# A rare and unusual Morgan 4-4, now ready to be enjoyed again after a four decade rest...

Published: July 2, 2020

Author: Kim Henson

Online version:
https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/a-rare-and-unusual-morgan-4-4-now-ready-to-be-enjoyed-again-after-a-four-decade-rest/




Kim Henson and Nick Riley tell the story of Nick's 1947 Morgan 4-4 and the fascinating history its bodywork was hiding.

*First, Kim sets the scene with a few words about the famous firm of Morgan and the revered models that the company produced in the early years (and of course the firm is still building its much-in-demand unique sports cars today, more than 110 years down the line).*



110 years of iconic Morgan models…

Morgan three wheelers, with a single driven wheel at the rear, were produced from 1909, with H.F.S. Morgan using externally-mounted vee-twin cylinder engines and incorporating an ingenious sliding hub front suspension design that was employed by the firm for many decades (note that this is often – and strictly speaking incorrectly – known as a sliding pillar set-up).

These machines featured an excellent power to weight ratio, providing astonishing performance when compared with most contemporary vehicles.

From 1936, Morgan produced an all-new four wheeler two seater Roadster in its Malvern factory. The new model was termed 4-4, also known as 4/4 or ‘Four Four’ (to indicate four cylinders and four wheels). These new sports cars incorporated a ‘Z’ section steel chassis frame, featuring box-type cross members, while the body tub was made of steel attached to

an ash frame.

Buyers liked these cars, and a four seater version was soon introduced, with a Drophead Coupé following in 1938. All carried sporting open bodywork and the two seater standard models (only) featured Morgan's 'trademark' twin spare wheels mounted at the rear of the car. All other variants had a single spare wheel.

Meanwhile the three wheelers were still being produced, although sales of the V-twin cylinder engined models were falling. By contrast the Ford (Model Y sidevalve) powered F-type, introduced in 1933 and featuring a 'Z' section steel ladder frame type chassis , plus a bonnet and radiator set-up similar to four wheeled cars of the time, was still selling well. The higher performance two-seater version, introduced in 1938, was named the F Super.

The Second World War brought a halt to Morgan car production but this resumed in 1946, and Peter Morgan (son of H.F.S. Morgan) joined the company in 1947.

The last vee-twin cylinder three wheelers were completed in 1946 and exported to Australia.

At the time there was a massive export drive within the British motor industry, with steel allocations depending on export performance as the U.K. repaid war debts. However there was not a great market for the three wheelers outside of Britain, and in 1950 it was decided to halt their production (the last example was completed in 1953).

The 4-4 (or '4/4' or 'Four Four) continued to be built after the War, and it is interesting to note that the engines used in this model changed through the years…

Early 4-4s from 1936 were fitted with a four cylinder inlet-over-exhaust valve 1122cc Coventry Climax engine, but a fascinating 'Standard Special' overhead valve 1267cc unit was employed from 1939. This followed the decision by Coventry Climax to cease producing their engine for supply to motor to car manufacturers (they continued to build engines for fire pump trailers – invaluable during the coming World War conflict).

## ‘STANDARD SPECIAL’ ENGINE

While the ‘Standard Special’ engine had the same 1267cc capacity as the Standard Motor Company’s sidevalve unit used in the Flying Ten models of the late 1930s, there were many differences within the motors used in the Morgan (and these engines were not fitted to any other vehicles). It is interesting to note too that the Standard Special engine was the only one used by Morgan that incorporated the name ‘Morgan’ cast into the rocker cover.

Among many detail changes the engine was an overhead valve design, the aluminium sump was unique to the motor and the oil pump employed was as fitted to the Standard Flying Twelve and Fourteen models – a higher capacity unit than those fitted to the smaller Standard engines of the time.

In addition, the cylinder block was unique to the motor (and narrower than the engines as used in the Standards). The single piece cast iron manifold (inlet and exhaust combined, and with siamesed inlet ports) was located on the right-hand side of the engine – whereas on the Flying Standard motors it was on the left-hand side.

Power output was a healthy 39 bhp @ 4,500 rpm (40 bhp @ 4,300 rpm for post-War units, and with maximum torque of nearly 62 lb.ft. at 2,500 rpm (post-War figure).

These figures translated into sprightly performance from the 4-4, for a sports car of the 1930s/40s.

