‘Driven’ – Britain’s Motoring Story to be opened at The National motor Museum

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Author:

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DRIVEN
Britain's
Motoring
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The National Motor Museum tells us:

(All words and photographs from The National Motor Museum).

One of the most significant changes to the National Motor Museum since it was built is about to be unveiled at Beaulieu. A new look entrance hall and upper gallery will house “Driven: Britain’s Motoring Story”, a contemporary museum display interpreting the development of motoring in the UK.

The new exhibition will be officially opened by well-known TV presenter Jon Bentley with an event attended by Lord Montagu of Beaulieu and invited guests on Thursday 26 March 2026.

“Driven: Britain’s Motoring Story” will have five distinct areas focusing on how Britain has changed over the decades, delving into the social and cultural impact of motoring. It will feature stories to surprise, engage and inspire. There will be spotlight loan vehicles and fun interactive displays, previously unseen items from the Museum’s collections, along with opportunities to watch and hear videos and sounds from the Museum’s archives.

The £600,000 project – funded thanks to support from National Lottery Heritage Fund, Garfield Weston Foundation, the Wolfson Foundation, and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Foundation – will create a new welcoming space, alongside a full redevelopment of the upper galleries.



Design concept for Driven – Far Post Designs.

Dr Jon Murden, Chief Executive of the National Motor Museum says, “This exhibition will herald an exciting new look to the Museum from the Spring of 2026. Creating new displays with the overarching story of motoring from its earliest times to the present day. Britain without cars and motorcycles would be unrecognisable – they have changed the shape of our cities, nations and landscapes, revolutionised the way we make and sell things, and transformed how we live our lives.”

“From assembly-line mass-production to electric cars, the new gallery will share the stories that have moved us.”

Gail Stewart Bye, Senior Curator of Objects and Exhibitions at the National Motor Museum says, “The stories behind the vehicles are going to be at the forefront of this display; the people who drove the cars, the impact on our lives and landscape and the influence on science, art and design. We’re still going to go under the bonnet to look at nuts and bolts

and the huge technological changes that you would normally associate with a motor museum."

Visitors to the new exhibition can also unlock extra content from the Museum's collection via the Smartify app. Showcasing archival film footage and photographs, the app offers in-depth insights into several of the iconic vehicles on display and explores their importance in the history of motoring.

Motoring Eras and Stories

The five sections of Driven: Britain's Motoring story are:

- Ignition: Motoring's First Pioneers
- Into First Gear: Motoring Between the Wars
- Accelerating Away: The Motorway Age
- Buckle Up: Motoring through Challenging Times
- Plugged In: New Journeys

1870 – 1910s Ignition: Motoring's First Pioneers

Britain's special connection with motoring has driven the nation's story for over 150 years. This section will look at first road locomotives, red flag warnings and puttering petrol engines, and will include the oldest self-propelled British passenger-carrying road vehicle still in working order, the 1875 Grenville Steam Carriage.

Edwardian motoring came to represent technological progress and social change. For the rich, the car soon turned from a mechanical curiosity into a cultural institution – one that brought new freedoms and new opportunities. John, 2nd Lord Montagu of Beaulieu was a motoring pioneer, and he introduced the then Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, to

motoring.

- A 1910 Bugatti Type 15 is included in the gallery. This is the second oldest surviving Bugatti and the oldest in Britain. It is believed that this car was originally owned by the Bugatti family and reputed to have been used on the Western Front during World War One.
  1920s and 1930s Handbrake Off: Motoring Between the Wars

  Motoring became part of everyday British life. The First World War had proved the usefulness of cars and motorcycles. Motoring between the wars came to symbolise modernity and freedom – while mass production lowered costs and made vehicles more accessible to ordinary people for the first time.

- The 1923 Calcott 11.9hp, a family car from a small British company based in Coventry is included in the exhibition.
  1940s – 1960s Accelerating Away: The Motorway Age



Hillman Super Minx.

As the economy recovered after the Second World War, austerity gave way to an era of consumer-led mass consumption. By 1969, there was one car on the road for every 5 people in the UK and motoring was rapidly transforming Britain's society, culture, landscape and towns.

- The first of the famous TR series of Triumph sports cars, the 1954 Triumph TR2 represents this era. Developed to compete with successful designs from rival manufacturers such as MG and Jaguar, the TR2 achieved motor-sport success at international and amateur levels.
- The classic 1959 Austin Mini Seven is on display in the area – this is one of the oldest in existence. Production of the original Mini continued until 2000 by which time over 5 million

had been built; the best-selling British car ever.

1970s Buckle Up: Motoring through Challenging Times

The 1970s began brightly for British drivers. Car sales hit record levels, with stylish models inspired by trans-Atlantic fashions, while motoring took a starring role in popular culture. However, prices soared, unemployment and industrial unrest rose, international competition increased, and Britain's motor makers struggled. Growing worries about road safety and the environment also started to reshape what motoring in Britain represented. The creation of British Leyland in 1968 promised to keep Britain a major global car-making force. Japanese makers, including Toyota, Datsun and Honda produced popular small, cheap but well-equipped, fuel-efficient vehicles. But it was Ford that emerged decisively as UK market leader. The Escort, Cortina, Capri and Granada all struck a perfect balance between affordability, reliability and aspirational appeal.

