

LADY WOLSELEY SIDDELEY 1911—THE RESTORER



Herbert Austin made Siddeley's first car for them in 1896. It was a copy of the French Leon Bollee tricar. When, in 1905, the company decided to produce one of Director John Davenport's Siddeley designs, Austin left Wolseley and the new type of car went under the name of Wolseley-Siddeley. A few years later the Siddeley name was to disappear leaving Wolseley to market the cars under his own one-name brand. J.D. Siddeley himself went over to the Deasy concern which then offered its car as a Siddeley-Deasy.

Meanwhile, in Newcastle, Armstrong, Whitworth and Company started to manufacture the Armstrong-Whitworth design which soon gained a reputation for solid British engineering and craftsmanship. Finally, in 1919, it was a merger between Armstrong and Siddeley which caused the Armstrong-Siddeley marque to come into being.

A further merger, in 1956, with Bristol Aircraft brought about the name of Hawker Siddeley which stopped making cars in 1960. The complicated nature of the relationships between the early automotive manufacturers in all countries indicates well the struggle most went through to establish themselves as viable economic concerns.

Denis Leach of Boyanup, Western Australia, owns this magnificent 1911, 25.6hp, 20/28 L4 Type Limousine which he and his father Jack, finished restoring in 1963.

The car drove off the Coventry production line on February 2nd, 1911 and courted a £6/6/0 tax. A little later in its UK life it was driven from Bournemouth in the south of England to Harrogate in Yorkshire in 11 1/2 hours - quite a feat at that time.

In 1928 the L4 was brought to Australia without its original Landulet body and was used at Argyll in Western Australia's south west as a farm truck. Later plans were made to use it to power a sawmill but they never eventuated. It was this running chassis that Denis recalls seeing as a teenager.

LADY WOLSELEY SIDDELEY 1911 20/28 L4 Type

By A. John Parker

After the Leach family had managed to acquire the car, they found out that the motor had been overhauled and the work that they had to do on the motor during restoration was almost nil. It was also decided then that a Limousine body was suited to the chassis. Quite an amount of the locally-grown Jarrah was used in this reconstructed timber body style. Even though the Jarrah helped the car achieve its 2 tonne weight and is not now regarded as an ideal timber for automotive restoration, few problems have arisen with it in the 27 years since restoration.

Sitting up behind the wooden steering wheel, one looks down over a long, stately bonnet hiding a huge 4.2 litre, four-cylinder engine which gives an astonishing 25 mph per 1000 revolutions.

After priming the engine, four deft turns on the crankhandle saw the motor burst into life ready for a drive along the charming country roads around the Leach farm. As with all cars of this age, the controls, even though basic, are still different enough to confuse the first-time driver. One relies heavily on the owner's knowledge of operating systems before changing seats and piloting the Limousine along the open road.

Using the worm and sector steering system, manoeuvring at low speeds requires some strength and determination but once the car is mobile the load lifts considerably and the car cruises along effortlessly. One is then conscious of the slight 'walking' feeling that one gets from large-diameter wooden wheels which are a little less than completely round especially after the tyres have held up the huge weight in the garage for weeks prior to the run.

Overall, however, the wheelbase of 10 feet 6 inches, track of 4 feet 6 inches and massive 8.80 by 120 tyres provide a firm but comfortable ride on the sealed surfaces around the Leach property. The luxurious studded seating and excellent vision would also make a day's ride an enjoyable event rather than a chore.

Wolseley-Siddeley used a 27-plate multi-plate clutch bathed in oil on the L4. This makes changing the

four-speed gears a relatively simple exercise except that one had to be conscious of matching both engine and transmission speeds fairly carefully.

Sitting in the fully-enclosed compartment behind the chauffeur one only had to close both eyes, listen to the rumble of the big car underneath and imagine being Lord Worthington-Smythe of Chelsea for a day doing his regular commuting between London and a country estate. Ahead was Denis, the eternal humorist, wearing his chauffeur's cap and coat really bringing home the luxury and ease with which the aristocracy travelled in the early days of motoring.

The handbrake is actually the one designed to be used as the road brake. The transmission brake is, like many modern commercial vehicles, meant for the purpose of securing the vehicle while parking.

To fuel up, one needs to prime the 14-gallon fuel system by pumping the hand pump until about 2 pounds of pressure are available to ensure initial flow. Once the engine is running a compressor keeps the pressure up in the tank.

Engine cooling is via a honeycomb radiator design and water pump. The electrical system is operated by a Bosch Standard Magneto.

Reminiscing, Denis, retold a frightening experience that they had while restoring the car. After reassembling the engine they attempted to start it - the timing had been set wrongly, the engine backfired and then burst into flame. Only some quick thinking saved the car from a fiery death.

