

SAVING THE AMAZON

By Steve Woodward

I am a self-confessed Volvo fanatic. Why? Because I've come to admire, through my using them at work every day, their robust build quality, incredible reliability, eight hours-a-day-in-the-saddle comfort and their admirable reputation for safety, which yes, I have experienced at first hand!

I became interested in the historical side of Police vehicles during the 1984/5 national miners' strike when many of us were sent north to the coalfields of Nottingham, Wales and Yorkshire. Whilst there I became fascinated by the huge number of different types of Police cars and vans used by each force. And I became acutely aware that Hampshire was looked upon with envious eyes as we were using Volvos and BMWs as a matter of routine, when others were still using clapped out Austins, Vauxhalls and Fords. I began photographing the cars and then started to seek out photos from various sources of older cars, long since retired from active service.

One of those photos was of CHO 621C, a 1965 Volvo 121 Amazon estate. I was hooked and had to learn more about this unusual looking car. I became even more enchanted when I discovered that it was the first foreign car ever used by a British Police force and slowly began to understand why the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary (as it was called then) had purchased it in the first place and why we, as a force had continued with what was then, a hugely controversial project. The more I learned the more I wanted to know and by the mid-1990s I had spoken to various people who had either driven these cars (there were 5 in total) or who had worked on them.



First foreign Police vehicle to patrol the streets of the UK

The basic history is as follows; In the early 1960s the force was running a number of MK2 Austin A110 Westminsters and a few Wolseley 6/110's on its Traffic Division fleet. Like many cars of the time they weren't exactly reliable and the all-important spares back-up was even worse which meant they spent far too long off the road. Police vehicles need to be reliable and as the strategic road network grew throughout the two counties this became even more important. The accident rate on our roads was increasing rapidly and the amount of emergency equipment these patrol cars needed to carry also increased to the extent that a standard saloon car just wasn't big enough. A decision was made to design a purpose built Accident and Emergency Tender (a sort of pre-Range Rover type unit) capable of carrying all the necessary kit to the scene of a crash, quickly and reliably.



*CHO 621C at Blackdam roundabout in Basingstoke
with PC's Alan Shaddick (driver) and Tony Garman (standing)*

Representations were made to the Chief Constable Sir Douglas Osmond and in early 1965 following a series of meetings the Deputy Chief Constable Mr Broomfield instructed the Chief Inspector, Traffic Division, Len Pearce, to undertake a project to produce an Accident Emergency Vehicle. It had to be capable of carrying a large amount of equipment to be used at accidents, but in all other respects had to remain a normal Traffic patrol car.

Chief Inspector Pearce formed a team of people to assist him and these included Inspector Jack Hamblin DFC and Sgt Les Puckett of the Traffic Division, the Transport Officer Tommy Atkins, the Workshops Admin Officer Cliff Thorn and the Workshops Foreman Jim Fraser. Between them, these people held a wealth of knowledge and

experience on car design, engineering and performance. They looked at the various options open to them in the estate car market in the UK at that time and found that most were either too small or vastly under powered. They ended up with just three contenders; the Series 3 Humber Super Snipe estate, with its six cylinder, three litre engine, the Citroen DS19 Safari estate, at sixteen feet in length and powered by a four cylinder, two litre engine and the Volvo 121 estate, with a four cylinder, 1780cc engine.

Arrangements were made for demonstrator vehicles to be supplied for road trials and a blue Volvo 120 Amazon (as they were commonly called) was borrowed from Rex Neate Volvo Distributors at Botley, near Southampton. Volvo's in 1960's Britain were about as commonplace as South Korean cars were in the 1990's and there weren't that many people who knew much about them. Cliff Thorn also managed to acquire a sample gearbox from Ken Rudd, another Volvo supplier in Southampton. It was examined very carefully and was described as a masterpiece in engineering and was finished to a very high standard.

After a few weeks' trial period, the big Citroen DS Safari was found to have the capacity, but not the weight carrying capability. It was also unstable at high speed when fully loaded and so this car failed to make the grade. Everybody liked the Volvo, but its 1800 engine lacked power. A second 120 estate was obtained, in white this time, because Volvo didn't have a black one. It had a Ruddspeed conversion fitted to the engine and this consisted of twin carburettors, high lift camshaft and a four branch manifold exhaust and this helped the acceleration and top end. On a quiet dual carriageway, with three passengers on board, Inspector Jack Hamblin DFC, a former RAF Lancaster bomber pilot took the Volvo past the 100 mph mark and on to a claimed 116 mph. According to legend, only Jack Hamblin was allowed to drive the car at this speed, because he was the only person within the Hampshire Constabulary who had ever travelled at over a 100 mph on a regular basis, whilst thundering down the runway aboard his Lancaster!

