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Austin Counties Car Club 50th Anniversary Rally June 2025

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Kim Henson reports on a fabulous Austins Counties Car Club celebratory get-together for owners and enthusiasts of Austins produced between 1939 and the mid-1950s...

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It was in 1975 that Ian Wheeler set up an organisation to support the preservation and enjoyment of Austin models built between 1939 and 1954 (and Austin A40 Devon-based commercial variants which continued in production until 1957).



It is a tribute to Ian's vision, plus his dedication and enthusiasm, and that of those involved with running the group ever since then, that the 'Austin Counties Car Club' is still going strong 50 years later and still operates with the same aims in mind.

Renowned for being one of the most friendly and helpful classic car organisations, the Counties Club caters for owners and enthusiasts of a wide variety of Austins. These include all variants of the company's Eights, Tens, Twelves and Sixteens produced from 1939 until 1948, plus those vehicles from 1948 bearing the names of English counties (and which gave these vehicles the unofficial name of 'Counties' models; hence the Club's title too).

Encompassed under this heading are the A40 Dorset two door saloon, A40 Devon four door saloon, A40 Somerset in four door saloon and two door Coupé forms, the A70 Hampshire and A70 Hereford models.

The Club also covers the A40 Devon-based Jensen-bodied A40 Sports, the A40 Devon-derived commercial derivatives (produced until early 1957), plus the 2.2 litre K8 'three way' commercials and all versions of the dramatically styled A90 Atlantic.

Austin Counties Car Club (ACCC) 50th Anniversary Rally

Held over the weekend of 20th to 22nd June 2025 in sweltering sun-bathed conditions, the Club's very special 50th Anniversary/Golden Jubilee Rally involved visiting the three counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, and was based at the Charlecote Pheasant Hotel, Warwickshire. It attracted participants from far and wide in the UK as well as overseas, with visitors from Holland, the United States and New Zealand in attendance.

Friday 20th June

Slideshow below: Some of the early Austin arrivals at the event on Friday 20th June.

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The festivities started on Friday 20th June with members arriving in time for a buffet evening meal.

The array of Austins in the hotel car park was terrific to see for anyone fascinated by these cars. There was particular interest in the A90 Atlantic owned by Robbert de Bie and driven from Holland to Warwickshire by Robbert with his friend Harm Derks. This fantastic Austin (included in the slideshow above) was rescued from a United States scrapyard and recommissioned in Holland. It had last been on the road in 1968! What a great effort to get it to the 50th Anniversary Rally.

Another brilliant car (pictured below) that attracted much attention was the A70 Hampshire saved from oblivion by Richard Hughes, who had carried out extensive work on the vehicle to get it roadworthy. The Austin is used often and ran faultlessly throughout the weekend.



Friday's meal was followed by a fascinating talk delivered by David Whyley. He explained the early and urgent post-War necessity for the Austin Motor Company to export as many vehicles as possible (to the exclusion of virtually all home market buyers). This was to help repay huge wartime-incurred debts, and since the government of the day operated stringent measures for the allocation of steel according to export performance.

David also talked about the vital association in the minds of potential buyers abroad between the Austin company and vehicles produced in this country (hence the 'Austin of England' script on the cars). He also elaborated on the 'Flying A' bonnet-mounted motifs used by Austin from the late 1940s onwards.



Fittingly, on display within the dining room throughout the event was the Club's terrific 'sectioned' A40 Devon chassis, in splendid condition after restoration work.



In addition, each evening copies were displayed of Austin sales literature, as well as unique memorabilia (shown below) relating to Alan Hess and his amazing publicity drives far and wide around the globe, from around 75 years ago.



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Saturday 21st June



Two A40 Coupés pause by Walton Hall.

Rally-goers set off from the hotel to take part in a meandering 15 mile road run through beautiful rolling countryside to the National Herb Centre, via the picturesque Walton Hall. The route included ascending the notorious Edge Hill – a good test for all vehicles, including old Austins!

Below: Some of the cars seen ‘resting’ at the National Herb Centre...

