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**ROYAL MAIL REVIVAL**  
Post Office Minor re-created

**IMAGES FROM THE PAST**  
The fascination of old ads

**MONOCHROME MAGIC**  
Looking back more than

**A CLASSIC DUO**  
J40 pedal pick-up joins  
Morris Z van





# ROYAL MAIL REVIVAL



**Dave Pfeifer, from New South Wales, Australia, is well-versed in Morris Minor saloons, but he decided to take on the challenge of re-creating a Post Office van. He did it, proving that patience and dedication really do pay dividends. He tells the story.**

**I** BOUGHT the van in July, 2013 from a chap in Bundaberg, Queensland. I believe that he had bought it with the aim of a restoration. The previous owner had used the van to tour around most of Australia. He had a bull-bar and towbar fitted and

had the inside lined with plywood and insulation, wide wheels and many gauges and modifications to the dashboard. Otherwise, the van was pretty much standard. As it turned out during my restoration, I found that he had quite a bit of work done

on the engine and brakes for his trip. This made my job a bit easier. However, I found that the van had incurred a pretty bad bang on the front left wing, leaving some damage to the inside panels in the engine bay.

The van was delivered to me in Corowa on a truck – around 2,000km – and I towed it from the truck depot to my home and then started research on Royal Mail vans. I travelled to Harcourt, in Victoria, to see the van that Richard McKellar had on display and had a chat with him about the extras that were included on the



*The Minor van as bought – it looks basically sound, but well-used.*



*A previous owner had christened the van Little Bandicoot, ready for its trip round Australia. A bandicoot is a small furry Australian marsupial, by the way.*



*Dave and Joyce Pfeifer, with Eddie Farrells' unrestored ex-Royal Mail van.*

postal vans. I took a lot of photos.

I only have a relatively small shed and already had a 1959 four-door that we drive on club events and I had just about finished





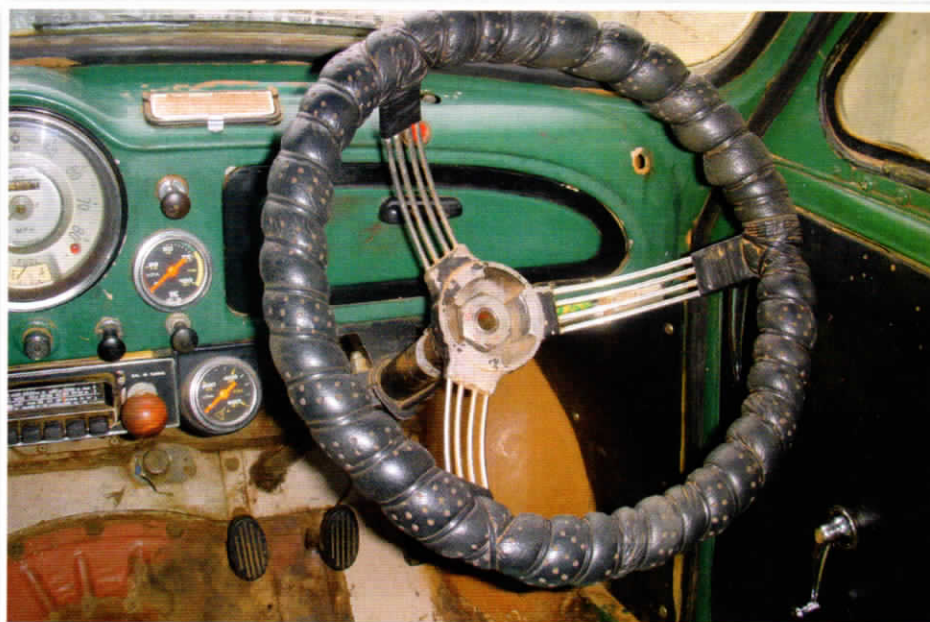
Side windows had been fitted – Dave removed them and welded in new panels.



