

Road Trip

Words and photos by Owen Sinden



Owen and Indra Sinden took their first trip to a Morris Minor Nationals event, and came back all smiles.

When I purchased 'Evie' in late 2013, I had never envisaged showing her to others; all I wanted was to enjoy driving an old English car.

I attended a club function or two, but a club run to the south coast changed my mind about showing my car (so did a cracked head – the car, not mine).

Extensive surgery followed: engine, brakes, steering, instruments, suspension, etc, performed impeccably by Darren Goff of Minor Magic (or, more accurately, 'Major Miracle') in Goulburn; to the point where my good lady commented one day "Evie drives just like a normal car!" High praise indeed!

So, to the biennial Australian Morris Minor Nationals on the Victoria-NSW border. Do I put Evie up for judging? Which category? Restored? Modified? Custom? So much choice, so much confusion.

Evie really wasn't ready. "Yeah, go for it" said Darren "but you might get smashed by the judges! Or you could just put your car up for display." Hmmm, decisions. I opted for 'display'; at least my car wouldn't be judged (or so I thought).

Good Friday, driving down the Hume Highway between Sydney and Melbourne, life was pretty good. Lots of glances from other motorists and passengers (the guys were checking out the car, the girls were checking out the driver...). Yep, all was good - until the good lady said "Will we get to registration in time?" Oh dear, it was time to up the pace a bit.

An accurate 110 km/h saw us overtake most other cars. As we cruised past a Porsche I said "Check out the look on the driver's face." Ha ha, the wide eyes and open mouth said it all.

Registration was interesting. Lots of top quality cars, then I spotted an immaculate gloss black MM with a turbo flat-head



engine – "Oooh" I thought, "my car is going to look pretty bad if this is the standard."

Friday night at the 'Bended Elbow' pub was quite entertaining. It was a good time to meet others and get a vibe for the weekend. So, lots of talking and lots of drinks – I think I'm understanding the Australian Morris Minor Nationals philosophy.

Saturday. The BIG day...NSW President Brian Condon organised the line up of NSW Minors on the side of the old Hume Hwy. How impressive did that look! And how good was the camaraderie between the NSW members! I was impressed again. Then the procession to Hovell Tree Park for the main event.

Driving into Hovell Tree Park... "Judging or display?" "Huh?" "Judging or display?" A bit confused, I knew I didn't put in for judging and I couldn't remember the other word, so I said "Display". "Drive over there." Hey, I just followed the car in front, I had no idea, this was all so new. I was a Nationals virgin.

My plan of action was simple: park the car, open the bonnet, tape up a few photos of my car, then go and check out all the other Minors; coffee; more cars to look at; more coffee; more cars; some food in there somewhere.

I was in Morrie heaven. So many cars, so many people, and only six hours of looking and talking. My camera was panting from all the use.

My good lady was just as enthusiastic – "Come and have a look at this one... Hey, that surfer van is great!...Why is this 'million' one mauve?...Miss Marple's car is my choice!...When are we having another coffee?"

Row upon row of Morris Minors in all the variations; lots of talk; lots of photos; then we strolled up the hill to drool over the highly modified entrants. Why would anyone put a V6 engine with Alfa running gear into a Minor? Imagine the fun you could have at the traffic lights with the young hoons! The list of mods to Evie was getting longer and longer. All I need is money – pity I'm not a bank manager.

What, its over already!? As a virgin I wanted it to go on much longer. My good friend Juan Antonio Samaranch said; "these Nationals are the best ever." Dinner at The Cube Wodonga, with an almost-fantasy story of cars and aircraft, was an entertaining way to finish the day.

Easter Sunday; chocolate eggs were consumed, then it was off to Bright in





Happiness is Morris Minor-shaped.



My good lady is 1 in a million.

Victoria. My good lady and I tagged onto the end of a small convoy, mostly of Victorians. When they stopped at Myrtleford, we stopped and joined them for morning tea. What a welcoming group!

At Bright they invited us to have lunch with them too. Speaking of Bright, what a beautiful town. And the view from the hill at the sports ground of hundreds of Minors was spectacular.

On the run back to Albury/Wodonga we tagged onto two quick Minors; it was fast and furious; we thoroughly enjoyed the brisk run along the winding, hilly roads. Mmm, nice! Gee, Evie ran well.

Albury Civic Centre for the formal dinner was a most appropriate venue. I enjoyed the presentations to winners, especially with lots of NSW wins thrown in. The looks on some of the winners' faces were priceless!

I knew Evie wasn't in the running because she was on 'display'; not being judged, right? My good lady and I had seen in the program a prize for 'Best Display' - we were split between Miss Marple's saloon and the surfer traveller. But why were they announcing "60 MORI" as the winner? Picking my jaw up off the floor and shaking my head, I made my way to the stage.

Well, knock me down with a feather! Lots of congratulations from the NSW contingent; first up was Mr President himself. I think I shook my head for a good five minutes until someone explained that 'Display' cars were actually judged.

What a night! What a weekend! What a Morris Minor Nationals! Many asked if I was entering the Nationals in 2017. As my good friend Arnold Schwarzenegger would say; "I'll be back."

The drive on Monday out to the Morris

Winery at Rutherglen was, um, delicious. They certainly have some top quality fortified wines! The good lady and I chatted to another group of Victorians who invited us to join them for coffee in Rutherglen. Wow, is everyone in the Morris Minor family this friendly?

Then it was off to Melbourne to catch up with some family who had recently moved there. They lived in Toorak, an appropriate place for a Nationals-winning Morris Minor I thought.

Three days of enjoying the Melbourne cafe/restaurant/shopping scene was a wonderful break.

Two days of driving back home saw us stay at Albury overnight; the rump steak at the Bended Elbow was superb.

A refuel at Holbrook and to check out the submarine museum/memorial, the hull of HMAS Otway, and it was the end of a wonderful road trip.

2,000km of trouble-free motoring was great but the fun and memories were priceless.

A bumper sticker I have says; "You can't buy happiness but you can buy a Morris Minor and that's kind of the same thing." That does it for me.

Thanks to Peter Lenne from the Albury Wodonga Morris Minor Car Club and his team for organising an amazing Nationals!

Thanks, too, to the members of the NSW Morris Minor Club for all their support and friendship, especially Mr Pres Brian Condon and wife Debbie, Terry and Fay Cullen, Terry Kane, Martin Chapman and especially to Darren Goff (Minor Magic/major miracle) and his wife Alison.

And special thanks to my good lady, Indra, for sharing it with me. 

