

# ISETTA

GAZETTE

SUMMER EDITION 2024



# The Isetta Owners Club of Great Britain Ltd.

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Website [www.isetta.org.uk](http://www.isetta.org.uk)

Isetta World [www.facebook.com/groups/267159327250111](https://www.facebook.com/groups/267159327250111)

### **I.O.C.O.G.B SUBSCRIPTION RATES**

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## **Editors Bit**

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You will find the gazette contains 24 pages this time but don't get complacent, I have nothing going forward to the Autumn Edition.

Let's have some stories to read during the autumn months, not that the last few months seem like autumn months.

I am writing this at the start of June when the summer should be well underway but all I see outside is rain.

I ventured out this morning in one of my cars to a classic car meet with a reasonable weather forecast, needless to say it started raining on my way and poured down on the way back, now I need to dry the car off and put it to bed to await some sunshine. This weekend is our village fete which also attracts a good variety of classic cars on the green, at the moment the forecast is good so I am keeping my fingers crossed to take two of my cars to display.

Next year we will be celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Isetta, inside is information on what we have planned for the event so mark up your diaries and keep the date free, it should be a good weekend for our members.



**Ian Parris**

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## **Chairman's Chat**

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Sorry to be repeating myself but it's that time of year again when the Annual General Meeting is at the planning stage. Full details will be published in the next Gazette. As ever the committee is mindful of the age distribution of its members and wonder how the Club would carry on without a younger element on the management committee. So come on members, I'm sure you want the Club to carry on to preserve our cars no matter who owns them into the future.

Did you see the Daily Express on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June. There was an article about the Microlino which will be available soon to buy in the UK. Effectively it's an electric bubble car complete with opening front door just like our Isettas. Special mentions must go to committee members Dave Watson and Mike Ayriss, or should I say his wife Helen, together with Terry Parkin of Isettaworld who were featured with their cars in the article.

**Jeff Todd**

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# Isetta World

The IoC's Forum on Facebook

[Facebook.com/groups/267159327250111](https://www.facebook.com/groups/267159327250111)



This, the Summer Isetta Gazette, has prompted some Anniversaries to come to mind...

27 May was my ( child bride ) wife's xxth birthday and ...

29 May was our Wedding anniversary and ...

2 June was my own 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and ...

26 May 1959 was the date of our Isetta's first registration, ( within a week of my 15<sup>th</sup> birthday ) and it is now 65 years old ( but not yet ready to retire )

So in 2024 I have now owned and used it for 46 years.

When I bought it, it felt as if I was the new custodian of a very old (19 years old ) car. But now I realise I have owned for well over half of my life.

When I bought it, it was showing 16,700 (and a few) miles on its clock. That same clock now shows 62630 miles, and that does not include several overseas expeditions when I substituted a kilometre speedo (handy for observing Continental speed limits and it kept my insured "restricted" mileage down) , and several periods of no speedo at all when the geared angle drive gave up its ghost and other occasions when my speedo cable broke.

All this prompted me to recall an article I wrote for the March 1998 Isetta Gazette, where I compared my Isettas longevity with the Volvo Estate which I had at that time.

In 1998 with 42,500 miles on the Isetta's clock I made some basic approximations, namely that both my Isetta and my Volvo had spent their life in an "average" of 3<sup>rd</sup> gear, taking into account town mileage, open road mileage and periods spent at tickover when stationery in traffic. Then by applying some known data such as transmission ratios and rolling radius of tyres my calculations revealed that in 118,000 miles my Volvo engine had turned a total of approx 358 million revolutions and over the 42,500 miles my Isetta engine had covered it had completed the staggering sum of 389 million revs – 31 million more than the Volvo. Back in September 1958 the magazine "The Motor" had quoted their test Isetta's overall gearing as 9.4mph per 1000rpm in top gear (crossply tyres)

and a claimed maximum power output of 13bhp at 5,200 rpm. Which meant that at a true speed of 50mph ( your speedo will probably read different on radial tyres ) their Isetta's engine was turning at 5,300 rpm . That is a phenomenal rate for 65 years ago and what's more the Isetta could maintain it almost ad infinitum.

Maximum Torque was quoted as 14 lbs/ft, developed at 4,200 rpm ( about 40 mph in top gear ) and with max bhp produced at about 49 mph (smaller cross-ply tyres remember ) the Isetta's ability to purr along at 45-ish is easily explained. Given the Isetta's willingness to rev, it could explain their reputation for dropping valves, a problem fixed by the Isetta Owners Club sourcing 1-piece valves in a better material.

While I have my abacus warm, let's also compare the weights of the Volvo and the Isetta and the power available to move them. We find that the Isetta is moving about 89 lbs per single bhp, while each of the Volvo's 112 bhp has only about 28lb to haul, (less than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the Isettas workload) and even with an average-ish caravan behind it the Volvo's task was only about 40lbs per bhp. So we might justifiably say that on average the Isettas heart is perpetually working twice as hard as a Volvo towing a caravan. Respect due !

So, even when compared with a vee-hicle that is renowned for covering high mileages, our Isetta engines are not only equally capable, but they also do it while propelling comparably much greater weight.

It is only when you consider loadings and performance such as these that you really, really realise just how robust an Isetta power-train is, how willing it is to carry its load, to cover the miles, to climb the hills, to match and overcome the severity of its daily duties.

You may have seen rear window stickers declaring "Windsurfers do it standing up" and "Scuba divers do it under water" and so on ... Maybe the most appropriate sticker for our treasures would be " Isettas just do it".

So next time you hear someone talking trash about the Isetta's "limited" capabilities please feel free to seize the opportunity to grasp them warmly by the throat and enlighten them. It's all a matter of proportion.

