

JT Motors.
the story thus far.
or
'17 cars over 19 years'

1.
car: Mini 1000.
year/registration: 1977 R ?
owned by JT: 87-88
cost: £ 400
affectionately know as "Heap".
colour: rusty red.

A short history:

Having been brought up on Morris Minors the Mini seemed very modern and sprightly. I remember being impressed that the heater worked and that the windscreen wipers had two speeds. I had been talked into buying a Mini by an undergraduate friend who was particularly evangelical about them. He described the amazing fwd design, that the engine was placed *in front* of the axles and that "they don't have suspension but the wheels are bolted to pieces of rubber". Before owning the car I did not quite believe these claims.

I ran this car on a student's budget i.e. virtually nil. Immediately, the fuel pump sprouted a major leak. At that time I was not a confident mechanic and it did not occur to me to take the pump off to effect repairs. Instead, my father donated an historic electric SU fuel pump, which I successfully fitted. This was of a type with circuit contact breakers reminiscent of old-fashioned distributor points. In use, a common occurrence would be the car abruptly coming to a standstill and myself getting out to clean the breakers with some emery paper I kept at hand for that purpose. I was interested in monitoring fuel consumption. The odometer however was stuck reading 70,000 miles, with only the two least significant figures functional, and these would cycle to 70,009.9 before returning back to a row of zeros. I thus kept a small note pad attached to the steering wheel and would mark off with a pencil the passage of each ten miles. It is within the bounds of possibility that this record still exists in a shed somewhere. This car was on occasion (allegedly) used to explore some of the less accessible regions of a university campus normally considered to be beyond motor access.

The car soon developed other idiosyncrasies. I was keen to customise it but had no money. I reversed the front passenger seat, as this seemed an original innovation and allowed for a more face-to-face conversation. The gearbox would, at random, jump out of fourth. The number plates comprised individual, three-dimensional plastic characters each attached by fasteners; it was possible to re-arrange these in the manner of an anagram if one was so inclined. I found it necessary to augment the choke control with a clothes peg, but later learnt that this is an absolutely standard Mini procedure. I developed a vague interest in rallying, and fashioned a sump guard from a piece of old gas boiler casing. I was also given some small spot lamps.

The brakes became quite awful. I was not sufficiently experienced to know that the Achilles' heel of Mini drum brakes are the evil manual adjusters which have to be greased daily to prevent their seizing. The adjusters on this car were quite diabolical. I developed a technique of always pumping the brake peddle twice; a friend dubbed this "double de-braking".

In winter the car became even more difficult to live with. A hole in the floor by the accelerator peddle would throw a stream of water or snow up one's trouser leg. The car would not start on cold mornings. I would attempt to push start it in reverse, on my own, but never perfected the technique in the narrow driveway of our shared student house, and had to abandon this approach after accidentally pushing the car through the neighbours' fence. I then developed a technique of pre-heating the battery in a tub of very hot water, which did the trick. I became more bold at mechanical repairs, and once mended the starter motor by repairing some shorted insulation with sellotape.

Cause of death.

I think that for about the final 6 months of this car's life there was almost no alternator function. I would re-charge the battery daily. A letter from the college bursar once took objection to this, stating "...if there is any damage due to acid you will be charged accordingly." I doubted the pun was intentional. It is also possible that this and similar pieces of correspondence have survived some place. By Christmas of the final year at university, this car had really come to the end. A twice-termly ritual was the packing of all my belongings (this once included a refrigerator) into the Mini for the trans-Pennine journey. The final such trip, with a fully loaded car and no means of re-starting it if stalled, was stressful. I dismantled it at home and cut up the shell with a hacksaw, an operation much aided by the ravages of "the rust beetle".

2.

car: Mini 1275 GT

year/registration: 1972 L

owned by JT: 88 - present (sort of)

cost: £ 300

affectionately know as "Flop".

colour: matt black

A short history

Probably an entire book could be written about this car. It had had a long and possibly tortured history even before it came into my care. I think the V5 shows 13 previous owners. It had belonged to a friend of a friend (one Gerard Hughes, who auspiciously in later years became the editor of Mini Magazine) and I'd driven it some weeks before the opportunity for purchase came along. At this time, it had 10"x 5" alloy wheels, bucket seats, a rattly 1275 cc motor with a 731 cam (actually a fairly rubbish cam) and standard manifolds. I later adapted these to run an LCB exhaust. After the Mini 1000, this car felt like a racing car, and I became very enthusiastic about Mini tuning. The bonnet was secured with some little leather straps, which I thought was a nice period touch. In many ways though it was a terrible car. The brakes were awful

Cooper S discs. The syncro on the remote-change 'box was gone on second. We had formed a university motor club, and organised 'rallies' or 'navigational scatters'. On one such event this car's motor expired in a big way - a big end failed and threw a rod through the gearbox casing. I remember watching boiling oil erupt from the rocker box. This event was later immortalised as a cartoon on one of our motor club notices.

