

A sole survivor?

By Lynda and Philip Skipper

On 21st September 1966, Norman, as he is now named, rolled off the production line. A black traveller with red interior, he was shipped to Colmore Depot Ltd in Birmingham, where he was sold and registered as LDA 233D couple of weeks later. Nothing unusual about that, however this particular car was bought for a police sergeant. While we were originally told that the car been purchased and used in the Wolverhampton police force, it was in fact amalgamated to form the West Midlands Constabulary in April 1966, so Norman must have been West Midlands police based throughout his time in service. Unfortunately we have no information about this sergeant, so are unsure for how long the car remained in use by the sergeant before being used as a panda patrol car. We do know that his car was at some point resprayed externally in Bermuda blue and white, although they left the interior painted black with red trim. He then served as a panda car with the force for several years before being sold to a private owner.

This rebranding of a sergeants car seems to have been quite unusual, and certainly not many police forces used panda travellers, only Edinburgh, West Midlands and Leicestershire; the vast majority of the panda cars were 2 door saloons. So far we have only been able to find one other surviving panda traveller, which was used in the Edinburgh police force. If anyone else has a panda traveller we'd be very interested in hearing from you!

The car has passed through the hands of a number of private owners, before being purchased by ourselves in 2010. One former owner worth mentioning made an important contribution to the Morris Minor. He was reputed to be a former Smiths employee, and was responsible for the design of the Smiths speedo.

However, with the last MOT certificate we have for the car dating to 1993, Norman has been off the road for some time awaiting an owner brave enough to tackle his restoration. We came across the car at Minor Services in Witchford. It had been transported there at the request of a German car collector, but when the quote was given for how extensive the work was, the car collector decided not to go ahead with the restoration. We popped in to Minor Services to pick up a few parts, and as we were already the owners of two ex-panda cars, we were asked if we had any contacts who might consider taking the car on.

During the course of our drive home, we wondered if we might have the space for one more... And after a bit of internet surfing for information about the car, when we discovered the exact car was available as OO gauge size models (1:76), we were on the phone to Minor Services, agreeing to take the car ourselves. Our research also showed that the Chief Constable at that time was called Norman Goodchild, hence our choice of name for the car.

We are still working on the restoration of an ex-Metropolitan police saloon. We had been hoping to finish her much sooner, but new job, house move and then new baby has slowed down the work somewhat! However we are hoping to be able to start working on Norman soon, and would be delighted if any members have any other information about his history. We are in fact applying for Heritage Lottery Funding for the work, and if our bid is successful, aim to get Norman to the 2013 Morris centenary celebrations.

Norman has also been an inspiration for a knitted police traveller toy. Philip is a keen knitter and thought that as all the knitted car toys on the market were very cartoon like, it would be fun to try knitting a more accurate Morris Minor. Naturally, he decided to knit a 'Norman'. After lots of people asked where they could get one, Lindum Crafts was set up, selling knitting kits of all the different Minor variants priced at £13 each including postage. All the police panda Traveller kits are based on Norman's original livery, and the profit from the sales will go to help with his restoration costs. You can find the kits online at www.lindumcrafts.co.uk or contact us at 5 Macaulay Drive, Lincoln, LN2 4DY.

Suggested captions for the pictures attached:

Norman in service outside the constabulary workshops at Bevan Garage.

Norman as he is now.

The knitted Norman!