

ISETTA GAZETTE

SPRING EDITION 2020



The Isetta Owners Club of Great Britain Ltd.

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Editors Bit

I have treated you all to 20 pages this time but don't get complacent, I have absolutely nothing going forward for the summer edition. If you want a gazette next time put pen to paper or save some of this gazette until June. As you should know, I am also the membership secretary and I remind members several times to pay before the latest deadline of 31st January or get disabled from using the spares service. I still get a few complaints that members can't renew their membership way into February using the online spares system. I can't win can I?

Anyway, a new rally year is about to start and I am looking forward to getting lots of test miles on my latest restoration. I only managed about 10 miles before I had to put it to bed for the winter. It is blocked in by my motorhome which is under it's covers until 1st April.

If it all shakes down OK I would like to take it to North Wales where there is a 'Drive it Day' rally in late April, so fingers crossed.

Ian Parris



Chairman's Chat

Well here we are the start of the show and rally planning, getting our cars serviced and ready. I still haven't confirmed my electrics burnout has been sorted but that is the next job on my list if I can hide the other list monitored by my wife. Hope everyone had a good Christmas and New Year I know it was a week or two off for Lee with new spares but he has been unimaginably busy for the last two months with record orders so please be patient if your order is not sent out by return. Mike is still working hard on replica spares and is currently looking at rear bumper brackets and RHD door catch plate... if anyone can help him out with a set of brackets or door catch to use a pattern, I know he would be grateful.

Nothing else to report at the moment but watch out for offer on spares ordering hopefully coming soon

Chris Skepper

3 tips to save you pulling out your hair and foul language

1. A simple spanner conversion to help with the removal of a carburettor.
Use a small number 13 and one that is as thin as possible then cut off the end and weld back on at right angles. This will allow you to access the two nuts more easily.



2. Before removing the donuts from the drive to enable easy replacement tie up with cable ties as tight as possible this will help keep the shape for refitting.



3. When re-aligning the clutch plate to centre it use a pair of callipers, measure the four points North, South, East and West set the same distance between all four points then tighten the thrust ring. The gear box will slide onto the engine with ease.



Simple ideas you may already do something similar but in my case it is helping save what little hair I have left.

Brian Chadwick

Going Home in 292 MHN by Yvonne Jaques

I didn't think there would be a round two when I was ready to leave the stand at NEC in November, but driving from the parked trailer into the NEC on setting up day I thought the brakes seemed a bit soft. Usually I consider them to be over engineered for the Isetta, and worry that there is always good possibility that whilst you as the driver have the steering wheel to hang onto, the passenger could well be propelled forward pretty seriously if you slammed on the brakes a bit smartish.

So... at the end of the show I warned Ray and Jenny Dilkes that I would be following them pretty cautiously back for our final nightie night on the campsite before loading up and heading South again on the following day. I was sure if I kept my wits about me, watched Ray's Heinkel rear lights all the time, kept the speed down, kept in the right gear, and made sure I could get at the hand brake if the need arose, I would live to tell the tale. As long as I watched all the other idiots on the road home like a hawk, and generally kept out of danger there was a fair chance I would arrive back at the campsite in one piece. Musing at the situation, I thought there might be a leak in the brake fluid somewhere and that was the cause of my troubles, but 7pm on a dark Sunday night is not the time to start looking.

I arranged with Derek Cole to A frame the car over to his place because he now had a spare garage where the car could be dealt with and left on site. I thought it would just be checking the brake fluid. HE thought he'd start by taking the wheel off and look and the brake drums and pads. Hmm. Good job he did. Inside the drums there was a shed load of dirt and what looked like oil or grease lining them and caked on the inside, and it had infiltrated the brake pads too. We had no idea where it had come from, there was plenty of grease there but no sign of any oil leaks anywhere. We even wondered if the axle grease had become warm and leaked out somehow. One of mysteries I suppose.

