

## My Austin Ute (replica) 25 years in the making

Back in 1995, when I was just starting to restore my Minor 4-door, I noticed an advertisement for a 1962 Morris Minor Utility in South Australia - and without even checking or even seeing photos of it, I purchased the vehicle. I think a bit of nostalgia came over me as I had a 1958 model as a daily driver back in 1964, and my Mini Cooper was too 'hot' for road use and mainly used on race days.

As bought in 1995



Harvey, from Wales, who at that time ran the Morris Light Commercial Vehicle Register UK, and convinced him to find me a good second hand Austin 'crinkle' grill. Once the grill was organised, other parts - horn button, badge, plain hubcaps - were available new or second hand online.

From then on it was mainly looked at in the shed and moved three times as we sold and built a new house. Then four children off to Uni, medical problems, the loss of parents, travelling Australia and overseas... Generally speaking, life got in the way.

By 2017 I had only removed the motor and gearbox, and fitted a front guard repair section - but at my age (now 75) I decided I should pass it all on to someone else. However, Sue would not agree and pushed me to start a total restoration, which at first I found tedious and overwhelming, but by the time the chassis was out being cleaned, my enthusiasm had massively increased.

The problem now was how to get it from Adelaide to Dubbo. Fortunately, I was told about a small car carrier who took unwanted trade-ins away from the local Toyota Dealer. I contacted him and, yes, he did Adelaide when required and would be coming back empty in a few days. So the following week it arrived and I picked it up in Dubbo, paid his fee and drove it home with just that day left on the registration. The vehicle never ran again for 25 years.

I had already decided to build it in Austin livery after reading that Morris/Austin Utilities were available from 1968 onwards (until 1973) after the companies amalgamated. I had contact later with Russ



That is when Sue's brother Lindsay, an electrician, also entered the scene, with his hobby of metal fabrication. His skills with cars is legendary here, with his shed full of metal working machines and welders, not to mention a custom V8 FX Holden under construction. Lindsay had already taken the rear cabin clip home, replaced the rusty bottom 100mm and fitted a high brake light and tub lights. Next thing the chassis was over there getting some new front plates and a fabricated bump stop fitted.

While this was happening, I prepared the diff section with new bearings/brakes and brake lines. I was very surprised to find the ute was fitted with a 4.22 diff so, already having a good one on the shelf, I sold one to a Club member

Things moved along and panels previously ordered were fitted, including floors tie/plates/B-post section, rear guards and beaver tail. Here I was pleased with the small bench folder and edger that I had bought, as I could fold a small section of repair and with a stepped edge lap fit and weld in. Also used were 'Clico pins', which hold the panels together and were removed once tack welded.

By the time I had repaired the cab and fitted the rear wheel arches, Lindsay had decided to take the tub and completely fit removable inside panels. In fact he made two sets, as one was not up to his standard, and also made the inner beaver panel which

I had not ordered. While this was happening, I fitted the cab and continued on spray painting panels.

A few months on we fitted the tub, complete with a new fabricated inner /outer beaver tail, and started on wiring and other fitments: bumper bars, mudguards, steering, suspension, and so on, all new or rebuilt. I forgot to mention that I had a good 948cc motor bored out to 998cc, plus an unleaded head with twin SUs, extractors, and a good smooth case gearbox taken out of my car years earlier.



With a lot of help from Sue, we rebuilt the bucket seats with new covers. I had bought a pair from a Club member and left them in the house to be fitted later. From here new wiring and extra items I had bought for the Ute were fitted. It boasts driving lights, daytime running lights, hazard lights and of course indicators, plus a USB outlet, a set of gauges and a radio incorporating bluetooth.

Once again, encouraged by Sue and with her help, we managed to fit both windscreens and the roof-lining followed by the seats and carpet. Not so easy was fitting the doors, as after painting I dropped my spare gearbox on



them and caused some damage. Then I discovered one door opening was about 6mm wider, causing some grinding off of the hinge and packing the other side.

A trip to the exhaust shop on a trailer encouraged me to check insurance... NRMA insured it for a premium of \$70 with a market value of \$12,000, even unregistered and incomplete. So finally it was driven into the mechanics for a blue slip, starting up OK after 25 years and passed without a problem. It was duly registered on CVS with the now E plates.

I cannot finish this without thanking those who helped me along the way - and

there were many. Firstly, Sue, for her perseverance and dedication and faith in me. Then my brother-in-law Lindsay for his skilful metal work. Good friend John Strachan (Ulladulla) supplying many parts gratis, the late John Kellaher also for parts, including new windscreens. And the many Club members with items: Brian Condon, Les Whale, Andy Draper, Graeme Gould, David Nunn, 'Jumbo' Perira, Colin Trusler, Graeme Frost (Qld) and Brian Parker (WA). Thanks all.

So, what did I do wrong and what would I do differently if I did it again?

1. Take more before photos for reference.
2. Keep a better record of what I had (I found I had two fully chromed front bumpers).
3. Trial fit all panels before painting them.
4. Buy all the top coat paint in one go (very hard to get an exact match later).
5. Check all undercoated panels for imperfections over a few days before top coating.
6. Start earlier in life and do something every day.

John & Sue Ballard

PS If you have a Ute or Van please register it here: [LCV Register](http://LCV Register)  
[www.minorlcvreg.com.uk](http://www.minorlcvreg.com.uk)



"SHE'S MY UTE"  
 Just back from having tonneau cover fitted, the finished product sits outside John's shed.  
 Note the sign on the shed: 'John's Sport and Recreation Centre'