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Classic Clubs Series – No. 2 – The Austin Counties Car Club

Published: April 24, 2020

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/classic-clubs-series-no-2-the-austin-counties-car-club/>



Are you interested in, or do you own... any of the Austin models built between 1939 and 1954 (and some commercial versions were produced until 1957)? If the answer is yes, it would be a good move to contact and join this club...

With regard to this series of articles, Kim Henson says... "Over time Wheels-Alive will be looking at the many enthusiastic organisations that exist to help their members to keep their classic vehicles (of various makes, models and types) on the road, and to have fun in so doing. We shall focus on one club per feature..."



This time we are shining the Wheels-Alive spotlight on the Austin Counties Car Club Ltd. Kim explains...

(Photographs taken at the Club stand at the 2019 NEC Classic Car Show, courtesy Austin Counties Car Club; all other photographs by Kim).

The cars – background



A pair of Austin Eights... the model was introduced in 1939 and re-introduced in mildly updated form at the end of World War II.

The Austin Motor Company was highly successful during the 1930s, and continued to forge ahead immediately after the Second World War and on into the 1950s.



The firm's pre-War reputation for producing high quality yet affordable, dependable vehicles, from the tiny and oh-so-economical to run Austin Seven to their large luxurious six cylinder saloons, plus well-respected commercials in a wide variety of sizes and types, was second to none.

The wartime years necessarily saw a curtailment of producing cars for the public, but Austin contributed hugely in terms of building military hardware to help Britain's War Effort.

Production of the Austin Ten continued uninterrupted throughout the War, with a total of more than 40,000 saloons and 'Tilly' utility models being produced for military use. (There is a famous photograph of Her Majesty the Queen with a Tilly, taken when she was Princess Elizabeth). In addition, nearly 100,000 Austin trucks were built during the conflict.

Crucially the company was ready to hit the ground running when hostilities ceased, including rapidly re-introducing mildly amended 1939/40 Eight, Ten and Twelve models (plus the new overhead valve Sixteen, more of which anon.) to keep the company going and supplying vehicles until radical new line-ups were launched in the late 1940s. In fact the Eight and Ten were re-introduced in civilian forms in 1945, and the Twelve in 1946.

The Ten was the first British model back in production, in May 1945, and a Ten was the first 'post-war' car to be exported - to New York.

The Austin company continued to produce cost-effective, reliable and well-respected vehicles, and in the U.K.'s post-War era which required exports galore, the firm's spectacular success in selling its products around the globe was a terrific help to Britain (in earning export currency) as well as further boosting the company's position and finances.

The bold new model ranges of the late 1940s evolved during the next few years, with a raft of up-to-the-minute features being incorporated into Austin vehicles.

Like their predecessors, Austins of these years were well-received and the new models were seen as being built with care and using high quality materials, but they were also modern



for their time. The overall effect was to further raise the profile and status of the Austin Motor Company, and in due course the cars became more widely available to home buyers as well as those in export markets.

The Club and the models it caters for



A variety of 'commercials', based on the A40 Devon (and some versions continued in production until 1957).

It was in 1975 when the Austin Counties Car Club was set up, and through the 45 years since then the organisation has built up an enviable reputation among enthusiasts for its helpful, friendly approach.



One of the fascinating aspects of this club is the wide variety of vehicles catered for, and their events attract a diverse mixture of types and ages of cars and commercials. In fact the organisation covers more than 80 models, of 12 basic types!

Currently the Club has 775 members – an all-time high figure.

[It is interesting to briefly look at the models covered by the Counties Car Club...](#) (Please note that this is just an overview; each vehicle really deserves an in-depth feature of its own!).

I'll start with the cars introduced by Austin just prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. These were the new Austin Eight (900cc), replacing the Big Seven, and the latest Ten (1125cc), both featuring semi-unitary body/chassis construction, and the Twelve (1535cc), which retained a traditional separate chassis frame. All were powered by sidevalve four cylinder engines and incorporated fresh bodywork styling by comparison with the more 'perpendicular' designs of previous Austins. The Eight and Ten were re-introduced in mildly revised forms, as the War came to an end.

The new 1945 Sixteen had similar styling to the Twelve, but with much more power and torque available, courtesy of its 2.2 litre (2199cc) four cylinder overhead valve engine – it was the first Austin car to feature an ohv power unit.



From left to right... Two Austin Eight four door saloons, and two Sixteens line up at a Counties Club rally.

The all-new A40 Devon (four door saloon; shown below) and short-lived Dorset (two door) models made their debut in October 1947, and were well-received by the press and buying public. They retained traditional separate chassis construction, but with stylish new - and very modern-looking - bodywork hiding a new 1200cc overhead valve engine and independent front suspension. Some commercial variants continued in production until 1957.



The 'A40' designation referred to the (approximate) bhp output of the engine, and in fact this approach was used for many Austin models right through to the end of the 1960s.

The contemporary four door A70 Hampshire, from 1948, was similarly styled to the A40, but was a much larger car, and was powered by the 2.2 litre engine first seen in the Sixteen.

