

Against The Clock

Simon Drew

- **Age:** 38
- **Occupation:** Proprietor of The Mini Works
- **First car:** 1968 Mini Mk2 that cost £20
- **Single or hooked up:** Hooked up to Gillian
- **Fave grub:** Pesto over pasta with tuna
- **Lottery win:** Buy a huge garage and help my friends out
- **Mini obsessed:** Yes
- **Minisomnia:** Yes
- **Maccy D's or BK?** Burger King is the king
- **You in three words:** Eclectic, fussy, sporty



Restoring a 1959 Mini from a totally derelict shell would be tough enough, but Simon Drew did this one in less than three months, in between his regular jobs!

Words: Andy Butler

Photos: Zoë Harrison



Simon enjoying the fruits of his hard labour, taking his '59 for another spin



The 1959 Mini Register's opinion



Bill Bell had the following comments:

"Simon's '59 restoration is not only remarkable for the timescale involved but also for the level of detail and quality he has built into it. He even made it all the way down to the 1959 Register stand at the 50th anniversary (IMM) under its own steam."



Regular readers will know the name Simon Drew of The Mini Works in Scotland, from a number of cars that have graced *MiniWorld's* pages in the past – both his own and those he's had a hand in rescuing. And if anything ties them together, it's some form of performance bias. But a Mini doesn't need to have gear-stripping grunt to float Simon's boat, as his 1959 Morris Mini-Minor 850 shows.

Bought in 2006, the Heritage certificate says this is the 923rd Morris built, but its mangy condition – rough bodywork, stripped original engine in the boot, non-runner under the bonnet – would have been enough to put most people off. "It was very derelict. The A-panels were made out of cement and the battery box was made from a road sign," he remembers. And yes, he was serious about the concrete A-panels. "Inside the structure was a great chunk of it, skimmed over the top with filler. I had to smash it off with a chipping hammer!"

But, it was a genuine 1959 Mini, and worth saving almost regardless of condition. At least Simon could do all the repairs without paying premium rates, and he'd been collecting early parts for a project just such as this. Plus, he had a couple of years to get it sorted before the Mini's 50th birthday bash. No problem, surely?

However, he also had a long waiting list of customers' cars that needed repair work, and that two-year window steadily diminished until it was almost too late to get the project completed. "I always believe in things waiting their turn or I'd never get the others done," he says.

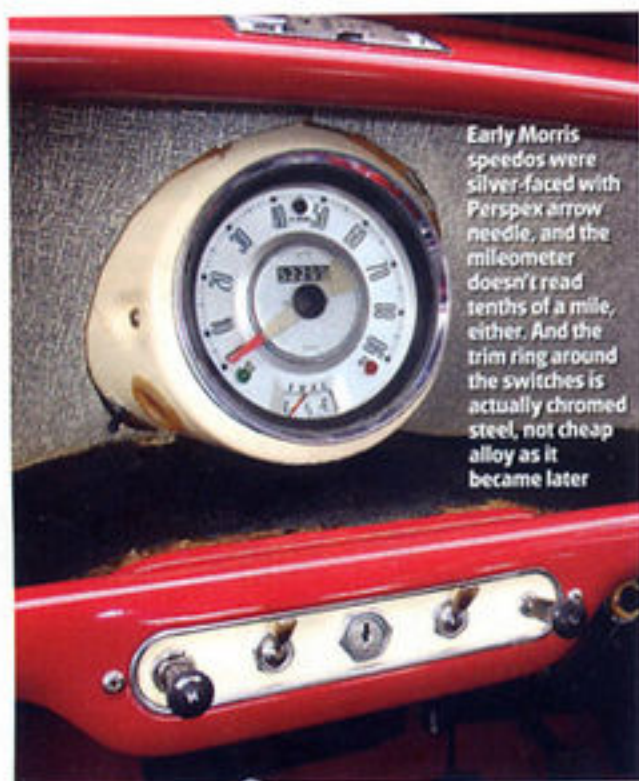
So, the work didn't start seriously until late May 2009. That gave him less than two and half months to do a full bare-metal restoration, including >>



Apart from the new carpet, and a lot of scrubbing and cleaning, the cabin is just as it would have been over 50 years ago



The original steering wheel just needed refinishing to cover a few signs of wear



Early Morris speedos were silver-faced with Perspex arrow needle, and the milleometer doesn't read tenths of a mile, either. And the trim ring around the switches is actually chromed steel, not cheap alloy as it became later



Rear seat base uses the original cover, but the filling has had to be renewed.



