

The Rebirth of Alexander Demonstrator and International Racer: 777 EBH

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Like so many 'good ideas', the one to buy and restore an early Frog Eye began in a pub with a few close mates. Having owned an MGB and MGC for a number of years, the temptation to take on a new project and restore a car with real period history was too much. And so it was, just over 6 years ago, that several phone calls later, I drove to Colmworth in Bedfordshire to meet well known marque expert, Paul Woolmer who had the remains of 777 EBH in his shed, storing it for the then owner, Christophe Wilmart. A deal was struck and we agreed that Paul Woolmer, with assistance from business partner, Paul Webb would through their firm, Colmworth Classics, restore what was believed to be a unique, very early shell and period conversion. The image of the car, as found in a garden in Buckinghamshire, by Spridget and Marcos enthusiast, Maarten Krikken, was saddening to say the least. A challenge was on!



Figure 1 Abandoned after a period in 70s mod sports racing

The car is an original home market, right hand drive Austin Healey Sprite Mk1. It was manufactured before the launch date of 20th May 1958, making it a very early example (AN5/813). It was subsequently modified for competition purposes by the first owners, Alexander Engineering Co. Ltd of Haddenham, Buckinghamshire with the addition of a uniquely styled steel coupe roof and lightweight bonnet. Only two of these conversions are known to have been produced and 777 EBH is the only one known to have survived. An article by Alexander development engineer, the late Ted Martin, in the June 1959 edition of *Sporting Motorist*, tells of the conversion work undertaken on the back of considerable experience with the A35 and Minor 1000. Intensive testing was undertaken in the Swiss Alps and German autobahn giving 'very satisfactory' results and subsequently an impressive list of competition successes. Ted

comments, with pride, that not a single engine failure was reported in six months.

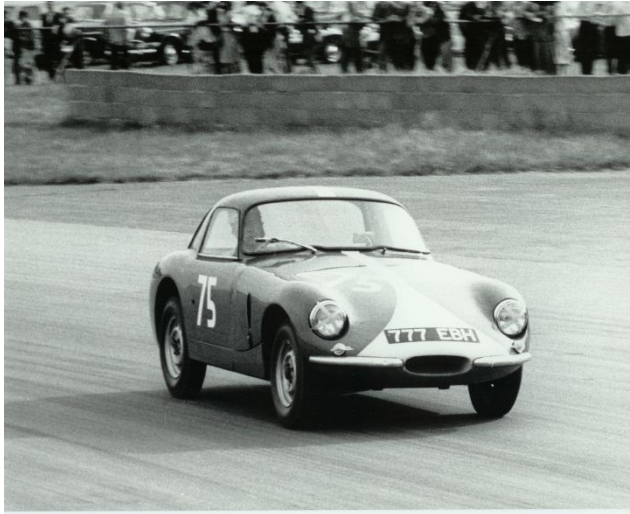


Figure 2 Thought to be Silverstone circa 1963

Typically driven by well-known and gifted Alexander driver, Geoff Williamson, 777 EBH is accredited with several club and international event successes. Some of the highlights include a creditable showing in the International Trophy meet at Silverstone on 2 May 1959, won by one Stirling Moss in an Aston, with Salvadori second in a Jag and Colin Chapman taking the final podium position. Other drivers participating included Graham Hill and John Sprinzel both of course driving for Team Speedwell and legendary Aussie racer, Jack Brabham is shown on the entry list although he appears not to have started.

Autosport reported on 16 October 1959, that 'driving an Alexander modified Sprite, Geoff Williamson won the 1,000c class in the GT race at the Coupe de Salon at Montlhéry. His car was fitted with the engine used in the A40 with which he competed in the Tour de France. Unfortunately, a shunt eliminated him in the event when he was lying in sixth overall.

Aside a competitive career, the car was also used as the company demonstrator to show Alexander's tuning products to the press and potential customers. The car appeared in a number of magazine articles.

The last six years have seen the usual trials and tribulations of a major restoration project. From the discovery stuck in the bushes, to recovery and particle blasting, the following early photos give a feel for the extent of the job undertaken:



Figure 3 recovered to Maidenhead initially



Figure 4 Determined to retain and restore the very early chassis

But, what a task! However, many conversations with fellow enthusiasts reassured me that it would be worth it and, as I neared the end earlier this year, they smiled, knowingly, saying that six years was actually pretty good going and they were reminded of their own pet projects of six, ten or more years, that still needed some attention!

Due to pressure of work and with the early shell restoration complete and a lot of the engine and running gear work taking shape, full time completion of the project passed from Paul Woolmer to Paul Webb and his assistant, Wes Attew, in December 2011. A huge amount of effort, skilled workmanship and meticulous attention to detail saw the project to completion in late April 2012 with a wet and freezing shake down session in north Bedfordshire. Squeezing into the somewhat

cramped cockpit not perhaps designed for someone over 6feet tall, and rather overwhelmed by the whole experience, the car was fine aside a few minor electrical and ignition issues that were quickly resolved. Paul Woolmer took to the wheel and soon had the car slipping and sliding but dancing under his skilful car control and reported a good feel and balance not dissimilar to his own well known 46 BXN.

The Julius Thurgood organised HRDC event at Snetterton beckoned some two days later and the car truly glistened in the dry, almost sunny conditions of the famous Norfolk track. Whilst never troubling the front runners, I got some miles in the car which performed really well, 'straight out of the box'. And it certainly turned heads in the paddock, looking a million dollars in its Alexander livery and finished to near concours standard by Paul Webb and Wes. It is certainly a tribute to the workmanship of Colmworth Classics for which I am truly grateful. They are great guys too and always patient and willing to go that extra yard to help.



Figure 5 In the paddock at Snetterton



Figure 6 Performing pretty well - in amateur hands

EBH has outings planned for Brands before travelling overseas for the summer event at Spa. The car is a complete joy and a privilege to own. It is so satisfying to have been able to help bring this small part of motoring history back to life to hopefully never slide back into the sorry disrepair that it was when I began this adventure.

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