

ISETTA

Gazette

SUMMER 2010.....



J. A. Wareing

The Isetta Owners Club of Great Britain Ltd.

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www.isetta-owners-club-gb.com

I.O.C. SUBSCRIPTION RATES

United Kingdom	£18.00	<u>Credit Card Payments.</u> IMPORTANT
Europe	£21.00	Please ensure you give the Membership Secretary the
N & S America, Africa, Middle East	£24.00	full card number, the expiry date and the 3 digit security
Australia, New Zealand, Japan	£25.00	number from the back of the card above the signature
		strip

Editors Bit



.Ian Parris

Chairmans Chat

A tale of coincidences

I recently researched the history of the Farmobil because I had just bought two of these unusual vehicles and subsequently wrote an article on them for the Gazette.

At the risk of boring all those only interested in Isettas I'd like to follow on from that article with the tale of coincidences that led up to their purchase and how things were set to get even stranger!

In September 09, while browsing in the Forum for the Register of Unusual Microcars I came across a BMW 700 workshop manual for sale. I didn't own a BMW 700, but for no better reason than wanting to add it to my library of 1950/60s BMW motorcycle manuals, I bought it. Incidentally it was through my love of BMW bikes that I purchased my first Isetta VGE 691 in 1994, joined the IOC and wrote an article for the Gazette about it – is it still alive?

A week after buying the manual, quite by chance I heard of someone relatively (by my standards) local selling two Farmobils – using BMW 700 mechanicals – spooky!

I contacted the seller and arranged to view them. It transpired that they were not stored at his house, so he asked me to pick him up there and he would take me to where they were stored. On the way, in conversation, we discussed our mutual interest in cars and he mentioned that he also had two BMW 700s for sale, a Coupe and a Saloon. I told him how, many years ago, I had been offered a 700, but had turned it down because at that time my interests lay in motorcycles.

When we got to where the Farmobils (and the 700 Saloon) lay, I was disappointed to find it was a corner of a field and not a shed as I expected. It transpired that the seller had until recently, been a farmer but had now retired and sold the farm. I assume he had to clear the cars he owned from the farm and they had been moved to a corner of a field that he had kept to build a house. The house was nearing completion and was soon to be sold, so the cars had to be sold to clear what was to become the garden.

I examined the Farmobils, a price was agreed and I returned with a car transporting trailer the following Saturday to collect the first of them. At this time, I was asked if I was interested in buying the BMW 700 Saloon. I gave it a quick look over and took a lot of photos of it to examine in greater detail later as the seller had the habit of hanging over you and trying to rush you. I examined the photos that night but decided it was pretty far gone with both wings, both sills, both rear roof pillars, both doors and the floor well rotted. The drivers' door and the engine compartment lid were also both creased.

I travelled through again the next day to collect the 2nd Farmobil and again the subject was brought up. A price was discussed, but he was keen that the car be part of a deal involving well over a ton of new and used mechanical 700 spares and the price he had in mind was well out-with what I could (or would) afford, having just bought both Farmobils. It transpired that the seller had been an enthusiastic 700 owner for several years and had at one time owned four BMW 700s and had bought the entire shop stock of parts from "TT Workshops" (a BMW 700 specialist run by a Mr & Mrs Hutchings) in Warminster when they closed for business. The saloon had been used by Mrs Hutchings as her personal transport for several years and it had been bought at the same time.

The seller and I kept in touch over the next few weeks as I negotiated to buy various BMW mechanical parts for use on the Farmobils and I subsequently went through a fourth time to collect the parts I needed. On this occasion the seller told me the Saloon would need to be cleared soon and offered it to me on its own for a more reasonable figure that we subsequently agreed on.

The 700 Saloon was collected in early November 2009 and it came with both old and new style log books and pile of old MOT certificates, tax discs and other paperwork.

When I had time, I sat down and studied the paperwork I had been given and was very surprised by what I found.