- A 1971 Ford Capri 1600L, the epitome of '70s accessible performance, style and glamour symbolises this decade in the display. In the world of motorcycles, Honda's C77 rivalled British motorcycles, as the Japanese motor industry rose to dominance and it's this bike that's included in the display.
- One of the first production examples of the Hillman Imp is on display and The Jensen Interceptor, a mighty British-made, luxury touring car with a huge thirst for petrol, reflects Britain's declining motor industry in the face of the petrol crisis and fuel shortages.

1980s – Today Plugged In: New Journeys

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Growing traffic jams, crowded city streets, and rising numbers of road deaths led to a nationwide debate. New rules on seat belts, drink-driving, exhaust emissions, and vehicle safety tests were introduced. Growing concern about vehicle pollution also encouraged a trend towards smaller, more economical cars, not just to save money but to reduce environmental damage. Attitudes to road building changed too. Disputes over controversial road schemes shaped Britain's ever-changing relationship between motoring, communities

and the environment.

- A 1986 Citroen 2CV is part of the display – a minimalistic and economical car – this unregistered late example is exactly as it left the production line.
- One of the most desirable Fords of all time. the Sierra RS Cosworth is displayed – known for its turbocharged power and race-winning performance.
- A 1990 BMW 325i Cabriolet, one of BMW's 3-Series compact executive saloon range models, completes the exhibition vehicles for this period.
  More recent developments in Britain's motoring story are reflected with Europe's first 3D printed electric vehicle, the 2020 Chameleon 3D, a Model S chassis of a 2016 Tesla Model S P90D, and 2015 Volkswagen XL1, a pioneering concept for a super-efficient diesel hybrid, and a 2005 Rover 75 1.8 Connoisseur SE.

Motoring greats recognised

'Blue plaques' in the gallery recognise unsung heroes of motoring such as Nils Bohlin (1920 -2002) the inventor of the three-point safety belt which has saved countless people from injury in road accidents, Terence Beckett (1923-2013) responsible for the development of both the Ford Cortina and Ford Transit, and Rose Boland, Eileen Pullen, Vera Sime, Gwen Davis and Sheila Douglas – sewing machinists at Ford who led a strike that resulted in the 1970 Equal Pay Act.

Interactive fun and things to discover

There's plenty of interactive fun for all ages; sniff the past, dress-up and unbox your "Motor Poseur" look, speak to the driver through a tube, lift the receiver and listen in on stories straight from the car salesroom, step into our retro living room, and listen to a car audio jukebox.

Discover amazing facts about car design, controls, signs, road layouts and car and pedestrian safety.

Spotlight display

Spotlight is a new regularly updated feature that will showcase outstanding examples of automotive engineering and history.

- The first car to be displayed is an early E-Type Jaguar, a car that has been described as 'Probably the best early E Type Jaguar in the World in terms of authenticity, accuracy and documentation… the closest to factory condition.'
- A true classic. The Jaguar E Type remains one of the most famous and desirable cars of the 1960s, if not of all time. The display car was the 22nd right hand drive E type built, incorporating the 43rd body and the 52nd engine. It was dispatched from the factory in July 1961 and delivered to its first owner in October. The car clocked up just 28,500 miles before being put it into storage in 1972. It subsequently underwent a painstaking restoration lasting nearly thirty years.

Further information and background articles on Driven: Britain's Motoring Story is available on the National Motor Museum's website: https://nationalmotormuseum.org.uk/story-of-motoring/exhibitions/driven-britains-motoring-story/

The exhibition opens to the public on Friday 27th March 2026 and is included in the Beaulieu admission ticket. Tickets are available at https://www.beaulieu.co.uk/

About the National Motor Museum

1. The National Motor Museum Trust Limited is a charitable organisation founded in 1972, which runs the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu in the New Forest. Continuing the work of the flagship Montagu Motor Museum, the Trust has a world-famous collection of 280 vehicles and associated motoring items, which are on display in the National Motor Museum

2. The National Motor Museum is an Accredited Museum and all its collections have been Designated by Arts Council England as being of national and international importance. Its internationally acclaimed collection of more than 1.9 million items is cared for by the National Motor Museum Trust and includes historically important motoring artefacts, film footage, images, documents and books.
3. For more information about its collection and services see www.nationalmotormuseum.org.uk
4. Visitors to Beaulieu can enjoy a full day out with features including the ancestral Montagu home Palace House, 13th century Beaulieu Abbey, adventure play area Little Beaulieu, and grounds and gardens. Tickets can be bought in advance. For tickets or more information, see www.beaulieu.co.uk or call 01590 612345.
5. A full calendar of events and exhibitions is held at Beaulieu by the National Motor Museum, including Classic Grille Evenings and Transport Torques. Details are available at www.nationalmotormuseum.org.uk/events