

1947 Rover P2 16 HP; on show at 2012 Weekend Witness/VSCC Cars in the Park Cedric Macdonald

Pics 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 by Rob North. Pics 5 and 6 by author

Getting by with a little help from one's friends.

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“Ever seen a P2?” asked the first Rover enthusiast.

“Never,” replied the second, “I doubt whether there are any in South Africa at all; or even in the whole of Africa.”

“Actually,” offered the third, “I think I might have one in my garage.”

And so he did: Pale greeny-grey it was, with some surface rust spots just appearing and woodwork, carpets and upholstery in need of replacement, but essentially complete. It was a 1947 Rover P2 16 HP, built at Solihull from 1937 to 1940, put on hold for the War years, then continued from 1945 to 1948, when it made way for the P3.

The enthusiasts in question are Clyde Wyatt, referred to affectionately as “the foreman,” Rob North, provider of workspace and an encyclopaedic knowledge of all things Rover, and Cedric Macdonald, owner of the almost-forgotten P2. They get together most Mondays to chat, have tea and work on the car.

In the glove box was an ancient Shell logbook detailing fuel and oil top-ups and consumption calculations. The final entry was on February 13, 1963, when its owner purchased 9 gallons and four pints of petrol at 87330 miles. The odometer now reads 87331, so we can be pretty sure of the date on which the then-sixteen year old Rover breathed its last. It was left with a Grahamstown area farmer but never reclaimed.

The agriculturalist in question passed away some years later with the undertaker, OD Inggs, taking the Rover in part payment for his services. Inggs in turn parted with it to his old mate Macdonald, who trailered it home and forgot about it for 30-odd years. That is until the conversation outlined above, because other projects had demanded his attention in the meantime.

Not much is known about the original owner apart from the fact that he farmed near Port Elizabeth, was ex-military and loved fishing. A rubber stamp on a document confirmed the first two, while bulging door pockets filled with fishing line, hooks and other paraphernalia confirmed the rest. Sea sand in body crevices and in chassis cross members indicated that his preferred fishing spots were at local beaches. The chassis, once the body had been separated from it, was found to be buckled, indicating either extremely rough farm tracks or some off-road adventuring.

It turned out that, although he had kept strict records of fuel and oil purchases, routine servicing had not been a priority. The engine was seized solid and instead of finding ancient oil in the sump, Macdonald and his helpers found jelly-like sludge. It was so bad that the camshaft had to be persuaded from its nest with a hammer, while the main bearings were worn away to nothing and wear on other mechanical parts was severe.

While the team set about stripping, straightening and repainting the riveted ladder frame chassis, the body and seats were sent out to specialists for refurbishment in its new colour scheme of two-tone blue-grey with blue upholstery. Then followed cutting and remaking of rotted wooden floor panels and sunroof framework. They refurbished door panels, carpeting and headlining, and stripped and re-varnished the decorative wooden trim on doors and dash. Sun visors, windscreen hardware and dozens of other items needed attention, so the team cleaned, resurfaced and repaired those as well.

The engine parts were sent to McKenzie Auto Engineers in Pinetown for machining and repair. This part of the project was delayed for some time owing to non-availability of crankshaft main bearings, a problem eventually overcome with assistance from Bob McCosh of Federal Mogul. He helped source the needed materials and to build up a one-off set. Once everything was ready, North, the most mechanically knowledgeable member of the team, tackled assembly of the engine.

But the best things take time; skip forward two-and-a-half years to October 2014.

"We have achieved a significant milestone – The engine runs - beautifully.

Yes, after the long-winded overhaul, for some reason the engine was very tight and the starter was unable to turn it over. Some freeing off was necessary so we towed it round the garden in gear with the spark plugs out. After many laps, it freed off sufficiently for the starter to work and once the timing was correctly set, she started up easily and runs beautifully. From our calculations, it is 51 years since the vehicle last ran!

The next is to sort out was an "S" licence so we could use it on the road to try out the mechanical brakes – adjustment of all the rods was new to me! The main work that was still to be done was the cover of the gearbox. The original was a rubber tunnel and completely perished. I made up a metal copy which had to be more exact in dimensions than the rubber one.

We had a lot of hassle with the rear springs. Being an underslung chassis at this point, makes setting requirements more exacting. We had them reset three times and still the rear end appeared low without any passenger load. We also needed to drive it a bit to get them to possibly settle. We had no reference to ride height dimensions."

Rob asked John (a reader from Melbourne, Australia and owner of a 1946 P2 12HP Sports Saloon), if he could measure the clearance heights under the mudguard lips to the ground on his car, un-laden, front and rear as this would be a big help.

John indicated his willingness to assist but pointed out that his car, now also elderly, appeared to be suffering from spring sag as well. (Sigh: Don't we all, eventually?) If any reader can chip in with accurate factory spec's for the ride height, we would be happy to pass them on to both these enthusiasts.



Basically complete, but a long way to go. Photograph: Rob North



...or perhaps looking not so good? Photograph: Rob North



The interior needed to be stripped and redone. Photograph: Rob North



With the body back from the panel beaters. Photograph: Rob North



Reassembly could begin. Photograph: Gordon Hall



The seats were reupholstered by a local specialist. Photograph: Gordon Hall



Just a new gearbox cover, reset the springs (again) and a couple of small details to go... Photograph: Rob North