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Rebuilding JBK 244

Chapter 1 – My first Riley

I purchased my first 2½ litre Riley RMF in 1977, I was 25 years old and had not long finished the complete rebuild of a fire ravaged Triumph convertible.

The Triumph was passed on to my younger sister and the Riley became my everyday transport, petrol was cheap in those days!

Many trouble-free holidays were spent touring Europe normally ending up in the South of France, and whilst in the Alsace took in the Schlumpf collection – no Riley's in there, just Bugatti's lots of them.

Chapter 2 – JBK 244 purchase

In July 1979 my father Bill passed me a copy of The Exchange & Mart and said "what do you think"?

Looking at the advert it read – Riley RME 2.5 part renovated with a recon engine plus spare engine £250, garaged in Eastleigh, Hampshire.

Give the man a ring and let's go. We arrived very late afternoon and as the lockup garage door opened there was just a vast pile of bits. Doors, wings, bonnet tops, engine and gearbox all off the chassis. Can I see the front grill please, the badge colour would tell me whether it was a 1½ or 2½ litre; it was light blue so it was a 2½ RMF, a dark blue badge would denote the smaller 1½ RME. Dad paid the £250 and a week later two transporter loads of Riley bits arrived at our Essex garage.

Chapter 3 – Oh dear what have we bought – the cold light of day.

Not fully realising at the time but what we had actually bought was a car and a half. Structurally the ash frame appeared in a bad way along with the main floor pan, boot floor and sole plates (these timbers hold the front of the body to the rear) the recon engine was fitted but the original engine was locked solid.

Chapter 4 – Don't worry, we can always break it for spares.

But just hang on a moment something is not right, let's put the Riley's side by side and check. The boot is a lot smaller than my one and there is a compartment behind the rear seat, what's going on? So, in 1980 I sent a letter (remember those?) to Arnold Farrar who was the Riley Motors service manager. Yes, I know what you have, it's a Police conversion, and if its JBK then its Portsmouth City and I used to keep in touch with them! From the chassis number he advised that we had one of the last batch produced before production stopped in summer 1953 to make way for the Pathfinder. RMF chassis numbers finished at 10960 – JBK is 10953. So, we have a Police car, a rare survivor!

Chapter 5 – OK, lets rebuild it then, famous last words.

Structurally the timber frame was in very poor condition and had to be braced in all directions before it could be unbolted and lifted off the chassis. The chassis was then sent to the shot blasters and on its return treated to zinc primer and 3 coats of black Valspar paint. The suspension components were sent to the powder coaters, most of the smaller bits repaired and painted at home in dad's workshop. I remember the complete front suspension cradle taking pride of place in our lounge whilst we were line boring the kingpin bushes. My mother raised more than one eyebrow, but you need to have somewhere to rest your cup of tea! By then I had met my future wife Ann and our trips to autojumbles with mum and dad gained an extra pair of eyes for all things Riley. It was decided to move the Riley to our new, very large garage freeing up mum and dad's lounge. Very sadly in 1988 dad passed away and the rebuild stopped.

Chapter 6 – The 1990s – not a lot done

During the early 1990s we had been contacted by Chris Davies of the Military Vehicle Trust and later by Steve Woodward, all with the fascinating history and photographs of JBK in service. Also, around that time a photograph of Traffic Sergeant Sidney Booth with JBK 244 was being used to advertise Classic Car Weekly, fame at last! Events took a further twist when Ann and I decided to relocate to North Norfolk, so everything was moved yet again.

Chapter 7 – January 2001 – are you going to rebuild that or not..... said Ann!

Well, OK if you insist. Riley restoration is not an easy undertaking so off JBK went to David Browns body shop in Mansfield who has rebuilt both pre war and post war Riley's. Now we can see how bad the timber frame really is. Its bad, very bad. So, what was left of the timber was taken away for me to remanufacture, my pedigree is timber engineering, but this is complicated stuff. Three months later and after conquering the dark art of steam bending, all the woodwork was returned to David, it's now April 2001. During May the new floor pan and boot floor had been made and fitted and the timber framework was being assembled, a long process to ensure door fits are correct. Work carried on through the year with the original engine rebored and fitted with new high compression pistons and the cylinder head converted to run on unleaded fuel. The gearbox was shot so a good one was made from two – we of course had a spare! January 2002 and the new vinyl roof was being fitted and all masked up in time for the 2-pack paint job. In late May 2002 the car came home so the new period wiring loom could be fitted along with the restored seats.