Terry Parkin

Isetta World – the Isetta Owners Club's home on Facebook

[www.facebook.com/groups/267159327250111/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/267159327250111/)

# **FOR SALE**

## **1960 Isetta 300**



Extensive restoration carried out in 2015/16 ( Photos to show ) Comes in a lovely dark maroon There is an A frame with attachments for towing A luggage rack with baskets is fitted Original buff logbook , original handbook and Isetta maintenance manual as well as a detailed Isetta Owners Club instruction book on how to care for the cars.

The car retains its original registration number. Loads of history and bills.

£22,995

Contact:-

Terry Westbrook

Tel : 07791287503

Email:

[Twest4380@aol.com](mailto:Twest4380@aol.com)



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Isetta engine/gearbox, stood in my garage for 10 years, turns freely with compression, no air cowling or carburettor and may need an overhaul hence £995. but open to sensible offer. Phone 07941508749. Keith.

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### **Reg 1/01/1961.**

Age related plate. V5 and v5c in my name. Owned since 2007. Runs and drives need a good checkout before more road use.

Located Abingdon Near Oxford England. Only £8500

Contact:-

[ianrjenkins@hotmail.com](mailto:ianrjenkins@hotmail.com)

or 07950967388



I have now been the elected committee member to liaise with the DVLA on behalf of club members for many years. Within this time I have built up an excellent relationship with the DVLA in Swansea and have had many successes. I can normally get an Isetta re-registered with it's original number and back on the road providing the correct documentation and archive material is submitted to the DVLA with the application.

Of Late the DVLA have tightened up their regulations to try and stop the many false claims from the entire classic car movement going through. Whilst this is something I would not encourage or do - we the Isetta club as part of the DVLA scheme have to fall in line to meet their standards.

## **RETENTION OF ORIGINAL REGISTRATION NUMBER.**

- **When can I apply?**

To re-claim an original number *can* be and normally is a lengthy process. Applications can be made at any time but the vehicle must be complete. Authorisation to re-register cannot be given on disassembled vehicles.

- **What do I need to do?**

For all vehicles not registered with the DVLA you will need to obtain the following forms from the DVLA. Either write to them or go online and download those forms:

FORM V55/5

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-a-used-vehicle-for-the-first-time-v555>

FORM V765.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-to-register-a-vehicle-under-its-original-registration-number>

There is also additional information on the DVLA web site that you may find helpful when completing the forms.

If you are intending to licence the vehicle enter "*HISTORIC*" in question two on form V55/5 and leave questions three, four and eleven blank. Complete the forms as far as you can. Then send to me with the following documents:

1) Clear colour photographs of the front, rear, and side (angle) of the car showing the current condition and the registration number. On the back of these photographs should be written the chassis and engine number(s) together with the registration number, signed by the applicant.

2) The old style log book, or any other documentary evidence ideally showing a direct link between the chassis number and the registration: (i.e. MOT certificate, Tax disc, garage receipts, old county records including if possible the surrender document etc.) The more evidence presented the stronger the application will be.

If you don't have an original copy of the V5 it's really worth looking to see where the Isetta was first registered from the last two letters on the registration plate. A quick Google

search will then tell you the county or area of the country. With more Google searching you can then normally find the applicable county / area records office and obtain a copy of the original entry in the County's / Area Vehicle licencing book and more importantly (if available) the Surrender documents. To help narrow the search you will need the rough date of manufacture (year). I can tell you this from the chassis number. The County / Area records are Public information so anyone can apply and it's also sometimes possible to visit county record offices and do the search yourself. In my experience it's easier to contact them direct – normally by email and let them find any information they hold. This is another of the areas the DVLA has tightened up on in recent months but a fairly straightforward process. If you are unsure who to contact I may be able to assist but will need to know the registration number first.

The DVLA may also insist on an inspection. I can do this if I feel it's needed. Normally I get a feel for an authentic vehicle from the evidence supplied by the owner / Keeper. Below is a helpful Web link to the location of registration letter codes:

<https://www.oldclassicar.co.uk/registrations/reg-letters.htm>

**N.B.:** *All documents submitted must be dated during or before 1983 to qualify. I will then Copy the documents and send only Authenticated copy's (stamped up by me) to the DVLA with your application. This will also eliminate the small risk of documents getting lost in the post. Please remember when sending original documents to me to use registered post. I can't be held responsible for any documents being lost in the post. Since the closure of the local VRO offices nationwide in Dec. 2013 this is now the only option for your application.*

#### ● **What happens then?**

What I then do is check the documentation and any history the club may hold on the vehicle within the data base, prepare the application, one final check that everything is in order and then send everything to the DVLA, complete with a covering letter. I have found you can wait anything up to six months for a reply, (you can't hurry these people!). I always put a contact 'phone number (my own) for the DVLA if there are any problems, normally there are one or two conversations before a final decision is made. Then, whatever the outcome, the owner or Registered keeper are informed of the decision by post. Normally it is good news as I have submitted only the correct evidence as listed above. Strange as it sounds I'm not normally told the outcome of the application so would appreciate a quick note letting me know!

If it is bad news, the DVLA decision is final. The only other option available is to then apply for an "age related number" - which again I can help obtain. Occasionally we find that a number has been lost due to the fact that it has been re-issued as a "private" plate. In these cases, although very rare, there is nothing that can be done.

**NB:** *I will advise an owner if he/she does not have a strong application before I apply, (and before cashing their cheque), warning them that the outcome may not be good. This way it gives the owner more time to locate vital missing information or apply only for an age related number. I will only advise, the final decision to apply is with the owner. The DVLA will not issue numbers with little or no evidence.*

Once the DVLA have approved an application they will issue a new V5c (log-book) direct to the owner. The vehicle can then be taxed in the normal way at the nearest issuing post office.