Front seats are repaired and cleaned up, but the structure and cover are both still original. They certainly built things to last back in 1959



This is the keyfob that was given with the car when it was bought new. Simon found it in amongst the rust and kept it because it's another tie to the past



Big differences on the early door lock include the ball-shaped locking lever, the shape of the stamping on the cover plate, and there are two holes drilled next to the lock pivot



Simon transferred the very rare scuff guard to the wheel arch carpet from the Morris's threadbare original



Early door detail has this tab welded over the window slide drain hole



These raised ridges on the cant rail are apparently for alignment purposes, but they disappeared on later cars. These are stamped into the steel, so they couldn't be removed after the shell was assembled



For a utilitarian vehicle, the Mini had lots of lights so passengers could see their oddments! And the heavy card liner is actually a full box that can be lifted out as one piece, which is something Simon hasn't seen before



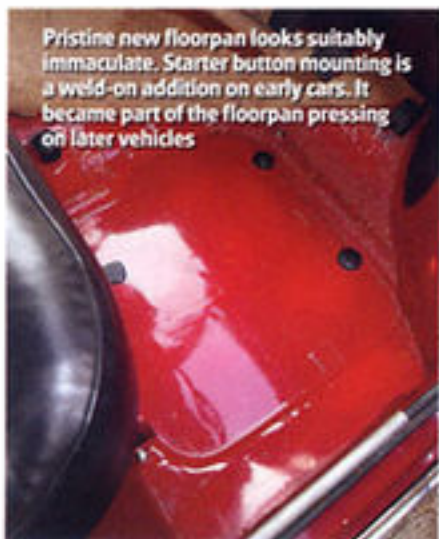
Floor-mounted starter button is original and still works fine after 50 years of labour. You can just see the early-style seat mounting bracket, too



Correct spare wheel is riveted together, and very rare. Riveted wheels didn't last long so Simon is very lucky to have a set of five on this car



Early window catch has obviously been spinning on the glass for some time. That's why the catch was given a locating peg and the glass had a corresponding hole to improve security on later cars



Pristine new floorpan looks suitably immaculate. Starter button mounting is a weld-on addition on early cars. It became part of the floorpan pressing on later vehicles



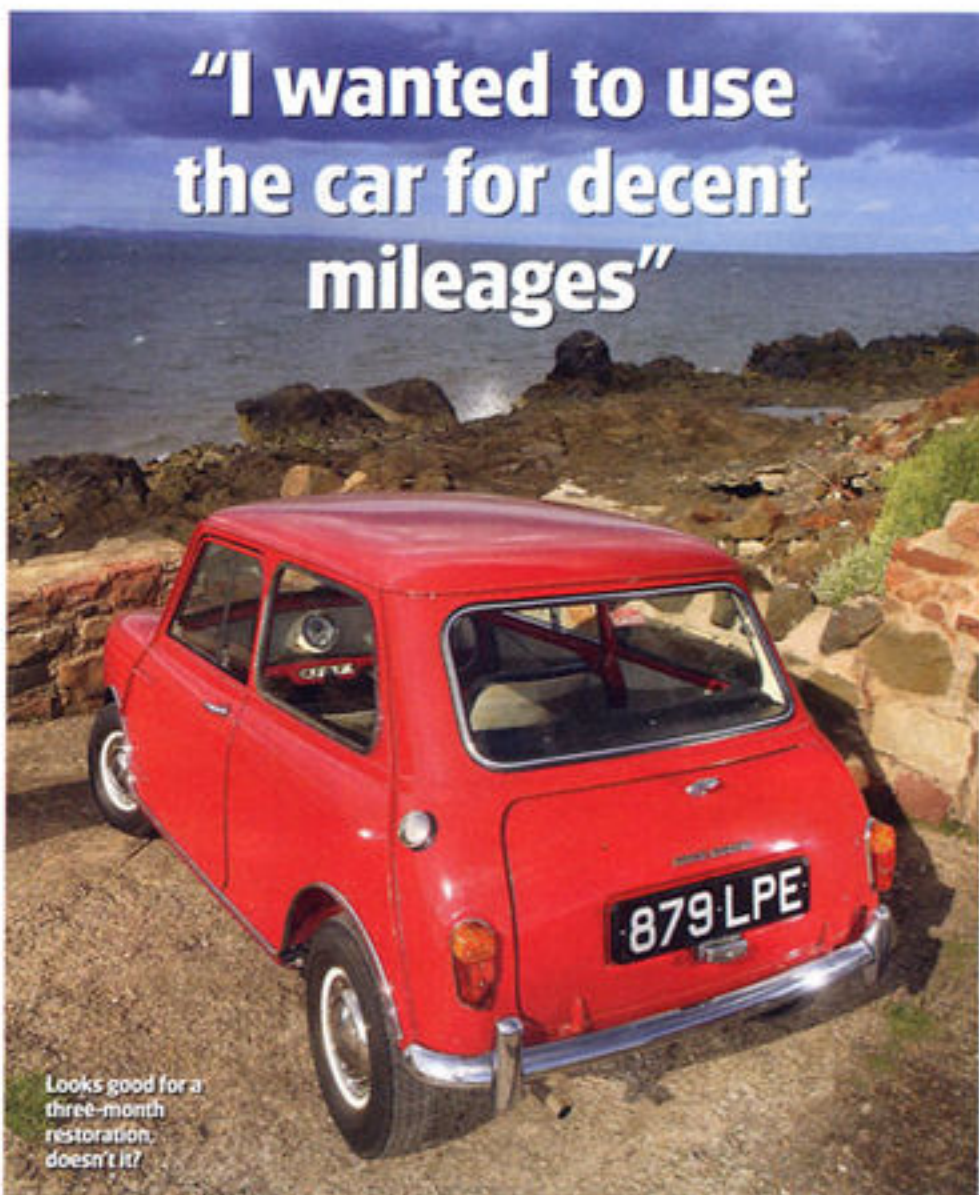
Can you believe all cars used to wear one of these during their first few hundred miles to explain why they were crawling around



