

# Anyone can make a mistake

*Occasionally, over the years, motor manufacturers—and others—make mistakes.  
Michael Savil has unearthed a family skeleton.*

Even today motor manufacturers occasionally make mistakes and produce cars which seem foredoomed to failure: the classic example being, of course, the ill-fated Ford Edsel.

But if today's car makers, backed by expert design, selling, and market research organisations can make serious errors of judgement, then it is hardly surprising that the infant companies of the Edwardian period made mistakes too.

Such a firm was the Wolseley Tool & Motor Car Co. Ltd., of Adderley Park,

Birmingham, an offshoot of the giant Vickers armaments combine, and the brick which it dropped was the 5-hp X-type baby of 1905.

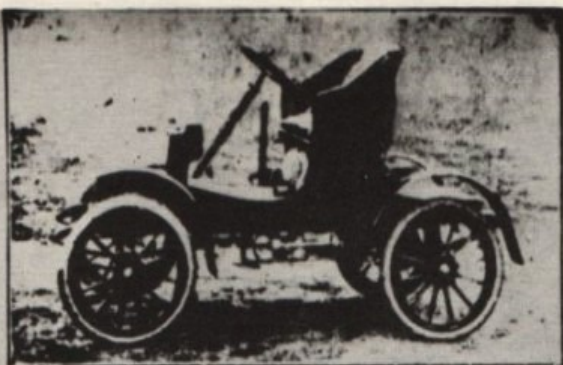
The Wolseley X-type was obscure, even in its own day. It was never catalogued, never photographed, never described in contemporary motoring publications and, according to the records of the Wolseley company, never really existed! Indeed, although there is now proof that a complete series of cars was built, their whole history is shrouded in

the sort of superfluous mystery usually reserved for the plots of cheap detective novels.

It appears that, early in 1905, a wealthy Indian merchant approached the company and asked it to build 50 special small cars for him to market in his country. The name of this merchant, like most of the details of this story, has been "accidentally lost" or "forgotten".

In all 52 cars were produced, some with phaeton and some with spider body work, and they were ready towards the

**SPECIAL  
SALE.**



**The CHANCE  
of a  
LIFETIME.**

**40 "WOLSELEY" LIGHT CARS.**

**THE  
MOTOR HOUSE,**

**314-316 & 366-368, EUSTON ROAD, LONDON, N.W.**

have just received instructions from **THE WOLSELEY TOOL & MOTOR CAR CO., LTD.**, to dispose of the entire stock of two-seated cars which were made for the export markets. These cars have been produced by this well-known company in enormous quantities, and a great number have been sold. Every one has given satisfaction.

This advertisement, dated 1906, is one of the two remaining pieces of evidence that the cars ever existed.

end of the year. Probably to save time and keep the cost down, the designers used components common to other Wolseley cars wherever possible—an early example of the now-common practice.

Thus, the single-cylinder engine, with bore and stroke of 3 in, seems to have been half of a 1904-5 8-hp opposed twin unit. Following the normal Wolseley practice, this was mounted horizontally under the driving seat, with the crankshaft parallel to the axles, and it drove the rear wheels through a two-speed gearbox, cone clutch, and centrally placed chain. The engine was lubricated through a total-loss drip-feed system with a reservoir mounted on the dash. Cooling was by the usual Wolseley system of finned tubes, placed around three sides of the bonnet.

The chassis, perhaps surprisingly for a small cheap car, was of channel steel and boasted five sturdy crossmembers. Suspension was half-elliptic all round.

When production was under way, Mr. A. J. Rowledge, who later achieved fame as a designer of aeroplane engines but who at that time was assistant chief car designer, was invited to use one of the

cars for a weekend. In those days such an invitation was a privilege accorded only rarely to senior executives and never to the lesser minions.

After driving a few miles, Rowledge turned the car round and headed back to the factory. History has not recorded what faults he found with it, but we do know that he vehemently stated that he "was not going to break his neck for Wolseley or anybody else!"

The faults in the design must have been basic and irremediable for, after this resounding condemnation of the car, frantic efforts were made by the sales department to persuade the Indian gentleman to cancel his order. But he refused, and the cars were built. The first dozen were shipped to India, where apparently the dealer arrived at the same conclusion as Rowledge and cancelled the remainder.

The 40 unwanted cars hung about at the Adderley Park works for nearly a year until Wolseleys, in desperation, decided to cut their losses and sold them to a London motor dealer for a knock-down price. It is significant that the company took this step instead of offering them to the public through their

own subsidiary, Motor Jobmasters Ltd., of York Street, Westminster, whose main function was to sell second-hand cars and run a hire fleet.

But the story of the X-types does not end with Wolseley's disposal of them. The knowledge that the cars had ever been built rankled in the minds of a few people at Adderley Park and, some three years after the cars had been sold, the order went out that all records relating to the X-types should be "accidentally lost". The offending sheets of paper were removed.

But whoever carried out the command to strike this mistake from the company archives made a mistake himself by forgetting to remove the index at the front of the service department's ledgers. This foolscap sheet of paper was recently rediscovered in a dusty loft, and it now constitutes the only record possessed by Wolseley Motors (1927) Ltd. of the ill-conceived 5-hp "Baby" cars.

It is believed, however, that three or four cars may still survive—one in this country, which was last heard of before the war, and two or three in India, although recent efforts to trace these have proved unsuccessful.