Chapter 8 – Netley June 2002 – not finished, but we are going anyway.

A generous proposal was made by Steve Woodward on behalf of Hampshire Police to have JBK transported down for the Police Families Day event at Netley. A truly wonderful weekend showing off the car and meeting Pat Stallard who is Sidney Booth's daughter. She remembers being taken to ballet classes in it! On the Sunday we were escorted to the old Portsmouth City Police Headquarters in Queens Crescent where the car was originally stationed. It would be another year before JBK was finally finished and ready for the classic car show circuit. In 2006 I drove JBK to Netley for a very special event. It had been arranged for Stanley Male who was the main driver of JBK 244 to be reunited with his patrol car and what a tearful meeting it was. He told me that he really enjoyed driving the Riley but was saddened when they were replaced.

Chapter 9 – Finished, well almost just one thing to find, radio.

I am to radio what Stevie Wonder is to wicketkeeping!

The problem is that the car is from 1953 and there are not that many people left to ask what was in the boot. Sadly, Stanley male had passed on, but I remember him saying that the chaps from Chelmsford used to arrive to monitor the radio sets. Apparently, Portsmouth City was the first to install radio equipment, a carry over from ship to shore radio of WW2. All I had was the original plywood boot deck. Over the course of the rebuild I had put out feelers and joined a few radio clubs all to no avail, when a friend passed me a photograph of a Gloucester Police RMF with the boot open. The radio equipment was identified as Marconi H16 which was made in Chelmsford. I found a handbook on eBay which included drawings and dimensions. I was advised to join VMARS – The Vintage Military Amateur Radio Society and promptly placed an advert. This equipment is very, very rare and the only set I found was in a PYE museum in Bewdley and they were not parting with it! It's now November 2014 and two weeks after placing the advert with VMARS the phone rang and the caller said he had an H16 set. Ann thought it was one of our friends playing a joke. Sure enough he had one and the under shelf control panel plus the correct microphone for the PA system. £50 later we had the radio which of course needed rebuilding – ring any bells! A new chassis mounting was made which mated exactly with the original holes in the boot deck.

Chapter 10 – Finally finished – well sort of....

The point is you are never finished, there is always something that parts you from your cash. The secret is to enjoy what you have achieved and make people happy along the way.

No project is without its trials and having a very understanding wife who knows when to bring the coffee in to the garage and then quietly retreat when its all going wrong is a blessing.

So, thank you Ann, loving wife with a sixth sense, Riley widow, accountant and shoulder to cry on.

Steve

Steve Woodward; At this point I need to fill in a couple of gaps regarding the visit of Stanley Male. After Steve Kinch had mentioned him to me I made contact with Stanley's grandson to arrange for him to visit Netley to view JBK. There was some concern because Stanley was now 90 years old, was in ill health and hadn't been out of the house in over six months. I said that I would have him picked up from his Portsmouth home in a current

Traffic car and driven to Netley and then returned home. The grandson was happy with this arrangement but stated quite clearly that Stanley would probably only be able to stay for about 15 minutes max.

Anyway a current Volvo V70 T5 conveyed Stanley from Portsmouth to Netley via the M27 at 140 mph with blue lights and siren ablaze. He LOVED it.

After arriving at Netley he was introduced to Steve and JBK. Although in poor physical health there was nothing wrong with his memory and he very quickly pointed out a few things with the car and recounted a number of great stories. As Steve said it was a very tearful reunion, none more so than when one of Stanley's former colleagues recognised him. They hadn't seen each other since the 1960s. I have to say that reuniting JBK with Stanley, his former crew mate in front of an audience of several onlookers was, without any doubt, the best moment I've ever witnessed at Netley. Its exactly what Families Day and the classic police car scene is all about.

Oh and that 15 minutes the grandson mentioned turned into more than two hours!













