

ENGLAND

# Motor museum fuels a passion



Time for an old-school tune-up at the British Motor Museum.

With the first Formula 1 race of the season in Melbourne tomorrow, we've turned our minds to all things cars. And JULIE HOSKING cruises into one of the great homes of motoring, the British Motor Museum.

**N**ow I'm going to take you back to really early motoring," our guide Dave Dunkley says, "and remember you've got to be two things — really rich and really patient."  
 He leads us to an antique contraption that looks like it would have trouble going down a hill, let alone up one. One of the earliest British cars, the 1896 Wolseley Tri-car was also one of the first designs from motoring pioneer Herbert Austin. He was working for the Wolseley sheep-shearing machinery company when they decided to get on board this new-fangled motoring game.  
 "It you could afford this you'd have a big townhouse with lots of servants, and a country house with stables — it's really a rich man's toy," Dave says.



Julie finds her dream car, the Triumph TR3a. Picture: Julie Hosking

"And the patience comes in when you want to start it."  
 He runs through the convoluted process of getting it moving — 15 minutes if you're lucky, much longer if there's a breeze — at just above walking pace. Then a draft would come along, blow out the flame, and

you had to start all over again. It'd be quicker to walk to the shops.  
 "If it had stayed like that, today you would have been brought here by horse and cart and this would be a coach museum," Dave says, with a laugh.

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The sports car collection at the Warwickshire museum will make your head spin.

Thankfully, Austin and plenty of other clever folk like him were forever improving their designs because I, for one, don't think I could handle a horse. And, despite being anything but a petrolhead, the British Motor Museum is a fascinating journey.

Formerly known as the Heritage Motor Centre, the museum underwent a huge revamp in 2015, reopening in February last year with a new name and new look.

There's the enormous building across the way, which marketing officer Penny Tyler describes as a "very glamorous garage". Housing the spillover from the museum, it is also open to the public, although it is not interactive.

"The more quirky the car, the more motoring enthusiasts like it. They really want to see all the prototypes," Penny says,



Hue, the first Land Rover.

"and now they can see everything in our collection."

The British Motor Industry Heritage Trust, a not-for-profit charity that makes the bulk of the money to run the museum through on-site conference facilities, has about 300 cars dating back to the very early days of British motoring, as well as about 100 from the Jaguar heritage collection.

"Hue" takes pride of place at the entrance. The first Land

Rover to roll off the production line, Hue's distinctive, er, hue is down to post-war necessity. Rover couldn't afford to go to a paint manufacturer in 1948 for something the company thought would be a very small production run, so it bought war paint from the Ministry of Defence — Hue's the same colour as the cockpit of a Hurricane or Spitfire. It's one of the museum's best-travelled cars, regularly heading off to shows or to the latest Land Rover launch. It's not as romantic as it sounds. "Driving this car is an absolute nightmare, the noise is deafening," Dave says, explaining most of the hullabaloo comes from wind rattling the doors. "We took this to a show and I had to pull over because I couldn't hear my colleague giving directions."

Alongside Hue is the very



A Wolseley Tricar. Picture: Julie Hosking

first Mini, as well as a fetching 1963 Jaguar E-type sports car. They also have a Jaguar R1 Formula 1 racing car.

I spy my dream car, though, round a corner. I'd always been partial to racing green but this little red beauty instantly steals my heart. It's a 1959 Triumph TR3a, for those who care about numbers — I just see it as the one I want to drive out of the showroom. Dave can understand my infatuation; he's a Triumph man, too. This particular version was most popular in the US, however, where it sold most of its 80,000 production run.

There are wonderful stories attached to many of the cars, such as the millionth Austin, made in 1946. Like most milestone cars, this luxurious motor, with leather seats and a nifty mechanical jack, was signed by everyone who worked on it. But it was damaged in a fire years ago, rendering many of the signatures unreadable. They had a wake and one man who attended, and had worked at Austin all his life, said "wouldn't it be nice if we could find granddad's signature". Fortunately, it was one which survived.

Dave points out a 1925 Austin 7 Chummy, in which a hardy

▶ CONTINUED P16



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## ENGLAND

◀ FROM P15

fellow called John Coleman set off from Buenos Aires in 1959 to drive through testing terrain, including mountains, jungle and desert, before finishing in New York almost a year later. "Some days John would chop 10m out of the jungle, get back in the car, drive over all the tree stumps, and on he went." Why does the phrase "only mad dogs and Englishmen" come to mind?

Then there are the cars that never happened. The showroom has many a prototype that missed the boat because of a lack of imagination from management at the time, allowing overseas competitors to corner the market in, for

example, a small 4WD that could have been British.

Which is not to say there weren't some inspiring men behind the machines. William Morris, one of Britain's most successful car builders, never had any children, so he and his wife decided that all their money would go to medical research. "William Morris didn't want to be a car builder," explains Dave. "He wanted to be a doctor, but the family couldn't afford to send him to medical school." During the polio epidemic, he built a production line specifically for iron lung machines and gave one to every hospital.

There's a lot of social history tied up with the machines, which the museum has worked hard to make interesting for all visitors, not just car enthusiasts. If you're the latter, however, and want to know about a particular car, you'll be pleased to know the museum has a huge archive where you'll be able to find its "birth certificate".

"We've got the original technical details for every car that's ever come off a British production line, most marques," says Penny. "We can tell you when it came off, what colour it



was, what its original spec was, so we provide a birth certificate — it's called a heritage certificate — for your classic car." Chances are I won't be getting one any time soon for the impressive array of Jags.

All around us are cars with a rallying or racing history that means they start at about \$8 million. Dave points out a Rover VRN associated with motoring legends Graham Hill and Jackie Stewart: "We were offered \$16 million for this two

years ago, it's probably worth something like \$22 million now."

I'd "settle" for the little Triumph but it's patently obvious they won't let me drive away with it. Instead I make a quick pitstop at the museum shop where I pick up an Aston Martin DB5, as driven by 007, for the man. OK, it's a Corgi toy but you can't have everything.

Julie Hosking was a guest of Visit Britain and Qatar Airways.

Take a drive through history at the British Motor Museum.

### fact file

■ The British Motor Museum is in Warwickshire and about 45 minutes by car from Birmingham, see [britishmotormuseum.co.uk](http://britishmotormuseum.co.uk). The Classic Land Rover Show is on May 6-7. The museum is open seven days a week.

■ Qatar Airways flies to Birmingham from Perth via Doha. See [qatarairways.com](http://qatarairways.com).

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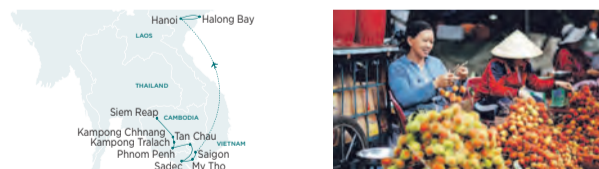
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