

KEEPING HISTORY ALIVE

AN important part of Oxford's legacy and car industry has sprung from the midst of another era, as the 'Big Car Project' reaches its end.

Two people who use services from Ridgeway, David Hoskins and Richard Hall, have spent the last 12 weeks helping build a model car in honour of the many workers who helped put Oxford's car industry on the map.

Words By **ALEX JACKSON**
Photos by **IAIN GARRETT+MICHAL PONIST**

The project, which started in September 2010, saw a team of adult learners recreate one of the most iconic vehicles to be built in the city, a 1967 Mini MKII.

“It has been thoroughly worthwhile and the group benefited from a small social environment in which they could thrive and learn lots of new life skills.”



David at work



Richard applying a finishing coat

The group worked with local artist Dionne Barber and The Searchers (a local research group), to research and develop the project over the course of last year.

The vehicle, which is now the centrepiece of a new exhibition at the Museum of Oxford, St Aldates, is made from wood wire and mod-roc plaster, and is homage to the original model.

David Hoskins, from John Sharich House, said he thoroughly enjoyed taking part in the project.

He said: "It was an exciting and eventful thing to be part of which I didn't want to miss out on. We learned a lot of different new skills including how to measure wood, painting, photography with the help of a professional photographer, and I used a hammer and tools for the first time. The hardest part was deciding on the colour, which ended up being red.

"The only scare along the way was when one of the group sat on the car half way through building it, and it nearly fell to pieces. We had our hearts in our mouths."

The project, run by Oxfordshire Adult Learning and the Museum of Oxford, will also lead to many of the group gaining a qualification from ASDAN's (a charitable social enterprise with awarding body status) Towards Independence Scheme.

Project leader Neil Stevenson, who is on secondment to the museum from the Pitt Rivers Museum, said the workshops had exceeded all expectations.

He said: "The idea came about as there was very little in the museum celebrating the city's rich car manufacturing heritage. We also thought it would be a good way of introducing new people and faces to the museum. The workshops were very hands on and the sessions were designed to increase construction skills, learn about health and safety and also team work."

Car manufacturing in Oxford has become world renowned with Rover, Morris Motors and Austin, since William Morris started producing the Bullnose Morris at Cowley in 1912.

Paula Simmonds, Oxfordshire Adult Learning Tutor Manager, who ran the ASDAN accreditation said: "This project has proved an exemplary show case of the learners' skills, abilities, enthusiasm and dedication and it has been a joy to see all involved achieve so much."

Dionne Barber helped run the art workshops each week.

She said: "It was a hugely ambitious project and one in which every person involved has been highly dedicated to finishing the car in time for the Christmas lights parade.

"It has been thoroughly worthwhile and the group benefited from a small social environment in which they could thrive and learn lots of new life skills."

David added: "I would recommend something like this to my friends as it was great fun and I learned a lot about the car industry I never knew before. I was so impressed and proud to see the car finished and can't wait to see it at the museum."

The Big Car Project exhibition, held at the museum, is open to the public until March.

Contact for further details

Paula Simmonds
Tel: 01865 779584
Email: paula.simmonds@oxfordshire.gov.uk



The artists impression