**NB:** *Once the tax disc has been issued the vehicle then falls into CR (continuous registration), CIE (Continuous Insurance enforcement) and SORN (statutory off road notification) regulations. ....oh deep joy.*



## **AN AGE RELATED MARK. FOR EXAMPLE: SU, SV, SK, DS.**

- **What is an Age-related number?**

An age related number is one that was originally allocated to an area of the UK but never got issued. Typically these areas for example in northern Scotland, where there were a relatively low number of new vehicles registered each year, therefore there was a surplus of unused numbers. However these numbers are now being used up but look more authentic than a “Q” plate.

- **When can I apply?**

The application and issue of “age-related” numbers is a much easier and faster process than the original number retention. This option will only be used when either the DVLA have totally rejected an application, or there is very little or no pre-1983 documentary evidence linking the chassis number with the registration number. The vehicle must be complete, and insured

- **What do I need to do?**

As before, obtain (Google search and download):

FORM V55/5

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-a-used-vehicle-for-the-first-time-v555>

Complete the form as far as you can and send to me with the following documents:

- 1) Clear colour photographs of the front, rear, and side (angle) of the car showing the current condition and any registration mark that may be with the vehicle. On the back of these photographs should be written the chassis and engine number(s) and signed by the applicant.
- 2) Any other documentary evidence as before.

- **What happens then?**

What I will then do is assess the documentation that has been sent. I will produce a dating certificate using the club records stating the year and sometimes (if possible) the month and location the vehicle was manufactured. Other information may include the current owner’s name, vehicle colour and any other relevant information. Form V55/5 will also be completed. Then, everything will be sent back to the owner / Keeper.

- **What do I do then?**

What you must then do is send the completed documents to the DVLA in Swansea with a covering letter Stating you would like an age related number issued (please do not send copies). If the application is successful (should be) they will then allocate a previously unused number to your vehicle and send you a new Log book (V5c) document. You can then get your new number plates made up, tax it and start using your car! You may be asked by the DVLA to pay a £55.00 “first registration fee” however this is a grey area, “historic vehicles previously registered with the old local authorities” are exempt as normally the Isetta/600/700 would have at some point been previously registered when new so this fee is NOT applicable. Having said that the DVLA can be very persistent and not open to negotiation.

**NB:** *All re-registered and age-related numbers are issued on a non-transferable basis. This way the mark will always stay with the vehicle.*

## **NOVA – What is it, and does it apply to me?**

Please have a look at the web link below:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6570647e73913500db03bd4/inf106-how-to-import-a-vehicle-into-the-united-kingdom.pdf>

NOVA stands for “Notification of Vehicle Arrivals”

This is ONLY applicable if you import a car from abroad into the UK. You must inform the HMRC within fourteen days and more than likely pay import duty. Again nine times out of ten this is NOT APPLICABLE as our cars were (mostly) built in Brighton or already imported back when they were first new. Recently the DVLA have been using NOVA to confuse both me and owners of cars wishing to get an age related plate due to lack of original documentation:

As well as offering re-registration with original and age related numbers, I can help and provide assistance with dating certificates for getting the correct date of manufacture on your V5c log book. If your car has been re-registered and given a new registration number for any reason in the past, that date has appeared on some V5c documents and is wrong. This *can* be changed. In such cases please contact me first so an assessment can be made as each is normally different. We also now have an accurate recognised Data Base that I have created to assist with this process.

In all cases you cannot deal direct with the DVLA. They will always in the case of Isetta, 6 and 700's refer you to me. Below are the current administration charges the club make to cover postage costs etc.:

	Club Members	Non Members
Full Re-Registration	£25.00	£50.00
Age Related Number	£15.00	£30.00
V5 Date Change	£10.00	£20.00

Please make cheques payable to “The Isetta Owners Club of GB Ltd” or use the clubs “subs” Paypal account (please let me know if the Paypal option is used)

There is an incentive scheme in place stating that any non-member who uses any of the above services can get a discount of £8.00 off his/her FIRST years membership if they join the club before the application is sent to the DVLA. I do get quite a few letters from non-members and we should not discourage them for the sake of the cars, but encourage them to join the club and get involved. No individual profits from Moines paid to the club for these services. You will only pay once; I will try all options until your car has a registration with which you are happy. I do try to answer all of your letters/e-mails within one week of receiving them. Finally, please remember I do represent *you* the membership, and am always happy to help wherever I can. If anyone would like to know more, or has any questions or comments you will find me at most of the micro-car events throughout the year. Alternatively write or e-mail, my address is in the front inside cover of the Gazette and on the web site.

Remember the golden rule:

**THE MORE PRE-1983 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE WE CAN SUBMIT TO THE DVLA THE EASIER YOUR APPLICATION WILL BE!!**

**Dave Watson.**

## **70 Years of the Isetta**

In 2025, the BMW Isetta will be 70 years old !!

The IOC intends to celebrate this very special Anniversary with a very special event.

Our 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party will be part of Mallory Park's Bonanza weekend and we will all have at least a couple of chances to take our cars around the circuit during the weekend. Mallory Park has full camping, camper and caravanning facilities and these will be available to all Isetta visitors. Any IOC Member with a running car is welcome to partake in at least 2 laps of the famous Mallory Park circuit and those with running or unfinished cars can make use of all of the facilities there for FREE !!!.

The IOC will make all arrangements with the Mallory Park Management to cover the cost of all of the above.

In addition, as a Club, we are intending to have a Club BBQ (Stand Up Dave "WotNoBurgers" Watson) bring along some Free one-off memorabilia and mementos of the event as well as running our usual Concours and longest distance competitions. We may even have a Driving Test within the circuit as well as all the other stuff being put on by Mallory Park. Our intent is to attract at least 100 Isettias and it will be an opportunity to run and display your vehicle throughout the weekend. Even if you cannot finish your car by then, bring it along and it will help the Club to understand how many cars are running and how many are being restored.

We recognize that 2025 is a long way off, but the purpose of this notice now, is to give you as much notice as possible to get your car(s) finished and ready.

