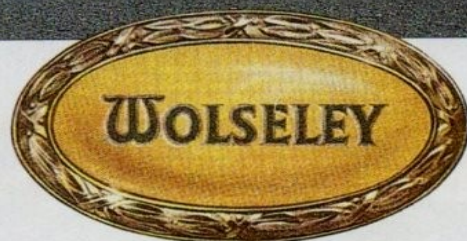




Suburban splendour



Some cars conjure up the open road, but Wolseleys settle best in suburbia, reckons Nick Larkin, who takes a pristine 6/80 in search of an idyll Photos by **Dave Wigmore**

The name sums up the cars you bought if you bought Wolseley. Well-made, quality cars, but never flashy or loaded with unnecessary fitments.

No, Wolseleys were at home in a post-war suburban idyll, a world of spaniels and slippers, with the aroma of sweet honeysuckle wafting in through open leaded windows on summer Sunday mornings, accompanied by the stilted laughter of tame children at play.

The sight and sounds of a suburban idyll, where, after a hard day at work as 'something in the city', the gentleman of the house could prise the sweaty bowler from his head and settle down to the always-ready meal his always-demure wife lovingly prepared nightly on her Belling.

A vintage illustration in a warm, yellowish-brown color palette. In the foreground, a man and a woman are seated at a round table, facing each other and smiling. The man, on the left, has dark hair and is wearing a white shirt with a dark jacket. The woman, on the right, has dark hair with a white headband and is wearing a white sweater. On the table are two glasses of water with straws and two small bottles. In the background, a classic dark-colored car is parked on a street. Behind the car is a wire fence and some trees. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century magazine illustrations.

The Wolseley Owner mentions his car with a certain satisfaction for discrimination in such matters proclaims taste as well as judgment. Wolseley prestige, a legacy of fifty years of brilliant achievement, is reflected in the performance, luxury and distinction of the Six-Eighty and Four-Fourty, two outstanding cars in the English motorcar tradition.

WOLSELEY

WALSLEY MOTORS LTD., COWLEY, OXFORD
London Showrooms: 12, Berkeley Street, W.1.
Overseas Business: Nuffield Exports Ltd., Oxford and
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SERVICE IN EUROPE.
Qualified British owners planning a Continental Tour are invited to use their Wolseley dealer for details of a free

kaao Times and *Woman's Realm*, a florist where late homing husbands could buy something with which to apologise.

No-one ever fought or really got aggressive in this post-war paradise, apart from an occasional bark at the children. Everyone paid their mortgage without problems. No-one ever seemed disabled or ill, ran off with anyone else's spouse, burped, rode noisy motor cycles or wrote on walls.

You'd like to buy a semi? Certainly, Sir; mock Tudor or art-deco 'Odeon' style? Or, of course, there were the detached houses, often on corner plots to emphasise their size.

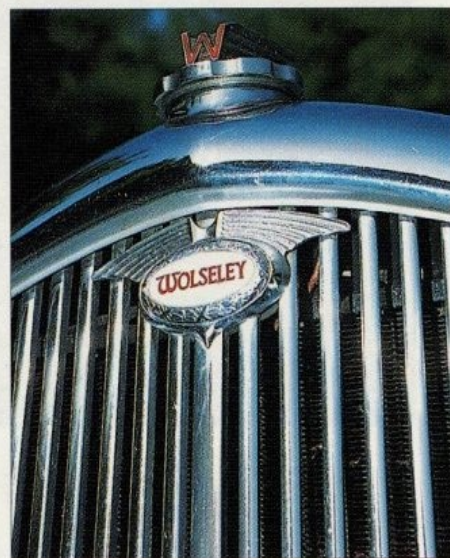
A Mars bar as a treat on Fridays for very good children only, after their week of education in an equally orderly school which smelled of disinfectant. For the wife? Well, it was friends round for morning coffee and arrowroot biscuits; ready to discuss the good and bad points of the new le at number 56.

Sunday school, Sunday lunch, Sunday tea, Sunday bath. Not the stuff of *Dan Dare* books, but certainly their readers in these urban heavens.

Cherry trees and pebbledash, sunrise gates and loud ticking clocks. But what did people actually do all the time?

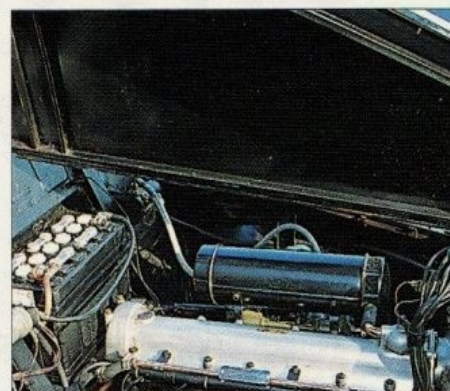
A detailed view of the driver's side interior of a 1936 Ford V8. The image highlights the brown leather upholstery on the seats and door panels, the wooden steering wheel with a central hub, and the dashboard featuring several round gauges. The car's body is painted a light blue color.