We began by trying to adjust the snails – well that was the plan – but even Derek had no spanner small enough and strong enough to fit the rear adjusting shank and the only option was to clamp a small pair of mole grips on the shanks which we managed turn – eventually. The whole assembly including the back plate was removed from the axle and at last we could get a look at the brake seals and I think we were both surprised at what we found. The seals were encapsulated in metal shrouds which looked as though someone had tried to extract the felt seal with a fair amount of force. The nuts holding everything together were well and truly rusted on. What shocked me was the felt seals that looked as though they had come out of the ark. Bearing in mind one of the rubber seals was also missing, I'm amazed that the brakes worked at all. Getting out the bushes and replacing them was soon achieved on an excellent 30 tonne press. However, it was clear the last one had been hammered in, that was obvious from the surface damage.

Now came the time to buy the spares we would need, so I contacted Lee and asked him what we would need. I put an order together and Lee sent all the bits we would need to repair the whole thing, within a few days. However, he politely pointed that we might have missed one or two things so I helpfully suggested that they send everything they thought we would need to replace everything but the back plate. Mercifully the new snail adjusting shanks were a decent size and robust enough to get a decent spanner on the back. Sensibly, Derek finished the job without any help from me, and bled the system with the help of Ken Bell. A preliminary trial run round the block revealed that the brakes were now different but very adequate and subject to some minor adjustment when they had had time to bed in, would be good to go. After the New Year I will take the old girl round the block several times to be sure it's pulling up well and not pulling to one side or the other. As a relatively new owner it's all still a bit of a mystery to me, but I am very impressed indeed with the spares department, I ordered the parts on the Monday night, they were picked and packed on Tuesday, dispatched on Wednesday and arrived on my doorstep on Friday morning. That's excellent service, and beats some of the other car clubs to which I belong into a cocked hat.

As a recent member to the I.O.C. I thought that I would introduce my car.

After thoroughly enjoying rebuilding a Mk E Bond tourer and a Mk G Bond estate and running them for many years since 1989, I met a local-ish chap around 1996 whom we, the rest of the micro-noughts lovingly called him "Revin" Kevin. Kevin was a Micro Maniacs member and he used to arrive at camping rallies in this Isetta fully loaded up with a disproportionate amount of camping gear no matter how far away the venue was from Leeds, sometimes driving through the night, it did not have a rear rack back then, some guy. The only persons I have ever known that could get more stuff in and on an Isetta are Steve and Jackie Pepper. Three years later while the Micro Maniacs were holding a rally at the Holme on Spalding Moor site called Major Bridge Park he mentioned that he reluctantly needed to sell his beloved Isetta. *Mmmm light bulb moment methinks.* After a few beers we struck a deal



The car seen here during the camping years doing a 120 mile round trip to site

A week or so after the deal was struck I slowly wobbled and panicked my way home, my trailer was not able to carry a 4 wheel Isetta before being converted hence driving it. I did not know at the time just how bad the steering and brakes could get on an Isetta. That was just the beginning of a year-long learning curve and getting to know all the foibles that came to bite me along the way. Luckily I still had my Mk G Bond to use during the renovation of the Isetta.

I repaired the steering bushes and links and replaced the entire braking system along with a new exhaust and gear selector joints the list goes on, as it does. Being an electrician the wiring was not a problem. Everything on the car was shot and bodged even the front wheels had been turned inside out to make it look sporty; all this did was to crack the wheels from one stud hole to the other.

The late great Allen Forster rebuilt 3 engines for me as I had bought all sorts of engine related stuff enough for 3 engines and then some. One of which was fitted 2 years after I bought the car.

Luckily all the bodywork including the floor and wings have never seen a welding machine as at some time in its life it has had several layers of green Hammerite paint and grease applied throughout underneath, so apart from some lads from the local pub adjacent to where Revin Kevin lived who decided to roll the car over one night the car was in good nick, all sorted 18 years ago.



I now have had GSV 820 for 18 years a dark red 4 wheeler R/H drive car and the car has travelled the UK to long distance rallies mostly on the back of my trailer but also I have driven the car for about 21,000 which includes rally miles, or should I say rally smiles.

After this year's season has finished the car will be parked up in my garage for the best part of 6 months and suffer its annual maintenance tinkering.

Ray Glendinning rally coordinator for the Micro Maniacs



Last weekend there was a Classic Cars and Motorbikes exhibition in Aveiro (Portugal) .