At this point, we intend for the event to be primarily for Isetta, BMW 600, BMW 700 Owners only, however at a future Committee meeting we will decide if we will invite all owners of other Microcars to come along. We would of course love to see any Overseas friends, as well as any Velams or Romi Isettias that may appear.

Wouldn't it be great to see some cars that few Members have seen before or indeed cars that have never seen the light of day at a Rally before.

The Mallory Bike Bonanza will run this year on the 6th & 7th July 2024.

If you want to go along to this Year's event, please do, but as we have no arrangement with Mallory Park for this year, you are on your own regarding Entrance and Camping fees.

We look forward to seeing you all there in 2025 !!!

## My first Isetta!

Having waved goodbye to my immaculate late Morris Minor convertible in January I started to wonder how I was going to live without a project in my single garage. A project would also act as a distraction, when time allows, from caring for my wife who has dementia. Over the years I've had a number of project vehicles, including rebuilding a vintage Morris semi-sport through to building a Porsche 550 replica, but although in my late seventies I still thought I had one project left in me! But what? Space being at a premium I thought of a bubble car, after all I had never owned one. So, I did much research, and the one that appealed most was the BMW Isetta, partly due to it's proper chassis and the historical interest. I knew from past expensive experience that rust was always going to be the enemy, so where to find a rust-free specimen?



It was my middle son who pointed out the South African finds, repatriated by Andrew Fitton, and sight unseen I plumped for a RHD German built 4-wheeler Tropical model. I was aware that it had no interior and probably lacked a lot more (correct), but hey it was a project I was looking for! I'm still taking stock of what I have, and so far, the only rust I have found is on the mating faces of the split rim wheels, now shot blasted and powder coated and shod with new Blockley tyres. Oh, and one missing wheel stud and one broken, both now replaced. All part of the fun! I'm now working towards lifting the body from the chassis, very exciting although a little daunting! So that's the story so far. I mistakenly thought

that I could register it straight away, Dave Watson put me right on that. Registration could be some way off! Lee Turnham has already been most helpful with spares. I'm certain I'll be contacting him many times in the future! Finally, what a great club! I've been most impressed so far with every aspect and I've learned so much from avidly reading all the technical articles which provide great guidance. Here's a couple of pictures of the current state of play. I hope to write some updates in the future, I know already that Ian Parris is always looking for new articles!

**Michael Houston.**



# **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

## **NATIONAL MICROCAR RALLY 2024**

**August 29<sup>th</sup> - September 1<sup>st</sup>**

At Hampton Loade

Nr Bridnorth

Shropshire

Reservations: [jennydilks@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:jennydilks@hotmail.co.uk)

### **The Club is pleased to welcome:-**

Derek Laycock	Morecambe	Jean Francois Pinard	France
Carl Jensen	Texas	Stephen Richardson	Lincoln
Per Petersson	Sweden	Gordon Ranson	Suffolk
Jeremy Goodwin	Plymouth	Richard Phillips	USA
David Green	West Sussex	Kevin Lidgerton	Boston
Jacob Saunders	Southampton	Edward Davingoff	Margate
Margaret Brander	Glasgow	Ralph Hough	Canada
Victor Damski	Lowestoft	Brian Nash	East Sussex
Tsuyoshi Suzuki	Japan	Martin Clarke	Cornwall
Paddy Kenny	Ireland	Amanda Wiseman	Shenstone
Neill Foster	Cambridge	John Morrison	Northern Ireland
Tony Partridge	Eastbourne	Constantinos Combos	Cyprus
Leo van Staden	South Africa		
Scott Higgins	Worcestershire		

**New Members since the last Gazette**

To advertise your items for sale or want adds etc. please email the editor at '[isetta@ianparris.com](mailto:isetta@ianparris.com)'

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## **Buyers Guide Original article by Steve Hurn updated by Lee Turnham**

So, you have made your decision; it has to be an Isetta. Maybe its nostalgia, maybe its curiosity, maybe you just like the door being on the front. It really doesn't matter. But what type of Isetta do you want? The choice is either a Bubble window or a sliding window.

The earlier Bubble window Isetta's (1955-57) have a purer bubble shape that is very close to the original Iso design. Unfortunately they are more expensive to rebuild and some parts are no longer available. The Isetta that most people remember is what's known as the Sliding window model (1957-1964). All British built Isetta's were of this type and were either left or right hand drive and three or four wheelers. The original cars were all four wheelers. The three-wheeler was launched in the autumn of 1958 in left hand drive only. Right hand drive three wheelers didn't arrive until late in 1960.

Originally there were two trim levels, Standard and Plus. Standard cars were basic, no bumpers, spare wheel, heater or hubcaps. They also had 5-inch headlamps. The Plus usually had all those items and the famous tubular bumper bars on the front and larger 7 inch headlamps with separate side lights mounted underneath. When the right hand drive three wheeler was launched in 1960 it also came as a Standard or a Plus. The Plus model didn't have tubular front bars, instead sporting a more conventional bumper. The headlamps were still 7 inch but the sidelights were built in

### **Body.**



#### **An original front wing with typical corrosion**

What you see isn't necessarily what you get. A nice coat of paint can hide a lot. To restore an Isetta body shell properly requires a great deal of time and effort. Often it's the little things that let an otherwise good restoration down. Whether you are buying a wreck or a car in showroom condition, thoroughly examine as many original Isetta photos as you can. It's surprising how many different interpretations there are on restored cars. As with any restoration it is attention to

detail that is important.

The first areas to be attacked by the dreaded tin worm were always the front wing corners. Nowadays all cars are dipped during production to protect against rust. Unfortunately the only thing that got dipped at the Isetta factory was the paint sprayers biscuit in his tea. This meant that the front of the inner arch and the outer wing joint was not exactly dripping with paint. In fact no paint ever made it into that panel joint.

Check for signs of poor repair. There should be a raised rib that runs from the wheel arch, across the lower front wing to the door. This may not be there at all, or might be visible as a shadow of its former self.