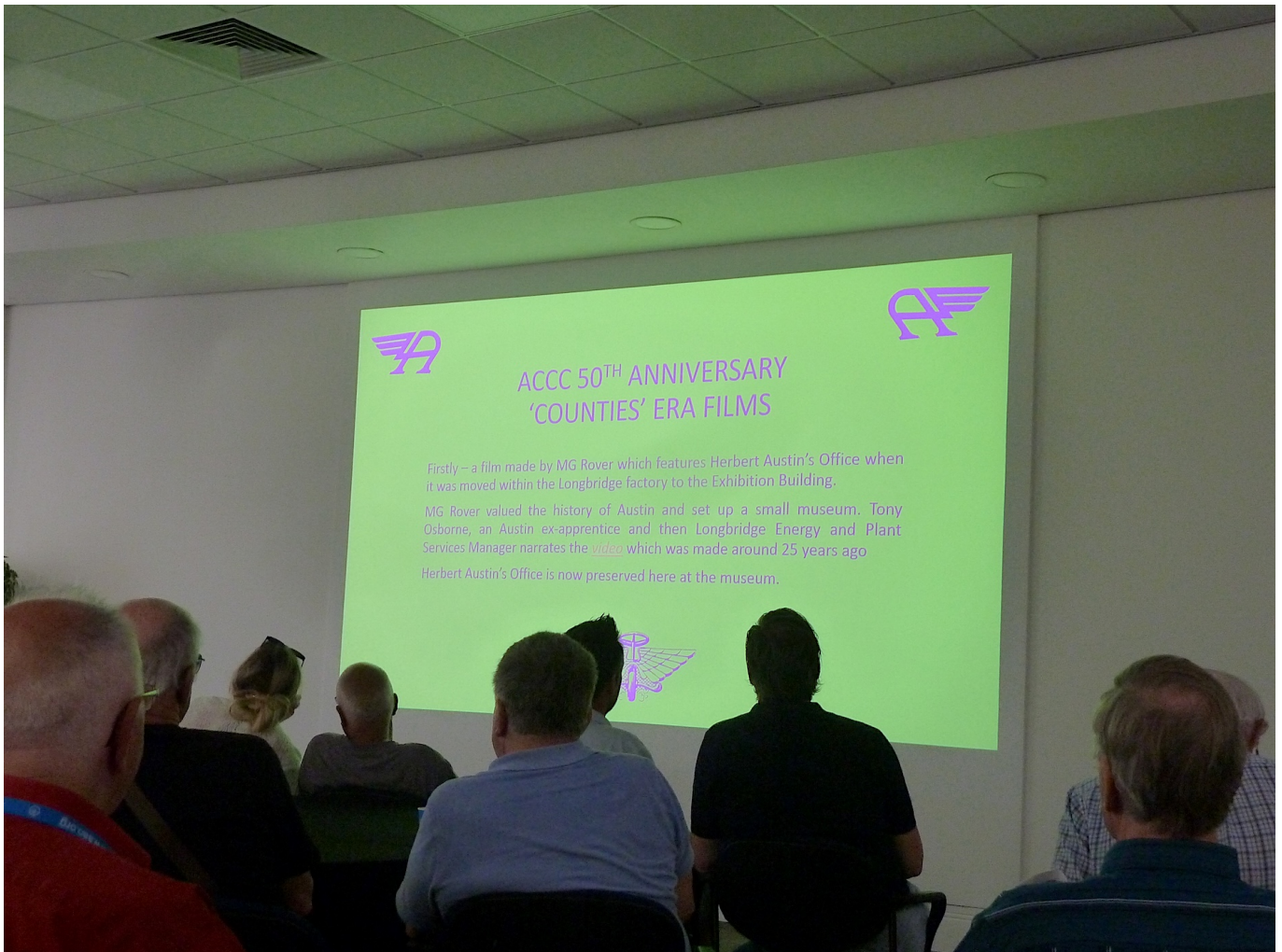
This slideshow requires JavaScript.