We manage to have a small area there

gathering 8 Isettas! Never seen before in Portugal (?) Of course, that mine was there, is the Yellow one (three wheeler).

Paulo Couto

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

August 30th Ormskirk Motor Fest in Ormskirk West Lancashire. For information go to <https://ormskirkmotorfest.com/about/>
To register go to <https://ormskirkmotorfest.com/registrations/register/>

Messerschmitt Owners' Club International Rally 2020 To be held at John Ruskin School, Coniston, Cumbria, LA21 8EW **30th July - 2nd August 2020**
Isettas are more than welcome to attend. www.mocrally2020.weebly.com

National Microcar Rally 2020 Photo Competition

The Messerschmitt Enthusiasts Club have kindly offered to help sponsor a photographic competition for a calendar to commemorate the National this year and will be included in the Rally pack. We need as many good quality photographs of as many different models of Microcar as possible. Send to alisonmccarthy264@gmail.com

Wings & Wheels Weekend Event 15th & 16th August 2020 at Wolverhampton Halfpenny Green Airfield, Bobbington near Stourbridge, DY7 5DY.
Booking forms are now available at www.halfpennygreenevents.co.uk on a first come first served basis.

The Club is pleased to welcome:-

Andrew Steeves	Canada	David Bell	Newcastle
Derek Woods	Preston	Rodger Bycroft	USA
Marek Sudomirski	Northampton	David Leach	Weymouth
Sammy Gauci	Aberdeenshire	Paul Denyer	Canada
Simon Delia	Malta	Aimee Waterworth	Bolton
Michael Robbins	Jaywick	Karl Kleeman	USA
Luis De Freitas	Surrey	Nick Plowright	Winchester
Paul Watson	London	Soren Kusk Nielsen	Denmark
Robert Champlin	USA	Corin Mellor	Sheffield

New Members since the last Gazette

To advertise your items for sale or want adds etc. please email the editor at isetta@ianparris.com

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My Restoration by Richard Bulkley

After finishing my Messerschmitt KR200 restoration I was looking for a fresh challenge and decided that an Isetta restoration would make an enjoyable project due to the excellent spare parts situation. However, since I already had a 3-wheel microcar I really wanted to find a 4-wheel Isetta.



I spent ages looking at various websites and simply couldn't find a project in the UK or one that I felt would be worth bringing back from Europe. I then came up with the idea of joining the UK Isetta club and seeing if I could find a project through the club. So, having joined the club I emailed Ian Parris saying that I was looking for a project. A week later I had an email from Ian with details of a 3-wheel project in Cornwall. I politely declined this project and was amazed a week later when I had a second email from Ian with details of a very early 4-wheel 250cc project attached. Even better this project was only 40 miles away!

Lee Turnham from the UK Isetta club agreed to meet me near the car's location and we then made our way to a very large house nearby where the Isetta had lived since its original purchase in 1955! The car's story was an unusual one. It had been bought from the UK Isetta distributor by a doctor in 1955 who also then bought a 300cc later car. He had enjoyed both cars but at some point the 300cc engine had ended up in the early car and the later car had been scrapped. Later on he passed away and the early 250cc car was bequeathed to this caretaker who lived in a tied cottage on the same site. Fast forward a few more years and the caretaker had passed away, the car was a wreck and the widow was moving, hence the car was available. Lee and I spend time examining the 250cc car, the stock of spare 300cc parts and I decided that the mass of rusty parts and the car would make a great project so I agreed to pay the asking price on the spot. At this point my own mother passed away and we were still in the middle of a house extension project so Malcolm Thomas kindly stepped in and offered to help recover the car and store it for a few weeks whilst life settled down and I could get the car back to my house.

It took me around 9 months to summon up the energy to remove the body from the chassis (again with Malcolm's kind help and muscles) and then the restoration started in earnest. The body went away to be shot-blasted and came back only requiring a new floor. The car had probably not been on the road since around 1980 as it only had a buff log book and all those years off the road and in a barn had probably saved it. After shot-blasting it was clear that the body was in great condition and only a new floor and some repairs to the bottom of the door were required. I chose to paint the car Reseda Green as the original colour was Beige which I personally didn't like. Reseda Green is a striking colour which really suits the car.