In all departments the Volvo won hands down. It was a good quality, solidly built motor car that had a good turn of speed and handled well, even when fully loaded. The mechanics liked working on it and it was good value for money. But it was foreign. No Police force had ever bought foreign cars before and Hampshire knew that they would probably be criticised for even thinking about it. Nervously, the team approached the Chief Constable Sir Douglas Osmond with the result of the trials and requested permission to buy the Volvo. His reply was "You're the experts, if it's the best car for the job, then go out and buy it".

And so in June 1965, CHO 621C became the first foreign Police vehicle to patrol the streets of the UK. But, just in case the force received too much flak from the media, it also bought the Humber, registration number COT 778C and it was decided to place both cars on a further six-month trial, only this time with the Traffic Division. Basingstoke got the Volvo, whilst Eastleigh trialled the Humber. After three months they swapped over and reports were submitted to Len Pearce.



CHO 621C with one of its driver's PC Roy Foord



*The Humber Super Snipe estate with its crew
PC Bruce Board (left) and PC Peter Booker (right)*

Consideration was given to respraying the cars black, as had been the tradition with all Police vehicles of course, but a decision was taken to leave them in white, as they would be easier to see at the scene of an accident during poor visibility. Another new concept on these cars was the introduction of an illuminated, roof mounted fibreglass box, incorporating the Police/Stop sign at the rear and the Lucas Acorn blue light. A blue panel across the front of the box had the word Police stencilled in white on it and they were manufactured by Wadham Bros of Waterloo. The Winkworth bell was positioned out of sight, behind the radiator grille, on the nearside. The public were left in no doubt that this state of the art Police vehicle meant business.

After the six-month Traffic Division trial, the Humber was deemed to be unstable at high speed when loaded and was noticeably heavy on corners. Its three speed column gear change also proved difficult to use at speed. The Humber was kept in service for three years but all concerned preferred the Volvo and in May 1966, a second 121 Amazon, FOR 298D was purchased.



FOR 298D was the second Volvo Amazon and is seen here with one of its drivers' PC Pete Gibson

This coincided with two important factors. First, the heavy steel accident signs were replaced by roll up cloth and vinyl items that buttoned onto fold up metal frames. This weight saving idea allowed for the provision of a petrol driven generator to be carried instead. This powered two Mitra-Lux floodlights, carried on tri-pod frames, to help illuminate accident scenes on dark country roads. The second and more important matter concerned the audible warning device fitted. The cars had been fitted with a Winkworth bell, which wasn't really loud enough when used on fast A roads and so the bell was supplemented by the all new two-tone horn. These electric air horns, made by Fiamm were much louder than the old bell and proved popular with the crews that drove the Volvo's as they appeared to help clear the traffic that much quicker.

Over the next couple of years three more Volvo 121 estates were added to the fleet. LOR 187F and NCG 236F had larger 1986cc engines, uprated brakes and other improvements and were stationed at Basingstoke and Aldershot Traffic Sections respectively. Both these vehicles covered more than 140,000 miles in their lifetime. At the time of writing I don't have details of the fifth car but these early Volvos laid the foundation stones to a relationship that has now lasted, unbroken for 50 years.



FOR 298D at the scene of a serious RTA on the A32 at West Meon



*The fourth Volvo Amazon was this F registered car
seen outside the front of HQ Winchester*

The cars that followed the Amazon include the following; More than 90 Volvo 144DL saloons, including the big bumper model were purchased by Hampshire Constabulary and no fewer than 350 of the 200 series from 1975 to 1992. This included the 244DL with its 2.1 litre engine, the 244 GLT with the up-rated 2.3i engine, the 240 Police Special (built to Swedish Polis spec) and the 240 GL model. The force also had two Volvo 264DL saloons, with 2.7 litre V6 engines and a manual gear box (very unusual) to try and combat the threat from BMW. A single batch of eight 360 GLEi saloons were purchased as urban area cars and in 1994 came the famous T5 range with first the 850T5 saloons, then the 850T5 estates (which were automatics) followed by the 1997 model V70T5 and then the bigger 2000 model V70T5. Currently (2016) the force operates a number of Volvo XC70 D5 estates as ARVs. In between all these the force has also trialled the 740 Turbo, 460, 960, S40, V40 and more recently the V60 D5.



The fifth and final Amazon is seen here at the scene of a plane crash at Farnborough in 1970. The car now has POLICE labels on the front doors

In 1997 I discovered that one of the Amazon estates, FOR 298D had survived. I was determined that the car should be saved for the nation. I know that sounds like a rather grand statement but in historical terms it is without doubt one of *the* most important Police cars ever made. Now my mechanical knowledge at this time wasn't what it should be and although I was forever reading classic car magazines I simply didn't have the know how or the bottle to undertake any kind of a restoration project. I therefore contacted the Milestones Museum in Basingstoke. They were on the verge of opening

the museum and after discussing my ideas with them, I found myself in a car with Alistair Penfold and Gary Wragg from the museum bombing down the M4 towards Wales to look over the Amazon. I had spoken to the current owner several times on the phone and he stated he wanted to sell the car. It had just failed its MOT but “only required a little welding to the floor pan and it would sail through”.