In August 1982 my wife and I hired a canal boat on the Shropshire Union Canal for our summer holiday. At this time I was rebuilding a BMW bike and we decided, as we were in the area anyway, we would collect an order we had placed for spares from a motorcycle dealer who specialised in older BMW's, just over the border in Wales rather than have them posted. The dealer was long established and we had dealt with him on several occasions but he had told us that he would be gradually downsizing in preparation for retiring to the Isle of Man. He had recently sold his garage and was now trading his remaining stock from his house. We visited and spent several hours chatting about bikes and collecting our parts. During the course of the visit, he took us outside to his workshop and as we saw two unusual looking BMW cars parked outside. Noticing our interest Dave asked if we would be interested in buying one of his black BMW 700s – one of his personal interests. The BMW 700 used an engine that had been developed from the motorcycle engine, hence his interest. We had a closer look at them out of interest, but at the time we were such died in the wool motorcycle enthusiasts that a car to us was merely something to carry shopping in and we said "thanks but no-thanks".

I was shocked now, because the name Dave Dickinson jumped out of the old style log book at me. Dave Dickinson was the BMW dealer from Tintern in Gwent that we had visited all those years ago.

I checked through the log book and MOT'S to confirm when he had bought it (1972) and more importantly, when he sold it (1982) and I saw that it had been MOT'd and sold less than two months after our visit. It is almost inconceivable that the car I had just bought was NOT one of the two cars offered to me 27 years previously and over 400 miles away!

I had turned down the offer to buy the car in 1982, again in September 2009 and only bought it with a great degree of reluctance to save it from the threat of being scrapped in November 2009.

I think if there were ever a case of a car seeking ME out this must be it!

Body panels for the 700 are difficult to find (and very expensive when you do) and that was the main reason I had initially turned down the chance to buy the car in September. I had looked at it critically (unusually) and considered it beyond economic repair – certainly marginal. I had now bought it more or less with the simple idea that it would now be stored safely under cover and I'd get to it (perhaps) at some time in the future, yet within a week of buying the car, I had heard of practically brand new front wing, two doors and an engine compartment lid, that had been in storage for many years in Austria, bought them and had organised their transport half way across Europe.

With the bond I now feel I have with the car following its strenuous efforts to seek me out again, I think it deserves a second chance and with the parts I now have, I think it safe to say its future is now assured.

If there are morals to be drawn from this story it must be that:

1. Coincidences **do** happen and can leave you questioning how some things in life might be decided for you, long before you get there!
2. If you ever think of buying a manual for a car you don't own, think of this tale and consider the consequences before buying it – it worked out to be an expensive workshop manual for me – but at least I now have three cars that can share it!

HOW IT ALL BEGAN by Edward Pipon

It all started in 1986 when I was just starting out in the motor trade. My first car was a 1967 Mini in which I learnt to drive, but it was not very practical for transporting all my tools and equipment. By chance I had a friend who had a Reliant TW9 truck which was



originally fitted with a sweeper body, unfortunately that body had since been scrapped and it now had wooden body. After a lot of haggling and a promise to get the vehicle back on the road again - the truck was mine. Once I got it home I set about repairing it mechanically and making a new body as the wooden one had seen better days. I kept the truck until I set up in business in 1991 and needed the cash - so the truck had to go! Fast forward to June 2009 - I came across a 3 wheel car for sale on a local internet site and after a bit of bargaining I was able to get back into 3 wheel

transport again. I set about a complete strip-down starting with the chassis, and rather than have everything stripped down at once I rebuilt the chassis first; replacing all the bearings and seals, all steel parts were sand-blasted (I bought one of those small sand-blasting cabinets for small parts - and after a few modifications I get some very good results!). As you can see the chassis is now finished. Once I got it back from the sand-blasters I gave it 3 coats of black paint on top of a special primer. Now onto the engine - and what a mess! The crank was badly worn out and all the main bearings were fit for the bin. There was also



a broken piston ring among many other problems that I discovered. I was very lucky that a number of boxes of spares, including a new crankshaft, conrod and piston (I got the feeling that a previous owner must have known something!) Anyway, the boxes of spares were a big help as I had something to get on with while I waited for parts from Mike Hearn (a very knowledgeable chap) who gave me the benefit of his experience - and lets face it, the workshop manual is not the greatest. With the body shell back from the sand-blasters - and in very good condition - I have started on that, but you will have to wait for the next magazine to find out how I'm getting on...