Glassfibre is often present and the rib may have been fashioned from it. We have heard of welding rod being used to replicate the rib as well. The Club spares carry an as original repair section. If you are lucky the rest of the wheel arch may be all right. A lot of unrestored cars are now showing signs of corrosion around the arch. If possible remove the inner trim panel and have a look at the joint. On the outer skin look for little dimples and blisters where



the inner and outer panels were spot-welded together. Moisture, dirt and debris collect in the joint, inside the car and out and start to push the panels apart. Repair is tricky, but the Club do have inner arch repair panels made.

At the rear of the body you are looking for accident damage. There isn't a lot of strength in the body at the rear and it is easily distorted. The rear wings can look slightly bulged outwards if the car has been bumped and most have. Look at the length and condition of the rear flutes. They should taper out to a point, just about where the

#### An example of rust blisters around the arch.

rear bumper starts. The panel joints that run up from the rear lights are affected by engine vibration and accident damage. Rust here is very common. Look at the fit of the engine panel; it should be flush all round.

The bottom edge of the door can corrode badly. On the worst examples the inner door pressing will also need repair. Again both parts are available through club spares. Look at the door hinge mounting points. The lower one flexes the outer skin. This cracks the paint. Check the condition of the hinges and pins. Hinges can be re-chromed and new ones available through club spares.

#### Look carefully at the floor/inner arch joint



The condition of the floor is very important. Any holes or pop riveted repairs are unacceptable, on a roadworthy car at least. If there are bodged and have an un-ribbed panel welded in you will suffer extreme drumming, due to vibration. The area of floor where you step in flexes a lot. Add to this moisture and dirt trapped under the rubber floor mat and the floor can go very thin. Check along the joint between the floor and the inner

arches, a common area for corrosion. Untidy patching on the inner arch is there for all to see. If the car is complete then it probably won't be possible to remove the seat. So use a torch and have a good look at the condition of the rear floor and battery box. The rear section usually escapes the ravages of rust, but the battery box loses its bottom due to battery acid and rust. New floors and battery boxes are normally in stock. Have a good look at the sills and check for rust and rot at the joint with the floor. Again repair panels are available.

The window pillars can corrode at the lower joint. The side window rubbers act as a moisture trap and this leads to rust. On very bad cars water getting inside rots away the parcel shelf and the outer skin where the two were spot-welded together. Rust and rot here is tricky and very time consuming to repair. The condition of the aluminium side window trims is important. There are two types; pre mid 1960 cars have a short aluminium trim, (1200mm long). Towards the end of 1960 the design was changed to the long type (1450mm long), these cover the base of the window pillars front and back. A lot of Isetta's have been rolled,

especially RHD, though left hand drive cars can be rolled too. There may be signs of grazing on the window trims and on the gutters. New trims are now available, good second hand trims are very rare to obtain, window rubbers including the sliding window felt/flocked rubbers are now available new.

**Wing flutes taper out just in front of the bumper**

### **Engine**

The engine is the heart of the car and must be examined carefully. If the engine number matches the chassis number then you have found quite a rarity. If the car doesn't run then make sure everything is there. Missing carburettors, dynastarts and cooling shrouds can be difficult to track down. Never try to start an engine that has been standing idle. **A totally worn out engine will still start and run, but it will prove nothing and probably do more damage.** There are two main areas of concern on the Isetta's BMW 300cc engine. The first is the crankshaft big end bearing. You can feel if the big end is on its way out. Rock the fan to and fro with your **hand**, never dig a screwdriver in and try to turn the fan with it; in fact never use a screwdriver to prise anything apart as it will only damage the aluminium castings. If you can feel a clonk or knock then the big end bearing has reached the end of the road. If the engine runs then a wayward big end produces a deep knocking sound, switch off the engine immediately.



**An un-restored engine and carburettor**



The main reason for the big end going is of course lack of oil. The slinger ring (Exploded view No.1 part No.37) is the culprit. It fills up with debris and eventually cuts off the oil supply. If you are doing a full rebuild make sure you clean it out and change your oil regularly.

The second and well-known problem to be aware of is the valves. BMW recommended changing the valves every 17000 miles. This was because the original BMW valves were made in two pieces, with the head and stem being welded together. The Isetta was well known for dropping valves simply because the

owners didn't change them and frequently over revved the engine. This would lead to them breaking at the welded joint.

So if the car is in running condition check through any bills for new valves, springs, collets and retainers. The new Club valves are made from stainless steel in one piece. **We would not advise anyone to run an engine with old style valves.** The risk to the engine is just too great. The cost of a cylinder head overhaul is small compared to the cost and inconvenience of a blown engine. It has survived for decades, don't you be the one to blow it to bits.



## Carburettor

Heavy-handed tinkering produces more carburettor problems than general wear and it pays to be careful when doing adjustments. The air regulator screw in particular may have been cross-threaded in the past. Damage like this can sometimes be repaired but not always. Chewed up cover screws can be replaced. A carb with a bulging or cracked choke tube can be repaired with a repair section from club spares. The screw ring on the Throttle slide (part 134) needs to be tight. If it's loose it will damage the fine threads. The Club has new rings, but if the thread on the main body is damaged then the carb may be scrap. The original style of air intake hose is in stock. An incorrect hose may make the engine run rich. The fuel filter assembly should also be present. The casting is expensive to replace if it is missing. The pipe from the fuel tap to the carb should be taught to aid the flow of fuel. One other thing is to check the float. Any signs of cracking and it should be replaced with either the original brass float (7 gr) or the new plastic float of the same weight. The plastic float will suppress the modern petrol/ethanol mix.

## Electrical

Isetta wiring can be in very poor condition. Look for chop blocks, signs of burning and shoddy repairs. If the loom has been badly chopped about then a new one is the only answer. Handle all Dynastart components with care. The Isetta's Bosch Dynastart is a very robust starting and charging unit, but it is now at least 60 years old. If the car runs you can easily see if it is charging. Run the engine and switch on the headlights. Rev the engine and if the headlights get brighter the regulator is working.