Bottom left, 6/80
is good for nearly
80mph when fully
in tune



Right, illuminated badge meant the car had its name in lights

**Bottom right,
Overhead cam
engine is a major
part of the 6/80's
character**



In suburban heaven the Wolseley was at ease. Its roads, whether brick-coloured tarmac or enormous concrete slabs, seemed to belong to the Wolseley. An Austin? No, a bit common. Morris. Certainly not. Jaguar? For flash Harrys, not us. Rolls-Royce? Perhaps one day, along with membership of the golf club.

A Wolseley, the car for that trip to Auntie Jessie's, where the children, wincing from having their knees scrubbed with a stiff brush and sitting uncomfortably in starched, prickly trousers, wondering how

'In suburban heaven, the Wolseley was at ease'

many slices of cake could be consumed and whether Uncle Joe would be smoking that awful pipe again.

So, was post-war suburbia so idyllic? Houses that before the war had been offered in droves for mortgages of 26/6 a week, with the extravagant claims that the station, ready to whisk daddy into the city and occasionally the family to the theatre, was reachable in five minutes. Well it was, by helicopter.

We can still see all the thirties suburbia we want. Walk around parts of Horsham or



'The fresh-mown lawns and the aroma of privet and primrose...'

▷ Tring and the semis are still there; but is it the same in 1992? Sadly, all too many owners have committed the unspeakable vandalism of replacing lovely leaded coloured glass windows with hideous bare aluminium double-glazing.

Takeaway wrappers are thrown over those twee hedges in suburban heaven, and some of the houses now have extra rooms in their roofs and inappropriate extensions, making the prim streets look like rows of rotting teeth. And how much mortgage misery must exist in the average row of such dwellings, behind those net curtains and gravelled drives? How many of their residents would be in a better state of health had they plumped for the Barratt two-bedroomed after all?

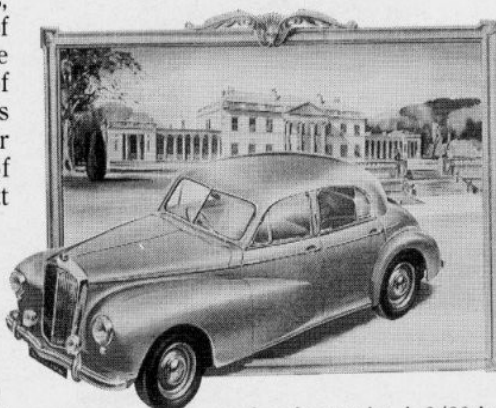
No, these are not good thoughts. We're after the idyll, the fresh-mown lawns and aroma of privet and primrose. We need a Wolseley to find it.

Enter Malcolm Holehouse's wonderful 1951 6/80, probably the best original example left of this most Wolseley of Wolseleys. The 'police Wolseleys' as many people remember them; the cars which enforced the law when there was rather less need to do so than nowadays. The nearest thing to crime in suburban heaven was probably accidentally smashing a milk bottle and not telling the milkman, or the sweet shop owner's young assistant popping the odd illicit macaroon in his mouth.

Introduced at the 1948 Motor Show, the Wolseley 6/80 was the top of Nuffield's range, which began with the Series MM Minor and progressed through the sidevalve Oxford to the Morris version of the 6/80, the Six. There was also a smaller Wolseley, the 4/50, which had a four-cylinder version of the 6/80's wonderful



Above, small details never let you forget the car is proud to be a Wolseley



overhead-cam six. A 6/80 is certainly imposing. A huge traditional radiator grille sporting Wolseley's trademark which no night-time motorist in the fifties would ever forget, especially if an encounter with the police put them into a panic – an illuminated badge.

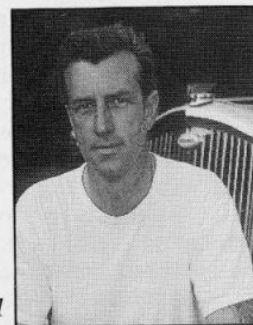
An oh-so-long bonnet ends abruptly just before the split windscreen. Follow the split, and there is another 'W for Wolseley' badge on the roof. Then the car becomes, as heathens, undesirables and just plain cads have said, 'like a big Morris Minor'.

Stepping inside the 6/80 is a bit like walking into a warehouse. Above you towers the roof, clad in grey Rexine, as you

OWNER'S VIEW

Malcolm Holehouse

1951 Wolseley
6/80



Despite having stood outside for seven years,

Malcolm Holehouse's 1951 Wolseley 6/80 was still rot free when he bought it from a neighbour a decade ago.

Since then a respray has been carried out, but that apart the car is a totally original 42,000-mile example.