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Ian Jenkins
BEEP-BEEP

Considering the 35,000 Isettas made and their immediate and enduring cult status, add the fact that the 'bubble car' concept is known by so many, it seems strange that so few songs and books contain reference to our big boys' toys.

The most famous must be the Beep-Beep song sung by the Playmates in 1958. The original (American) version used a Cadillac and a Nash Rambler to tell a story of a mechanical David and Goliath. The little Nash overtakes the powerful Cadillac and when alongside asks the Caddy driver how to change out of second gear. When it was decided to release the song in England, both as a 78 and 45rpm, Columbia Records (the BBC of the day) would not allow the use of actual product names so generic terms had to be substituted; 'Cadillac' became 'limousine' and the 'Nash' a 'bubble car' -but not just any bubblecar! After many years of searching I managed to purchase a copy of the original sheet music (very hard to find!) and found on the front graphics a real Isetta cartoon-style sketch with the number plate: 'ISETTA'.

I have yet to find a fiction book featuring an Isetta, the closest being one by author JJ and called Monty Woodpig and his Caravan (first published 1958). This features a bubblebuzz car which has distinct Schmitt tendencies. The tale seems to be one of a hedgehog (Monty W) who finds a caravan then buys a bubblebuzz car and goes off on his adventures meeting a variety of animals performing real style jobs. I use the word 'seems' as my copy of the book is written in Hebrew! The ones in English are about as hard to find as the Beep-Beep sheet music but much more expensive, somewhere between £100 and £200. Good luck all you car booters and if you get two, don't forget where you heard about it! I would love a sensibly priced copy in English.

American Song Lyrics:

While riding in my Cadillac
What to my surprise
A little Nash Rambler was following me
About one third my size
The guy musta wanted to pass me up
As he kept on tooting his horn
I'll show him that a Cadillac is not a car to scorn
Beep beep beep beep
His horn went beep beep beep

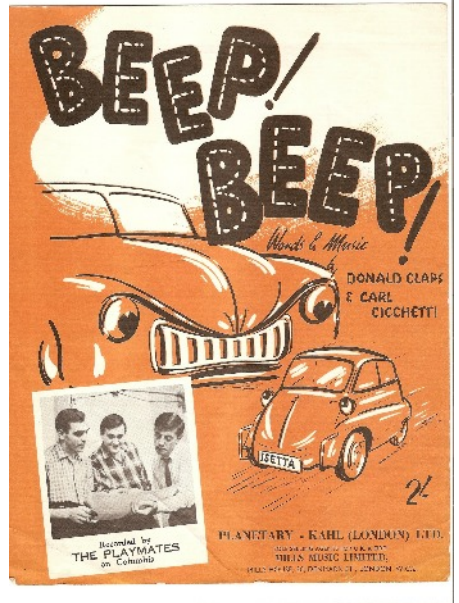
(slowly)
I pushed my foot down to the floor
To give the guy the shake
But the little Nash Rambler stayed right behind
He still had on his brake
He musta thought his car had more guts
As he kept on tooting his horn (beep beep)
I'll show him that a Cadillac is not a car to scorn
Beep beep beep beep
His horn went beep beep beep



(normal speed)
 My car went into passing gear
 And we took off with gust (whoosh)
 Soon we were going ninety
 Musta left him in the dust
 When I peeked in the mirror of my car
 I couldn't believe my eyes
 The little Nash Rambler was right behind
 You'd think that guy could fly
 Beep beep beep beep
 His horn went beep beep beep

(quickly)
 Now we were doing a hundred and ten
 This certainly was a race
 For a Rambler to pass a Caddy
 Would be a big disgrace
 The guy musta wanted to pass me up
 As he kept on tooting his horn (beep beep)
 I'll show him that a Cadillac is not a car to scorn
 Beep beep beep beep
 His horn went beep beep beep

(very quickly)
 Now we're going a hundred twenty
 As fast as I can go
 The Rambler pulled along side of me
 As if we were going slow
 The fella rolled down his window
 And yelled for me to hear
 "Hey buddy how do I get this car outa second gear?"