## 4-4 PRODUCTION STOPS; ENTER THE PLUS FOUR

Meanwhile, following Standard Motor Company’s adoption of the ‘one model’ (Vanguard) policy from 1948, and with it a ‘one engine’ strategy too (the Vanguard used a 1.8 litre, soon to be 2.1 litre, four cylinder motor), the Standard Special engine was no longer available to Morgan.

A Vanguard-powered prototype for a new Morgan model arrived in 1949, this being put in

production as the ‘Plus Four’ from 1950 (and from 1955 the Triumph TR2 power unit was used).

Production of the 4-4 was halted in 1950, to be re-started in ‘Series II’ form from 1955, now with 1172cc four cylinder sidevalve Ford 100E model power.

Nick Riley now takes up the story in his own words, with regard to his own 1947 4-4… His text was first used in the June 2020 issue of ‘Miscellany’, the magazine of the Morgan Sports Car Club. Grateful thanks to Nick for allowing me to use his words and photographs, including new pictures he has taken for Wheels-Alive of the car as it is today…

## A VERY PECULIAR MORGAN



Nick’s Morgan prior to purchase…

Retirement finally caught up with me at the end of August last year and although I have several classic motorcycle and car projects “on the go” I decided to treat myself to a sports car that I could actually drive and enjoy. Over the years I’ve owned several Triumph TRs of various sorts, a Jaguar and a couple of TVRs so I started browsing the internet to try to find something affordable and a bit different.

My closest encounter with Morgans up to that point (apart from a quick blast as a passenger in a modern 3-wheeler) was back in the early 1980s, when a colleague of my then wife called Bob Adams helped me to weld up a Frogeye Sprite. We lived in Chelmsford at the time and Bob was a mechanical technician at Writtle Agricultural College. Bob had restored

a flat-radiator two-seater but fitted a cowled front. It was coloured red and I remember being very taken with the twin spare wheels. Through Bob we ended up helping as support crew for Norman Stetchman's Plus-8 team at the Willhire 24 race at Snetterton, probably in 1982.

So I had a look at some Morgans for sale and quickly found an advert for a "1947 Four-4, last used in the mid-1970s…" at a very reasonable price. The advert had been placed that day (a Friday) and it seemed to me that it wouldn't be available for long. All thoughts of a practical, drivable car went out of the window. Two days later I drove the eight-hour round trip to view the car and arranged to buy it. I gave it what I thought was a thorough examination but the fact that it passed this examination was entirely due to my ignorance of Morgan cars. I didn't find any soft or rotten wood and I think I'm a competent mechanic so it looked like a straightforward restoration. My plan was my usual approach to these projects: phase one, get it functioning; phase two, tidy it up.

The car was accompanied by a small amount of history. Apparently it had been ordered and paid for in 1947 and delivered to its first owner in Guernsey in 1948. It was first registered on 30th June 1948. It's original colour was Sax blue with black running boards and blue wheels. A report on an inspection carried out by the MSCC in July 2017 indicated that it still has its original Standard Special engine and Moss gearbox. The only other documents were an original green log book, a couple of old MoT certificates and a tax disc in the windscreen which expired at the end of August 1979.

Looking at the details in these documents, it seems that the car was re-imported to the UK from Guernsey in 1965. Over the next four years it had four owners based in Wales, then it lived in York for a year. During 1968 to 1971 it lived at the Post Office in Knayton near Thirsk during which time its colour was changed to dark green. The car then passed to Mr A of County Durham, who used in for a few years and then laid it up in the late 1970s.

After nearly 40 years asleep, it was sold at Bonhams Auctioneers in 2016. This new owner commissioned the MSCC report mentioned above. Unfortunately he had to sell it so it went

to Charterhouse Auction in February 2018. Again nothing was done with the car until I purchased it at the end of November last year.

If you haven't dozed off by now you will at least be thinking "so, why is this peculiar?". It is indeed the sort of story that accompanies the majority of "barn-find" type projects. I started to read a bit about early Morgans and realised that the fact that it was fitted with trafficators (semaphore-arm type indicators) was unusual, as these were normally only fitted to coupes at that time. In conversation with George Proudfoot, during the purchase of engine overhaul spares (valves, guides, springs, gaskets, exhaust etc) he said he'd never come across a Morgan with rear wheel spats (wheel covers) whereas my car has brackets and slots on both rear wheel arches clearly designed to take spats. Both the trafficators and wheel cover brackets could easily have been added, so they don't really count as peculiar either.