Interior had been lined with plywood – that had to go.

restoring a 1952 sidevalve two-door, which had to go to make room for the van. It was sold after a short time and I could start work on my new project. On advice from Richard McKellar, I joined the Morris Minor Owners' Club in England and found that my van was made in 1958 and delivered to Australia in 1959. All of the work was done by myself in my shed at home. Nothing was sent out for repair and parts were bought mostly from Bull Motif in England.

First thing was to totally dismantle the van. I had to remove the plywood lining and the insulation behind it. The dash had many extra gauges and a radio had been cut in above the left hand glove box. There was also a large hole in the firewall above the pedals. On removing the engine and radiator, the damage to the front left side panels was obvious and I had to straighten it out and replace some of the inside wing. The sides of the floor were rusted and I welded new pieces on both sides.



The steering wheel cover certainly looks comfy, but not a lot else.



Previous owner had been at work on the bulkhead – using self-tapping screws to hold repair plate in place.

Apart from that, the body was sound, with very little signs of rust or dents.

I removed the van body from the chassis, and the doors and wings, then started on cleaning off the layers of paint on the body. The two side windows had to be taken out and I welded in solid panels. Inside the van, the gutters had quite a bit of rust and I made replacement pieces for both sides and welded them in. It is a lot easier to work on the van body when you can turn it over any way you



Engine proved to be in quite reasonable condition and fired up without too much trouble.

want. The outside gutters had been filled with silicone and very little repair was needed, once the silicone had been cleaned out.

The chassis, complete with the cabin, was bolted to my home-made jig, so that they could be rotated 90 degrees to work on the underside. I left the torsion bars and front end connected, but cleaned it all to find that a lot of work had been done in that area before the round-Australia trip and all was still good. There was a lot of red mud caked on



Lots of extra gauges are very handy, but not for a Royal Mail van restoration.



Slot had been cut out of the dash above the glove box to accommodate





Front nearside wing had taken a knock, which also damaged the inner wing.



Bulkhead was stripped back so that condition of metal could be fully assessed.



Suspension needed overhauling and returning to original spec.



Van body was removed for repairs and paint to be applied.

everything underneath and it took a great deal of time with a pressure washer to get rid of it.

### YALE-TYPE LOCK

About this time, we were planning a trip, which included some time in England, so I put in a good order with Bull Motif for parts that I thought I would need. This included all new rubbers and change-over front shockers. When we arrived in England, the first stop was to pick up 18kg of parts for the van. We saved a lot of dollars in postage by carrying these home in our spare case on the plane. Virtually all parts work out cheaper by buying in England and paying the postage. We get them in 10 to 14 days.

Next stop was to meet Eddie Farrell, who I had contacted through the MMOC. Eddie



Dave made up his own jig – he calls it a spit – so that the body could be rolled over.



Bonnet has been painted and the finish is looking good.



Chassis was found to be in generally good





*What a difference colour coats make.*



*Check out the finish, check out the panel gap – any complaints? No, we didn't think so.*

has a genuine Royal Mail van that has not been restored and is in original condition. He took us to look at the van and I took many pictures. Eddie gave me a mechanism from one door that included the Yale-type lock parts. When I got home, I reproduced this for the passenger door. We inspected three more postal vans and saw many Morris Minors in various museums in England. When we got home, I had hundreds of photos to help me with my restoration.

Back in Australia and it is now time to start painting. A lot of time was spent preparing the panels and then applying the paint, which came up pretty good. A few weeks later, the decals came that I had ordered from Andy Greening while in England.

It takes a bit of time for a restoration like this and I worked on the van most mornings when we were home. Being retired, we do a lot of trips overseas and plenty of cruises. I managed to obtain a set of original-size cross-



ply tyres and after cleaning and painting the wheels black, they were fitted and balanced at the local tyre shop. I had the double-ended wheel nuts to suit the postal van of that vintage (no hub caps).

On reassembling the van with all new rubbers, I then started to fabricate the special bits that made it a Royal Mail van, such as the inside covers on the hinges of the back door, the Yale-type locks on each side door and the back door and the bar-locking system on the outside of the back doors. These made it more difficult to break into the van when it was in service. I met a chap who actually drove a Royal Mail van for the Post Office and he explained to me how three men would take the van to pick up £20,000 from the bank and sort it out in the back to deliver various amounts of cash to each Post Office in their area.