Whilst the body was away being done I stripped the chassis. The 300cc engine which came with the car was sold and a new 250cc unit built in Germany. I then posted the gearbox to Germany so this could be rebuilt as well. Whilst the rear suspension is quite simple the front suspension proved to be the complete opposite and quite a challenge given that parts are only available from one German supplier and one side was fitted with a later 300cc brake backplate. The chassis was also shot-blasted and powder-coated before being slowly but steadily refitted with hubs, brakes, suspension, cables, pipes

etc. Mike Ayriss kindly dismantled, vapour-blasted and the rebuilt the rear transmission. Once the rear transmission was back in the chassis the rebuilt engine/gearbox was fitted and I had a chassis ready to accept the body.

Malcolm and his wife Sheila came to the rescue again and helped lift the body back onto the chassis. Once the body was on some of the most difficult challenges became apparent – fitting the front quarter 'triangle' windows, the side windows and the front windscreen. The triangle windows in particular are incredibly hard to get right and you can see why BMW simplified the design after the first six months! Their workforce must have been ready to go strike! An aluminium rear bumper was sourced in the US and new front quarter bumpers/brackets handmade based on originals lent to me by Malcolm Thomas. The door and side cards were cut at home from millboard and then these and the seat professionally covered by a local trim shop. The green tartan material was sourced in Germany. Once the seat was in the car could be road-tested, again by Malcolm who judged the car to be road-worthy! Finally the car went to the trimmers to have the sunroof made to fit the car. Just when I thought I was done the last challenge emerged – fitting the rear



window. This final job involved 3 pairs of hands, 3 hours and much cursing. However, it all seemed worthwhile once the finished car could be admired from a distance. So many thanks to the people and firms that made bringing this Isetta back from the dead possible. Ian Parris, Lee Turnham, Malcolm Thomas, Sheila Thomas, my wife, the UK Isetta club and the German Isetta parts suppliers (Isetta Service and Oldtimer Teile).

1961 BMW Isetta 300 – BMW Lays An Egg



On a bright and beautiful Saturday morning last month, Jim Klein and I were on our way to the Toyota Megaweb museum by way of an elevated train. He was keen to point out an Alfa Romeo he had spied in one of the surrounding building car parks when we rode past a gigantic BMW / Mini dealership. Amongst the many modern machines gathered there, I thought I saw a distinctly un-modern ovoid shape. Our stop was next, so I convinced Jim to walk in the opposite direction of our stated goal to investigate.

That's how we happened upon this relatively rare British-made BMW Isetta 300. The tell-tale sign of its true origin – aside from the RHD steering – is its **three wheels**. All other Isettias, be they made by BMW or others, had four wheels. Some British-made ones had four wheels too, but those were made for export, mostly. The three-wheel tax loophole made the four-wheeled version quite superfluous in the UK. It couldn't have been that good for the car's stability, but some people will put up with anything to save a buck (or, in this case, a quid)...



The Iso original, made from 1953 to 1956

The story of the Isetta is rooted in the inventiveness of an Italian firm and the desperation of a German one. In the late '40s, Isothermos CEO Renzo Rivolta got his firm involved in the latest automotive craze, which was scooters. He soon figured that a four-wheeled version might be an easy sell, provided he could make the product compact and modern enough. Rivolta hired aeronautic engineers Pierluigi Raggi and Ermenegildo Preti to design a completely novel concept, the Isetta.

The Italian Isetta was launched at the 1953 Turin Motor Show and made quite an impression. It did not, however, meet much success on its native market, where Fiat reigned supreme. Rivolta only managed to make a few thousand, including a pickup version, until Iso production stopped in 1956. He soon realized that recouping his investment would entail foreign licensing deals.



Enter beleaguered Bavarian bike-maker BMW, whose financial health was not at its peak by the mid-'50s. **BMW's cars were too big for the times**, so they were very keen on introducing an economy model, which could use a BMW motorcycle engine, to compete with the dozens of microcars that buzzed around German and European towns in the '50s.



