

RESTORING

WOLSELEY HORNET

Hornet's best

Student Adrian Hall braved a strict budget to restore his Wolseley Hornet to showroom condition – and has kept it that way despite a 10,000 annual mileage. But how? Nick Larkin finds out

Photos by **Dave Wigmore**



LOOK at Adrian Hall's Wolseley Hornet at a show, and you'll probably think it's just another pampered concours competitor on one of its rare sunny summer outings.

Well, yes, the 1969 car is lovingly cared for, but it's no stranger to snow, rain, fog and even excessive sunlight. This Hornet is used everyday without fail, chalking up 10,000

miles a year, yet can still pull off the prizes. Okay, so the engine may be the wrong shade of green (gasp!) and you may come across the odd stone chip or two, but you have to marvel at how the car has been brought into its present condition, and even more about how it has been kept there.

Adrian, 19, from Sussex, bought the Wolseley in 1989, intending to restore it to a 'good condition two' standard, ready

'I decided that I wanted BL parts, not lousy copies'

for passing his driving test in two years' time. But the result definitely surpassed these expectations!

'I'd originally wanted to build a kit car, using an old Mini as a donor, but decided this Hornet would be more fun,' said Adrian. The car had belonged to a local

garage proprietor, who decided he didn't have the time to give the Hornet the attention it deserved. 'The car was a bit rough round the edges, but had 52,000 miles on the clock, and a very good interior.'

Adrian's first task was to remove that interior carefully,



Engine was given a decoke, but no further work was required. It was painted in green enamel, although not quite the right shade!



and show the surface-rusted floor the rough side of a wire brush.

'As I was restoring this car in order to use it I decided a good job should be made of the body from the start, saving a lot of unnecessary work and expense later,' Adrian said.

So, the Hornet went to Chris Talman's bodyshop at Wisborough Green, where a new offside front wing and sill were fitted, the nearside ones merely needing to have some new metal let in. 'I decided that I wanted BL parts, not lousy

copies which would only need replacing again. That nearly broke the budget!' he said.

Returned to him was a completely sound car. Adrian then set to work stripping the bodyshell. The engine and ancillaries were removed, but the subframes left in place – one was original, but in good condition, and the other had been replaced a couple of years previously.

Next came the unenviable



Body with new sills fitted and seams tidied up



task of stripping the old underseal, using a trusty Black and Decker heatgun.

'This was the worst task of all – it was so laborious,' recalled Adrian. Surface rust was wire-brushed away, and the entire underside treated with an anti-rust primer, before the car was carefully re-undersealed. 'This has proved to be well worth the effort, because if the underseal is damaged in any way, the pink primer shows through.'

Next for scrutiny was the hydrolastic suspension, which turned out to be in surprisingly good order. The tie bars were removed and front hubs dismantled before the system received a good helping of black Smoothrite. The rest of the bodyshell was then anti-rust primed and stripped back to bare metal where necessary, all corrosion having been removed.

Once all the sanding, treating and filling was completed, the Hornet was trailed back to Chris Talman's for repainting. Adrian specified cellulose, as original, rather than potentially more durable two-pack.

'There were times during the

restoration when I wished I'd never started it, but once the paint is on you feel a lot better,' reckons Adrian.

Meanwhile, a friend rebuilt the gearbox, fitting new synchromesh hubs – though Adrian ended up having to do some further work himself.

The engine ran well, merely requiring a good decoke. Even the valves showed no serious signs of wear, so Adrian decided to leave well alone.

The dynamo and starter motor were stripped and cleaned; and the carburettor treated to a rebuild and new gasket set. A new vacuum advance unit, bought from a breaker, was fitted.

Electrics good for 20 more years

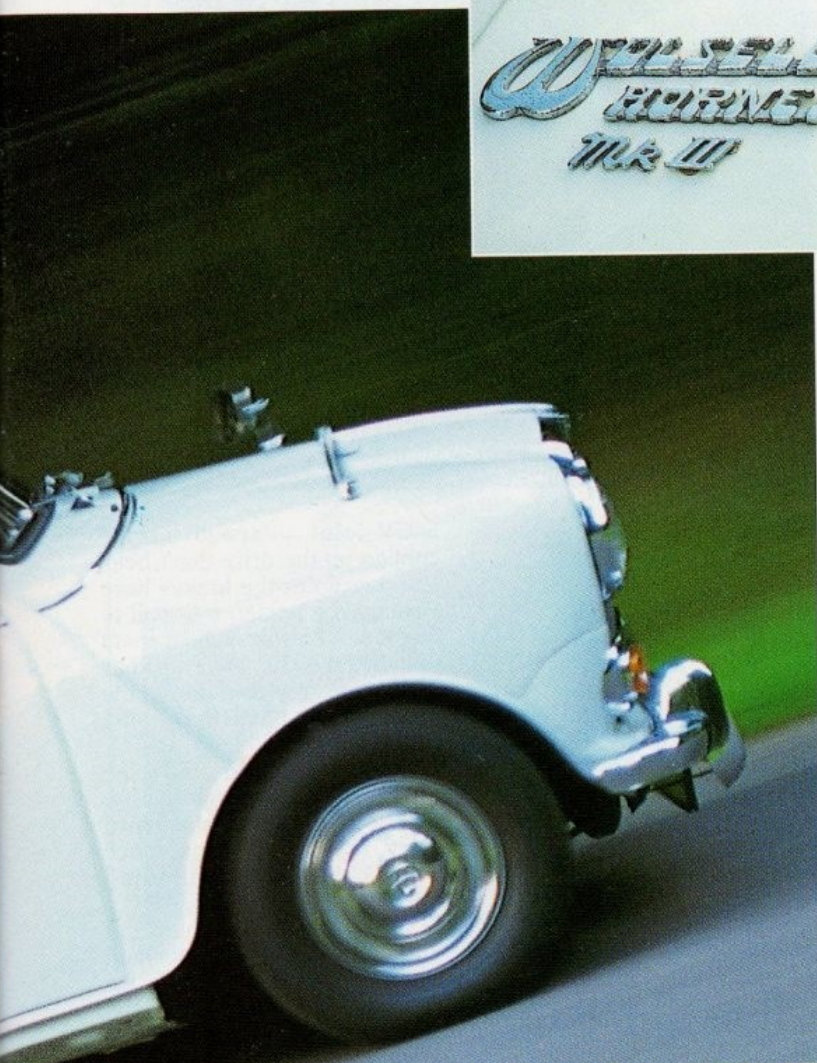
Finally, the engine was sprayed in green enamel: 'This wasn't the original colour but the best I could get at the time. I have since discovered other sources,' Adrian says.