A wobbly Dynastart post can also lead to problems. If the post is not supported by its grommet, it stresses the posts mounting point. It can break where it passes through the insulator plate causing a break where the post connects to the starter coils. The heavy-duty wire from the starter relay to the Dynastart post must be a flexible wire (multi-strand). If the wire is too stiff this will put unnecessary stress on the post.

Dashboard castings have usually acquired a few non-standard holes. The Sixties were the era of the flick switch and all those spot lamps and air horns leave lots of holes. If your dash looks like Swiss cheese then a second-hand one from the club might be able to assist. Other items that may be in poor condition are the indicator and headlamp switches. From 1960 most models of Isetta (except the Standard) were fitted with column mounted stalk switches. The stalks break off easily and replacements are now available via the club spares.

## Transmission

The Isetta gearbox is a superb piece of over engineering. Remember that it only has 12hp to transmit. We know that many owners would never dream of taking their gearbox apart. So be aware that the gearbox may not have been touched. A car in good mechanical condition should have a relatively smooth change. They have never been a 'fingertip light', you need to be positive but don't rush the change. Left hand drive cars have a slightly more positive change due to them having all rod linkages. **You will have to get used to the gear change being back to front in a LHD car.** Right hand drive cars use a cable and the change is the right way round. There's not a lot to choose between them. A difficult change usually means the gear linkage bushes or the linkage pins have had their day. There may also be clutch problems. The original clutch faces were riveted. Eventually the linings begin to fracture at the rivets. The linings will eventually fall apart and the gear change will get progressively worse. We now supply new bonded clutches with no reported problems.

If you are looking at a roadworthy car, checking the condition of the drive couplings or 'donuts' is very important. They can be difficult to see and very awkward to change, especially with the body on. Any splits or perishing and they must be replaced. If they break



Make sure everything is there before you leave

up at speed at the very least you will lose drive, at worst the drive shaft could jam and lock up the rear wheel, let alone cause casing and cable damage.

There are only a few things to check on the chain-case, they are very important however. If the oil is silvery in colour then the chain is too slack. A slack chain slaps the inside of the casing scraping off aluminium. A tight chain will damage the bearings, so it's a balancing act. The three-wheeler rear axle is another weak point. It needs to be tightened up correctly to avoid the hub moving around and damaging the splines (no more than 210 ft lbs and no less than 180 ft lbs). The club spares now have manufactured, the new axles/hub assemblies.

### Brakes, steering and suspension

There are two systems on the Isetta, Lucas Girling and ATE both are well up to the job. If the car is road worthy then it should pull up squarely. A spongy feel to the brake pedal means that there is possibly air in the system. It can be difficult to see into the master cylinder but it is worth a look. Lift up the seat and check the colour and clarity of the brake fluid. Dirt or corrosion means it's time for a rebuild or a complete fluid change. On a restored car the brake pipes will probably have been replaced with copper or copper nickel pipe. Re-piping should be done neatly and held firmly in place by clips that are welded to the chassis. There are some attempts that look like tangled spaghetti as original clips have rotted away and have not been replaced. Make sure that the flexible hoses are in good condition. Any signs of cracking or perishing and the car is not roadworthy. The Club can supply all the parts needed to overhaul the complete braking system on either type of application. Never cut corners with brakes. **THE GOLDEN RULE IS WHAT YOU DO TO ONE SIDE YOU DO TO THE OTHER.**

The steering on an Isetta is what's called a worm and nut design. It can seem vague if you haven't experienced this type of steering before. The car may tend to wander, especially if there is no steering damper and cross-ply tyres add to the effect. The fact that the steering has so many joints doesn't help. To check for wear first sit in the car, move the steering wheel from left to right quickly. If you hear a knock then there is wear in the worm and nut. Next have a look underneath where the steering shaft comes out of the chassis to the drop link (stands upwards). Get hold of the link and see if it will move up and down. If it does then its brass bush needs replacing. Whilst you're underneath the car check the condition of the track-rod end bushes. Look for signs of the rubber collapsing. **For safety there should be a large washer underneath the bush to stop the track-rod dropping if the bush gives up.**

It can be awkward to check the condition of the front suspension. Although things like bushes and even dampers are available new there are parts in the suspension that are now harder to find. The two swinging arms (part 19 and 26 on exploded view No.3) on each side must be nice and tight. Any wobble or knock points to worn out bushes and probably

corroded swing arm bearing surfaces. Once again good second hand ones are becoming hard to find. Also look for leaking dampers and worn silent blocs bushes.

### **Interior**

The Isetta's interior really couldn't be more basic. The single bench seat is well known for its tartan cover. From late 1960 the material changed to grey leatherette with Bedford cord panels. For some years the Club has had the tartan material woven specially. We also re-manufacture original style rubber mats. The grey interior panels were made from millboard. We currently stock these interior panels.

Simple, basic, but an elegant design



### **Conclusion**

That just about covers the troublesome areas. It may look like a minefield, but buying an Isetta is all about corrosion, originality and completeness. If the car you are viewing is in boxes make sure the important parts are there. If it's badly rusted then be careful how much you pay, bodywork is very expensive to repair. If it's a runner then look at the areas that may lead to failure or breakdowns. An Isetta that has been properly restored will be a robust and reliable Bubble car that will give you many years of enjoyment.

### **Price Guide**

Values are always a delicate subject. Owners can get a little upset when they realise just how much their little gem is actually worth. You can easily spend more than a car is worth on a full restoration, especially if you don't do most of the work yourself. Valuing a classic car is very difficult, you can check the price guides in the glossy magazines as much as you like. Real world prices can be all over the place. Auctions just confuse the matter even more, we have heard of Isetta's selling for up to £40,000.