After refreshments and a look around the amazing varieties of herbs on offer, participants were back in their vehicles to continue their short drive to the British Motor Museum at Gaydon. The photos below show some of the Austins lined up outside the Museum entrance, where they attracted much attention...



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At the Museum the Counties Club members were treated to viewings of a number of Austin publicity films made between 1939 and the early 1950s, including coverage of a stiff test in the Lake District for the then-new 1939 Austin Eight model, also the various publicity events undertaken by Alan Hess in the late 1940s/early 1950s to promote the reliability and practicality of Austin vehicles.



Austin publicity film show about to start.

While there, the Club presented to the Museum an original collection of 15 'General Arrangement Drawings' of Austin cars of the Counties' era. These beautiful art works are in



fact completely accurate illustrations of complicated Austin products, including whole vehicles. They were meticulously drawn at Longbridge (on linen paper, by highly skilled draughtsmen) whenever a new model was being introduced, and were usually produced ahead of the pre-production phase of vehicle design.

These drawings were due to be scrapped in 2005 after the demise of Rover, but thankfully were rescued from a skip at Longbridge before being acquired by the Club.

These linen paper drawings are fragile, so after being digitally scanned they have been passed to the Museum (in a handover with Counties members present in front of Lord Austin's Office, moved from its original home at Longbridge) for safe keeping for the future).

Herbert Austin's Office

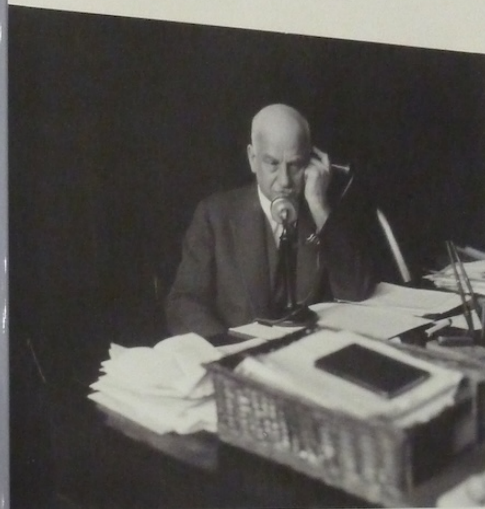
When Herbert Austin arrived at Longbridge in 1905, he got straight to work in a room adjacent to the administration block's front door. It would be his office until his death in 1941.

From his window, Austin could see the works gates (later 'K' Gate) and out south past the Victorian water pumping station to Rubery village. He watched his factory grow bigger and busier.

In the 1950s Longbridge expanded dramatically. Two directors spent short periods working in 'The Old Man's office' while their new offices were constructed, before Austin's Office was put into storage as the original buildings were swept away.

In 1958 Austin's Office was installed in the new South Engineering Block. Now visitors could get a glimpse into his workplace. In 2002 the office was relocated yet again to the Exhibition Hall.

In 2021 MG Motor UK offered the office to the Museum. Everything in the office was methodically recorded, including individually numbering hundreds of wall panels and parquet floor tiles, before the move to Gaydon.





The Austin Club party was then free to explore the Museum before departing on a final section of road run back to the hotel. The photo slideshow below depicts some of the exhibits on display...

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If you have never yet visited the British Motor Museum, or haven't been there recently, I urge you to go and have a look for yourself. The displays are innovative and effective, and the history of motoring in Britain is comprehensively covered. Exhibits include examples of a wide range of vehicles, including, in alphabetical order, Austins, Fords, Jaguars, Morris and Triumph models, plus many from other manufacturers. In addition to the main museum exhibits (including their excellent 'Time Road', 'Design and Concept' and 'Sports Car' areas), there are zones exclusively covering Jaguars and Land Rovers - in each case including some rare and 'one-off' vehicles.



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Saturday evening, 21st June - Dinner



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An A40 Devon-based van, A70 Hereford saloon and two very rare A70 Hereford Coupés, all owned by Chris Cole, lined up outside the dining room.

The Saturday evening saw a three course dinner being served, with many attendees dressed in clothing appropriate to the era of their vehicles.