Flat sills are another early-shell giveaway. And notice the cover is missing from the radius arm pivot. Simon has these, but they are the one thing he didn't have time to install. And that original seam trim is made in three pieces and incredibly rare



Early full-skirt front panel doesn't have the later (1964-on) cutaway corners that were supposed to help brake cooling. And you can tell the trim is a genuine early part as the later ones stop at bumper level



"I wanted to use the car for decent mileages"

Looks good for a three-month restoration, doesn't it?

» swapping the boot floor, interior floor pans and the roof. Although he didn't have any major problems doing the work, he reckons "it was scary putting on a new roof – the hardest part was sorting the front floor panels as I had to get them hand made, so thanks to Dave Boswell for his efforts in making them." Finished off with a few coats of original Cherry Red, the shell now looks mint.

While renovating the mechanicals was a much less scary proposition, the engine still needed major attention. The original block was badly marked from spinning a thrust bearing and the crank had rusted beyond use, so Simon found a new crank in his spares loft and rebuilt the car's fitted motor around that. Even the radiator is the original one, as is the SU PD-type fuel pump, but the crimped-silencer exhaust pipe is another New-Old-Stock (NOS) part from his Tardis-like spares loft.

One thing that Simon has updated during the rebuild is the gearbox, swapping the cone synchros for bauk rings using a proper BMC kit. Apparently this kit was offered because the early cone synchros weren't much tougher than toffee and failed miserably early. And – wouldn't you know it? – he had one tucked away waiting for a job like this one. "I wanted to use the car for decent mileages going down south, so it had to work properly in normal fast-driving conditions. Plus service parts are tricky to find for cone-type transmissions," he explains.

When it came to sorting the brakes and suspension, a surprising amount of gear was good enough to be cleaned and rebuilt – even things like the master cylinders were up to being refurbished. The front subframe was also useable, but the rear one was beyond saving, so Simon found an early pre-Hydro item in his loft and pressed that into service. To give the running gear and subframes additional protection, Simon had them fettled by Pentland Powder Coating.