The infamous Christies auction of Microcars in 1997 saw some of the most ridiculous prices ever, how about £50,000 for a U.S.A spec Isetta? But if you are looking for an Isetta or any classic car you need a starting point. 'Knowledge is power' so they say. Keep an eye on eBay and the Classic magazines. Look for examples that actually sell, and remember that a tiny photograph can make anything look good, the camera never lies... I don't think so. It has to be said that there are quite a few dogs out there, listen.... you can hear them howling. To help you avoid the mutts and find your supreme champion you need a fair and unbiased price guide, and here it is.

Guides usually break down into three conditions, however based on experience we believe that five categories are needed.

A1: £20,000+ Fresh restoration to a very high standard. Every part overhauled or replaced. Excellent in every respect, in perfect working order. Ask to see all the bills and photographs of the restoration.

Good: £10,000+ Restored within last five years, some use, but very tidy. All to original spec. Healthy engine and again check the bills and restoration photos.

Average: £7,000+ Older restoration, some non-original parts, may need repainting. Engine may well require rebuild. but don't value that too highly. Has any work been done recently? Check the paper work.

Restoration: £5,000+ May run, but don't risk it. Will need either floor repair or a new floor. Wheel arches and front corners will also need work. Some parts missing and some non-original parts. Full mechanical overhaul required and a repaint. If a car is not badly corroded it will certainly be worth a little more. Hopefully a V5 or the original logbook.

Basket: £1500+ May have been stored outside and probably in pieces. Possibly been a parts car, so find out what's missing. Engine missing or in poor condition. Body will be very poor. May have original documents. Not for the faint hearted.

Whatever category the car fits into its originality and completeness that counts. Most driveable U.K based Isetta's fall into the £7,000 to £15,000 price range. If you are offered a pile of rather dirty looking parts with the car take them. If you don't want them the Club is always looking for second hand parts. Ask for any documents relating to the car. If it has a V5 document it will be easy to re-register. If it hasn't ask for the old logbook, MOT'S and tax discs, if you can remember what they look like. These official pieces of paper may help you get the registration number back, no official paperwork and the number is almost certainly lost. Whatever the seller may say about the 'nice number plate' if the car has never had a V5 then the number plate has no value. It will hopefully be reissued to you, but the new V5 will be stamped 'Non transferable registration mark'. The number will then stay where it belongs, on the car it was issued to. Cars with original numbers are always more desirable. Well its crunch time, time to see the colour of your money. The golden rule is don't let your heart rule your head. Become an expert and you can control the negotiations. If you are still unsure take someone with you who has some mechanical knowledge, even better someone who has restored an Isetta. If in doubt walk away, there are always other cars for sale. Don't rethink if the seller offers you a lower price, **think WHY?** Buy the right car and you won't regret it.

## **A few tips**

### **Top speeds:**

In the old road tests, top speeds of 55mph were often mentioned. General advice is that you do not exceed 45mph. The Isetta engine does not like being over revved. When accelerating from a stop, try not to change gear too early. Use the red segments printed on the speedometer face as a change guide. Changing gear too early labours the engine, which is as bad as over revving.

### **Track Rod Bush Washer:**

This must be in place. Place a large washer under the Silent Bloc and then the nut. The washer will stop the track rod dropping if the bush ever failed. We would also **not** recommend the 18mm Silent Blocs being used on the track rod.

BMW introduced the 28mm Silent Bloc in 1958 because the 18mm ones were not up to the job.

### **Silencer Straps:**

The silencer straps should support all the weight of the silencer. If the exhaust pipe doesn't line up with the silencer tube then remove the exhaust pipe and bend it to suit. Do not over stress the cylinder head. If you are using an old silencer make sure that the safety bar is still in place. It points forward and passes through a hole in the chassis. This prevents the front of the silencer hitting the road if the straps ever broke.

### **Clutch Spacer Ring:**

Strangely this part is not shown on the original factory drawing. It sits between the clutch diaphragm (part 188 on the Engine drawing) and the clutch thrust plate (part 189). It is 1.5mm thick and creates an air gap for the clutch to operate. If yours is missing it is almost impossible to adjust the clutch properly. The club spares have these as a second-hand part.

### **Back axle:**

To check if the axle is all right, jack up the rear of the car; try and move the wheel side to side. If it wobbles its past being serviceable. In the past owners simply did not tighten up the hub nut sufficiently. It should be tightened to no more than 210ft lbs, and no less than 180ft lbs. Always wind the nut on to get to the split-pin hole, never wind it back.

### **Rear Wheel:**

Three-wheeled Isetta's were always supplied (except the standard version which had no spare wheel) with a rear wheel as the spare. Make sure that your rear wheel is in fact a rear wheel. They are easy to recognise. They have a much thicker edge where the hub passes through and that the wheel nut holes are much larger. The front wheel has small holes and is much thinner. NEVER use a front wheel on the rear. A rear can be used on the front as a means of getting to a place of safety to replace with the correct wheel.

### **Drive Donuts:**

The original bolts for securing the donuts had much thinner heads than any standard bolt. A standard bolt will either hit the gearbox casing or rear axle oil seal housing. The correct type are available from the club, best practice is to replace in donut sets of 6. When tightening the nuts on new rubber donuts make sure that you don't twist the steel inserts. This will lead to early failure of the donut. Only remove the steel strap after the donuts are in place and tightened.

### **'D' Washers:**

Aligning the new top brass 'D' washers when fitting new kingpins can be awkward. So, grind an old kingpin to a point on one end. With the 'D' washer in place as best as you can, insert the pointed end of the ground kingpin and this will centralise the brass 'D' washer ready for the new king pin.

### **Front suspension:**

Lubrication for the front suspension is key to trouble free maintenance. Oil alone is no good. Use a lime-based grease mix with standard (mineral) engine oil. It makes a slightly runny paste. Some oil will come out of the mix eventually, but the grease will stay and repel any water ingress. keep an eye on the levels as good suspension arms are becoming rare to find.