1956 US advert helpfully taught folks how to mispronounce I-talian names...

The idea had merit and the Isetta fit the bill. Production of the 12hp BMW Isetta 250 started in 1955 and sales were quite satisfactory, though they improved even more once German legislation enabled BMW to raise the 1-cyl. engine's displacement to 300cc in 1956, which edged the hp count to 13.

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There was another Isetta at this Tokyo BMW dealer: a two-tone German-made late '50s example

But the UK did, because the licensee, Isetta of Great Britain, Ltd., got their kits straight from Munich. The Southern Locomotive Works in Brighton made a deal with BMW to manufacture the Isetta under BMW's name in Britain and provided factory space for this purpose in the English resort town. Production started in April 1957. BMW sent engines, transmissions and body panels to Brighton; tyres, electrical gear, brakes, suspension and other small bits and pieces were sourced in the UK.

Later that year, BMW engineered a completely different shell for the Isetta that gave the car a sort of pseudo-hardtop appearance. This enabled the installation of sliding windows – a definite progress compared to the older design's goldfish-bowl. Other Isetta licensees, such as Velam in France or Romi in Brazil, did not get the benefit of BMW's superior design.

EQUIPMENT

- 40 Miles to a Gallon
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- 7½ Feet of Thrill-Packed Driving
- 80 Full Miles on a Gallon of Gas
- 90 Full Miles on a Gallon of Gas
- 100 Full Miles on a Gallon of Gas
- 110 Full Miles on a Gallon of Gas
- 120 Full Miles on a Gallon of Gas
- 130 Full Miles on a Gallon of Gas
- 140 Full Miles on a Gallon of Gas
- 150 Full Miles on a Gallon of Gas
- 160 Full Miles on a Gallon of Gas
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- 260 Full Miles on a Gallon of Gas
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1957 British brochure excerpt



Compare and contrast: the interior of a German-made BMW Isetta and of a British-built one

The British Isetta lost a wheel in 1958 and sales finally took off. BMW were in danger of sinking without a trace, and but for their little bubble car to buoy up the company's market presence, they would have. After the infamous Quandt buy-out in 1959, the Bavarian firm found its footing again and started getting rid of the many dead-end product lines it had accumulated throughout the '50s, such as the 600, a kind of stretched Isetta four-seater that went nowhere, commercially speaking.

The bubble hadn't burst yet on the Isetta, though. It soldiered on until 1962 in West Germany and for about a year longer in Sussex, as the British side of the JV was bought out by BMW and production was moved to a different part of town. The Isetta egg-speriment had been a success: over 135,000 were made in Bavaria and another 25,000 were assembled in England. By comparison, none of the French, Italian, Spanish or Brazilian Isetta variants ever broke the 10,000 unit mark.



How small is the Isetta? Here it is compared to a regulation-size CC Editor...

Some have claimed that this little "motorcoupé" saved BMW's bacon. I have my doubts – the real saviours of the marque were the 700 and the Neue Klasse saloons, in my opinion. Financially, the Isetta certainly kept a trickle of cash flowing into Munich, but it was nowhere near sufficient.

On the domestic market, BMW sold these for the price of a motorbike, which is how they manage to sell so many. But I doubt they made a lot of profit from it – unlike Iso, which used the proceeds of their Isetta licensing deals to launch an **ambitious V8-powered Bertone-styled coupé**. A sort of BMW in reverse, which did not end well. All because of that little egg. The yolk's on them.

Irritating Isetta by Philip Durow

This is a tale that no doubt will make you shake your head in disbelief at the incompetence of a new Isetta owner. Many an experienced owner will let out a small chuckle, raise their eyes to the heavens and remember their early days. Full of hope and enthusiasm, relishing the hundreds of miles of trouble free motoring ahead, they foolishly attempted to cross the Pennines and peaks with only a spark plug and bag of sandwiches to keep them nourished. Alas I am guilty of such doings, all started so well, until.... Ah, you need information? Of course, a brief résumé of events up to this point.

I purchased the 3 wheel 1960 Brighton Isetta off a friend who had it stuck in a garage for nigh on 20 yrs. Trailored it home and set to work getting the girl running and back on the road. Brakes, pipes, trunnions, tyres, filters and the usual electricals, and a few hundred quid later MOT passed, though the inspector questioned the cross ply radial mix of tyres, he let it go. A summer of short runs and fun ended up with a limp home, smoking, popping and general lack of power, resulted in my decision to restore.



