the Rotadip process.

**Starting with the underside, I honed my technique before moving on to the engine bay. This was followed by the boot area and then the inside and the dash.**

Whilst the car was on its side on the rollover frame, it seemed the perfect opportunity to spray the roof. The broad sections on the roof proved much more difficult to spray in order to achieve an even finish. I soon discovered that the spraying strokes needed to be long and overlapping.

Once the paint had been applied to the roof, the car was rolled back onto the wheels and the paint was applied to the rear sides.

The hardest part proved to be avoiding any contact between the bottom of the spray gun and the vehicle, whilst trying to keep the gun close enough to put the paint on wet. If the gun was moved too far away from the panel, the paint would dry mid-air and an unwanted sandy texture would result. Fortunately the Acrylic system is quite forgiving. Any blemishes can be easily sanded flat and repainted after the paint has hardened.



**Home Restoration** – Undertaking a major restoration at home, particularly if you are confined by space and the lack of a dedicated workspace area, can prove difficult. I'm told that there are in excess of 19,000 components in a Morris Minor. I am sure that during the course of the restoration my family have seen most of them.

Anyone embarking on a major restoration project will have their own ideas when it comes to planning and organisation. For me, one of the most significant features was the subdivision of labour and the categorising of different components. With an eye for colour, I decided from the outset to use a colour coding system. It worked well ... for me.

A significant number of the ancillary parts fitted to the Morris Minor were painted **black**. As the vehicle was dismantled these were set aside for refurbishment or replacement and final painting.

A similar pattern was followed for the **green** bits including the starter motor, generator, rocker cover and sump.

The **yellow** fan blades and top pulley and the red jack and wheel brace were set aside in the same way.

**Assembly** – This was one of the most exciting stages of the restoration, as it marked the beginning of the assembly process. The absence of components provided plenty of access to the corners and other difficult to get to areas. It also allowed a welcome opportunity to do any last minute rectification work.

Every nut and screw was scrutinised before being buffed prior to fitting. Where possible, original items were refitted. However, occasionally new nuts and bolts were used. All the ancillary components were painted or buffed in order to ensure a factory type finish.

**Mechanicals** – The 948cc engines are bullet proof providing they are regularly serviced and the oil and water levels are checked frequently. We were aware at the time of purchase that the engine had been rebuilt at least once in its lifetime. This was borne out by the fact that even given the recent history with our family as the paddock basher, the engine performed well, never missing a beat. Nevertheless, with this restoration nothing was being left to chance and the decision was made to thoroughly check the engine out and recondition all engine components. The radiator had to be recored and electrical items were refurbished.



*From ebay – a Smith's speedo in the original box with the odometer showing 'one mile'*



*Wires were loosely put in place prior to final fitting to the electrical components.*



*Percy is seen here manually working out the tracking by using a plumb-bob and strings.*





(below) the trusty 948 cc A series engine... reconditioned, polished and rearing to go!



**The Journey** – It has been a very rewarding experience restoring this car back to its former glory. Like any restoration it was full of heartache and pain, excitement and joy. Certainly the highs and lows let us know we were alive. Bill and I often think what a gift it is to share a common interest and be passionate about the projects we undertake together. I am the pushy, highly strung creative force, Dad is laid-back and a little more calculating (put that down to life experience!). Together we make a formidable team... and once again we got the job done.

I must add that I relived the enjoyment of the project by writing the book. It was rather like doing it all over again.

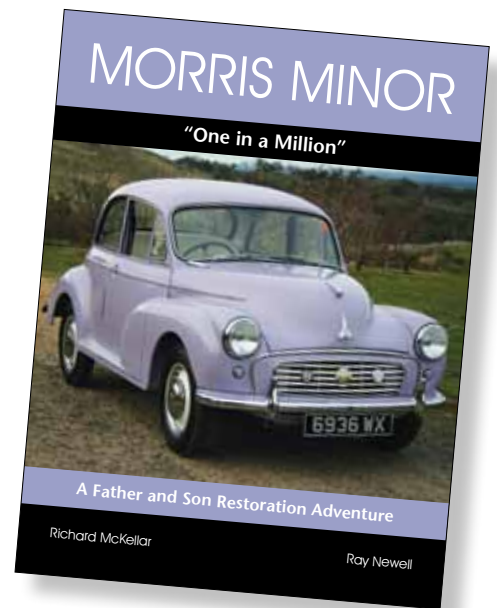
Ray Newell’s input as mentor and friend has been greatly appreciated.

**Book Review** – I have to say that the resulting book “**Morris Minor – One in a Million**”, a **Father and Son Restoration Adventure**” is a fabulous read, whether you’re into Morris Minors or not. Richard McKellar, the owner of his own Graphic Design and advertising company, together with renowned UK Minor expert, Ray Newell, have put together a first-class 160 page book on the restoration process. But it’s not just a “how to” book on turning a rust bucket into a swan, the book is written in a way that shows the people involved are passionate about the task. Illustrated by something over 550 brilliant color photos, the book details step-by-step instructions in turning a down-at-heel Minor into a work of art. The authors lead us through a journey that depicts how to scrape off years of accumulated underseal from the underneath of the car, how to dismantle, restore and replace every possible piece of the bodywork, paint, assemble and test the whole until the finished product is better than when it left the factory years earlier.

Okay, so you may not be into Morris Minors or vehicles of that era but you could do a lot worse than have a read of this superbly-produced book, admire the photos and devour the text that together guides you through the restoration project. The book presents well – it looks like a professional production, and it is.

As a classic car owner, I can’t recommend it highly enough.

**Jeff Whitten – RallySport Magazine**



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**Signed first editions can be purchased from Richard via the website [www.morrisminorgarage.com](http://www.morrisminorgarage.com)**

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