

## An Early van from Malta – Nigel Woodford

In 2014 I decided to buy an early Series 2 Morris Minor Van. I scoured the internet, looking for a decent, restored, example. After several weeks looking, I saw an advert on ebay for an early van. Unfortunately it was located in Malta and the condition was obviously 'ready for restoration.' However, the roof and guttering were in good order. I have restored vehicles before and was not daunted by the work ahead although the rebuild was unlikely to be trivial as I was not getting any younger! The van was not a runner and the photos showed several areas of extensive rust. The engine was a replacement 948cc which lacked compression and was covered in leaking engine oil. I bought the van and negotiated for it to be transported back to my address as part of the deal.



Loading at Mosta



Heading for docks in Malta



Arriving at my home

The seller kept his end of the deal and as agreed the van turned up in my drive. Now I had to uncover the true extent of the work required. After tilting the van in my drive I decided that the body and chassis would need to be separated, and all repairs made good before painting. Rather than attempting to do all of the work myself, I decided to get help in the areas where I felt others could do the job better. This was clearly the welding and paint spraying. My welding is agricultural and I don't have the facilities to paint it safely in two pack. JB Motors at Cromhall took on the job.

The next decision was whether to go for modern seats or get the original seats refurbished. The more expensive option was to go for original seats. Newton Commercials re-upholstered the seats and made a lovely job of them in a similar brown finish – I also bought new van carpets from them.



Exposed springs for easy access



The seats were a little tired



Seat upholstered by Newton

Having negotiated a fixed price for the bodywork from JB Motors, I began stripping the van. I placed each item in a clear plastic bag to be restored and painted over the winter(s). It was nearly a year before the bodywork was welded.



Cab lifted off by crane



Engine bay stripped



Cargo box being welded

Whilst this was going on I had the chassis at home – I cut out the rust with an angle grinder, had the chassis sand blasted and put in primer. I fabricated plates to fit the many damaged areas. I paid a professional welder to repair the chassis whilst strengthening the torsion bar areas and fitting new bump stops. I coated the chassis & the rear axle with 'Rust-Beater' and finally coated both with smooth Hammerite.



Rigged steering - rusty chassis



Sand blasted and in primer



Chassis welded & painted

The van was now in the paint shop being prepared for spraying. The fixed cost paint job was dependent on it being an 'ambulance job' whereby it would fit around their normal workload. This delayed the build again but progress was made and with each visit I could see the van coming back to it's former glory. JB Motors kept all of their promises and the paint finish exceeded my expectations.

The cab and cargo tub were prepared and sprayed separately. I purchased the top half of a scrapped van sides. These were cut and glue/spot welded in place where the side windows used to be. Once in primer I was unable to detect the repair either from the outside or from within.



Cab stripped to bare metal



Cargo box with filled panels



Painted Cab

The body was in paint and ready to be moved home, so once the restored rear axle was fitted to the chassis with new springs & poly bushes, I made a simple towing bar attachment which I fixed through the suspension holes in the chassis. Crude, hardboard mudguards were fitted and I was set to tow the chassis and collect the body.

Four guys lifted the body onto the chassis and it was located on thin rubber pads. All was bolted together. The doors and bonnet were fitted and the van was towed home on its trailer chassis.



Now on chassis



Bare Cargo box – old wheels



Grill & doors on – home we go



Once at home it was reversed onto my ramp, ready for assembly. I had worked over two winters to create a stream of restored parts to put back on the van. These were placed in new plastic bags once painted and stored in an empty shed. The engine was past saving, as was the gearbox. I had already replaced the rear axle and decided to steer away from the original 803cc drive-train, to make the van safe and drive-able in modern traffic. Hard decisions had to be made and I decided to use 8" drum brakes on the front rather than discs or the original 7" drums. In order to ensure compatibility I opted for the 1098cc engine, gearbox and axle. I did however decide to retain the long gear stick as it embodies the character of the van. As time passed the pile of restored items in the shed grew – whereas the pile of parts yet to restore shrank. Several items were declared beyond economical repair – especially as the 'chewing gum and string' approach to maintenance in Malta was more than evident.

Typically life got in the way. My mother, who I had cared for over a 10 year period, passed away aged 93. Dealing with her death and probate took its toll on the project. When clearing my parents home I discovered a photograph of my father which was taken in the mid 1950's. At that time he worked as a window cleaner in Southampton. In the photo he was proudly standing in front of his 1953 Van. Serendipity that I bought and was restoring an almost identical van? I like to think that as a small child I formed a lingering memory of my dad's van which we used at weekends for transport.