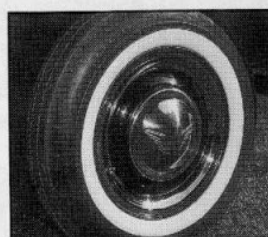
This particular 6/80 attained some fame in the sixties when its then-owner, a Mr Middlemass, wrote to Motor appealing for someone to buy the car: 'I know quite well that its secondhand price is nil but I believe there are people who seek and gladly buy cars like this... I would hate the car to get into the hands of a tearabout.'

Mr Middlemass received replies from around the globe, but ended up selling the 6/80 to the garage which had serviced it.

The 6/80, a regular 6/80 and MO Club show winner, has also done some film work, including a 1972 BBC production of the Craig and Bentley murder case.

'I think its appeal is partly the presence it has on the road. It feels like a Rolls-Royce to me,' says Malcolm, a 39-year-old maintenance fitter from Hertfordshire.

peer out through the small windscreen along that distinctive bonnet, with the winged Wolseley badge atop the radiator seeming four miles away.



Grasp the austere angled, thin-rimmed steering wheel and run your eyes along the tasteful instrument panel, flanked on both sides by wooden gloveboxes which looked as if they have been removed from some ancient bureau.

A row of cream plastic knobs protrudes from the painted wood-effect tin dash, and the instruments themselves resemble a jumble of elderly alarm clocks.

Press the starter and that engine wins you over instantly. Wonder what the Wolseley's original owner would have thought had he known its design originated with Hispano-Suiza: something a) flashy and b) – a big 'b' this – foreign.

There's a restrained roar, a raucous tune tamed for suburbia as you shift the positive column gearchange into first to move off. This is accompanied by the gear whine to end all gear whines, a truly magnificent sound which varies in pitch and strength as you go through the 'box.

Not only does the engine sound great, it's wonderfully flexible, and will take the car to nearly 80mph. Although the 6/80's unit suffered from overheating and valve problems, when on song it must be one of the most pleasant units you could drive behind. Unhurried, unruffled and melodic.

Above, Wolseley quite suits its non-original whitewalls

Left, from the doors backwards a 6/80 is identical to smaller Morris MO Oxford

Opposite top, car is just right for period picnics

Opposite lower, 6/80's elegance in the sunset





Steering a 6/80 is not unlike manoeuvring the average ferry in harbour. Lock to lock takes some five turns of the wheel, and the huge weight of that engine tends to make the car rather front heavy.

This may sound ridiculous, but a 6/80, presumably because of strange centrifugal forces common only to Wolseleys, seems to handle better into bends the faster you're going, within the 6/80's meagre sensible limits of course.

The car's ride, aided by twin telescopic front shock absorbers, is nothing short of sensational; I would certainly rank it as good, if not better than, Jaguars of the time.

From the back seat, the ride and Dunlopillo combine to create an extremely unruffled environment as you stretch out in a homely environment, the best Wolseley could do for luxury in an era of post-war shortage.

Head for thirties suburbia 1992 style, and close your eyes as the Wolseley makes steady progress up Burgess Avenue and along The Grove, and you can almost hear the engine note echoing from the gable walls of those omnipresent semis.

The 6/80 is back in its element; where a 6/80 ought to be; its world of wireesses and tall standard lamps, *Educating Archie* and *The Woodentops*.

An unaltered thirties semi has its own appeal. Surely planning regulations should preserve them for posterity? There's a great temptation to demand a tour of the interior, something I'm sure the owner would not be too happy to arrange five minutes after arriving home following a stuffy hour on

the 6.03 from St Pancras.

Would the house still have the school-type wooden floor blocks, heavy panelled doors with brass handles and the original fireplaces upstairs? Or have the living room and lounge been knocked into one and now dominated by horrific pseudo-stone fire surrounds and fake horsebrasses? Are they about to welcome the next aluminium window salesman with open arms?

Wonder what the 6/80 would think of that. The car powers us homewards, past the Gaumont Cinema, now a Do It All. The 6/80's reflection in shop windows makes a fascinating sight. It seems to glide, a symbol bringing back another age, even though the sign in the window is more likely to read 'pizza' than 'refreshments'.

Finally, with the Wolseley in its garage it

is time to reflect on semis we have seen, and detached dwellings with green roofs and spindly iron windows.

Symbols of suburbia's golden age and quintessential lifestyle which must be preserved. More tea or another piece of Victoria sponge, vicar? ■

SPECIFICATION

Wolseley 6/80

Built	1948-54
Engine	6-cyl, ohc
Capacity	2215cc
Bore/stroke	73.5 x 87mm
Max power	72bhp @ 4600rpm
Transmission	4-speed manual
Suspension	Front: ind, torsion bars, wishbones Rear: semi-elliptic leaf springs, Panhard rod
Brakes	drum
Steering	Bishop cam
Length	14ft 9in
Width	5ft 6in
Max speed	78mph
0-60mph	24sec
Fuel cons	18-22mpg