The remains were left in the college car park for the remainder of the winter term, then towed back home for the Easter vacation courtesy of a friend who had a 2 litre Ascona. I was not deterred however, and had by now purchased (!) and almost memorised the definitive A series tuning book by Vizard. I spent my grant for the next term (yes, students had grants in those days) at Mini Sport on a 1380 cc engine kit. I had to re-cycle many other parts though. I had acquired a spare gearbox with the car, and on assembling the differential, was puzzled to find a large clearance between pinion and crown wheel. It had not occurred to me that these items come in different ratios, and must be matched to one another ! More by luck than judgement I corrected this error, but later found I had fitted a 4.1 diff. With this, and running a piper 285 cam and MG metro head, this car would out-accelerate anything in our club. I had also upgraded to a rod-change 'box, having re-cycled the rod linkage from the 1000; unfortunately I had previously had to saw through this item and it was then necessary to make up a connecting piece from a bit of tube; the gearchange action was thereby compromised. I had no money left over for such items as brakes, suspension, and tyres etc. The car handled terribly, and this is an evil thing indeed in a Mini. I once tried to get the tracking done at a garage but the mechanic had to abandon the operation because everything on the car was worn out.

Cause of death.

Actually this was only a temporary death, but a fairly spectacular one. Only days before the end of term I was driving with one James Johns (who may appear again in a story much later on) and lost control. I spun the car under braking in some bends, took out about 30 feet of wooden fence, and ended embedded rearwards into a stout tree. The tree was undamaged, but the car split apart like an over-ripe fruit. Later, a friend dragged the wreckage back to Lancashire and I salvaged everything of any conceivable value (and plenty of no value whatsoever).

This car will appear again later.

3.

car: Mini 1000

year/registration: 1978 S ?

owned by JT: 89-90

cost: £ 110

affectionately know as "Son of Heap".

colour: horrible brown.

A short history:

This car was a stop-gap during a directionless period of unemployment. I had no money at all. I got this car cheap because the rear sub-frame was rotten and the suspension had collapsed on one side. I drove it home feeling like a crew member of

the Titanic, and dug out the spare subframe salvaged from "Heap". I dabbled with cylinder head tuning and fitted an over-sized carburettor. This was quite a bad car. I had fitted a home-brew exhaust system which frequently fell off. Once this occurred on a busy dual carriageway and the exhaust was flattened by following traffic. Salvaging the remains was stressful and I had to hammer it all back into an exhaust-like shape. On one occasion I dropped the distributor drive into the sump, and so had to lift the motor out.

Cause of death.

After a minor run-in with The Law it became convenient for this car to disappear. I sold it for £ 50 to a friend-of-a-friend who wanted some parts and could be trusted to not ask questions...

4.

car: Mini 1293

year/registration: 1976 ? P

owned by JT: 90-94

cost: £ 650

affectionately know as "The Green Bean".

colour: BRG with white roof..

A short history

This was one of my more successful Minis. I still had no money but had just secured a job, so it occurred to me that the adult thing to do was to get a bank loan (the first and last time I ever did so.) I found this car locally, through an advertisement at my place of work. It had been looked after quite well and sensibly modified to run a 1293 motor (I found this out later) with a Kent 266 cam - this is still my favourite road cam - but with standard manifolds and carburettor. I improved the engine mods. with my spare MG metro head, 1.75 inch SU 'HIF6' carb, LCB and infamous home-brew exhaust. The car then went really well and was a work-horse for some time. It was my first Mini with 12 inch wheels and brakes that worked, these being the 8.4 inch disc variety. The stereo was fitted under the rear passenger seat as a matter of security. I travelled all over the country in this car and quite liked it. It caught fire only twice: once when the famous Mini battery cable shorted out, and once when I left an oily rag on the exhaust.

Cause of death.

This car had a very sad and protracted demise which it did not deserve. I had by now an additional two cars. At some point the motor suffered catastrophic oil pump failure. I'd also acquired a 1310 cc motor and set about finding a viable combination of engine and 'box. I had not realised that the oil pump failure had been precipitated by failure of the main gearbox bearing, which was thus throwing debris directly into the pump. A second pump was destroyed before I noticed this. The 1310 cc block had a stripped thread on one of the top stud holes, so I couldn't torque down the head. I attempted to salvage this by drilling through the block into the base of the stud and fitting a grub-screw. Regrettably, this did not work. The thread in the block for the

engine steady bar was also gone. Perhaps this block had been made from a particularly bad batch of re-cycled iron.

The car's long and hard life was now showing. I gave it away to a friend in Leeds, who, to my disappointment, did not look after it at all. One day he phoned me to say the car "had disappeared". While this is a common enough phenomena in Leeds, his theory was that The Law had confiscated it as he had not bothered to tax it. I reported it as stolen. The remains later turned up in another town but were not economic to salvage.