44. R. McCombie Metcalfe climbs Sutton Bank with a 295cc Isetta bubblecar. The Stirling Ten was said to weigh 8½ cwt.

Photo courtesy of Terry Parkin.

The Tango Queen – The Crash And Rebirth 2009/2010

By David Marsh

Late in December 2009 I went into town to have a look at what was going to be on sale at the local auction house on Wednesday Night. This is always an event not to be missed here in Nelson as anything and everything of the human race's ability to collect STUFF ends up here. Anyway after deciding which items I was going to bid for we set off home in the Tango Queen. We use the Tango Queen most days for trips into town as it is easy to park for nothing as it is allowed in Motor Cycle bays here in New Zealand. In addition it uses far less petrol than the obligatory 4x4 that we have here.

It was raining, a rare occurrence here in the sunniest place in New Zealand. At the traffic lights at the end of New Street we had to stop. In the rear view mirror I could see a car approaching us, to my horror it didn't appear to be slowing down, it didn't. At the last minute I released the hand brake and braced myself. The crunch pushed us half way across the junction, luckily nothing was coming.

We got out; the elderly gentleman, who was driving the car, was shocked and white. "I put my foot on the accelerator rather than the brake" he said. Looking at the damage I replied "I hope you have got some good insurance". A word of explanation is required here, in NZ car insurance is not compulsory. Yes that's right you can drive with no insurance. Personal injury caused in crashes is dealt with through ACC a no fault scheme that operates here which is



funded by the road tax or reggo. So if you have a crash you have to pay for the car(s) damage unless you have taken out third party or fully comprehensive insurance. I have fully comp so I knew that I was OK, even if the guy had no insurance my insurance company would take him to court if needed to get their money back.

He looked at the back of the car with me, the rear lights were smashed and lay in the road and the whole back of the car had been pushed forward so that the back wheel was almost rubbing on the body.

The body work had cracked a little and was obviously bent. Even more shocked and

shaky he gave me his contact details, he was a local, and he was so shaky we offered to phone home for him to get someone to look after him. Sadly he said "I have no one at home anymore". We were a little shook up but no apparent injuries (two days later though the jolt had resulted in some very stiff neck and back joints, short lived thank the Lord).

We pushed the bubble out of the road and helped him move his undamaged vehicle out of the road.

We searched around for witnesses and found that in the office facing the junction a group of people had seen the whole thing, they had been attracted to look out of the window by a colleague to look at the funny little car, and saw the whole sorry saga. Names and addresses were exchanged.

I decided to pull the body away from the wheel, the damage had been done. And gingerly drove it home.

I phone the insurance company and arrangements were made to take it to my favorite panel shop (they had done the certification work required when I brought it into NZ).



I loaded the Tango Queen onto the trailer. I was very worried, had the crash damaged the chassis, the whole body would have to come off to check this.

On arrival at the panel shop the insurance assessor arrived, he asked where the motor bike was? Yes the insurance company had sent a motor bike specialist rather than a car one.

He contacted HQ, yes he could go on with the assessment. He told me he didn't have a clue about what the car was etc. So I explained and told him the big concern. On the spot he authorized work to commence to remove the body and check the chassis.

He then left, I had a long chat with the owner of the shop, he didn't know that much about the car as well. So I was the expert really. I offered to come down and take the car apart in his workshop, and in return for me doing the work I would like to discuss with him some refurbishment work he could do for me on a quid pro quo basis.