The strip down was great fun, and a great way of learning how things worked. Every bolt came out bar one! Incredible. I bagged and labelled everything, a thousand photos(thank god for digital!) and a massive wish list of spares. Following John Jensons bible, I stripped the engine, fairly simple job having made a couple of extractors for the flywheel etc, and thoroughly cleaned and labelled everything. I decided to farm out the head to Bromley which came back looking like new, with new valves etc and got a new o/s piston and had the barrel rebored. Re-assembly was fairly straightforward and I replaced all bearings and seals inc the blowy valve thingy. This is where I hear the tutting of experienced tongues, I re-used the timing chain, but replaced the tensioner, paying particular attention to the marks I made on strip down. Everything else went together fairly easily. I found a methodical approach and a clear working area a must, and all that bagging, photos and labelling essential, it's amazing what you forget after stripping and one photo can save a load of

headaches. I fortunately had the benefit of a spare engine which I stripped and used some parts as they were in better condition than what was on the original engine.

Skipping forward a few months. After successful restoration of the Isetta, an enjoyable Saturday run out at the Cheshire Microcar Rally clocked up over 100 miles without major issues. Trouble started next time I took her out, misfiring, spluttering, cutting out and a limp home. Dirt in carb? So I thought, and so began the frustration.

Must be carb, so stripped, cleaned and refitted... no change. Do it again, and again, and again. Starts but only runs on choke. Air leak? New gaskets, slightly better. Eventually she would just not fire at all. This is where you need to simply walk away and leave it alone for a while and scour the forums for advice! It was fascinating getting advice from people I'd never even met in this community of microcars, all freely giving of their time and experience. Very humbling.

In this time, I decided to strip her back and begin by replacing the timing chain. Something I regretted not replacing on initial rebuild. Great service from ICOGB spares as per usual, I purchased chain with new split link and gaskets. I found it awkward to see the inspection hole to flywheel, so removed the mounting bracket and buffer, much better view. By sticking

a long thin screwdriver or dowel in the plug hole, I rotated the crank and with one end of the stick on the crown of the piston, I noted the movement of the other until it moved neither up nor down. TDC! A quick check with the marks on the flywheel confirmed all was inline thus reaffirming the timing marks for later, also noted the marks on the sprockets I made previously were in line.

Removed the split link in the bottom space between timing and crank sprockets, and gently removed the chain from the crank sprocket. I rotated the crank so piston was away from valves (unnecessary?) and with aid of grips gently rotated timing sprocket to remove chain completely. Resistance was found when turning as the cams forced the valves open.

Now for the valve timing... I removed the covers and undid the pushrod adjusters, loosening them fully. Then rotated the sprocket again gently with grips in the two side holes on sprocket to a point where the sprocket was almost "locked" in place by the valve spring resistance.

Moving either way would open a valve. TDC. Dry positioned the new chain alongside cam sprocket with the end in the position where I could put the link in, marked chain and sprocket with marker then backed off the cam sprocket and fed the chain over, matching the sharpie marks. Rotating the sprocket forward back to it's original position at it's TDC I then positioned the crank back up to it's TDC then pulling chain tight, laid it over the crank sprocket. Connection of the link is awkward, I used a bent piece of card to act as a spring against the casting and the link to help as I connected the ends together, a few coaxing words of encouragement also helps. All marks now lined up perfectly so timing should be correct. Refit tensioner, crankcase halves with new gasket, bolt up and finish rebuild. Replaced springs on advance unit and cleaned and greased the same.

The condenser had been fitted on the stator which worked, but Brian at the NEC classic show generously gave me his spare which I fitted correctly to the coil. Connected bulb between CB wire from stator and the coil and checked the timing of the points, slightly out, adjusted after checking gap. Timing seemed to be bob on! Rotated crank to 180° from TDC and adjusted the rockers.

Stripped and cleaned carburettor, replacing starter jet and pilot jet, throttle needle and jet and main jet (all expensive!)