5.

car: Mini 1275 GT

year/registration: 1981 W

owned by JT: 90-99

cost: £ 800 ?

colour: black

I could call this "son of Flop" but "the first Flop re-shell donor car" might be more fitting.

A short history

The tail continues. While the green mini was my every-day car, I had always planned to re-shell the original 1275 GT, and used this car as the donor shell, although I ran around in it for a few weeks before taking it to pieces. I also by now had income with which to properly finish the motor. I purchased a large-valve Longman head, 1.5 ratio roller rockers and a (very) light steel flywheel, among other items. I have always run this motor with a single SU carb, as this works well and is simple and reliable. This car has remained a project which has never quite been properly finished. Over the following years, this particular incarnation acquired a straight-cut 'box and drop gears and 6 x 10 Revolution alloys with Yokohama A008 tyres (probably an obsolete type these days). The idler drop gear bearings failed and I had to upgrade to the roller type where the bearings live in the gear. I put some effort into getting the suspension items replaced (all the usual suspects: rear arms, ball joints etc.) and set it up with an appropriate level of negative camber. To drive, this car was a hoot, and I would terrify a number of unfortunate passengers on the Lancashire country lanes. This version was dyno-tuned (twice), it probably put out a little over 100 bhp. A well-handling mini is great fun to drive, and this one I could really nail down the lanes with confidence (although I was probably too young to know better.)

I persevered with this car as an ongoing project despite several changes of location during the mid nineties. For periods it was stored in Lancashire. After moving to Oxford, I had opportunity to re-build the motor with a much better bottom end from MED of Leicester. This was in about 97. I was really impressed with the quality of MED's work at that time, although I'm not sure they have continued with the same personnel. The old Minisport bottom end was by now worn out, the cam in particular; MED diagnosed over-stiff valve springs and supplied others appropriate for the new Kent 286/2 cam. They supplied a lightened and balanced metro turbo crank and rods, strengthened centre bearing etc. This motor survives to the present time although I haven't had it on a dyno as it seems to work well enough with existing ancillaries.

Cause of death

By 99 the shell had gotten pretty rotten and I spent every evening for a week welding up the sills in preparation for an MOT. I then took it for a test drive, and as is one of my bad habits was simultaneously reading the OS map. I was looking at some lanes in preparation for helping out with a road rally. A van appeared over a crest and we met head-on. The chap was jolly decent (he knew he had also been driving without proper attention) and dropped me off at the pub while I phoned a rescue service. The remains were dragged back to the shared house where I lived and I proceeded to strip the shell since this was beyond further viability.

This car will be back again.

6.

car: Opel Manta GTE

year/registration: 1983 ? A

owned by JT: 92-94

cost: £ 1550

colour: "gunmetal grey"

affectionately know as "The No Hope-el"

A short history

Re-wind to the early nineties. I had at this time two Minis and several sheds full of parts. It occurred to me I might get another vehicle which was not a Mini. I quite liked the Manta, although a friend was quite disparaging about them and suggested they had a bad image. This same character had once owned an Austin Allegro. I admit the "GTE" graphics were quite naff. This one was a 2 litre coupe. It was a good car to drive and very good on long motorway runs. From the specification, I seem to recall that the motor was a very short stroke unit, although bizarrely, it had loads of low-down torque but would not rev. Strange. This was also a great handling car although ultimately a bit under-powered. The brake discs were warped. I was annoyed when this car dumped the contents of its fuel tank onto the hard shoulder of the M6.

This car is associated with an amusing episode which (allegedly) involved the kidnapping of a wheel clamp from the premises of British Aerospace, where I was employed. While digressing, it is worth briefly touching upon this. I'll spare the technical details but suffice to say it does not require a genius to outwit the security staff of BAe. These poor characters were hardly literate. In earlier times, I had often found little notices placed under my Mini's windscreen wipers warning me that I had transgressed some parking regulation and that the consequences would be dire. To alleviate this annoyance I took the simple expedient of removing the Mini's wipers. Then, some poor wretch would have to stand outside in the cold each morning awaiting my arrival so that the notices could be delivered to me in person. I once saw a car wheel-clamped because it was "blocking an emergency route". Returning to the story, I took the clamp one day to the picturesque shores of Coniston Water where a friend took some rather fetching photographs of it 'paddling' at the lake shore. This was in the days before digital cameras. A couple of weeks later, we returned to the

Lake District with the print, and wrote on the back, in the manner of a postcard, "enjoying my holiday, glad you're not here" and addressed it to "Wheel Clamp Engineering Department" etc. I know that this item arrived safely as by chance I later overheard a security person talking about it. The Manta was thereafter presumably a marked vehicle, although I later left it in the car park for such long periods that brambles grew between the spokes of the wheels.