We arrived at a farm, half way up a Welsh mountainside. The owner rolled the car out of a barn and I nearly cried. There was no floor pan, in fact there was very little left of it at all. Not a decent panel in sight with rust everywhere, seats eaten by mice, wafer thin roof lining hanging by a thread and thick white smoke pouring out of the exhaust. I went to open one of the rear doors and all I had was the handle, the door stayed shut! I looked at Alistair and Gary and they just shook their heads. En route home a few minutes later they reckoned it was going to cost about £8000 to restore it properly and they couldn't justify spending that much money on one project.

The car as it was found in Wales in 1997!





Undeterred in 1998 I contacted Volvo UK who made all the right noises and came up with a plan to ship the car back to Sweden for the factory apprentices to rebuild. Everything was fine until the money men stepped in and estimated the total cost to be around £20,000. Needless to say they withdrew. I was now beginning to think that it would be left to rot when an acquaintance by the name of Terry Wells got to hear about the car.

“I’ll buy it” he said.

“But you’ve not even seen it” I replied.

“Well nothings beyond salvage” he stated confidently.

And sure enough a couple of weeks later FOR 298D was delivered by trailer to Enfield and Terry set about the task of rebuilding the car. That was in 1999 and I didn’t really hear anything more until 2004 when I heard through the grapevine that the restoration was complete and that Terry was considering selling the car on. Photographs were sent by e-mail and FOR 298D certainly looked a whole lot better than it did the last time I saw it. I had been a member of the Hampshire Constabulary History Society for several years and decided that I should make an approach to them to sound out the feasibility of the Society buying the car back and using it as a mobile museum piece. I prepared a written business plan and at the next meeting went armed ready to do battle, convinced that I was going to have to fight one or two of them, twist some arms and generally

cajole them into purchasing this unique car. After reading the plan a vote was called for and a unanimous decision to buy the car was reached within seconds. You could have knocked me down with a feather!

During the interim period from 1999 to 2004 I had actually taken the mechanical plunge and bought another car to restore myself. It was of course another Volvo and it was of course another Hampshire Police Volvo, a 240 Police Special area car that was actually my old patrol car from Southsea. It also needed a complete restoration job doing on it (but that's another story!). I had recently met ex Sgt Barry Gard who is nothing short of a welding genius and he taught me many restoration and bodywork techniques during this time. He also happens to own a Volvo Amazon saloon of his own and it transpired that when he was a Cadet he actually did his Traffic attachment at Havant nick and rode in FOR 298D for most of it, so it goes without saying that he was very interested in the project himself. So we travelled up to Enfield armed with a set budget from the History Society and a large dose of eager anticipation.

The Amazon looked glorious as it was wheeled out of the garage but our smiles quickly turned into frowns as we looked closer. Terry openly admitted that he had no love for the car and had become bored with the whole project. He won't mind me saying so but it showed. Take nothing away from the man, he quite literally saved the cars life and without his efforts it would have been scrapped years ago (remember Milestones and Volvo both withdrew). But I'm a fussy bugger and I have to have everything perfect in a restoration job and this wasn't. The interior was still in a terrible state, with ripped upholstery, battered door panels, holes in the metal dash, a split dash top, the same old headlining and lots of detail parts just missing or not properly fixed. Who ever had painted the car had also covered most of the glass, the seat belts and the upholstery in white paint too. We couldn't agree on a price and I left even more disappointed than when I saw the car in Wales.

However over the coming weeks some sense prevailed on both sides and I travelled back to Enfield and proudly returned with FOR 298D on the back of a Hampshire Constabulary recovery truck. No sooner had we got it back we were contacted by the BBC who wanted to film the occasion for their South Today program. Within days I was driving it up and down a road whilst being filmed and interviewed by the BBC's Transport Correspondent Paul Clifton. In hind sight the car was a mess and the engine blew out so much smoke that at times you could hardly see it. The cars arrival was also featured in the force's monthly newspaper Frontline and got a one page write up in the Volvo magazine. We even took the car back to Havant Police Station for a brief photo shoot with Barry Gard standing proudly beside it.