Removed fuel tap and flushed out the tank several times, also stripped and cleaned tap. Reconnect everything, new Bosch spark plug. Back together, now, come on my little beauty.....

Battery fully charged, new gallon of fresh fuel in tank, fuel on, ignition on, choke open, fingers crossed and small prayer, turn the key.....chug, suck, chug...BBRRRRMMMMM!!

Huge relief, accelerator responsive, let it run for a few minutes, now, will you work with choke closed? Gingerly I closed the choke... and she kept running. So pleased. Spent the next happy hour adjusting the tickover and refitting the seat. Short test run proved a success, and the following day took her out for maybe 30 mile run without incident.

So what was the cause of the initial problem? Incorrect timing due to slack chain? Dirt? Air leak? Plug?Electrical? I don't think I'll ever really know, but the main thing is she's running again, still noisy, still bounces around on the road, still gets pointed at with a smile. I can't wait till the spring weather and more smiles per mile.



Philip Durow

Isetta World

Did you know ? ...
that there is a thriving Isetta Club
in ... Uruguay, South America ?



According to the historical
information service of BMW
archives, the following cars were imported into Uruguay:-



- 1955: 3 BMW Isettas
- 1956: 2 BMW Isettas
- 1957: 136 BMW Isettas
- 1958: 108 BMW Isettas ; 8 BMW 600
- 1959: 31 BMW Isettas ; 49 BMW 600;
- 1960: 108 BMW Isettas
- TOTAL: 388 BMW Isettas (250s + 300s) + 57 BMW 600

With help from Felipe de Leon of the Isetta Club del Uruguay, Isetta World has researched into the history of Hoffmann, the notorious would-be Isetta competitor.



Jakob Osswald Hoffmann of Lintorf, near Dusseldorf had a small factory producing bicycles and accessories (exploiting forced labour during WW2). Later, in 1949 he bought a licence from the Italian Piaggio Company to manufacture their Vespa Scooter in Germany, consequently acquiring a strong presence in the market virtually overnight. His Vespas were branded "Hoffmann". Jakob even appeared in Life Magazine as the "man who put Germany on two wheels".

Before long, Hoffmann asked Piaggio if he could put a bigger engine in the Vespas, but his licence stipulated that he had to produce their scooters



exactly as their original design (presumably because the Italians didn't want a foreign scooter which performed better than theirs). So, exploiting know-how from his Piaggio production Jakob started producing his own two-stroke scooter of 150 cc alongside the Piaggio 125. This helped sales, but angered the Italians and they quickly cancelled Hoffmann's licence .

Needing a new product to occupy his factory Jakob tried to get a licence to manufacture the ISO Isetta, but found that ISO had already awarded the deal to BMW. Realising the potential of the concept, Hoffmann swiftly built a prototype of his own version which pirated the Isetta's design features.



Hoffman Prototype

His car, which he designated as "AutoKabine" echoed the established Isetta shape, but was intended to include a back seat for two children (which never appeared). In the standard version, Hoffmann's car had a right side door with rear hinges which was impractical in a LHD car but in a planned luxury version, had two side

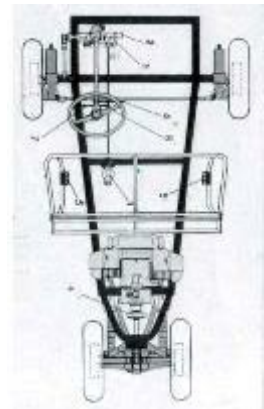


doors, left and right. The front headlights were low, similar to an ISO. The rear wheels were exposed. Thanks to the fixed front, it was also possible to have a fixed dashboard with more instruments than the lone speedometer of the ISO.

The Hoffmann Auto-Kabine was such a blatant copy of the Isetta that it even had dimensions of 2.28 x 1.39 x 1.35 m. almost identical to the BMW's 2.28 x 1.38 x 1.33 m. (Length, Width and Height).

The two rear wheels were separated by a narrow axle, without a differential, again as in the Isetta.

It was initially equipped with a horizontally-opposed 250cc twin cylinder 4-stroke motor mounted centrally in front of the two rear wheels, developing a claimed 18.5 HP at 5400 RPM with a fuel consumption of 3.8 litres / 100 km (approx 74 mpg) and a maximum speed of 85 kmh (approx 53 mph).