Cause of death

Technically, the car did not quite die during my ownership, but it certainly entered a very prolonged, albeit interesting, period of deep decline. For some reason I just lost interest in it. I would not spend any money on it. When I broke the casing of the battery, I repaired this with epoxy and a bit of plastic from an oil tub.

One day the starter motor would not turn. I took it off to get it checked out. It turned out there was nothing wrong with the starter motor, but I discovered that the material of the engine earth strap had corroded into a strange powdery substance found only on motor cars of a certain age. Once replaced, the starter worked fine. The engine management system however did not. It flooded the motor to the extent that the sump filled with fuel. Repairing the management system was beyond my powers, and Manta ECUs were not cheaply available.

Thus commenced a motoring modification to which I am to this day justifiably proud. I had available no Manta parts, but plenty of Mini parts, including several 1.75 inch SU carbs. I dispensed with the Manta's airflow meter and then fashioned an adapter plate, with the aid of more epoxy, to attach the SU directly to the air intake in front of the throttle housing. All other intake parts were retained. The SU then operated as a single fuel jet, and I blanked off its unrequired throttle. The technical and observant reader may be mindful that a Bosch injection system runs at a fuel pressure around 40 psi or so, while an SU requires only a very small fraction of this. My solution to this disparity was to bleed off a little fuel from the low pressure, tank return side of the fuel circuit by adding a T-piece. Pressure was then controlled by placing a brake hose clamp on the flexible pipe on the tank return side. The cold-start procedure was highly effective; the technique was to flood the SU by turning on the fuel pump and then, by hand, squeezing the clamp until the SU was nicely primed. The optimum level was apparent when fuel spurted out of the SU breather tube and into the engine bay. The motor would then fire up readily. I don't know why, but I bought a new K&N conical air filter to finish off this set-up. I really have no idea why. I did not spend a penny on any other aspect of the car. I did not even ever change the oil, reasoning I suppose that the petrol in the sump would evaporate away soon enough.

This arrangement allowed the Manta to run under its own power. Strangely, the performance was always thereafter rather erratic. I found that the motor was very sensitive to the exact positioning of the hose clamp which regulated the fuel supply. The car might do 90 mph for many miles, but without warning drop down to 30 mph or so. There is a slope on the M6 at the Lune Valley which I will forever think of as "No Hope-el Hill" where this phenomena occurred.

To dispose of the car, I considered disguising the SU arrangement inside a fake air flow meter-type box, and passing it off to a dealer. I couldn't be bothered though.

Eventually, some passing character offered me £100 for the car, but soon realised it was a disaster, and found some other passing character who had a spare ECU. I later saw the car on the road in Preston so must assume that somebody extracted some further life from it.

7.

car: Mini 1000

year/registration: 1977 ish / can't remember

owned by JT: 1994 - 95

cost: £ about 250

colour: blue

affectionately know as "The Blue Heap".

A short history

This was a terrible car. I think at the time the Manta and green Mini had both recently departed and I deliberately set out to find the worst Mini available within a 30 mile radius. I probably succeeded. I was planning to leave my job and was preserving money. This car had lots of terrible stickers on it which I had to remove. Perhaps they were holding the car together. It was an old-type mini with ten inch wheels and thus no brakes. I cannot remember to what extent it was vaguely road-legal. On one occasion I dodged The Law at Forton motorway services, wherein I hid for an hour. On my departure, I took advantage of the direct exit to the twisty Lancashire lanes near Garstang and continued my journey without further recourse to the M6.

I took this car with me to Portsmouth where I studied for half a year. I stayed in touch with friends in Lancashire who rented a farm house and where my other Mini was stored. On one trip up the M6 this terrible car came to an abrupt halt somewhere near Wigan. I diagnosed fuel pump failure. I was keen to get off the motorway. I had a gallon of petrol in a can. I found that by filling the carburettor float chamber directly i.e. by removing the lid, the car would go about one eighth of a mile. Fortunately, the nearest exit was not a great distance and I had to re-fill only another 3 times. Once off the motorway, I had a rummage through the junk in the car and found a length of flexible fuel hose and a plastic lemonade bottle. Using a penknife, I cut a hole in the lid of the bottle into which I inserted one end on the rubber hose, the other end of which I fed through the bulkhead to the carb. I filled the bottle with about 2 litres of fuel and fed the motor by gravity. The car would do about 40 mph with the bottle held just above shoulder height; it was necessary of course to put it down to change gear, but the car would stall if the bottle wasn't immediately lifted again. Fortunately, when an oncoming police vehicle passed me suddenly on a brow, this was during one such gear change operation. I proceeded a further 30 miles or so to complete this trip. I should have just thrown this car away but as I had a spare fuel pump I fitted it and thus prolonged the life of this worthless car.

Cause of death

I abandoned this vehicle at my friends' rented farm house. In the summer, we decided to start it up and drive it around their garden a few times. We got it stuck on an embankment. The roof collapsed when four of us sat on it.