The interior had remained in good condition, merely requiring a new carpet set, and the handbrake lever repainting!

Electrically, the car had been in excellent condition, but Adrian carefully checked the entire system and found, to his surprise, that it was certainly good for another 20 years.

Brakes were stripped, the master cylinder reamed and new seals fitted. New shoes were also installed, and the drums skimmed. Both front brakes received new slave cylinders, but, on the rear, only the seals needed replacing. New copper brake pipes, where necessary, completed the work.

The condition of the Hornet's chrome surprises many people, especially when they discover that, with the exception of the wing mirrors, it's all original. 'I don't know how it stood up so



Condition of interior was good to start with, but now it looks as though it is just out of the showroom





Finished shell, with wiring and hydraulics back in place

well – the car's previous owners must have just polished it carefully,' mused Adrian.

After final assembly, the car sailed straight through its MoT – and was ready for hard work, transporting Adrian to school, student jobs and social occasions.

'After spending all this money I certainly couldn't afford to just use it for shows. Anyway, I believe cars should be used, and I like driving this one,' he said. 'To be honest, when the restoration was done, all I wanted to do was to get in and drive it!'

Adrian has been determined to keep the car in A1 condition – and it hasn't always been easy over the past 24,000 miles and two years.

He sticks to some basic philosophies: arming himself with a Haynes manual and sticking rigidly to the recommended service schedules, along with regularly, and thoroughly, cleaning the car, concentrating as much on

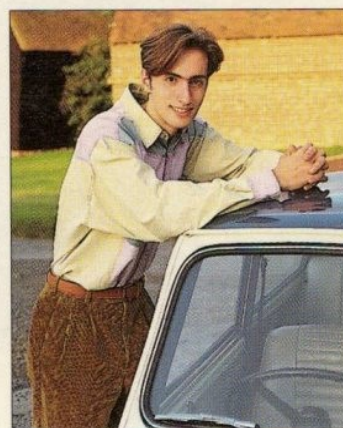
Right, back on the road; no wonder it is a prizewinner! Below right, Adrian Hall is now looking for a buyer

the underneath as the topside. The car has also been heavily Waxoyled, and the condition of this coating is regularly checked.

'If there are any stonechips, or even the slightest hint of rust, it's dealt with immediately. I just don't wait.'

Adrian has recently resprayed the car's front panel himself: 'I wouldn't worry about doing a whole car myself after this practice,' he said.

As we've said, Adrian never intended to show the car. 'I blame you lot at *Popular Classics*,' he dared to say. He took the car to our 1992 Roadshow heat at Fontwell Park. 'I didn't intend to enter, but was persuaded at the show.' He won prizes at both the 1991 and 1992 Fontwell shows, and our 1993 Sussex heat at Parham.



a CV joint – 'speed bumps coming up the drive don't help' – and at times the brakes have developed a tendency to pull to one side. 'I always adjust them just before the MoT.' Rear brake seals, replaced during the restoration, have had to be renewed again.

These minor points aside, the car has performed faultlessly, with low running costs. Third party, fire and theft insurance costs £280, bearing in mind Adrian's age.

Sadly, because he's at university in South Wales and the Hornet isn't the best car for commuting from Sussex, Adrian has reluctantly decided to sell it.

'I don't want to. I've had a lot of fun with the car and still love driving it. I've been trying to persuade my mum to have it, but she's not too happy at the thought of giving up her BMW. And I can't really afford to keep the car mothballed.'

Concludes Adrian: 'The Hornet couldn't be more reliable or more fun. It's certainly taught me about cars, and I intend to get another classic, hopefully a Caterham Super Seven or a Rover P5B coupé, in a few years' time.'

'He never intended to show the car, but started winning prizes'

The Hornet returns 40mpg and 45 on a run, when Adrian normally cruises at 55mph. 'It has been extremely reliable over 24,000 miles, and, of course, very usable.

'Though I have to keep costs down, I would never want to do anything that might affect safety, and I certainly don't believe in bodging,' he said.

Adrian has just spent £35 on a new radiator for his car, after nursing the old one with Radweld for some months. The battery still soldiers on after

living in the Hornet for at least five years. 'It still works perfectly, so why replace it?' Two new front tyres have cost £25 each.

Rather than fork out £150 for a stainless steel exhaust, which admittedly would last for ever, Adrian opted for a £15 mild steel one. 'It's a question of striking a balance as far as longevity and immediate costs are concerned,' said Adrian. 'The mild steel exhaust should last for more than three years, in any case.'

Adrian has needed to replace