The 2.6 litre four cylinder A90 Atlantic was shown at the 1948 London Motor Show, and was a fast and spectacular looking motor car for its time, with styling deliberately aimed at the U.S.A. market, where to be truthful it was not the hoped-for success. However today the surviving Atlantics are much revered by enthusiasts. Four seater convertible and fixed head



versions were produced until 1950 and 1952 respectively.



Replacing the Hampshire, a new version of the A70, designated 'Hereford', arrived in 1950 with boldy restyled bodywork, but still retained the proven 2.2 litre engine of its predecessor. The Herefords were produced until 1954.



From left to right, a rare A70 Hampshire, next to an A70 Hereford. Both featured 2.2 litre overhead valve engines, as used in the earlier Austin Sixteen.

Meanwhile in 1952 the four door A40 Somerset saloon arrived, still with a separate chassis and still with the 1200cc engine of the Devon, which it replaced. However the bodywork was all-new, and the car looked very much like a scaled-down A70 Hereford, with the same 'family' appearance. (Note: This body style was also applied to the smaller A30 from 1951, but this monocoque 'baby' Austin does not come under the Counties Club umbrella of models).



In addition to saloons, Austin produced attractive four seater drophead versions of the A40 Somerset and the A70 Hereford; both were designated 'Coupé'. The Hereford Coupés, like the one shown below, are especially rare.



Mention also needs to be made of the A40 Sports, based on the Devon and built between 1950 and 1953, with aluminium bodywork by Jensen, and a twin carburettor version of the 1200cc overhead valve engine.



You may have noticed that the new Austin models from 1947/8 onwards were known by their respective English 'county' names (as well as by their engine power in bhp); hence the 'Counties Car Club'...

Commercial versions, mainly vans and pick-ups, were produced of the A40 and A70; these and the K8 '3-way' van – so called as it feature doors at the sides as well as the rear (and derivatives) were important vehicles in Austin's history and are also catered for by the Counties Club.



[A magnificent Austin K8 in ambulance form.](#)

For context I should add that the next generations of Austins, which are not covered by the Counties Club, featured 'chassis-less' unitary construction, including the A30 from 1951 (powered by a new 803cc overhead valve four cylinder engine, effectively like a two-thirds scale version of the A40's unit), the A40 (1200cc) and A50 (1489cc) Cambridge models from September 1954, and equivalent six cylinder Westminsters of the same era. All these cars are catered for by other clubs (that we also aim to cover in due course, later in this series).

What does the Counties Club do?

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The organisation is known and liked for its friendly approach and the way in which all owners or those interested in the cars are welcomed.

It is run by volunteer enthusiasts for the enthusiast members, and in addition to its first class bi-monthly magazine, 'County Counsel', the Club holds local and national get-togethers/rallies, as well as local meetings.

In recent years the Club has won numerous awards for its displays at the NEC Classic Car Shows, which help to bring wider attention to the various ranges of Austins covered by the organisation. In November 2019 it was the turn of the A90 Atlantic to be highlighted.

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The Club's excellent spares service for members is very active and much appreciated by members, helping to keep the cars on the road and/or assist with restoration projects.

Notable too is the level of friendly advice available within the organisation, member-to-member and also via the network of model-specific ACCC 'Representatives', who can assist members.

As a member of the Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs (FBHVC) the organisation is also represented at national level so can give and receive information relating to the wider classic movement.

In addition the Club has a DVLA representative to help members with, for example, requests to retain or reinstate vehicles' original registration numbers (under the DVLA rules and regulations).

The Club's archive helps to accurately date barn finds and imports in support of the DVLA registration processes.

The Club has a comprehensive and useful website too: <http://www.austincounties.org.uk>



Please note: Due to the current national/international Covid-19 situation, Club events and the spares service, plus, possibly, other aspects of Club operations, have necessarily had to be curtailed for the time being; normal service will be resumed as soon as possible.

My own view (says Kim)

From personal experience as an 'ordinary member' (and A40 Somerset Coupé owner) over 15 years I can confirm that the Club is a friendly, helpful organisation...

The national rallies that I have attended have always been well-organised and fun, and for me it is always a joyful moment when the latest edition of the members' 'County Counsel' magazine arrives... Truly, I enjoy reading each issue from cover to cover. This fascinating publication includes top class historical and technical features, written by people who have been involved with the vehicles (and in some cases the Austin Motor Company) over many decades, and who really know and understand the cars and commercials covered. I also find inspirational the stories penned by individual owners about their Austins and how they have used/worked on/loved their cars!

How to join?

Please go to <http://www.austincounties.org.uk> and click on the 'Membership' heading for details and a joining form, or contact Membership Secretary Mike Greasby on (07753) 742855 (at sensible times only please), or by e-mail at: mikegreasby@gmail.com

Currently membership costs £28 per year.

Thanks

Kim adds, "My grateful thanks to the Counties Car Club and their members for information for, and help with, this feature".

Coming very soon... While on the Austin 'Counties' theme, in our 'Motoring For Fun' series I shall shortly be covering a week-long trip touring in Normandy with my A40 Somerset



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Coupé, in the company of a 1939 Amilcar drophead. Please keep watching this space...