BBC South Today filmed the cars return to Hampshire with PC Steve Woodward



FOR 298D with PC Steve Woodward and retired Sgt Barry Gard in the rear yard at Havant nick with a modern day Volvo V70T5

Once all that was over Barry and I set about dismantling the car again, ripping out the interior completely, including the dash and logging everything that either needed replacing, repairing or finishing off. The list was huge and we were going to need some financial help. I therefore went back to Volvo UK and spoke to Peter Cody at Volvos Special Vehicle Operations. He was the man responsible for selling Volvos to the Police and 2005 just happened to be the 40th anniversary of the first one to be sold, ie CHO 621C to the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary. Volvo could see the worth in assisting us finance the project and sponsored the deal to the tune of £2500. This enabled me to purchase a large amount of new stock for the Amazon. Yes, I did say new. You can still buy just about anything for the Amazon from every body panel, door cards, headlining, chrome trim, the original rubber floor covering, window and door rubbers, to just about all the engine parts. Most of it came from a UK supplier and the rest was imported from Canada.

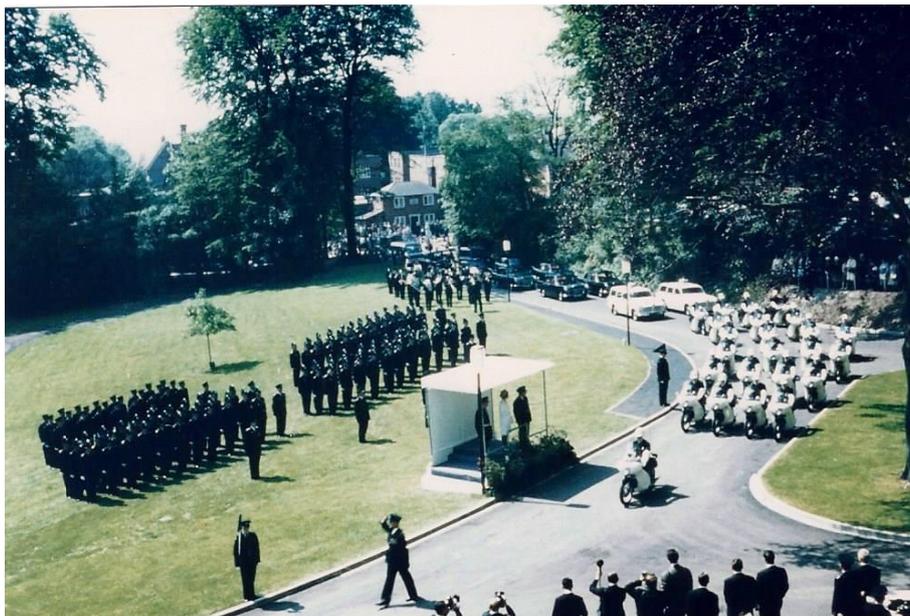
Other projects included obtaining all the period Police equipment for the interior. The car was fitted with the old Winkworth chrome bell plus a set of two-tone horns, a Lucas Acorn blue light, a flexi map light, Smiths calibrated speedometer, Pye Westminster VHF radio set and the various Lucas switches to operate it all. I built a large wooden box (as per the original) to house all the emergency kit in. I managed to find a dozen orange and white cones and I built two replica No-Tech flashing blue beacons on stands. The box also housed, a tow rope, a first aid kit, four blankets, a reel of electric cable and half a dozen Police/Accident signs and the finger breaking metal stands they sat on. A very heavy petrol generator was also obtained. It's no wonder the rear mud flaps can be seen dragging along the road in that first set of photos!



The new dash panel with Smiths calibrated speedo and all the necessary switch gear

In the meantime, I'd been doing quite a lot of research into the history of the car and discovered that it was purchased on the 1st May 1966 from Rex Neate Volvo dealership at Botley (the first three were supplied by Rex Neate with the last two supplied by Rudds of Southampton) and that it was based at Havant Police Station and had the call sign Juliet Zero One (J-01).

The car entered service on 16th May 1966 and was retired on 20th November 1969. The week after it entered service the car was paraded with CHO 621C at the opening of the all new Police HQ at Winchester in front of HRH Princess Margaret. Sadly CHO 621C was written off in 1967 following a serious RTA on the old A33 Winchester by-pass.



The 1966 opening of Police HQ Winchester and the two Volvos take part in the parade in front of HRH Princess Margaret