On a slack couple of days, when I was waiting for parts, I started on reupholstering the seats with black vinyl. They came up good, as did the other trim pieces. Also, I had no headlining, so I used a set from a car as a template and made a set that fitted nicely. The glove box inserts were stuffed and I used



*Even at this stage and from the back, the Minor is looking unmistakably like a Royal Mail van.*



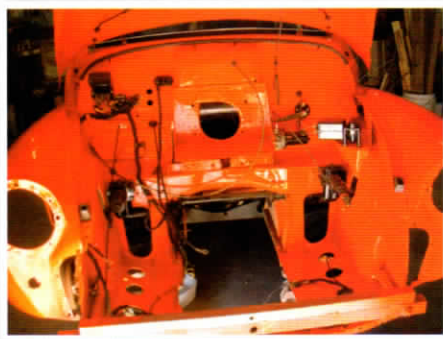
*Dave made a splendid job of the load area.*

them as a pattern to make a former that I glued two layers of heavy cardboard on to make new ones, then riveted the backs on. They fitted perfectly and only cost a couple of dollars for the pair.

I fitted a Smiths heater under the dash and a copper and brass fire extinguisher beside the passenger footwell. The speedo and control knobs cleaned up well and all fitted in. The wiring loom was a bit tatty, so I carefully stripped the cotton covering and replaced any damaged sections where needed. Then I bound it up with black cloth electrical tape that I found on eBay from China. I fitted pig's ear-type lights for the indicators. I realise that they were fitted on later versions, but it seemed better than adding extra indicator lights.







Engine bay is all ready to accept the motor.



Royal Mail – two words that hold a certain magic for fans of old commercials.



Van has all of the correct fittings, such as grille that separates driver from load area.

## EARTH WIRE

A small delay came unexpectedly as we suddenly decided to move to a larger house, with a nice size shed. As it was just up the road, I could do the shifting over the Christmas/New Year, but it put me back quite a bit on my restoration. After shifting, I needed to tidy up the last bit of wiring and fit the parking lights and tail lights. I had a problem with the wipers and it took some time to work out that an earth wire was broken a couple of inches from the switch. After that was fixed, they worked properly. A bit of fiddling with the distributor and the spark plug leads and it fired up. I let it run while I had morning tea and then readjusted the valve clearances while the engine was hot. Everything seemed to be working, with no great oil leaks.

I took it for a short run down the road and first gear was a little noisy, but the other gears were fine with no slipping out of gear. There is still a small oil leak from the front seal of the diff and somewhere around the engine/



Dave is not a full-time restorer, yet the quality of his work is commendably high.



Spare wheel present and correct in every detail.

gearbox, but I hope they will sort themselves out after a decent run. All up, I suppose it has cost me around \$5,000, including the cost of the van, and I did the entire project myself, using as much of the original vehicle as possible.

**What a brilliant story and it's great to know that the enthusiasm for old Post**



Locks on rear doors are as Royal Mail had them fitted.

Office vehicles is so strong in Australia. Dave mentioned Richard McKellar and by way of explanation, Richard owns a restored genuine ex-GPO Minor van and Dave found that vehicle a great source of inspiration. We also mentioned a chap called Eddie Farrell and he will be known to many readers of CVP. Eddie rescued a former GPO Minor van from the ravages of the Scottish Highlands and brought it back to his home in Stockport. It was an achievement against all the odds and a most remarkable tale that we told in 2013. Dave got to hear about Eddie's exploits and was so determined in his quest that he travelled to England with wife Joyce to look at other Minor vans and, in particular, visited Eddie's home to see his other ex-Post Office van, UXH 143. The van once operated in Ipswich and Dave used that district on his Minor's door decals as a thank-you to Eddie. Eddie is always keen to further the cause of GPO vehicles and he was instrumental in this story and photos getting to us here at CVP. We are truly indebted. Eddie has promised to update the story on the van rescued from the Scottish Highlands, SLM 454, and we look forward to that tremendously – Editor.

