BMC and Leyland Show attracted classics galore on a very hot summer weekend

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Above: Austin Counties Club cars take pride of place.

Enthusiasts flock to the BMC and Leyland Show…

…Kim Henson reports.

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Henson).

The British Motor Museum at Gaydon played host to this year's BMC and Leyland Show (held annually, Covid-apart) on Sunday 10th July. On a blistering hot day, more than 800 classic vehicles produced by BMC BL, Leyland and Rover arrived, together with their enthusiastic owners. Some of the vehicles were individual entries, while others formed part of displays arranged by a multitude of one make/model clubs.

What a great show it was, and I hope that what follows, while not exhaustive, gives a flavour of what was on offer to see…

Austin Counties Club models

I started my tour looking at vehicles put on display by members of this year's 'featured' Club; the Austin Counties Car Club, which caters for a wide variety of Austin models produced from 1939 to 1954.

The sensational line-up of Austin Counties models around the main doors of the museum was terrific to behold. These included a Second World War 'military' Austin Twelve (pictured below), post-War Sixteens, A40 Devons and Somersets, plus A70 Hampshire and Hereford models. 'Non-Counties' but nonetheless fascinating vehicles also adorning the stand included a Metropolitan, a prototype four wheel drive Austin Ant and an A35.



I was thrilled to see them all, but especially enticing from my perspective were the immaculate Devon-based A40 pick-up, (complete with its ‘load’ of a J40 pedal car), owned by Tony Key, Chris Coles’ ultra-rare A70 Hereford Coupé (drophead), also a spectacular A70 Hereford ‘woodie’ estate car, plus A40 Sports and Somerset Coupé models, not to mention a fabulous line-up of A90 Atlantics.



Above: Austin J40 pedal car on the load bed of Tony Key’s A40 Pick-up.



Above: A70 Hereford ‘Woodie’ estate.

Many Minis



Moving on around the displays of other models, there were Minis galore (the ‘original’ series, sold from 1959 to 2000), including sporting versions, and it was also very nice to see an early Morris Mini-Minor looking pristine in the sunshine.



Family Farinas



I then turned my attention to the various four and six cylinder ‘Farina’ saloons and estates. The mid-range ‘family Farina’ models started in 1958/9 with the four cylinder 1.5 litre Wolseley 15/60 and Austin Cambridge A55 Mark II, then evolved through the years until 1971, with different variants badged Austin, Morris and Wolseley, plus twin carburettor MG Magnette and Riley versions. Six cylinder Farina-styled models from 1959 were the Austin Westminster A99 and upmarket Wolseley 6/99, changing to the A110 and Wolseley 6/110 from 1962. There were also very high specification Vanden Plas 3 litre models.

I admired all on display, buy my attention was especially drawn to a lovely Westminster A110 and an equally smart Wolseley 6/110 – essentially a ‘posher’ version of the Westminster.



Rovers



Next on my agenda were the Rover P6 models, ranging from the 2000 to the V8 powered P6B, such advanced cars in their time I feel.

There was also a line-up of Rover SD1 variants to admire; these were so far ahead of their time when introduced in late 1976 and still look freshly styled, even today.



More modern Rovers were represented by examples from the 200/400 ranges in a wide variety of guises.



Other versions on display included the sporty 200 BRMs (delivering 140+ bhp) with their un-missable orange frontal trims. The larger modern classic Rovers, produced until 2005, were also on show in abundance, and very attractive they looked too.



Marinas, Itals, Metros, Maestros and Montegos

Family cars were on show in abundance, including examples of Marina saloon, coupé and estate models, introduced in 1971, plus Ital variants, which arrived in 1980 and are now very scarce but no less practical. These straightforward rear wheel drive family models sold well in their day, and made money for BL…



Above: Attractive Marina Coupé.



Above: A late Ital saloon in superb condition.

The Metro hatchback was hailed as a car to save BL when it arrived in 1980, and it was good to see some pristine much-loved examples on display.

I also enjoyed seeing some terrific-looking Maestro hatchbacks and Montego saloons. The Maestro was launched in 1983 and the Montego in 1984, offering space and comfort within a reasonably compact body shell. The turbocharged petrol versions were especially fast for their time.

MGs in abundance

MGs were on display in large numbers as well, including Midgets, MGBs, and more modern classic variants of the sporting ‘Z’ cars, ZR, ZS and ZT (introduced to much acclaim in late 2001), also the F and TF two seater sports cars.



I was pleased to see the MGs displayed by the MG Car Club ‘Young Members’ group, encouraging youngsters to get interested in classics.



Classic Car Loan Project



Classic Car Loan Project Ital saloon handover (Grateful thanks to Bob Wilkinson for the photograph).