He agreed and so next day armed with my spanners and the trusty John Jensen book on renovating the Isetta I set to. 5 hours later the door was off the bolts and cables holding the body to the chassis were disconnected and I was ready to get some help from the panel beaters to remove the body. Two burly chaps emerged from straitening a rather bent Subaru (pronounced SUBAROOO here) and with ease the body was lifted off and placed on a trestle.



The Isetta manual I had got on the Internet was consulted and we measured the chassis, to our surprise it was perfect and had not been damaged.

Closer inspection of the body showed it had been cracked as it twisted downwards

I decided that as the chassis was OK I would take it home and do some essential maintenance whilst the body was being straightened and redone.

So the trailer was loaded with the chassis and I left the workshop to ponder how it was going to tackle the repair work. At home over a glass or three of wine I considered the enormity of what had happened, what could have happened and now what faced me rebuilding this car out here without the support network I had in the UK. After discussion with a friend of mine who is a bit of a mechanical whiz I decided that this was the point to do a major renovation and rather than just refit it all as is. I compiled a list of what I should do. On the

chassis I should renew all the cables, pipework, shock absorbers and springs and repaint the chassis after cleaning it all and checking all the moving bits.

The engine is fine except needing some checking and repainting of the air circulation system, however I really should change the clutch as its very difficult to do when the body is on and also the engine mountings and drive couplings as well. The interior trim of the car needed replacing and really the whole body should be checked and repainted away from the Nissan Micro Orange (sorry Tom) to something more fitting.

This would mean lots of new bits were needed A somewhat restless night ensued as I contemplated this. I went into the panel shop the next day and discussed it with Richard the manager. He thought it was the most sensible thing to do, as with the Christmas holiday period approaching (most of New Zealand stops from Christmas till the 11th of January as they all go on their summer holidays) the availability of his really skilled panel man Barry was limited and this would give time to do what I needed.

So then the negotiations, rather than just fix the accident damage I would pay for any additional work a close inspection of the body revealed needed doing.

We went into the workshop and spent an hour with Barry looking round the car. The major work to do was to strip the now loose fibre glass panels that had been put under the floor plan to protect it and see what was going on, repair it, also go over the whole car, removing the bad finish paintwork, repairing bits. Not quite a bare metal strip but damn close. The final step to respray the whole car. A fixed price was agreed on the condition I did the stripping of the body parts and the rebuilding. Well as I had taken it all off it was probably the most sensible thing to do.



I left the workshop and started work on the chassis. First Job, get it clean. So off to the local heavy goods vehicle repair company for an hour's labour of steam cleaning the whole thing.

They did a great job the filth of the last 50 years coming away with relative ease. I watched as the bones of the Isetta were revealed under the cloud of steam.

Whilst I was there I spotted this truck, it had come in for its MOT as the owner was planning to take it on its annual trip to the Bach (The Bach is a NZ tradition of having a summer house somewhere in the wilds, no TV, water, or flush loos where the whole family go over the summer holidays, these are amazing places, some little more than a home built garden shed; others mini palaces).



I wonder how this vehicle would get on in the UK on its MOT? No it's not a commercial vehicle it's a house bus which can be drive on a car license!

BTW; it passed after a little bit of work, yes really!
I took the chassis next to the local shock absorber shop, "The Shock Shop" and discussed the work I needed on the springs and shock absorbers. They said they would remove them with my help) and would try to source the replacements (where needed) in NZ.

They started that afternoon, the springs were removed and the rear shock absorber, the front suspension towers were removed using the leg of the car hoist as a compressor, and there on the floor where the major suspension components. A hour on the phone gave some good news and some bad; The good news, the

springs could be stripped and re-tensioned locally but the suspension units were another thing, there was only one company who might refurbish them and they were in Auckland. I talked to them on the phone and they suggested I sent the units up by courier; they would examine them and report back. Two days later they did. They couldn't refurbish the fronts and didn't have any suitable replacement. The rear shock absorber, well they could build something similar but the coil spring over the shock could be a problem. This would require a specialist company to make a new one to match the new shock absorber as the new one would be bigger than the existing one.

