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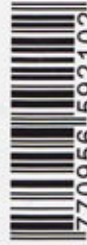
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COMMERCIAL VEHICLES

'British to the Backbone'



Bob Jerry talks to Alan Barnes about the reasons that led to his decision to base his father's old 1933 Morris Commercial at Beamish Museum as a working exhibit.

Period piece: the 1933 Morris at Beamish Museum.



The Morris leaves Bob Jerry's garage in April 2011 for the final time for a new life at Beamish.



Beamish director Richard Evans with the 30cwt lorry.



At Beamish loco yard, October 2011.

For Bob Jerry and his family, this year marked the end of an era when they finally decided to say goodbye to the 1933 Morris Commercial 30cwt lorry which they had owned since new. However, for the lovingly restored lorry itself, as one era ended another chapter in its eventful life was just beginning, as this charming vehicle now has a new home at the Beamish Museum.

For a vehicle with its roots firmly in the North East of England, it is highly appropriate that the Morris will be on display at Beamish, although transport curator Paul Jarman is determined that the lorry will not just be a static exhibit. Indeed, during the first few months following its arrival at the museum, Paul has already pressed the lorry into service as his 'curator's runabout'. The Morris has also ventured somewhat further afield and took part in this year's Beamish Reliability Trial which was held on June 20.

This was the 40th running of this 'jaunt' around the rugged countryside of Co Durham and North Yorkshire and the difficult terrain and hill roads would provide a stern test even for modern vehicles, let alone a lorry built 78 years ago.

As Paul explained: "Around 150 vintage vehicles, mostly cars and motorcycles, took part this year, leaving Beamish at staged times and completing a large figure of eight taking us as far south as Hawes before heading back to Beamish for a late afternoon finish. This was my first run driving the 1933 Morris Commercial with Beamish director Richard Evans as co-driver. Accompanying us were Ian Bean and Jim Pattinson who took the 1927 AJS 350 motorcycle over the route. As support we had Brian Williams and Andy Martin following us with the museum's Transit van – a prudent step in light of what happened during the run.



Registered in Newcastle 78 years ago, the Morris is powered by 3-litre flat-6 petrol engine.



'British to the Backbone' – the lovely enamelled Morris Commercial badge and RAC radiator cap.



This was the first internal combustion vehicle that Bob's father bought.



The interior is plain and functional.



Refuelling at Bainbridge while on the Reliability Trial in June 2011.

"The route took us into the 'high country' at Tan Hill but by this time the Morris had developed a rather worrying wheel wobble. Brian, fully equipped to deal with such a situation, had the lorry lifted, wheel off, wheel bearing problem identified and all back together and we were back on the road within 10 minutes. The Morris climbs hills superbly although the brakes are of the period and reliance has to be placed on the gears when descending – however the old lorry took the trip in its stride. In fact both our veterans (the 78-year-old Morris and the 84-year-old AJS) distinguished themselves on the day and successfully completed the whole route."

While this may have been Paul's first trial with the Morris, the lorry had been there before and had taken part in the first of these events which was held in the 1970s. As Bob Jerry told me: "That was after the Morris had been refurbished and returned to running condition following a very lengthy period in storage. The Morris had been retired in 1947 and was laid up in the garage until 1967, the year my father died. The Morris had spent 20 years raised up on four oak barrels to keep its wheels off the ground and the family was now facing the choice of either keeping the lorry or selling it."

The lorry was bought new in 1933 by Bob's father, John Hansel Gerry, a master cooper with a business in South Shields. This was the first motor vehicle which the business had acquired and previously it had relied on the use of a horse and cart to deliver barrels around the area. The Morris, powered by 3-litre flat-6 petrol engine, was registered in Newcastle as YG 5825 and had been fitted with a flatbed body with side boards. The lorry remained in use until 1947 when it was replaced by a new Austin Lodestar and upon its retirement was taken off the road and placed in store.

Bob continued: "The logbook still only shows three names, my father, my brother Archibald, who was sadly killed in the war, and me, and the Morris itself is pretty much in original condition. When it came out of 'retirement' I spent a couple of years carrying out some refurbishment work which included a complete overhaul of the steering system and the brakes. The front brakes are hydraulic while the rear brakes are cable operated, not an ideal system and one which can make going downhill rather interesting! A lot of sediment had accumulated in the bottom of the radiator during its lay-up and this was completely cleaned out while the engine was also given a thorough clean. >



John Hansel Gerry was a master cooper with a business in South Shields.



The former North East-based lorry fits in well at Beamish as a 'runabout' around the site for the transport curator.

"Being in the garage had protected the lorry from the weather and the cab and the body were in pretty good condition although the paintwork was looking a little shabby. To reduce weight I removed the wooden side boards and run it as a flatbed. Once the work on the engine and the mechanics was completed I arranged for the vehicle to be professionally repainted and signwritten. The colour and lettering is the same as the vehicle carried in 1933 and all the work was finally completed in 1970.

"For the next 20 years or so I took the Morris to rallies and shows, although by 1990 the attraction of regularly attending these events was beginning to wear off and I decided that the lorry would once again retire to the garage. However, during this time the lorry was regularly started and given a run out every couple of weeks and it continued to prove to be a reliable performer.

"A few years ago the 'rally and restoration bug' bit again and my enthusiasm for vehicle restoration and visiting rallies returned. The Morris was brought out of hibernation and I decided that she deserved a thorough overhaul. This time the engine was stripped right down and I fitted new valves and pistons and a new water pump. The old radiator which had always been a little bit suspect was replaced and a new battery was also fitted. This work was carried out over the winter of 2008-2009 and was rounded off with a nice new professional paint job complete with signwriting, again in the original 1933 colour and style.

"Following a few health problems I had to decide what the future held for the 'family Morris'. My own children, now grown up, had showed no interest in it and I didn't really want to sell part of my heritage to a complete stranger.

"Following discussions with Paul at



A testing route on the Reliability Trial.

Beamish Museum it became clear that the museum would welcome the Morris to its collection. The museum also agreed that the lorry would not be kept as a static exhibit but would be maintained in running condition and used as often as possible. The Morris would also be kept in the J H Jerry & Sons livery while at Beamish and if at any time the museum wished to dispose of the vehicle it would be offered to members of the Jerry family who would have first refusal.

"The lorry was taken to Beamish in April 2011 and almost immediately I began to regret my decision. Every time I went to the garage there was a large empty space where the Morris had stood all those years. However this feeling of regret was tempered by the many local people who came up to me in the following weeks and months telling me that they had seen my

old lorry while visiting Beamish and that their children had loved having their picture taken with a lorry from South Shields. The old lorry had given me years of enjoyment when out and about and now it was bringing enjoyment to a new generation.

"Paul has also kindly said that I can visit Beamish at any time and take her for a spin – an invitation that I gratefully accepted during the recent Power of the Past event held at the museum. I was able to take my own grandchildren to see the Morris in its new surroundings and I must say that it does look better running around the museum than it did tucked away in a dark garage."

Our thanks to Bob Jerry, Paul Jarman and Beamish Museum for their help and for allowing the use of their photographs.

For details of events and opening times at Beamish Museum visit www.beamish.org.uk ♦
Photos: Beamish Museum / Alan Barnes.



On top of the world: parked at Tan Hill.



Apart from a wheel bearing problem, which was swiftly sorted, the Morris gave a good account of herself on the day of the trial.



A formal portrait for the trial participants.



Blending in at the Power of the Past event at Beamish in September 2011.