

# MORGAN SPORTS CAR CLUB CHAIR JANN ROBINSON

Almost a year into her tenure, MSCC Chair, Jann Robinson, reveals to MOG's Lily Wallen that change is underway at the Club

How many of us can say with certainty that we're truly, unwaveringly, obsessed with the nuts and bolts of our jobs?

If I had previously thought I could place myself in that camp; after an hour in the passenger seat of Jann Robinson's motoring world, I realised that few of us embody the meaning of 'vocation' more than her.

"I've just driven back from Yorkshire, so apologies," she says, then, as if to prove the point, "I'm in my 'jamas."

When we speak on a Monday evening, Jann has just completed a drive from Yorkshire to Malvern, returning from the Morgan Sports Car Club's Annual General Meeting, held over the preceding weekend.

"A four-hour trip in an open-top car – one gets rather dusty," she tells me. The car in question, her CX Plus Four, which she bought three years earlier.

It was a fitting introduction to someone who, I would come to understand, prioritises the driving experience above all else, dust and all. Jann spoke with the candid assuredness you find only in someone who has poured a great deal of themselves into what they do. Nearly a year into her tenure as Chair of the UK's foremost Morgan owners' club, she appears to have found in the MSCC a happy confluence between family legacy, personal passion and professional fulfilment.

"Morgans have been in my family since 1936, when my uncle had one of the first four-wheeler cars from the factory," she tells me. "My father was then given a Morgan for his 21st birthday, he loved the marque. "When I was born, he had lots of sports cars, and I was brought up restoring them. We had a farm, so I learnt to drive the tractor when I was about 10; then, for my birthday, my dad gave me a Fiat Topolino."

Meaning 'little mouse' in Italian, the Topolino was one of the smallest cars in the world at the time.

Jann continues: "So, I was driving around the farm roads in my little Fiat, and then I drove my first Morgan, my dad's Plus Eight, with its Rover V8 engine, when I was 15. But that was on the airfield, not the road – in case there are any policemen reading this!"

Jann's connection with Morgan only deepened with time: "I just loved it; I loved the marque. All through my life my dad told me he'd get me a Morgan for my 21st birthday, which would have been very nice. However, my brother was killed that

year in a car accident, so my mum didn't want me to have a car.

"Eventually she relented and let me drive, but only my dad's cars. So, for most of my life I've not owned a car; my dad had to own them."

"About five years ago, my mum died and my dad said, 'Well, there's enough money in the kitty for you to have your own Morgan.'

So, I bought a brand new Plus Four CX. The spec was black and chrome like the Plus Eight I drove when I was younger, although the Plus Four is a smaller version because it's got a two-litre BMW engine."

## MORGAN IN THE BLOOD

It's hard not to feel that Morgan chose Jann as much as she chose it. Just as she now serves as a steward of Morgan's heritage in her role as Club Chair, the cars themselves have preserved her own sense of personal history.

"Unfortunately, my dad didn't live to see me drive the Plus Four I now own, so I wrote a message to him on the wooden frame, she says. "Before the car was finished, I went along to



Morgan and wrote a message on the passenger side, so it's like he's constantly in the car.

"I think it must be in my DNA, because, although my family restored lots of sports cars, one that I made particular use of when I was around 21 was called an SS Arkley. It's essentially a fibreglass version of a Morgan, like a squashed, baby version, made in Bromyard near Malvern. Even through other makes, I was always looking for my Morgan."

The industriousness Jann brings to the Chair role today is informed by a lifelong connection with Morgan that, while not detracting from her impetus to move the MSCC forward, ensures the marque's traditionalist instinct is maintained among members: "One of my dad's friends – my mum's boss at the time, she was his PA – was one of the founding members of the Club in 1951, so we've always been part of things."

"I started my working life in Australia, so there were many years when I wasn't involved. But upon moving back, I did PR for the Club, then I was Vice Chair for two years, and last year I was elected Chair."

Jann is candid about the challenges the Club has faced – chief among them, a dwindling spirit of volunteerism. "I think the numbers of people volunteering, especially in a club that isn't a charity, but is there for the benefit of its members having a great time, was on the decline. So, they were struggling to find someone to fill the Vice Chair's job."