The eventual disposal of the car proved to be astonishingly convenient. I stripped it for (mostly worthless) spare parts, and as I started to cut up the shell a character appeared from the proximity of a junk area on the adjacent property, with a trailer of scrap, and offered to take the shell away.

8.

car: Mini 1000 City

year/registration: 1985 D

owned by JT: 1995-97 ish ?

cost: £ 600

colour: silver, then matt black

not affectionately know as anything.

A short history

This was one of my less interesting cars. I was living in Oxfordshire and my only other car was the 1275 GT. This Mini was initially silver, but I later found it convenient to paint it black. There are two basic types of cellulose thinner: cheap stuff to be used only for cleaning tools and brushes, and expensive stuff to thin the actual paint. Guess which type I bought for my re-spray ! The end result was a surface texture closely resembling a piece of coal. I drove this car on an epic overnight trip via Leeds, Oban and thence by ferry to the island of Islay. Later, our winter vacation proceeded to Torridon and I did about 1800 miles in this car in two weeks.

Cause of death.

Later I moved to Oxford and bought a Peugeot, and this Mini had to go. I gave it to a friend/colleague/student-type-person who didn't use it much, and eventually gave it back to me. In fact, this has happened to me more frequently than would seem reasonable. The second time I gave the car away was to a youth in a motor club, and fortunately I did not see it again.

9.

car: Peugeot 205 1.9 GTi

year/registration: 1988 F

owned by JT: 1997 - 2002

cost: £ 2900

colour: grey

affectionately know as "The pug"

A short history

Ahh ! Here beginneth the Peugeot era ! I had inherited a little money and decided to buy a relatively modern sports car. On balance, I spent too much money on this car. In

those days the 205 was a relatively 'current' vehicle and the Gti had a huge reputation. However, most were being traded by crooks and villains of various types (I do not count myself among their number !) and I looked at a lot of cars with dodgy chassis plates, either missing or obviously having been moved. I think I looked at 12 in all before buying what seemed like a straight example.

I could not figure out where to put the engine oil. I removed a hose from the top of the cam cover and poured oil through a small aperture. The next day, this hose came loose and sprayed oil over the exhaust, causing a small fire. A few weeks later, I changed the oil, using some cheap stuff from the local shop. The engine then expired on a fast night-time drive to the Lake District. I had had the stereo on loud and not heard the knocking coming from the motor until it was too late. A big end had failed. I limped back to Oxford at 50 mph, and lifted the motor out at the shared house where I had a room and use of a garage. The crank was beyond the point where it could be re-ground. Through work connections, I met a character who had a tuned-up 205 but had just written it off in a big roll, and was thus selling off the parts. I acquired a motor with a mildly tuned top end (Piper cam etc.) and a four branch exhaust manifold. (This latter item was in fact rather pointless as there is nothing wrong with standard 205 exhausts.) I got lots of conflicting advice about re-mapping the ECU, but eventually contacted Skip Brown Cars, and had the car set up by them and retaining the standard ECU. The motor put out 121 bhp at the wheels, only 9 bhp above standard, but I was not unhappy with this as oftentimes a half-baked engine modification will lose power.

This car then went like stink, but became increasingly unreliable. This was a non-power steering model and had a horrible slow rack which I replaced with a 2.7 turn quick-rack. I found that the front tyres wore very quickly. Then, I found that the car was unstable under braking and acceleration, and upon investigation I discovered a cracked cross member. This item is home to the lower suspension arms, which in consequence were flailing around somewhat. Welding failed to be viable, due to a constant but unseen rain of oil contaminating the metal. I resorted to some stout metal plates and bolts, reflecting that the car had probably been crashed heavily in a previous life.

The car failed its MOT on rear brake balance. I could not find anything wrong with the brakes. It failed a second time. In desperation, I removed the brake bias valve from the supposedly weak side, and made up an adapter piece to re-connect the brake lines directly. The car then passed the MOT, but would always thereafter lock the affected wheel under braking. I could not re-fit the original bias valve as I had broken a drill in it.

I began to put a lot of miles on this car. The drive shaft output oil seals failed. I replaced them and they failed again. Then, the motor and gearbox became terminally disconnected, like a failed organ transplant. At least in the field of medicine drugs are administered to suppress this effect - I wonder what is the equivalent for cars ? Loctite perhaps ? - I only once bought Loctite and was dismayed to find I had purchased a tube of fresh air. The engine and 'box on a 205 are held together with only four bolts - perhaps Peugeot were experiencing a French bolt manufacturers' strike when designing this car. By now I had joined the RAC and so had the car recovered and later cobbled it all back together again.

Cause of death.

Basically I drove this car into the ground. It broke down frequently. Various things go wrong on Peugeots which are a nightmare to repair. A handbrake cable breaks, but the remains are irreversibly embedded in the calliper. You dare not remove the calliper because the hydraulic lines are seized. You bleed another calliper and the bleed nipple shears off.