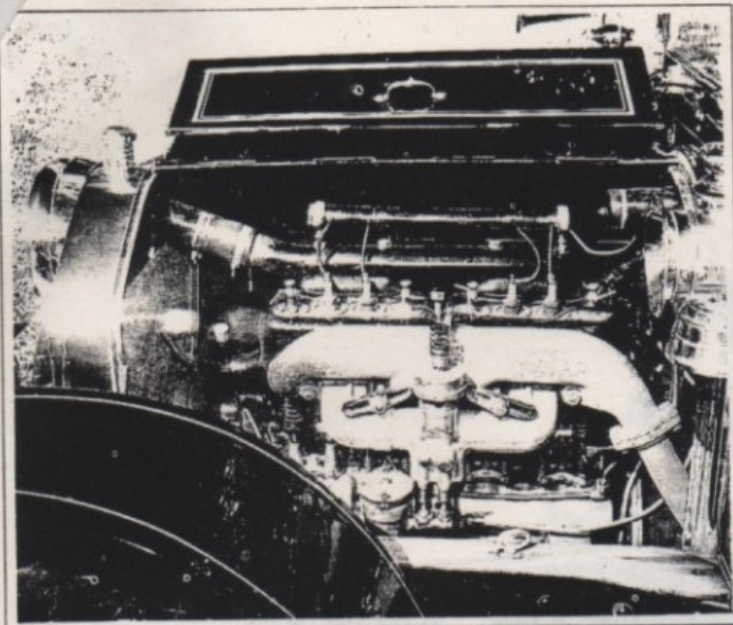
In the early days of their restoration the hobby was very small in Western Australia and very few country people were involved. Being somewhat isolated on the farm Denis and Jack found that very little knowledge was around for them to listen to and so they went ahead with their restoration using whatever materials and skills they could find. For a short time after licensing the car they used Model T Ford side lights because they did not



Lovely driving position, except when it rains



On the dash is the hand primer needed to pump the petrol from the tank



The huge 4.2 litre, four cylinder engine which gives an astonishing 25 mph per 1000 revolutions



The magnificent body completely reconstructed over 27 years ago. The car weighs in at 2 tonne



Substantial springs are required on a limousine like this to maintain smooth travel!

have the original ones. Fortunately a restorer in Melbourne had some Lucas lamps and was willing to swap them.

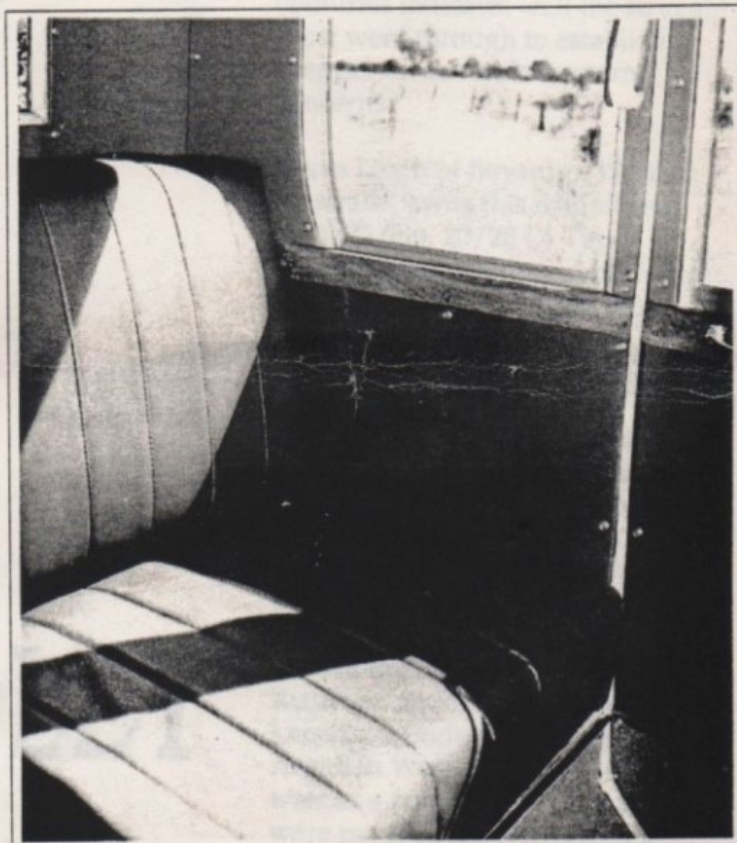
They had been lucky enough to find the original acetylene generator then did another swap of a P & H acetylene generator for the Lucas horn that they needed.

Stored carefully away today is another spare engine which Denis was able to acquire some years ago indicating that there were more than just one vehicle in Western Australia over the years. It has an identical 4 inch by five one-eighth inch bore and stroke, cylinders cast in pairs and would give the same 20mpg economy. The motors had pressure-fed main bearings but used the less-sophisticated splash feed system for the big end bearings. An alloy ('Hidium') makes up many of the castings on the motor.

In 1911 Siddeley-Worless marketed nine models from 15.6hp to a thundering 48.6hp. Denis is lucky enough to have been supplied with a handbook from an enthusiast in New Zealand who owns a 1910 16/20hp tourer which is essentially an original vehicle.

Now, approaching 30 years later, the Worless-Siddeley is a stunning example of the workmanship and quality built into the prestige car of Britain as she grew into the newly-burgeoning automotive field.

What other delights does Denis have in his workshop under restoration? Well, one can admire the Austin Healey BN/1 sports car, a 1947 Rover 16 saloon, a 1936 Austin Seven or an uncommon but pretty 1955 Hillman Californian which he can use as everyday transport if he chooses. Your move...



Sitting in the fully enclosed compartment, one is taken back to when travelling like this, was reserved for a selected few