The development car worked quite well until the transmission failed at 13,000 km and unfortunately the transmission continued to be unreliable. Another problem was that the car was heavy for its size and the 250cc engine was not powerful enough so they expanded it to 300cc. The major problem with this was that the lowest class of driver licence in Germany in those days was a Class 4 which only permitted driving cars with engines up to 250cc - and Class 4 drivers were intended as the target market for the car ! So, Jakob decided to employ deceit and simply called the car the "Hoffmann Auto-Kabine 250" and expected no one to notice. (Just like he hoped that no-one would realise he had copied an ISO design concept.)

Nevertheless, Jakob made plans to put the car in production for Autumn. As he had invested so much money in the engines (and in the scooter engines), he negotiated a loan from the Deutsche Bank to get the funds needed to make the production tooling for the Auto-Kabine. The money would arrive in October, so Hoffmann began to produce a first series of cars by hand.



However, as soon as they learned of Hoffmann's Auto-Kabine, ISO sent Hoffmann a court order to stop production. Hoffmann ignored this by going even further and publishing adverts which claimed that the Isetta was a copy of *his* car. So because his lawyers had said that everything was fine, Jakob thought he was safe and took his car to the Paris Salon Exhibition.

But - also in Paris there was a real ISO Isetta and now more people began to be suspicious. Hoffmann countered those concerns by claiming that his car was better. However, he was still waiting for the bank money loan and unfortunately for him that was something which would overturn his plans – because the new BMW plant was also going to be funded by the Deutsche Bank. BMW was a much more established brand than Hoffmann and Germany was eager to restore BMW's presence in the world car market so the Deutsche Bank simply cancelled Hoffmann's loan application.



To make his position even more difficult, both ISO and BMW sued Hoffmann for infringement. Without money, Hoffmann couldn't pay his workers who consequently started plundering the factory for items they could sell. Jakob declared himself bankrupt.

Simultaneously to the bankruptcy process, he also fought against the trial. Hoffmann claimed it was just a coincidence that the two cars looked alike but BMW won. Curiously, BMW subsequently sent a new BMW 502 V8 as a gift to Hoffmann But that was little consolation and Hoffmann's company was liquidated to pay late wages.

It was said that 113 Auto-Kabines had been built before the end. It is rumoured that at least 80 of them were sent to Distributors but none are known to survive today. Legend says BMW bought them all, took them off the market and destroyed them. The BMW Isetta then went on to become the best-selling microcar of all time behind the Goggomobil. In different circumstances, would Hoffman have outsold the BMW? We'll never know.



Hoffmann remained in the car industry becoming a supplier of parts to Karmann, the specialist body designers. He died almost forgotten in 1972.

Today, there's a small number of Hoffmann motorcycle collectors and the Hoffmann Vespas have the reputation in the world of scooters as being the best ever built. It has also been said that the Auto-

Kabine was the car that BMW would have manufactured if, like Hoffmann with Vespa, they had not been restricted by their licence with ISO.

Terry Parkin

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HOFFMANN-KABINE 250

Wir beabsichtigen, in Anbetracht der in Kürze lieferbaren neuen vierrädrigen HOFFMANN-KABINE 250 die Verkaufsorganisation im gesamten Bundesgebiet zu erweitern.

Die neu zu besetzenden Vertretungen vergeben wir jedoch nur an Firmen, die über gute Verkaufsräume und einen gut geführten und fachlich betreuten Kundendienst verfügen. Angebote richten Sie bitte unter Beifügung von Ansichtsmaterial Ihrer Verkaufs- und Werkstatt-Räume an die Verkaufs-Abteilung der



Hoffmann-Werke

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Bei Anfragen beziehen Sie sich bitte auf



16/54

43

Colin Green a club member would like help with a restoration of his Isetta. He would like to hear from anyone within a 50 mile radius of Bridport. His address is Swan Cottage, Brook Street, Sipton Gorge, Bridport, Dorset. DT6 4NA Tel. 01308 898334
Email colingreen33@gmail.com