Mid 1960s Britain was an incredibly busy era. During our cars service period it saw huge changes and achievements in the world. Just two months after FOR 298D entered service England won the 1966 World Cup of course. Harold Wilson was Prime Minister; Lyndon Johnson was U.S President with Leonid Brezhnev Soviet Leader. The Vietnam War was at its height, Moors murderers Myra Hindley and Ian Brady were sentenced to life imprisonment. The mini skirt was all the rage and Twiggy was 'Face of the Year 1966'. Walt Disney died. The 70 mph speed limit was introduced on our motorways. The Aberfan disaster in Wales killed 116 children and 28 adults. BBC Radio 1 was launched after Radio London and Radio Caroline were closed down. Colour TV arrived for the first time and the oil tanker 'Torrey Canyon' ran aground off Lands' End. Sir Francis Chichester completed his around the world voyage in Gypsy Moth IV and was knighted by HM Queen on Southsea beach upon his return. Dr Christian Bernard performed the very first heart transplant, the breatherlyser was introduced and the QE2 was launched. The first decimal coins were introduced whilst the Great Train Robbery was the biggest in British history. The MK1 Ford Escort was launched; Dr Martin Luther King was assassinated followed by U.S Senator Robert Kennedy. Richard Nixon became U.S President in 68 and in early 1969 Concorde took its maiden flight. The Kray twins were convicted and sentenced to life for murder. British troops were sent to Northern Ireland for the first time and the biggest event in history saw man land on the moon on 21st July 1969. Colonel Gaddafi seized power in Libya and Yassar Arafat became leader of the P.L.O. The Harrier jump jet was launched (69) and huge car carrying hovercrafts crossed The Channel for the first time. Biggest toys of the era were the Space Hopper and Action Man. Average house price was £5000 whilst a gallon of 4-star leaded petrol was just 27p.

Top films included; The Graduate.....Bonnie and Clyde.....Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.....Midnight Cowboy.....Alfie.....The Dirty Dozen.....Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.....2001 Space Odyssey.....Carry on Camping!

Music defines an era of course and some of the biggest sounds included; Paperback Writer, Yellow Submarine, Eleanor Rigby, All You Need is Love and Hey Jude from The Beatles.....Paint It Black and Jumpin' Jack Flash from The Rolling Stones.....Good Vibrations from The Beach Boys.....I'm a Believer from The Monkees.....Puppet on a String by Sandy Shaw.....A Whiter Shade of Pale from Procol Harum.....Congratulations by Cliff Richard.....Dizzy by Tommy Roe and Sugar Sugar by The Archies.

During the 1960s and 70s just about everyone seemed to smoke but even back then smoking in Police cars was a serious disciplinary offence. The standard fit ash tray on a Volvo 120 is a slide out unit from the left side of the dash. To facilitate the fitting of the Police VHF radio set the ash tray was removed. What were our 1960s smoking officers to do? One of them told me the following story. They were dispatched to Winchester railway station one afternoon to pick up the Chief Constable Sir Douglas Osmond to convey him back to Police HQ at West Hill. Mr Osmond was a very heavy smoker and the first thing he did after getting into the rear of the car was to light up.

"Where's your ash tray?" he enquired.

"Oh we don't smoke in the patrol car sir" came the reply.

"Yes I know that" said Sir Douglas sharply "but where is YOUR ash tray?" he demanded.

A rather sheepish officer then presented the Chief with an old Golden Virginia tobacco tin that was bolted to a 12-inch length of plywood, shaped like a boats oar that sat on top of the transmission tunnel in between the two front seats!



Essential ash tray was placed on top of the transmission tunnel

It was now February 2005 and the goal was to have the car ready by June 4th for Families Day at Netley. Where better to debut the car than at the forces own open day? Barry and I logged more than 1000 man hours of work leading up to June 4th and I was still polishing the car at half midnight the night before that first show. One of my neighbours who had been monitoring our progress came out, shook his head and said;

“Now I know you’re mad”.

Maybe I am. But I knew it had been worth the effort the following day when I saw the look on some of those faces. People who had once driven it in anger or who had serviced it stood there in disbelief. But they were so proud because they had a connection with a piece of Hampshire history and so chuffed that their car had survived after all these years that it made all that effort and all that aggravation so worthwhile.



Families Day at Netley 2005 and J-01 makes its public debut

What made that day even more interesting was that I had also tracked down one of the cars that the Volvo was tested against in 1965. It was the Humber Super Snipe estate which is now owned by Alan and Angela Wildman from Essex. Although they knew of their cars provenance they hadn't managed to ascertain much of its history. So I promised to tell them everything they wanted to know in exchange for them attending Netley for the weekend. It was fantastic to see the Amazon and "Henry" the Humber as they affectionately call it sitting side by side on Hampshire turf once more. And to complete a memorable day one of the Humber's former drivers PC Bruce Board attended and was over the moon that his favourite patrol car had also survived.



J-01 and Henry the Humber meet up again for the first time in 40 years

FOR 298D still needed more work though. Phase 1 consisted of returning the car back to a condition that allowed it to be used as a static exhibit at shows and I think we had achieved that. Phase 2 was to concentrate on the engine and the cars performance potential. In 1966 the Hampshire Police Volvos were fitted with Ruddspeed conversions to up the performance from 90 bhp to an impressive 116 bhp and a top speed of 116 mph, which was unheard of for a 1960s estate car. Ruddspeed

Engineering was originally a Sussex based firm but had recently been resurrected by a company in Gloucestershire and negotiations were entered into to build a 1966 spec engine for the car. Sadly the cost of that project far outweighed the historical aspect of the idea and so it was abandoned.

