

## Chapter 1- Judy & Warren's Cars and Castles Tour 2017

The inspiration for our trip was **the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Zündapp** being celebrated at a commemorative Motorcycle Rally in Germany. As long as we were going to Germany, why not visit England? And as long as we were going to be on the other side of the pond, a week's visit with relatives in Sweden seemed in order as well! Especially once we learned our trip would time to celebrate cousin Per-Olof & Margareta's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.



Our trip begins with a stop in England where MG Banners greeted us at the airport. "So you went to London to see Big Ben, London Bridge, The Queens Palace, Changing of the Guard and the like?" Well, no. Our visit to England had one purpose in mind... a pilgrimage to the Morgan Motor Car Factory in the Malvern Hills south of Birmingham.

Since my days in college, I have wanted a Morgan sports car. But somehow, whenever we went shopping for a Morgan we would end up buying something else. After 48 years of looking at classified ads, keeping an eye on Hemming's Motor News, and eBay, we actually only looked at a few Morgans for sale. We never found the right car, at the right time, in the right place, at the right price. But alas, our time finally came in 2016. I was flogging a 1932 Ford Model-A Tudor Hot Rod on eBay when on a whim I asked someone who was offering up a Morgan for sale, if he would have any interest in trading. I never dreamed he would. But sure enough, I traded up even for a 1989 Morgan 4/4 with less than 2,800 original miles on it. The Hot Rod was trucked out to Texas where the Morgan was retrieved. We did the deal on faith, sight unseen.

So now that we were Morgan Owners, it seemed

only proper that we visit the Morgan Factory in Malvern, England.

Our flight from Boston took us to Amsterdam where we changed planes to fly into Birmingham, England. It's an overnight flight from the USA with the time zone changes, and no sleep on the plane we arrived in England as weary travelers. It was supposed to be only a 90-minute drive from the airport to Malvern. But my sleepless wits were not up to the challenge of driving on the wrong side of the road seated on the wrong side of the car. Especially challenging were the roundabouts, which travel in the opposite direction of elsewhere in the



luggage loaded on the plane. Thankfully we had carried on bags with a change of clothes and essentials. I cannot go without mentioning that KLM should be avoided. They have very friendly people, but the airline is totally out of control. They have no idea what gates the planes will depart or arrive from until the very last minute. Constant gate changes are the norm and expecting that luggage will arrive on the same plane as the passengers is just asking too much.



civilized world. The directional and traffic signs were totally puzzling and before long we found ourselves sucked off in the wrong direction and heading towards London. We finally calmed down and got back on course. Off the highway and onto the secondary roads we were faced with the biggest challenge of driving in the UK. The roads are not much wider than a driveway. They are just barely two cars wide. But making matters worse, cars park on both sides of the road so you have to play chicken with oncoming traffic. It really is crazy.

We arrived much the worse for wear at our Hotel in the village of Malvern. Oh, I forgot to mention, KLM airlines didn't just lose our bags; they lost the entire plane's luggage. The plane left Amsterdam with no





**Cotford Hotel** advertises in MOG, the Morgan magazine. It is a storybook Inn of Gothic Victorian architectural style. It was built in 1851 as the summer residence for the Bishop of Worcester. What



was the Bishop's private chapel is now the restaurant L'Amuse Bouche. On arrival, they brought two cold beers to our private courtyard. After a brief nap it was off to the reception room for drinks and then into the dining room, I ordered Lock Fyne Scallops from

Scotland. Judy had wild venison from Balmoral, Queen Elizabeth's II's estate in Scotland. Some said, don't expect much from the food in the UK. To that I would respond... rubbish. Currently owned by a couple named Morgan (no relationship they insist), he is a well-known chef; she runs the business side of things. The service and food alone were worth the trip.







Winston the wirehaired terrier greeted us the next morning at the Inn.

But enough of the food.

