

Wolseley's centenary

Wolseley's 100th anniversary was celebrated in style, with an incredible week of activities ranging from a cavalcade with police escort through the centre of Birmingham to the biggest ever gathering of the cars. Nick Larkin, and his 1975 Wolseley 2200, joined in.

WOLSELEYS literally stopped the traffic before taking over Birmingham's City Centre in droves while a jazz band played and Charleston dancers performed in their honour. The City's Mayor also paid his respects, before the cars headed in a police-escorted cavalcade to their biggest ever gathering.

You probably don't believe a word of this. How could these genteel, quality cars be associated with so much, well, razzmatazz? There was, however, a good excuse - it was all to celebrate 100 years of Wolseley cars.

When you saw Birmingham City Centre's most prestigious spot, the normally pedestrianised Centenary Square, brimming with Wolseleys, an air of unreality crept in, coupled with the joy that these cars were finally getting a slice of the limelight.

This venue wasn't just appropriate in name - the square also adjoins the site of Wolseley's first factory in Broad Street.

Incredibly, both the first and last Wolseleys to be built were present, the 1895 Tri-car, built by one Herbert Austin, who was then working for Wolseley, and a 1975 Wolseley 2200 'Wedge,' both members of the British Motor Heritage Trust Collection. In between those two were just about every Wolseley you could imagine: vintage models, Wasps, Hornets, 14s, 6/80s, 4/44s and Farinas.

Former employees, some in their 80s who had been Wolseley apprentices in the 1920s, were stopped in their tracks by the nostalgic sight of the cars they built. Bemused shoppers, wondering what was going on, were

similarly affected by the huge display of cars.

Then came the cavalcade, with around 120 cars proceeding from the start at Centenary Square to the Wolseley Garden Park, near Rugeley in Staffordshire. Needless to say, even with a police escort, the different speeds of cars spanning 60 years or so meant the convoy soon split up. But everyone arrived in one piece, ready to prepare for Sunday's massive rally and concours which attracted some 200 cars to attend.

And what an event!

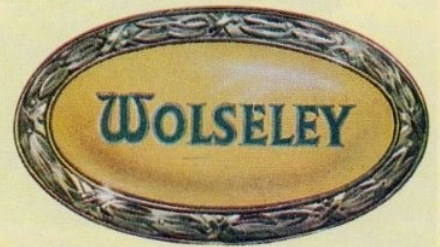
Wolseleys galore in perfect summer weather, together with enthusiasts from all over the world attending. Cars came from Holland, Switzerland, Germany and even Australia to be present.

Prizes were presented by Sir Charles and Lady Wolseley, and the event was a fine chance to relax. For some, it was the finale of a week's celebration organised by the Wolseley Register, which had included visits to many places of Wolseley and general historic interest.

Few could understand just how much work the Wolseley Register must have put in to organise such a spectacular event, but so many will be grateful!

Top right, Wolseleys in their hundreds took over the centre of Birmingham
Above right, every Wolseley was represented. The 1895 Tri-Car, built by Herbert Austin, was also celebrating its centenary
Middle right, Swiss Wolseley 1500 brought matching caravan to the camp site
Right, Larkin tempted but managed to resist





WOLSELEY FACTS

- Frederick York Wolseley was born in County Dublin in 1837, emigrating to Australia where he patented a Wolseley Sheep Shearing Machine. There he met Herbert Austin, an immigrant from England whose company made small components. He appointed him Wolseley's manager in Britain, where, in 1895 he built the Tri-car, generally regarded as Britain's first car. By this time, FY Wolseley had resigned from the company. He died in 1899.
- Wolseleys might still have been in production under the wing of General Motors had an attempt by the American company to buy it from the receivers in 1926 been successful. Instead, GM bought Vauxhall and Wolseley was bought by William Morris, later Lord Nuffield, as his personal property.
- The best selling Wolseley ever was the 1500, more than 100,000 of which were built from 1957-65. Wolseley was by then part of the British Motor Corporation, later British Leyland, which ditched the marque in 1975.



Far left, calcade of Wolseleys en route through Birmingham



Left, hmm... not quite what was intended for the engine bay in Marek Czwardon's 16/60



Below left, overall show winner was the restor-ed red Hornet special of Roland and Anne-Marie Haubold in which they drove from Germany in convoy with fellow Hornet owner Gunther Klaus

