

1931 AUSTIN 20 BACK FROM THE DEAD

The fact that I went to my Garage one Sunday morning to check all was well, and found it closed, the petrol attendant having not turned up, was in some way a blessing in disguise. Needing some petrol in the Rolls Royce Phantom I, I called at Sir Jack Brabham's garage at the other end of the town. Whilst filling up, a man came across and admired the Rolls. Casually he mentioned that he had a Rolls Royce Wraith which he claimed had belonged to Field Marshall Lord Montgomery of Alamein. He added that he did not use it because he could not stop petrol leaking from the carburettor. I enquired if he would sell it. A definite "No" was the reply, but I do have a 1930s Austin 20 that I am thinking of selling - I went to see it. It was in an unbelievably dilapidated condition. The front wings, headlamps, and radiator laid on the floor. The Landaulette Hood, which was originally leather was in tatters. The seat springs were forced through the leather of the seats, also showing lots of horse hair. The engine block showed a six inch split. The tyres were bald. But I liked it. I bought it for £1,900.00. Incidentally, also in the enormous shed was the Rolls Royce Wraith, the registration and chassis numbers I have lost. Also a 1930s Triumph, I think it was a Super Nine with 4 seater tourer body. This was also not for sale. I understand it was left for a son to own and rebuild on reaching more mature years. I was told by the seller how he became the owner of the Austin. He lived opposite the big house and garage where the Austin was kept. On speaking to the then owner, a Mr Pratt, one day Mr Pratt recalled the days when before the war he operated a hire car business with two Austin 20 Limousines and the Austin 20 Limousine Landaulette. When the war started he removed the front wings, headlamps and radiators from the cars and hid them in the cellar of his house. It was in order that they were not taken by the government to be used by the military as staff cars. After the war Mr Pratt put the two limousines back together and continued with his car hire business. The Landaulette with leather hood in tatters and a cracked engine block remained in the garage with the wings, lamps and radiator still in the cellar.

The person I was buying the Austin from then went on to say that Mr Pratt showed him the Austin Landaulette and agreed to sell it to him. Some money changed hands for the car. Mr Pratt had not told, or had forgotten to mention, that the wings, lamps and radiator were in the cellar. Perhaps the elderly Mr Pratt had forgotten what happened to them. A short time later my seller went across the road to collect his Austin, only to learn that Mr Pratt had died.



The Austin 20 sees the light of day. Behind the RR Wraith