

1 in a Million

MINOR 1000000

Words and photos by Craig Watson

When BMC set out to celebrate the 1,000,000th Morris Minor, the car had to be something special. When Bill and Richard McKellar set out to restore theirs, they knew it would make a good book, which it has.



When Lord Nuffield first saw a prototype of Issigonis' Morris Minor he described it as looking like a poached egg. Yet, it would go on to be the first British car to reach the magical production figure of one million. In all, around 1.6 million would be made by the time it was discontinued in 1970.

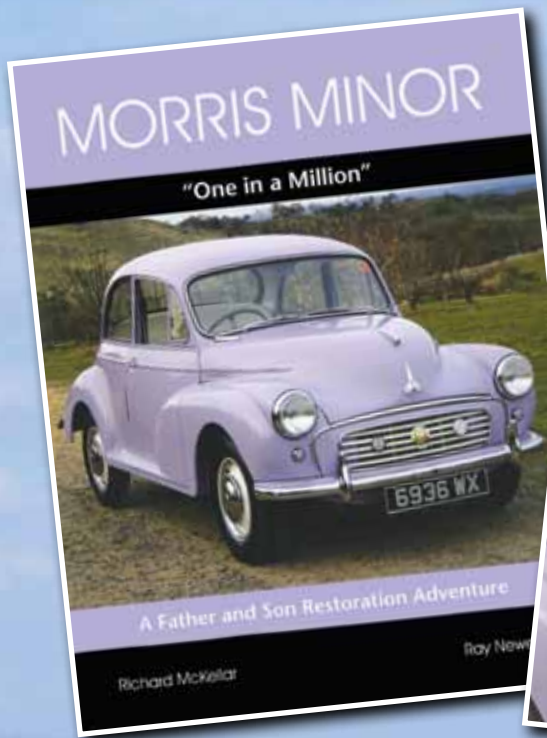
Revealed at the 1948 London Motor Show, it established Alec Issigonis as one of the

great car designers of all time. It was the right car at the right time for Morris, coming out of war production at a time when "export or die" was the catch-cry of the government, to rebuild the British economy. In all, around 50% of Minors were exported, with the peak of 80% being reached as early as 1950.

By the end of 1960 the car was on the verge of hitting the one million mark. While

this is not uncommon these days, in 1960 it was a rarity. Morris was justifiably proud of its achievement with the Minor. In order to celebrate, a special limited edition model would be released, which would become known as the Minor Million.

Mechanically, the cars were identical to the standard production Mini 1000 model, and the differences would be entirely cosmetic.



The first decision was the colour. Although the original preference had been for gold or silver, limitations of the day meant that the paint technicians could not guarantee the results for more than six months.

Publicity Department chief Jack Field had a number of Minors painted in a variety of colours, including bright orange, yellow, lime green, pink and lilac.

A group of BMC managers was invited over to look at the cars and decide on a colour. Apparently, the only they could all agree on was that orange was out of the question, and the decision was left up to Jack, who chose the lilac.

The interior was white with a mix of vinyl and leather, and contrasting black piping, while outside received a little extra chrome in the

shape of special wheel embellishers, and one-off "1000000" bonnet and boot badges.

The boot badges were simply modified 1000 badges, but each was hand-made by young engineering apprentice Keith Philpot, who had only been with the company for about a month at the time. This in part explains why some look decidedly more "hand-made" than others.



The millionth Minor - 22 December 1960.

Toward the end of 1960, a Minor was taken off the production line – chassis number 881386 – and made up as a prototype Minor Million. A total of 350 Minor Millions were made, but because the commercial vehicles, vans and utes, had a different numbering sequence, but passed down the production line with the saloons, there was no guarantee that the 350 Millions would have sequential chassis numbers.

Minors were being assembled in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Eire, Holland, India and Denmark, from CKD packs from the UK. Realistically, any of these could actually have produced the one-millionth car, and the next could have been from any other plant.

The chassis numbering is an interesting point, on another level. As was common for all Morris vehicles, the first Minor was chassis number 501, so it would seem that chassis number 1000000 would, in reality, have been the 999,500th saloon built, on top of the many thousands of commercials.

It was therefore logical to take the 350 cars for the commemorative edition from the Cowley production to give them special sequential chassis numbers. However, it is believed the car with chassis number 1000000 was indeed the one-millionth produced, and it came off the production line on 22 December 1960.

The other 349 cars were built between 13

Apparently, one Minor Million was built in Australia – a four door model that in every other way matched the two-door UK cars, and was a prize for the TV show *BP Pick-a-box*.

It is believed to have survived until about 10 years ago, when it was inadvertently sold as scrap and destroyed. If true, that is a real tragedy.

If anyone has any more information about that car, we would love to hear from you – and so would Bill and Richard.



Co-author & Minor authority, Ray Newell.

and 20 December, and numbered 1000001 to 1000349, with the prototype – chassis 881386 – being renumbered 1000330.