### **Battery:**

Your battery must be held in a secure manner, this is a legal requirement. Originally a strap and a Bakelite cover were fitted. The club now supplies a glassfibre battery cover but sorry no strap. Therefore a fixing device need to be home made. The battery terminals should face the front of the vehicle, ensuring that access is quickly gained should things start to go wrong. A cover is most definitely in your interest, many Isettas have been lost due to the seats metal springs shorting out across the terminals.

### **Gear change ends:**

Right hand drive Isettas use a cable as part of the gear change mechanism. Never fit a new cable without the cable guides. They are available via the club spares, they consist of a domed nut with an integral floating tube passing through it. The tube supports the exposed ends of the cable, preventing the inner cable from kinking. **Do not fit a cable without these ends.**

### **Sump pans:**

If a sump pan is dented knock it out. The oil pump needs all the clearance it can get. When refitting the sump, first check the fit (without a gasket). There should be a metal to metal fit all the way around. The boltholes on the sump flange are often domed, due to over tightening, so tap them flat. Use a very thin film of Hylamar blue gasket sealant on both sides of the gasket. **Do not use silicone or instant gasket.**

### **Clutch release lever spring:**

Commonly referred to as the beehive spring (part 35 on the gearbox exploded view) it can be lost if your clutch cable breaks. Save yourself the hassle of buying a new one, attach a small piece of wire to the spring and loop it down to the fulcrum pin that holds the clutch lever arm in place. If the cable breaks the wire will retain your spring from disappearing into the hedgerow.

### **Piston collision:**

If you are competent in rebuilding your own engine this is simple to check. Mark the base of the piston with a marker pen. Fit the barrel and piston and rotate by hand. Remove the barrel and piston and inspect. If it is colliding there will be four polished marks where the marker ink has been rubbed away. Solve the problem by getting an engineer with a lathe, to turn off a small amount of the piston base (approx 0.76mm).

### **Oil slinger ring:**

The oil slinger ring (part 37 on the engine exploded view) is a notorious Isetta weak point. Infrequent oil changes lead to it filling up with dirt and debris. Once dull of debris it starves the big end of oil, thus emptying your pocket. Make sure you clean it out when rebuilding the engine. **Ignore this at your expense.** Change your oil every 500-1000 miles maximum.

### **Carb float cap wobble:**

After many years of being tightened down the ears become bent. To repair this damage, first mark the underside edge of the cap with a marker pen. Put the cap back on to the main body and twist it back and forth. The ink will be removed on the high spots. Use a small file to carefully file the caps high spots down. Repeat until you have a good metal to metal fit. Fit a new gasket without any sealant and then tighten screws but not too tight.

### **Drive spider locking tabs:**

These are locking tabs (part 74 on gearbox exploded view) and part 64 on chain case exploded view) are often missing. It is important that these are in place. Put a thin smear of silicone sealer under the washer, this will prevent oil coming up the splines and past the bolt.

### **Silent bloc bushes:**

Ensure that the bottom of the 28mm silent bloc bushes in the steering knuckle is flush with the bottom of the casing. Do **NOT** use standard bolts, the heads are too thick. The correct bolts are available via club spares. The bolts come with the correct castellated nuts. The correct split pins are also available through club spares. Use the correct castellated nuts as often nyloc nuts are used and these are only supposed to be used once, but are often used several times, allowing the nuts to become loose.

### **King Pins:**

To check them you will need to jack the front wheels clear from the ground, use axle stands on the chassis and **NOT** the front steering knuckles. Hold the top and bottom of the tyre, push and pull the wheel. Any movement at all will require new kingpins and bushes. Regularly grease the kingpins to keep them serviceable. Keep pumping the grease in until new grease is visible from the top and bottom 'D' washers.

### **Rear Axle Lubrication:**

Oil seeping out from the rear brake plate can be either brake fluid from the cylinder of rear axle oil. Either is **NOT** a good sign. Remove the back wheel and brake drum to diagnose. If it is axle oil, firstly fit a new seal along with a new gasket, checking that the axle is running true in the seal. Then to avoid losing much loved and needed lubrication, position the back plate cap (part 38 on rear axle exploded view) with the overflow spout at the top. Doing this closes off the hole in the back plate and therefore prevents the loss of the much-needed oil.

### **Brake cylinders:**

Original front brake cylinders have been obsolete for some time. The club now supplies an alternative. If your brakes have not been apart in the recent past, think about servicing them. Clean out the pistons thoroughly to remove any dirt or sludge. At the very least replace the seals. The club has seal kits in stock. (Front and rear). Remember the golden rule; **what you do to one side do to the other.**

### **Dynastart posts:**

Ensure that the post fixing is secure to the dynastart housing. The special grommet must be in place. This supports the top of the post and prevents it breaking at the soldered joint at its base. Use a multi-strand copper cable as it is much more flexible. Solid core cable is too stiff and puts a lot of strain into the posts mounting point. Remember the engine does shake and vibrate quite a bit.

### **Rubber door seal:**

Many people don't know what to use to stick the door rubber to the door. Any good quality impact adhesive will suffice. Firstly, rough up your nice new painted door, only where the seal is to fit, with a piece of emery cloth, don't go mad. People have used super glue in the past to their peril. Don't be tempted to put all the glue on in one hit, apply in small sections, 30cm at a time, and you won't end up wrestling with a rubber snake.

### **Floor:**

When fitting a new floor, it is crucial that you use the chassis as a jig. Put the chassis on axle stands ensuring that it is 100% horizontal flat across the top edge in all directions. Make sure that both wheels sit in the centre of their arches. If the floor is out of square then the body will look twisted and the rear wheels will not be true with the body. So, check all alignments before setting off with the MIG welder in Ernest.

Don't be tempted to cut the old floor out without taking many measurements and photos. Brace the shell when happy to cut out floor.

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