Christmas now loomed. I went to the internet and talked on the telephone and Skype to David Tadman in the UK and Werner in the United States. Werner had two new front shocks available now and at 70 US dollars each plus package etc was a no brainer. I ordered the new shocks from America.

The rear one however was a problem, this was not so easy.

I did a search on The Isetta World site and found that others had used a Spax or Koni shock absorber as a replacement. However this did not have the coil over spring I had on mine.

A thought struck me! Perhaps the spring was not original. Looking at the Isetta books I have there was no mention of such a spring. I posted a query on the Isetta World web site about this; I had some very useful replies including one from John Jenson himself. I also looked at pictures of other Isetta's that had been rebuilt; they didn't have a coil over spring.

After considering the evidence I believed that the one fitted to my car was non standard, used maybe because the rear springs were so weak and the coil over spring was an attempt to deal with that.

So some careful measurement of the existing stroke and length of the shock were made and after trolling through the Shock Shops reference manual we found that the shocks from a humble BMC mini would fit providing we modified the two clamps that hold the rear shock in place. So suitable stuff was ordered.

I took the stripped chassis to Nelson Brake and Clutch to discuss with Peter the other work, the new clutch, the new engine mounts and the new drive shaft couplings. Yes they could help, providing I was there with the John Jenson book and the other Isetta reference books I have. I searched through my box of spares brought out to NZ with the car. I had a spare clutch plate, both the pressure plate and the clutch plate itself.

I took them all into the shop and we took the clutch apart. The old one was very worn, the new one I had however was not a lot better! It had been contaminated with some oil, so the only option was to strip and refurbish it as the ones I had were stuck on types. The Clutch Specialist, Peter, was worried that as they burnt this old stuff off the plate would warp. And yes I did need the new engine mounts and drive shaft couplings; the existing ones were in a similar near death state.

Hmm! That night I phoned David Tadman, explained what I needed, yes he could help. David explained he had a refurbished clutch plate in stock as well as the engine mounts and drive shaft couplings and would but them in the post for me before the Christmas break.

Christmas Eve came and work stopped.

To be continued in the Autumn Gazette:-



BUY AND SELL

BMW 700 INNER SILL TO FRONT WHEEL ARCH BOX STIFFENER PANEL

This is professionally made in 18 gauge thickness mild steel, as a copy of the original profile panel. Price £10 plus postage. Tel 07968-048762

BMW 700 Coupe Rear Body Panel

It bolts on behind the rear bumper. Made as a copy from an original panel, in a thicker gauge metal. Price £50 plus postage. Tel 07968-048762.

BMW 700 Saloon and Coupe Sills.

These are new outer sills, copied from factory originals, in a thicker gauge metal. Sold individually or pairs, at £165 each. (Inner sills are also available). Collection or postage cost to be added.

BMW 700 Saloon

RHD Body shell and parts for restoration. Complete with V5C Registration Document. Previously owned by Lord Strathcarron, this vehicle was also featured in a comparison road test article, featured in the BMW700 Brooklands book. RHD versions of these cars are now very scarce. I am open to offers for it to go to a good home! Tel. 07968-048762.

BMW 700 COUPE OUTER SILL EXTENSION PANEL TO REAR WHEEL ARCH

This is professionally made in 18 gauge thickness mild steel (Thicker than original BMW 700 bodywork) and is made to be welded onto the end of the outer sill at the rear of the sill and includes the rear wheel arch up to approximately 75mm above the outer sill height. Price £55 plus postage. Tel. 07968-048762

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

36th (Inter) NATIONAL MICROCAR RALLY

To be held at The Three Counties Showground in Malvern Worcestershire
2nd - 5th September 2010

Organised by Nick Haddon & Ray Dilks on behalf of The Heinkel Trojan Club
www.national-microcar-rally.co.uk

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