I still had this car when I moved to York and bought property. I left it in the garden for about 8 months. Then, I decided to use it on the Cossack Road Rally, I guess this was 2001. A friend drove and I navigated. This rally has a fearsome reputation and we were not doing very well. A CV joint began to fail and we retired. I drove very steadily home up the A1 with an increasing clunking noise emanating from the CV, although this finally gave out a Clumber Park. Another friend appeared with a recovery truck. Later I replaced the broken drive shaft and used the car for trips to the tip before finally breaking it up. I cleared about a ton of rubble this way; it was cheaper than hiring a skip. I now had space for storing cars and parts and discovered that re-cycling vehicles can be quite lucrative. I stripped the car for parts and later sold two sets of leather interiors and various other parts. I cut up the shell and using a borrowed box trailer removed this to the nearby scrap dealer.

10.

car: Mini 1275 GT

year/registration: 1973 M

owned by JT: 1999 - present

cost: £ 600

colour: maroon, but then black

A short history

I had to buy this car in a hurry so as to re-shell the crashed 1275 GT whilst living in Oxford. It has never been properly finished off. The shell is very poor underneath and full of filler and cardboard, and the wiring loom is pretty bad too. The MED motor is still fine, but the syncro. is about gone on the 'box. I treated myself to some Minisport 4-pot alloy callipers which fit under the 10 inch rims, and work with 8.4 inch discs machined down to about 7.9. I seem to keep this car for sentimental reasons and do not frequently use it. I have half-baked ideas to re-shell it properly, or build a historic rally car, but have never had time or been able to find a better donor shell.

11.

car: Mini 1000 City, then 1275

year/registration: 1988 F

owned by JT: 2001 - present

cost: £ 190

colour: red

affectionately know as "The red mini"

A short history

Technically I suppose this car belongs to Catherine, my wife. (I will not attempt to describe Cath's views on my approach to motoring, but suffice to say she is incredibly tolerant. I first new Cath in Oxford, where she would check my hair for fires when I was welding.)

This has been one of our most successful vehicles. I acquired it at a time when Mini prices were climbing rapidly but the dealer who sold me the car had not noticed. It had been standing for a while and needed an MOT, which fortunately was not too painful to obtain. This was a spare car / project / workhorse at times when various Peugeots were not working, i.e. frequently. We have a picture of a dining table strapped to the Mini's roof. We have driven it to the Lake District quite often, and it has a special half-sized parking space in Ambleside. The original 1000 cc motor was fine but it amused me to upgrade to a 1275 Metro engine which I found at a breaker's yard. This I upgraded slightly to run a Kent 266 cam, and it runs with a standard 'box and 3.2 diff. The head is the larger valve Metro type. The exhaust manifold is an LCB left over from some other project which defies memory, and the silencer system is a Minisport proprietary item. The inlet is the Metro item which came with the motor, cut away from the exhaust part; this is not ideal because the inlet will freeze in winter time during humid weather. I have needed to keep ahead of various bodywork problems and have replaced both the A-panels. The car is garaged which has contributed to its longevity. In many respects it is an excellent car and it goes really well. The numbers on the speedometer finish at 90 mph, but the needle can be made to go well past this and into the region at about "6 o'clock" where on an older Mini you would expect to find the fuel gauge. I discovered however, through using a friend's new-fangled GPS gadget, that the speedo. does over-read by 10 % so the indicated speeds are therefore somewhat flattering.

12.

car: Peugeot 205 1.9 GTi

year/registration: 1989 G

owned by JT: 2001(?) - 2004

cost: £ 500

colour: some kind of pretentious metallic dark green, which almost looked black.

affectionately know as "pug 2"

A short history

The first Peugeot 205 GTi had ultimately turned out to be a nightmare so the only sensible thing to do was to acquire another one. This one, some kind of half-baked limited edition thing with "injection" stickers on it, I found via a motor club

acquaintance. The owner seemed a little over-eager to get rid of it. Actually, to start with, this car went really well. The motor burnt a little too much oil, which was rather embarrassing in traffic queues when the scenery would fade away behind a grey-blue fog, but it pulled well and felt smooth enough. This car was a power steering model and so Cath was able to drive it.

In February 2002 we drove this car to Scotland to attend the wedding of some friends, being in fact their only guests. On the way home, we indulged in a minor race in the region 110 – 120 mph for a short time. Shortly after, the pug ground to a halt, just after leaving the M6 at Penrith. For no reason whatever, the car started again and ran for a further 10 miles before coming once again to a permanent halt. I was lucky enough to be able to free-wheel into a lay-by near Appleby. I could not figure out what had gone wrong. We summoned the RAC and we tried to affect repairs. Apparently, the fuel pump was not working, but it seemed to be the relay that was at fault rather than the pump itself. We were recovered home. Later, I eventually got the car running by changing the ECU.