However, the car did require an urgent engine transplant. One of its many previous owners (Andy Rowlands from the Volvo Owners Club) had removed the original Ruddspeed engine to use in a rally car project and had replaced it with a standard B18 twin carb unit. By the time we'd acquired the car it was in a very poor state mechanically and so the hunt was on to find a decent engine for it. To my surprise I located one on E Bay which had covered a mere 33,000 miles. I won the auction for a snip at £65 and then spoke to the seller by phone. He was a true Volvo enthusiast and raced modern Volvo cars and undertook a lot of restoration work on classic Volvos. We naturally got talking about J-01 and he laughed.

"My father probably drove it then" he said.

"Really? Who's your father?" I asked.

"Dave Strong" came the reply.

Any former Hampshire officers or staff will all know who Dave Strong is but for those reading this who don't allow me to explain. Dave was a Traffic Officer through and through but achieved force wide acclaim when he became one of the force driving instructors but primarily *the* motorcycle instructor for many years. A few days later Kev Strong delivered the engine to my house and brought Dave with him. He was so pleased to see the old Amazon and got quite emotional about it all. He was doubly pleased that his son was now supplying the new engine for it. Several years later Dave donated his original orange fluorescent jacket to the car and it now goes everywhere with it hanging over the back of the driver's seat.

The Amazon and the new engine were taken to the Police workshops at Fareham so that the engine swap could take place. A couple of weeks went by and I got a phone call stating it was all done and would I like to pop over and take a look? I was on duty at the time and had a probationer Constable with me on his two-week Traffic attachment. We were greeted by Darren the technician who had undertaken all the work. He really was quite excited by it all and would I like to hear how good the new engine sounded? Well of course I would.

What happened next still sends a shudder down my spine. To set the scene; Darren jumped into the driver's seat whilst I stood outside of the open driver's door. My 'proby' was walking across the front of the car just as Darren started it. On full choke. In first gear. The car shot forward about six feet. The open door knocked me to the ground. The car collided very heavily with the wheel balancing machine situated directly in front of it. This machine had a long steel bar protruding from it that punctured a huge hole through the front of the bonnet, bending it in half, before exiting via the front near side wing. It lifted the front of the car about 6 inches off the ground. Had my probationer been one second later in walking across the front of the car that steel bar would have gone straight through him.



The huge amount of damage to the Volvo Amazon at Fareham Workshops

The Amazon needed a new bonnet, slam panel, front valance and grille. By some miracle that steel bar didn't touch any of the engine parts. It spent several more weeks being repaired and it all looked good once finished. And that new engine made such a huge difference to its performance. Which was good because I needed it for a very important photo shoot at Netley. 2005 marked 40 years since the Hampshire and Isle of

Wight Constabulary had purchased CHO 621C and I thought we should mark that anniversary in a special way. I therefore arranged for J-01 to join the 1985 Volvo 240 Police Special, a 1999 model Volvo V70 T5 in the current candy stripe livery and a brand new 2005 model Volvo V70 T5 in the all new Battenberg livery. The force photographer Jan Brayley snapped away and we eventually settled on the photo you see here.



Hampshire Constabulary and Volvo cars 1965 to 2005

I then had three of them framed and presented them to Peter Cody of Volvo Special Vehicle Operations and to John Bradley MBE, Hampshire's Fleet Manager, who had supported me and the Amazon project from day one. Oh and I kept the third one for myself!



Steve Woodward (far right) presents John Bradley MBE and Peter Cody with their framed photos

Those framed photos were presented at the 2005 National Police Fleet Managers Exhibition and Conference at Wroughton in Wiltshire where both the Amazon and my restored Volvo 240 PS took pride of place on the Volvo UK stand. It was a very proud moment I have to confess and in the following weeks I found several photos of the Amazon and the story behind its rescue and restoration in a number of classic car magazines.



The two Hampshire Police Volvos on the Volvo stand at the 2005 National Association Police Fleet Managers Exhibition at Wroughton

At the Hampshire Police Families Day in June 2006 the Amazon made another appearance and during the day I became aware of a chap stood in front of the car shaking his head. His name was Peter Neate, son of Rex Neate who'd sold the cars to Hampshire Constabulary. He was shaking his head in disbelief, not so much because the Amazon had survived but because of the registration plates on it.

"I made those" he said.

"How can you tell?" I enquired.

"Because as a 15 year old apprentice I had to make up the plates for the new cars and I always filed the corners off into a nice rounded shape".