After dinner speakers included Club Chairman Alastair While (with a short talk about how he became interested in the 'Counties' cars and how this led to his involvement with the organisation), President Chris Tallents (talking about the history of the Club and the Austin models it represents, and he proposed a toast to 'Lord Austin and the Austin Motor Company'), and Tony Osborne. Tony is Vice President of the Austin Apprentice Association and spoke about his Austin experiences within his illustrious career with the company which ran from 1972 until the closure of Rover in 2005 (and including his many years in charge of the Austin J40 pedal car factory at Bargoed in South Wales). Tony proposed a toast to 'The Austin Counties Car Club'.

Next it was the turn of Norman Milne, ACCC Archivist, to pay tribute to Alan Hess, responsible for so many daring/adventurous publicity events involving post-War Austin models when new. Norman proposed a toast to 'Alan Hess'.

The wonderful 50th Anniversary cake was then cut by long-time Club member Romer Adams (pictured below)...



Last but not least, prizes were awarded by Austin ex-Apprentice Mike Sheehan, to rally-going members for: 'Furthest travelled in an Austin', 'Furthest travelled' and 'Best period dress'.

Sunday 22nd June



An early start was the order of the day as participants took to their cars for a marvellous drive (arranged by John Reed) that took them to a variety of locations used by the Austin Motor Company for the beautiful publicity photographs (truly works of art) of the firm's various new models of the late 1940s/early 1950s.

The drive culminated in a spectacular line-up of Counties vehicles at Coughton Court, Warwickshire, where photographs of the cars were taken and the assembled cars and their occupants were video-filmed from a low-flying drone. Coughton Court was significant for the Austin company as, in 1952, it was the location used for photography of the then-new A40 Coupe (four seater convertible). Three members present on 22nd June 2025 took



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photographs of their own A40 Coupés in the same spot!



A90 Atlantic, A40 Coupé and 16 at Coughton Court.



Seen here at Coughton Court; on the left is Harm Derks, on the right is Robbert de Bie, with Robbert's Atlantic in which they drove from Holland to the Rally, and back again.

For those who wished, there was a further section of road run to the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway (GWSR) at Toddington in Gloucestershire.

For some the weekend fun continued with a final evening meal in Wellesbourne (with a record number of 37 people in attendance), whereas for others they started their respective journeys home, in some cases travelling over long distances.



VERDICT

My wife and I were made very welcome at the Rally and had a wonderful time over the weekend. All participants I spoke to agreed that it was a fantastic and very well-organised event, and very fitting for the Club's Golden Jubilee/50th Anniversary celebration. The legendary camaraderie among Club members was again evident throughout the weekend.

A huge amount of work was put in by the members of the organising team, for which grateful thanks are due.

A nice, much-appreciated, touch for Rally-goers was the comprehensive Rally Pack presented to attendees at the event. Included were beautifully-produced booklets relating to the 'General Arrangement Drawings' referred to earlier in my report, and covering the locations used by Austin for photographing the company's products in the late 1940s/early 1950s, plus detailed maps for Sunday's road run taking in these locations.

On a personal note, I was delighted that we were able to travel to and from the event in our 1954 A40 Coupé, after much preparatory work to ready it for the weekend, in which we covered around 400 miles in total. It was great to take part in our 71 year old Somerset, and I was reminded of the firm's sales slogan from long ago, 'You buy a car, but invest in an Austin'!



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Kim's A40 Coupé at Coughton Court, where the model's publicity photographs were taken by Austin in 1952.

The Austin Counties Car Club

If you own one or more of these Austins (or just have an interest in them), joining the Club can make the experience even more enjoyable, and indeed can help you keep your car(s) on the road. There's much more information about the Club at:

<https://www.austincounties.org.uk>

I also featured the Club on this website in April 2020; the direct link to the article is at:

[classic-clubs-series-no-2-the-austin-counties-car-club/](#)

On this website there's also a review of Dr. David Whyley's excellent book on the J40 pedal cars at: [for-your-bookshelf-the-austin-pedal-car-story-the-fascinating-history-of-austins-j40-and-pathfinder/](#)