I persevered with this car for another year or so. A special feature of Peugeots, it seems, is particularly egregious wiring looms. The car developed starter failure. I sought advice from a very helpful local auto electrician. Apparently, the low current trigger circuit for the starter solenoid (this is supposed to kick in on turning the key) actually pulls a fairly high current transient on start-up, and the effect is exacerbated as the brushes on the starter motor wear. I ought to be able to both understand and explain this better given that I now work in a branch of electronics, but I cannot. I 'cured' the wiring problem by fitting a switched cable directly between the battery and starter motor. A few words of advice to others interested in adopting this solution: use, as a minimum requirement, 13 amp mains cable (you may obtain this cost-effectively at B&Q) attached directly to the battery positive terminal and do not be tempted to add any unnecessary luxuries such as fuses. The fuel pump relay was a permanent liability and I always carried a spare as a first line of defence, and sufficient connectorised bits of wire with which to effect a by-pass as a second

Cause of death.

Another favourite Peugeot feature is the dreaded seized rear beam axle. This car had possibly left the factory in this condition. I did at some point change the axle using my only spare item, but by this point I had reached the end of my patience with this car and although I ran it for a few more months it went the same way as its predecessor and was abandoned on bricks, in the garden, before being stripped for parts. The shell went to the local scrap metal place. I had by now acquired a medium sized twin axle car trailer and so could transport the shell in its entirety. The price of scrap steel had also fortuitously risen and, augmented with an old cast-iron gas boiler, the aggregate junk heap weighed in at about £ 20.

13.

car: Peugeot 205 Diesel

year/registration: 1989 G

owned by JT: 2003

cost: £ nil

colour: possibly some washed-out-looking blue or grey type effect

A short history

A friend donated this car at a time when the other 205s I had owned were beyond hope. I needed a car which would move under its own power for a summer holiday in Scotland. My friends had driven this car into the ground and it had covered 240,000 miles. It proved to be reliable enough though. It was a 5 door model and an endearing feature was that doors would fly open at random on cornering. To prevent this, the trick was to push the door handles down, from the outside, before driving away. On at least one occasion the tailgate refused to open and our passengers had to retrieve their bags via the passenger compartment and by folding down the rear seats.

This car did about 50 miles per gallon and the motor would probably have kept running indefinitely if you did not first die of old age. I would describe its road manners as 'plodding along'. I kept it only for about 4 months.

Cause of death.

Once again we encounter a vehicle which experienced an interesting and rather drawn out doom. I have known a very small number of friends who are even lower down the motoring food chain than I am myself. I sold this car to one such person for £ 50. I had taken the trouble to get it an MOT and, considering the fuel in the tank, I probably lost money on this deal. What is really astonishing is that my friend ran this car for a further *2 years* before its ultimate demise. Following my friend's health troubles and the collapse of his business in I think 2004 I helped him out by assisting with the necessary work for a further MOT. This involved 'welding' the sills (the quotation marks imply that various glue-like products may have been employed) and a range of other very tedious jobs. This entailed many hours' work during the course of several very cold November days and evenings and was absolutely not justifiable from an economic point of view. A year henceforth the car was returned to me for whatever purposes I saw fit - the second occurrence of a 'homing car'. Of course, I stripped it and sold various parts and dragged the shell to the scrap merchant. I later sold the motor for £ 40; perhaps the buyer was planning to start a museum of some kind ! Probably, this was the only car from which I ever made a profit. The wheels are still around the back of the garage.

14.

car: Volvo 440 GLT

year/registration: 1990 H

owned by JT: 2004-2005

cost: £ 100

colour: green, bordering on blue

affectionately know as: the Volvo.

A short history

Initially, I borrowed this car from a motor club friend who lives nearby and at a time when I needed a car for a long-ish drive one weekend when the only alternative available to me was a Mini. My friend had three other cars and this one had long since been demoted to the one which took the rubbish to the tip. I sensed that he did not want the car to come back. Shortly later, after a brief exchange about our differing perceptions of the car's worth, it came into my possession for £ 100. It still had a few months' MOT and on the strength of this I was able to obtain a year's road tax.

This car had some faults: there was slack in the steering rack and the car would thus wander slightly on the motorway. I had to weld up a rattling exhaust. The rear arches were rotten and collapsing. The tyres were marginal. In many respects though this was a great car. The handling was not too bad. To my amazement I found that I had a tow-bar bracket, that fitted the Volvo without modification, under a heap of stuff in the garage.

There is something quite comforting about running a car which is more-or-less without any value. You just do not care what happens to it. You reverse it into a bollard at the supermarket. The interior lights stop working. You chip the paint when propping your bicycle against it. The local youths torch it at Halloween. It is all immaterial and you ponder philosophically upon the trappings of our consumer society.

Cause of death.