Whilst waiting for the engine parts to arrive I made a start on stripping out the very tatty and incomplete interior and this is where it does get peculiar. I couldn't find any wood. This is probably why my brief inspection of the car before I bought it, didn't show up any soft or rotten wood. There is no wood. Actually that's a slight exaggeration, as it does have plywood floors and the rail around the back of the cockpit has wood inside it. But the rest of the car is entirely steel. So whereas I thought that the loose door hinges were falling out of rotten wooden "A" posts, it was actually just a case of tightening the screws which were tapped into a substantial metal A post. The steel internal structure looks very professionally made. In particular the rear inner wheel arches and internal door frames look like proper pressings. The doors and B posts have been made to accept "Silent Travel" locks, of the type fitted to contemporary MG T-types. All of the internal steelwork shows evidence of the pre-1969 blue paint, so if the car was modified, it was done prior to 1969.



Rear inner structure – all steel!



Door inner casing.



Silent Travel lock housing.

The final bit of peculiarity is around the chassis number. When the car was inspected in 2017 as mentioned already, the chassis number could not be found on the chassis crossmember, although the “correct” chassis number was found on the bonnet hinge. This is not unusual since the numbers on the chassis were often quite lightly stamped and suffer from rust and abrasion over the years. However, I spent about two hours very carefully examining the cross members in minute detail and eventually found the chassis number “00L1” stamped in the usual place. Now this is very intriguing. I’d be very grateful if any

readers either remember this car or can shine any light on the origin of this very peculiar all-steel Morgan.



Chassis number 00L1.

UPDATE FROM NICK RILEY, 1st JULY 2020:

Nick writes, “Following publication of the article in the June edition of the Morgan Sports Car Club magazine “Miscellany”, Martyn Webb (the Morgan Motor Company archivist) told me that the all-steel body on the car is in fact its original body. The car was exported to “Motorhouse”, Guernsey as a brand new rolling chassis in 1948. Motorhouse existed until about 20 years ago when it was taken over by Freelance. To quote Martyn Webb: “The body on Nick’s car was therefore most likely built, not by the Morgan factory, but by a craftsman in Guernsey, who may not have been familiar with the use of an ash frame, or if he was, decided to do the job using his own methods instead. As in the case of the Indian 4/4, the timber-less body on 1591 is probably the car’s original 1948 body! The provision of semaphore indicators and spats over the rear wheels may also have been original features rather than later additions. There is a convincing argument therefore for retaining and restoring this unusual all-steel body”.

I contacted Freelance and they were very helpful in trying to trace the company who built the body, but with no success to date. I have also contacted the Guernsey Old Car Club but again without success.”

Kim adds: “If any Wheels-Alive readers have any information about Nick’s car or its bodywork build in Guernsey, he would be delighted to hear from you. In this case please e-mail me via this website and any replies will be forwarded to Nick. Thanks.”

PROGRESS SO FAR ON NICK’S MORGAN, TO 1st July 2020




Almost ready to return to the road, what a beauty!

Nick explains, “I now have it running and tidied up. The engine has received new exhaust valves and guides and new valve springs, I’ve substantially re-wired it, installed the seats, overhauled the distributor, fitted a Dynamator (alternator disguised as a dynamo), restored the dashboard and sorted out the lights, indicators and dashboard warning lights. One interesting “feature” was that the car would turn left on a sixpence but wouldn’t turn right – the steering box drop-arm was incorrectly positioned. So, after its 40-year sleep, the car is now almost ready for a road test.”

## MORE ABOUT MORGANS:

For anyone interested in owning, or learning more about, Morgan models, these links may help:

Morgan Sports Car Club: https://www.morgansportscarclub.com//

Morgan Motor Company – history: https://www.morgan-motor.com/history/

Kim concludes, “Grateful thanks to Nick for this insight into, and story of, his delightful rare Morgan. He has promised to keep me up to date with further progress on this car, plus his other three classic cars (Saab 95, Riley Gamecock and Datsun 240Z – long-term restoration) and 25 motorcycles!”