During a regular journey through her delicious local slice of countryside, Jann's decision became clear: "I was driving my Morgan over the Malvern Hills, having just read a letter from the then Chair urging someone to take on the position or else face the Club's deterioration," she tells me, "I heard this voice –

which I'm saying was my dad's voice, because in my head it was – going, 'go on, you can do that, you've got the pedigree. You know about Morgans, you've been living Morgan all your life. Why don't you do it?'

"So, I rang the chair and said: 'Yes, I'm female, but I know a lot about Morgans, and I certainly know a lot about running things' – because I'd just been running a multimillion-dollar company – 'and I think I can do this'."

Despite Jann not being the first female Chair of the MSCC, gender was still evidently a point of tension she couldn't ignore in stepping into the role: "I hate to say it, but there is still quite a lot of misogyny in car clubs. I started a women's group called GlamMog – because everyone's glamorous in a Morgan, not because we all have to be glamorous ladies – and some people actively tried to stop it because they thought there was no place for that."

Still, the tides are turning, and Jann is quick to champion the women behind the wheel of change – the growing pool of professional women Morganeers, if you will. "There are lots of women salespeople coming into Morgan. There's a really super one over at Woodcote & Copse in Silverstone called Jae Burbage, and a longstanding female salesperson and Morgan partner called Sarah Hutton at Brands Hatch Morgan."

Jann sees the car itself as a major part of the appeal to women: "In my mind, the new Plus Four is an ideal female sports car." Beyond the obvious kerb appeal, she describes the ownership experience as a deeply social one, that's especially desirable to women: "There's a great network of people that know about the cars. The dealer network is great and, I have to say, it's like joining a huge family, because you've always got company."

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## RE-ENGINEERING THE CLUB

Our modern day has ushered in a more welcoming landscape for women in car clubs, but fresh challenges posed by our increasingly busy schedules arise; never have we been less inclined to ‘hobby’. Indeed, any vast organisation of 4500 members, propped up solely by volunteers, would struggle not to creak, classic car oriented or not. About this, Jann is under no illusions.

“My headlines are simplicity, sustainability and security. “Security because 4500 people in a driving club can be an insurance nightmare. “Simplicity was the reason we needed to change the constitution, because we had become embroiled in lots of rules and regulations that had accumulated. Some of them so archaic they needed throwing out, some adapted and others retained.

“We’re taking the best from the past and moving forward – that’s sustainability.”

Part of her solution is structural, breaking down large volunteer roles into manageable, appealing contributions.

“We’re attracting more young people to organise events,” Jann explains. “Instead of making it a difficult and onerous thing to volunteer for the MSCC, I’m creating lots of small volunteer roles to organise, say, one event – at their own discretion. Then if they want to come back next year and organise another event, they can. “Under our new constitution, members will also have access to better information, because there’s less bureaucracy. We need to be safe and legal, but we don’t need all this administration in a car club, we need more fun.

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“Members will have information straight from the board, and they can contact our directors with requests. If they want an AGM with a dinner-dance, they get it – if they want a big spares fair so they can stock up on parts – they get it.”

Now, with decision-making processes simplified, the Club is operating more nimbly: “I don’t have to consult 60 or 70 people with every management decision made,” she says, describing a more agile and responsive leadership style that pares the Club back to its spiritual bones. At its core, it’s about breathing life into the Morgan experience.

It’s hard to imagine a better synthesis twixt person and marque than this marriage between Jann and Morgan. She’s a mirror of the brand’s virtues; bringing equal parts nostalgia and loyalty to the MSCC, along with a fresh vitality and dynamism.

She’s under no illusion that the task of maintaining a 75-year-old classic car club is a anything but challenging; but it’s certainly not insurmountable for the self-proclaimed leader, founder of the Club’s first women’s group and architect of the MSCC’s new and improved constitution.

Jann’s leadership is, in many ways, informed by nostalgia. But it’s also a recalibration – an effort to future-proof the Club while staying true to its spirit. If Morgan’s legacy is one of craftsmanship and industry, then Jann’s vision is to ensure that legacy keeps rolling forward, with room for new drivers at the wheel.

“We’re making forward-thinking changes, so that the Club remains sustainable,” Jann adds. “The MSCC is 75 years old next year and I really want it to last another 75.” 