The End came in a timely and tidy manner. The 12 months' road tax had expired and I considered attempting to get the car an MOT test. At this very time however the car became unreliable and on a couple of occasions refused to start. It was obviously not worth attempting repairs so I just threw it away. Actually, I saved a small number of parts (including the alternator and all the light bulbs – I do not expect to ever have to buy an auto bulb by the way). I later sold the alloy wheels on ebay, and dragged the hulk to the scrap dealer. I could add that I now have a small collection of receipts from the scrap dealer and it is probably timely to collate these into an historic record as these might have some merit in their own right.

15.

car: Mini

year/registration: mid nineties / N ?

owned by JT: 2004 - present

cost: £ 45 (sort of...)

colour: white, then red...

affectionately know as "the autotest mini"

A short history

A friend who has been restoring an early eighties Mini 1000 discovered this car through the grapevine. It was a mid-nineties single point injection 1275, and an insurance write-off. I think it was the category of write-off which means it can never again be used on the road, and so it has not. Honest. My friend wanted the engine, 'box and injection system, including all the fuel system, so as to modernise his restoration project. I inherited the rolling shell. We went half each on the £90 the car cost. The car had suffered a shunt and the rear end had been stoved in. However, I did my best to pull this out by tying the remains to the Volvo, using some stout ropes, and driving the Volvo away. This worked better than you might have expected. I found a spare boot lid, and the overall effect is now not too bad.

This car has been my autotest project and it has now done three events with two different engines. I needed an autotest car to justify owning a trailer. The trailer however has been used more frequently for towing a small rally car belonging to one James Johns who appeared much earlier, and for whom I occasionally co-drive or act as rescuer, but more on these exploits should be deferred to some other more appropriate forum.

16.

car: Rover 216 SLi,

year/registration: 1994 M

owned by JT: 2005 - present

cost: £ 500

colour: red

affectionately know as "The Rover"

A short history

When the Volvo expired we were reduced to a choice of Minis, push bikes or the bus for transportation purposes. Another vehicle was required, so I scoured the papers and internet advertisements. I seldom found anything suitable within a 50 mile radius of home. These days, I am reluctant to spend a lot of time traipsing about to look at cars. I looked at a car on the far side of Leeds, but the people selling it were utter time wasters and so that was the best part of half a day lost.

I had a theory that the cars made by Rover in the early nineties were half decent, having driven a few hire cars or cars owned by friends in those days. At any rate, I was sure they were a sight better than the dross peddled by Ford at the time. I really wanted a 309 GTi, as this would give opportunity to re-use my hoard of Peugeot

wheels and tyres etc., but could not find one. I think my friend Alastair has bought up all the remaining 309s in North Yorkshire and most of the adjoining counties.

I ended up with this Rover because it was a car, it worked, and it was on sale just a few miles away. In many ways it is a fairly decent car, and it has been very reliable. It has a decent Honda engine and 'box and all the controls work. I can tow with it, within reason. Unfortunately it is exceedingly dull, and fairly dismal to drive on the open road. The main problem is that the handling is rubbish. It is not evil, it is just that the suspension is far too soft. I do not know what inspired Rover to make these cars this way. I really wanted a 220 GTi, but of course could not find one at the time. I have learnt to regard this car with a mild dislike and I have long-since been utterly bored with it. If it had the decency to brake down convincingly I would probably just walk away from it and forget about it. The only vaguely interesting thing that once happened was when the front brake pads expired one weekend in the Lake District. I was not too phased by this and continued the holiday through use of the handbrake alone.

17.

car: Rover 216 GTi,

year/registration: 1992 J

owned by JT: 2006 - present

cost: £ 100

colour: red

affectionately know as "The new/old Rover"

A short history

I have only very recently collected this car and cannot say very much about it. It came my way through another motor club friend, and offered an opportunity to de-modernise to a pre-catalyst era of vehicle. The handling should be radically better than the SLi, and the GTi has the twin cam Honda motor which puts out 130 bhp. It has only done 95,000 miles and so is almost new. The wings and sills are rotten however, and I have done my best to re-engineer these with skills finely honed over the years and some products more commonly associated with household DIY. I have a vague plan to make one half-decent Rover out of the two donors now available, but I think this approach can easily lead to having two broken cars sitting in your driveway.

Closing remarks.

At the time of writing, I think that totals 17 cars over a 19 year period. It is entirely possible that I have owned other cars and forgotten to include them in the above list. I have not counted cars which were borrowed, nor an additional free car (a Renault Clio) which I rescued and passed on to be a motorclub autotest car.

Having written the numbers down, it is easy enough to present a few meaningless statistics: The total purchase expenditure of these vehicles has been £ 9,595.00, which sounds like a lot, and the average of £ 564.41 per car is also now looking a bit higher than I would ideally like. In future years I hope to re-visit these pages and see if the latter figure can be driven downwards.

JT. October 2006.