As an aside, and to give some relevance to the production of the time, if one million were built between about September 1948 and December 1960, this gives an average of around 6,800 per month (not withstanding that production reached its peak in 1957 to 1958) or around 300 per day. All 350 could have conceivably been built in one day, but to do so would have interrupted normal production of all models to meet orders in hand. It made sense, then, to spread the production of these cars over a week or so.

30 of the cars were built left-hand-drive, 20 of which went to North America, with the remaining 10 going to European agents.

The one-millionth Minor was used for press purposes, then donated to the National Union of Journalists to be raffled off in support of the union's Widow and Orphan Fund – a very clever way to ensure blanket media coverage. Incidentally, after a rather chequered history, that car was recently located and restored to original condition.

The other 319 right-hand-drive cars were sent to dealerships across Britain, to ensure that every dealership had at least one in stock for the official release on 4 January 1961. There were clearly not 319 Morris dealers in the UK at the time, and some dealerships had more cars than others, according to the size of the dealership and the potential market. 32 went to Stewart & Arden, the UK's biggest Morris dealership, with branches across Greater London.



Chassis number matches that on body.



1000086 before the restoration began.

As part of the publicity drive, a competition was held to find the oldest surviving Morris Minor still on the road, with the winner receiving a Minor Million in return for their old clunker. Although entries were received from across the globe, the winner was Cyril Swift from Sheffield, England, who's car turned out to be chassis 501 – the very first production Morris Minor made. The car was eventually restored and now takes pride of place in the National Motor Heritage Centre at Gaydon.

Our featured Minor Million is chassis number 1000086, built on 13 December 1960 and sold to Appleyard of Leeds on 22 December. Registered 6936WX, it spent most of its life in Yorkshire, before being retired in 1978.

It was advertised for sale in 1993, when it was bought by Victorian Minor enthusiasts, father and son, Bill and Richard McKellar. "A friend of ours saw an ad for it in the UK", Richard recalls, "and we basically bought the car sight-unseen. It was pretty cheap, but with the passage of time I've forgotten exactly how much we paid for it."

Bill and Richard's love of Minors goes back to Bill's first car, a 1955 convertible that he bought when it was only a year old and on which he lavished plenty of attention. Richard was born in 1965 and was told from the time he could listen that the car would be his when he turned 18.

Unfortunately, with a third child in the family, the need for a bigger car and a lack of funds, the Morris was sold in 1969. When Richard turned 18 he tracked the car down and bought it, eventually restoring it, with Bill's help, back to its former glory.



Bill & Richard take a break from the resto.



Interior trim is one of the key components of the Minor Million.

As often happens, that Minor led to more, with other restorations taking place – most notably a 1959 Traveller “Woodie”, which has won many concours trophies at National Minor Rallies in the ensuing 20 years or so.

By the time the Million arrived from the UK, the McKellar collection already included around a dozen Minors of various shapes and ages, including a couple of pre-War examples. We will cover more from their collection in future issues of this magazine, and will go into a lot more detail then.

When the Million arrived at Bill and wife Claire’s property in Harcourt, near Bendigo in country Victoria, it was quite rough – described by Richard as a “bitsa”. “It had a front section from another Morris Minor ...and four different coloured wheels. It had mechanical components swapped from other Morris Minors, presumably to keep it going in times of strife.”

At least mechanically it was quite strong, and was used for a few years as a “paddock bomb” to teach Richard’s two daughters to drive. Although painted light blue, there were plenty of areas where the paint had worn down to reveal the original lilac underneath.

In 1998, the 50th anniversary of the Morris Minor, Bill and Richard attended a Minor National Rally and became fired up to restore the Million. Richard had always wanted to write a book, and decided the restoration would be the perfect opportunity. The work

was thoroughly planned out, and every step photographed and noted for the book.


The restoration took about ten years work, with Richard and Bill doing as much as physically possible themselves. Because of their careful methodical routine most things went according to plan, but there was one near disaster, when it was discovered the freshly-painted panels didn’t quite line up.

Another concern was matching the original colour, which took two attempts, aided by samples from behind the glove boxes.

The full story of the restoration, and the complete history of the Minor Millions, is vividly detailed in the book; Morris Minor – One in a Million, which was written by Richard in association with British Morris Minor authority Ray Newell. A full review of the book can be found on p8, and we have it available for sale on p79.

The car now takes pride of place in the McKellar collection, and has been the subject of many newspaper and magazine articles. For more information on the collection and the book check out their dedicated website: www.morrisminorgarage.com

Richard said one piece of advice he can share is that if you intend taking on any restoration, the first thing you should do is join an appropriate car club, where at the very least you will find like-minded people.

We couldn’t agree more. 



New-old-stock speedo was a lucky find.



Interior from Newton Commercial in UK.



Door cards featured leather door-pull strap.



1000000 badges were hand-made.



1961 was the last year of semaphores.



Millions came with chrome wheel trims.



Mechanically same as regular Minor 1000.