The interior is also amazingly original, with most things just needing a good clean with his secret weapon – washing powder. The carpets are the only new addition, but everything else seems to back up the 50,000-mile odometer »



The rear rain gutter drain hole is factory-stamped on this shell, adding to the confusion of what exactly was and wasn't done on the earliest cars



Super-rare Champion plug leads and caps are really difficult to get hold of now



Original washer bottle needed lots of careful cleaning and scraping to get it to this condition. And that is the original ignition coil, too, just cleaned up and given a new decal



Four-blade metal fan was painted this colour because other early cars Simon's seen have been this colour, and the radiator is the claimed to be original unit



Carburetor is the original SU 1 1/2-inch, with its brass dashpot cap



Radiator build plate, a feature of early vehicles, is very rare as most have been replaced



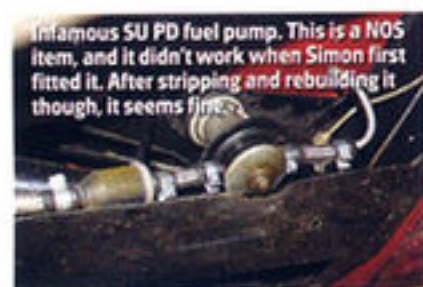
Very early horn only lasted for a few months, and given the patriotic tone sounds like the horn is full of water, the change was a good idea



Early MOWOG subframe just needed a clean-up, and Simon has had it powder-coated so that it lasts indefinitely



Very early track rod ends had their own grease nipples, a great idea and one that probably helped this original TRE last well enough to be reused perfectly safely



Infamous SU PD fuel pump. This is a NOS item, and it didn't work when Simon first fitted it. After stripping and rebuilding it though, it seems fine



Underside of the starter button, complete with exposed live terminals. The exhaust was bent to stay away from any possibility of shorting out the main battery cable



Early radius arms didn't have handbrake cable quadrants, they used a guide tube instead



Square raised section is a locating mark for the wiring dip that is welded underneath



Front subframe mounting bolts. These screw up into captive nuts in the bodywork



Early vertical-slot bonnet stay locator is different from the later cars with the horizontal slot. Simon had to use a new Auto Sparks wiring loom as the original one was too scabby to reuse

Technical Specification

1959 Morris Mini-Minor

» **Engine:** Early but non-original rebuilt 848cc engine . NOS crank . reclaimed early pistons, rods . original rebuilt single SU 1 1/2-inch carb . cast iron inlet manifold . standard air filter . SU PD electric fuel pump . in-line fuel filter . standard exhaust manifold . NOS single-box crimped-silencer exhaust system . refurbished original two-core radiator . four-blade cooling fan . standard points-equipped Lucas DM2 distributor . LA12 coil

» **Gearbox:** Standard-type clutch friction plate . later-type diaphragm spring . rebuilt original four-speed, three-synchro gearbox . BMC baulk-ring conversion kit . standard diff . 3.76:1 final drive . original straight-type gearlever

» **Suspension:** Fully rebuilt . standard specification parts throughout . original front subframe and refurbished pre-Hydrolastic rear subframe . many parts sandblasted, powdercoated

» **Brakes:** Single-circuit, non-servo drum braking system fully rebuilt to standard spec

» **Wheels/Tyres:** 3.5x10-inch steel wheels . Goodyear 5.2x10 tyres . wheel trims

» **Interior:** Original black, grey flecked upholstery, new wool carpets . rear view mirror . speedo-only binnacle . original door cards, pull strings

» **Exterior:** August 1959 UK bodyshell, rebuilt . NOS panels including roof, A-panels, boot floor, sills . hand made front floor panels . overrides . Morris bonnet badge . numerous localised repair patches . resprayed in original Morris Cherry Red two-pack . white grille . original sill/arch trim



Simon doesn't believe in keeping his cars as art objects – they have to withstand proper use no matter how rare they are

» reading and is comparatively unworn.

And in the time-honoured tradition of last-minute projects, Simon was rebuilding right up until the deadline, and it was a bare shell one week before the 50th anniversary event. He worked through the night before setting off to Longbridge at 5am, and he was still fitting trim panels and sorting the horn in the motorway services on the way down. But it was worth the effort. He now has something that's both rare and useable to add to his growing Mini collection.

Simon would like to thank: Kevin Murray, Jamie Mullen, Graeme Allen, Eric Patterson, Stuart May, Owen Cooper, Willie Ramsay and Gary Rae for all their valuable help; my girlfriend Gillian for putting up with me and Minis; Pentland Powder Coating (www.pentlandpowdercoating.co.uk, +44 (0)131 448 0098) for coating the suspension bits. WA Ramsay car and vehicle upholsterers (+44 (0)131 440 0555) for sorting the rear seat.

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