It was a nice little piece of history and we spent a long time chatting about his late father and his love for the Volvo product and how honoured he felt to have supplied the cars to the Police. He later sent me a couple of rather poor quality photos of CHO 621C attending an RTA ironically right outside Rex Neates Volvo dealership.



CHO 621C attending the RTA outside Rex Neate Volvo dealership

It wasn't just Families Day that the car attended. It starred at the Goodwood Revival as part of the policing team two years on the trot, where it escorted the mods and rockers around the Goodwood circuit each day. It was displayed at The Portsmouth News Motor Show in 2006 as part of the Police Road Safety stand, as well as a number of other Police force open days in Sussex, Avon and Somerset and Thames Valley. One of the biggest events it attended was the Cops and Robbers Day at the Ace Café in north London where it teamed up with another 30 classic Police cars including Henry the Humber.



J-01 at the Goodwood Revival event on the track keeping the mods and rockers in check and with Special Constable Richard Owen looking smart in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary uniform



J-01 and Henry meet up again at the Ace Café in north London

In 2007 my youngest daughter Katie chose the Amazon to attend her school prom night in. Despite her father having access to a large number of arguably more exotic classic Police vehicles through his connections with Police Car UK (www.policecaruk.com) she insisted on being transported there in the Amazon. She still loves the car today.



J-01 takes daughter Katie to her Prom Night

Shortly after that I arranged a rather interesting experiment. I had some very good TV contacts and wanted their assistance to film a DVD production to show case some of the former patrol cars that members of Police Car UK owned. The cars were assembled at the Daedalus airfield so we could use the spare runway and included a Metropolitan Police Daimler SP250 Dart, a Lancashire County Constabulary MGA 1600, a MK3 Ford Zephyr 6 from the old West Riding Constabulary and the Amazon and Humber used by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary. I wanted to drive the two cars side by side to 'recreate' the original test to see if the force had made the right decision back in 1965. For me personally it was a fascinating experiment. I'd already driven a couple of thousand miles in the Amazon so knew it was extremely comfortable, had a fabulous gear box, a decent turn of speed and handled well, albeit with a lot of under steer compared to a modern car. The Humber was like sitting inside a gentleman's club with wall to wall leather and burr walnut fittings. It was a big car and sort of lumbered about in a rather genteel and unflustered manner. It was pleasant to drive sedately but of course Police cars aren't driven that way and this is where the Humber lost its way completely. The three speed column gear change was a nightmare to use even at a relatively slow pace; I just couldn't find the gears. Even Alan Wildman the cars current owner of 25+ years still has difficulty with it. So trying to do it at any kind of 'hurry up' speed was virtually impossible. I'm not sure why they chose the column gear change because Humber made a standard floor change gear box available for Police use (I have the period advertising material to prove this) and the Metropolitan Police who used the same car for exactly the same reasons that Hampshire did opted to use the fully automatic gearbox instead. So on that basis I can say with absolute confidence that the right decision was taken 50 years ago. The DVD is called Classic Cop Cars on Camera.

That proved to be one of its last outings because I received a call from Dave Stevens at Fareham workshops one day because they had a problem with the Amazon. I drove over to find it sat up high on the ramp. I was told that I could no longer drive it on the road because it wasn't as safe as a new Volvo V70. No shit Sherlock. Despite the fact that it had recently passed its MOT and was legally fit to travel on the Queens Highway the force had decided that due to the patchwork quilt of floor pan repairs that had been carried out prior to us purchasing it that they could be held legally liable if I sustained serious injuries if it was involved in a collision. There was no budging them and so the Amazon was effectively grounded. I was further told not to worry because the force would transport it to and from any events that it needed to attend in the future. However, a few months later in 2008 the financial crash caused more damage than any accident I might have had because the force now couldn't afford the luxury of providing transport at weekends and so the car got shunted off to the hangar at the Daedalus airfield, a damp and rather desolate place teeming with mice; hardly the right conditions for the old girls enforced retirement.

I retired from the Police service in January 2008. Once retired you quickly lose that day to day involvement with former colleagues obviously and my personal connection with J-01 started to evaporate too. The only time the job could transport it anywhere was to Families Day every June and it spent the rest of its time being shunted around Fareham workshops or left in the hangar at Daedalus. Over the next few years my family and I had other commitments to attend to and to be honest my interest in the car had waned.

In June 2015 I attended the National Association of Police Fleet Managers Exhibition in Telford as I had done every year for almost 20 years. I always paid particular interest

to the Volvo stand obviously and I met up with Sarah Symcox from Volvo Special Vehicle Operations. She'd taken over from Peter Cody when he retired in 2007 and one of the first things she asked me was "How's the Amazon?"

I relayed the sorry saga of its enforced imprisonment and we had a good old chat about the cars history. She then showed me the 2015 Police Volvo brochure and there on the inside front cover was J-01. I felt rather proud that Volvo still acknowledged the importance of the car to their heritage. And on the way home I started to think about how we could get her back on the road once more.