In the same vein the excellent Classic Car Loan Project, conceived by Bob Wilkinson, was on hand to extoll the virtues of classic car enjoyment and ownership, to young people. On the day, and with the terrific support of the Marina/Ital Owners' Club and Peter James Insurance, a smart 1980 Ital saloon that had been bequeathed to the Club was handed over to its new custodian Dan Tompkinson, for a year's use.

Round number anniversaries

2022 marks 70 years of the A40 Somerset (celebrated by the Counties Car Club).



It is also 70 years since the Austin A30s were first sold in Britain (having been introduced at the 1951 Earls Court Motor Show) and 60 years since the best-seller front wheel drive Morris 1100 (later followed by Austin, MG, Wolseley, Riley and luxurious Vanden Plas variants of the 1100/1300) was introduced.



I didn’t spot any A30s at the Show, but did notice three A35s – introduced in 1956 and developed from the A30 (Austin’s first unitary construction car).



Above: Two Austin A35s side by side, from left to right in Island Blue and Speedwell Blue, respectively.

Minors and Wolseleys

I enjoyed seeing the line-up of Morris Minors of all descriptions, ranging from early ‘split-screen’ Minor models (the first of which arrived in 1948, with a sidevalve 918cc engine, later replaced by Austin’s 803cc overhead valve unit from the A30) to the later Minor 1000s (with 948cc and, from 1962, 1098cc BMC ‘A’ Series motors).



Wolseleys on show included a number of 1500 four door saloons (early and late types). Sold during the late 1950s/early 1960s these were powered by the BMC ‘B’ Series 1.5 litre engine and offered good performance, reasonable space and excellent handling for their time. The uprated, twin carburettor Riley 1.5 version was faster still, and a great example of a sporting family saloon of its time.



I was thrilled to see a 15/50, such a stylish car and based on the 4/44 but powered by BMC's then-new 1.5 litre 'B' Series motor.



I was also very happy to find a 1936 12/48 to admire. In two tone blue and black, I thought this was a great-looking vehicle. Wolseleys of the 1930s were higher specification versions of equivalent Morris models, and quite rare today.



‘Land Crabs’, Austin 3 Litre models and Allegros

Continuing the front wheel drive layout started within BMC with the 1959 Minis and then the highly successful 1100/1300 ranges, the ‘Land Crab’ took the theme to a higher level with the 1800 models. Powered by a 1.8 litre version of the proven ‘B’ Series engine, mounted transversely, these were spacious and very comfortable saloons of their time. BMC/BL also produced six cylinder 2.2 litre variants. Examples of both were there to enjoy seeing at the Show.



Rarely encountered these days are the rear wheel drive, oh-so-spacious and comfortable Austin 3 Litre models, of which several were on display; lovely they looked too!



I must also mention the Austin Allegro, produced in the late 1970s/1980s and providing front wheel drive motoring within saloon or two door estate car bodywork. The Allegro provided up to the minute styling and there were versions ranging from economical 1.1 litre models to sporting 1750cc variants. It was good to see a line-up of well cared-for examples at Gaydon; they are quite rare these days.



Standards and Triumphs

Standard-Triumph was drawn into the BL/Leyland ‘family’ in 1968 (with the Triumph name being applied from 1963, after 100 years of Standards).

A variety of Standard models, including an early Vanguard estate and rare commercials, was available to admire at this Show, and there were Triumphs galore too. These included examples of Herald (introduced in 1959), Dolomite and Stag, as well as 2000/2500 saloons and TR sports cars – all, in their different ways, stylish motor cars in my view.


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Innocenti



I was delighted to see an Innocenti 950 sports car, dating from 1962 and the result of collaboration between BMC and Innocenti. This model was launched at the 1960 Turin Motor Show, and was powered by BMC's 948cc (Sprite-type) engine.

What a great-looking sports car…

Autojumble stalls – and The Museum

In addition to the cars on show, there were relevant autojumble stalls that seemed to be busy, and The British Motor Museum was open for visitors to enjoy.



I have visited the Museum many times over the last few decades, and always enjoy the experience. The vehicles within are well-displayed in innovative ways, and plenty of information is provided for those who wish to know more about the exhibits. Favourite exhibits of mine include the ‘toy’ cars displayed on top of their ‘boxes’ and the millionth Austin produced, a Sixteen that was signed by the people who built the car in 1948.

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VERDICT

Terrific – a fabulous day out for any car enthusiast, and especially those with an interest in the products of the BMC/BL/Leyland eras. Roll on next year's event!

For information about the British Motor Museum and their forthcoming events, please go to:

https://www.britishmotormuseum.co.uk