Historic car, future stars… four automotive apprentices win rare chance to drive 121 year old car…

Published: August 15, 2025

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Online version:

https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/historic-car-future-stars-four-automotive-apprentices-win-rare-chance-to-drive-121-year-old-car/

The British Motor Museum tells us...

(Photograph and all words from The British Motor Museum).

• Four automotive apprentices win once-in-a-lifetime experience to drive 1904 Thornycroft Tourer – in the world's longest-running motoring event – later this year.

• Competition launched by SMMT and British Motor Museum to celebrate industry's latest generation of apprenticeship talent – with winners from Aston Martin Works, Bentley, Caterpillar and JLR.

• Competition reflects how far automotive skills and technology have travelled in past

century – from early petrol engines to the latest zero emission cars.

Four talented automotive apprentices have won a once-in-a-lifetime chance to drive a 121-year-old car in the Veteran Car Run, the world's longest-running motoring event, later this year.

The rare opportunity to get out on UK roads behind the wheel of a 1904 Thornycroft Tourer follows a competition launched by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) in partnership with the British Motor Museum to mark National Apprenticeship Week, with ambitious apprentices sharing personal stories of how automotive heritage has inspired them to pursue a dream career in the sector.

The winning four – Matthew Cresswell, Product Design & Development Engineer Apprentice at Caterpillar; Matt Ferley, Panel Shop Apprentice at Aston Martin Works; Connor Heath, Applied Professional Engineering Apprentice at JLR; and Sophie Reynolds, Project Management Apprentice at Bentley – represent a new generation of talent getting to grips with the industry's very latest skills while understanding the role of past innovation in the UK automotive industry's success.

The Basingstoke-built Tourer was a cutting-edge innovation upon its debut in 1904, fitted

with a prop shaft instead of a chain drive to enhance its smoothness, helping it finish first in the Veteran Car Run – previously called the Commemoration Run – on several occasions prior to the Second World War.

More than a century on, technological innovation remains at the core of the industry, with new vehicles now powered by different energy sources, with more than 130 car models now available as 'zero emission' (while running).

While there are more than one million electric cars currently on the road in the UK, there are just two examples of the Tourer – making it a prized possession in the British Motor Museum's collection.

The apprentices now have the chance to learn how to drive the Tourer and its Edwardian-era transmission, steering and braking systems with a visit to the British Motor Museum, before they embark on the 60-mile London to Brighton run on 2 November.

Stephen Laing, British Motor Museum's Head of Collections & Engagement, said,

"Cars like the Thornycroft represent an era of rapid change in the early 1900s, employing the brightest of minds to design, build and sell the latest in technology, the motor car. How history repeats itself! We're delighted that some of 2025's top-level apprentices will be joining us on the unique experience that is the Veteran Car Run."

Mike Hawes, SMMT Chief Executive, said, *"What's considered cutting-edge technology has changed dramatically over the past century – with zero emission cars now a familiar sight on our roads, and vehicles that may not even require a human driver likely to arrive soon. What has stayed constant, however, is the automotive industry's boundless capacity for innovation, driven by a talented and passionate workforce. It is immensely inspiring to see a new generation of apprentices embrace the challenges facing the industry but also retain a keen interest in its illustrious British history."*

Apprenticeships are a crucial recruitment path for automotive employers seeking to gain raw talent and add in-demand skills to their workforce, particularly given the rapid pace of technological development, with more than 3,200 people having started an apprenticeship in the past two years alone.

Veteran cars, meanwhile, defined by the Veteran Car Run as those dated before 1905, remain a thriving part of the UK automotive landscape, with hundreds of historic models set to join the 123rd edition of the prestigious event this year. The Run began in November 1897 to celebrate the Light Locomotives on the Highway Act, passed the year before, which raised the speed limit for light vehicles from 4 mph to 14 mph – an early example of how legislative change can unlock innovation such as that seen in thenThornycroft Tourer, and in the years that followed.

Matt Ferley, Panel Shop Apprentice, Aston Martin Works

BRITISH MOTOR MUSEUM

SMMT DRIVING THE MOTOR INDUSTRY

"I gained an interest in classic cars when I became the owner of a 1937 Armstong Siddeley 12hp Saloon – the car was used as my parents' wedding car and, thought to have been lost, it was rediscovered when clearing sold property.

This inspired me to pursue training and ultimately a career in the restoration of vintage cars, particularly the skill of hand wheeling new panels on a wheeling machine.

I have been given a fantastic opportunity to learn these skills during my apprenticeship and now, by participating in the London to Brighton Veteran Car Run, I will get a true feeling of the early days of automotive history."

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Sophie Reynolds, Project Management Degree Apprentice, Bentley

BRITISH MOTOR MUSEUM

SMMT DRIVING THE MOTOR INDUSTRY

"The water-cooled engine was a groundbreaking innovation that shaped automotive history and remains crucial today.

The 1904 Thornycroft 20hp Tourer was ahead of its time, featuring a four-cylinder, water-cooled engine that set it apart from many early automobiles.

High-performance vehicles, from Formula 1 racers to hybrid supercars, rely on advanced cooling technologies to maximise efficiency and longevity. What started as an early solution to engine heat has evolved into a sophisticated system for modern vehicle performance.

This legacy highlights the brilliance of early automotive engineers, whose innovations continue to drive the industry forward."

Brave

Connor Heath, Applied Professional Engineering Degree Apprentice, JLR

BRITISH MOTOR MUSEUM

SMMT DRIVING THE MOTOR INDUSTRY

"My maternal grandfather moved from Wales aged 16 to join Standard Triumph, as an apprentice toolmaker. On my father's side, my Great Grandfather worked for Rover from the '40s until the '70s, likely spending time working at the Solihull plant.

Nearly 50 years later, I started my apprenticeship on the Solihull site. It inspires me that I often retrace steps they'd have taken, even if a little different – and that some of the [product] lineage, started while my family were at Rover, I still work with today."

Matthew Cresswell, Product Design & Development Engineer Apprentice, Caterpillar

BRITISH MOTOR MUSEUM

SMMT DRIVING THE MOTOR INDUSTRY

"My aspirations to become an engineer stem from my father's passion of cars and vehicle maintenance – he purchased a Land Rover Defender 90 for use in off-road trials.

With his help, I began to understand the basics of car maintenance and how to maintain an old car – and it was the maintenance of older mechanical engines in particular which excited me, due to the ability to fix most issues with a socket set and some WD-40. No expensive diagnostic machines needed."