I talked it over with Phil Jacob a retired Hampshire Traffic PC and like me a member of Police Car UK and the force History Society. At the October 2015 History Society meeting we outlined our idea to remove the shackles from the car and return it to the History Society. Our proposal was agreed but it took another six months for the details to be thrashed out. In the meantime, the car was featured in a five-page article in Auto Express magazine that centred on the fact that Volvos had now been in Police use for 50 years. They pitched the Amazon against a brand new Police spec Volvo V60 D5.



1966 Volvo 121 Amazon and 2016 model Volvo V60 D5

FOR 298D was eventually returned to us on 16th May 2016 exactly 50 years to the day since it first entered service.

But it wasn't all good news. The car failed its MOT and needed almost £2000 worth of work to gain its certificate which was carried out at ADL Motors in Chertsey by Surrey Police trained mechanic and Police Car UK member Alex Lee. A couple of weeks later on the 4th June I was very pleased to be able to drive it to and fro Families Day at Netley once again where it proved to be as popular as ever. We even reunited a couple of retired officers who once patrolled in the Amazon's including Special Constable John Beel. Since meeting them John has kindly written a few memories of his time in the car when stationed at Fareham which we have included here;

Some of the details are from a pocket book I still have from March 1969 to August 1971. As a nineteen year old Special Constable stationed at Fareham Police Station there were some occasions when the duty shift sergeant would instruct me to report to the Traffic office to double crew a patrol car if they were short of officers. As you may imagine this was quite something for me as I was so keen. During this period I was also the Civilian Telephone Operator at the station.

My pocket book shows there were at least six occasions when I double crewed the Amazon mostly with PC 617 Peter Gibson. Our call sign was H-01. My first duty was on Friday 1st April 1969. We walked into the yard and that is when I saw the Amazon for the first time. To me this vehicle looked a beast of a motor car with its rounded bonnet. It made the Mini 850 panda cars parked each side of it look very small. The colour was unusual, being so used to seeing black Traffic cars up until then. The Amazon was an estate and carried all the necessary equipment for use when attending road traffic accidents. This had to be checked before commencing patrol. First impressions when getting into the car were how solid it was; opening the door took some effort. It was very comfortable with plenty of room, being able to wear a cap, something which was a problem in the Minis. In those days you had to wear your cap in all police vehicles. In addition to the standard fixtures in the car there was a calibrated speedometer and a force frequency radio with a telephone style hand mic with centre squeeze when transmitting. I remember at some stage a flexible light was fitted to the dash board to make it easier to complete pocket book at night. Out on patrol the Amazon certainly turned heads, I doubt many people could afford one for private use.

Our first call was for assistance required at Fareham railway station. Football fans started causing trouble on a train at the station. All units to attend to assist BTP officers. We were at Catisfield and cruising towards Fareham. PC Gibson instructed me to turn on the blue light and horns as he accelerated. The power surge and sudden throaty roar of the Amazon was quite amazing. The car although quite heavy appeared to handle well. On another occasion we spotted a stolen scooter at Stokes Bay. The rider failed to stop. We pursued it and in the centre of Alverstoke village there was a large oak tree where the rider tried to out manoeuvre the patrol car by riding around the tree a couple of times; we followed. The Amazon kept up and the rider was stopped and arrested.

John has also kindly donated a number of very special items of equipment from his own personal collection to help when showing the car. These include a Police cap with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary badge, white Traffic sleeves, a period hardback pocket book and a pair of 1960s Hiatt hand cuffs.



Families Day, Netley 2016 and J-01 is back on the road again

J-01's current estimated mileage is around 550,000 miles and is an ongoing project which I hope brings joy to all who see it.

As a side issue J-01 isn't the only Hampshire Constabulary vehicle now in preservation. In fact there are several. They include the 1965 Humber Super Snipe estate and the 1985 Volvo 240 PS as previously described here, a 1953 Riley 2 ½ litre RMF from the old Portsmouth City Police, a 1970 MK2 Cortina Lotus, which was based at Newport on the Isle of Wight, a 1975 Rover 3500S V8 which was once the official car used by Lord Mountbatten when on State business on the Isle of Wight, a 1985 Series 3 Jaguar XJ6 4.2 from Basingstoke, a 1987 BMW 528i from Cosham, a 1970 Rickman Zundapp 125 motorcycle, a Honda CB200 also from the Isle of Wight and a replica Morris Minor dog van from the Portsmouth City Police. A 1960s Lambretta scooter was restored several years ago and now resides in a museum and the force itself has kept the 1992 all electric Ford Ecostar Escort van which was based at Fleet. That's a total of 13 vehicles which is by far the largest single force collection of restored vehicles anywhere in the UK.