The next morning we were off to the Morgan factory, just a few miles down the road. We roamed the factory grounds, visited the gift shop, and checked-in with the rental desk to see if the 3-wheeler would be running the next morning. "It is still tentative," It turns out the rental car had been used by *Autocar* magazine for a long-term test and, no doubt, it was given a thorough workout.

We had booked a mid-morning organized tour with about 20 other people from various corners of the world. Only a few of us were Morgan owners, some were thinking about buying one, and others were just interested in a factory tour of the oldest, still operating, automobile factory in the world.







**The Morgan Motor Company** was founded over a century ago, in the fledgling days of the automotive industry. Since the first car in 1909, the Morgan family has owned the Company.



From the beginning, Morgans were more than a means of transportation, they extolled a newborn spirit of personal freedom and excitement and a new age. Lightweight and powerful, even the early Morgans harnessed the imagination of all who drove them.

The first Morgans were 3-wheelers. Two wheels in the front, one wheel in the back with a hearty V-Twin motorcycle engine, (the likes of Matchless, J.A.P) mounted at the very front of the car. Morgan has never manufactured engines, they simply do not build enough cars to warrant the expense, but they have always used the best engines from other makers (Triumph, Rover, BMW to mention a few). But the most common engine in 4-wheel Morgans are European Fords.

#### ***Why on earth would anyone make a 3-wheel car?***

3-wheel cars are considered to be “motorcycles,” and as such they are taxed at a far lower rate. So basically, the 3-wheel car was a tax dodge. They represented a lightweight vehicle that was far more comfortable and more respectable than a motorcycle with a sidecar. This was an affordable



performance vehicle that was considerably less expensive to own and operate. But beyond the tax advantage they are thrilling to drive...

*In early competition, the Morgans excelled in trials competition and on road tracks.*

In 1936 the first 4-wheel Morgan was produced. It was designated the Morgan 4/4, (four wheels, 4-cylinder engine). In 1939, a 4/4 was entered into the 24 Hours of Le Mans race and it finished in the top 13.

Needless to say, much has changed in the way automobiles are designed and manufactured today. But in Malvern, England in a series of brick sheds, much remains the same as it was in the very early days of the automobile industry. Morgan never embraced the merits of Henry Ford's assembly line mass-production technology. Today, each car is still built one at a time with one man responsible for taking the car through the various stages of production. The process begins in the Chassis Shop where the fabrication of the frame, suspension and steering takes place. The car is then rolled to the next building. This process is made easy by the fact that the buildings are on a hillside and each stage of production is one building down the hill. In the Wood Shop, the body frame is created in age-old craftsmanship with hand tools, vats of glue, steam and pressure-bending clamps, tacks, screws and wood – much in the way fine furniture, wooden boats, early airplanes and most cars were originally fabricated. The Morgan





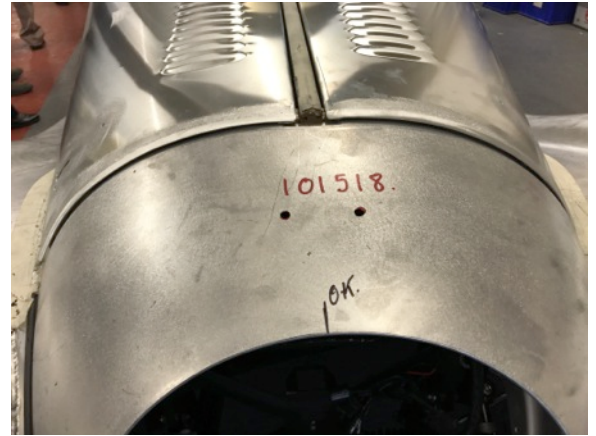
philosophy for the most part is that if it worked then, it likely still works now, so why change? That is not to say that in some capacity Morgan has not embraced new technologies. The Aero line of cars is crafted with space-age technology and materials. A new electric Morgan will soon go into production. But the classic line of cars is still, for the most part, fabricated the way they were originally.



Our Morgan is a 1989 4/4 model, (4 wheels, 4-cylinder engine). The 4/4 is the oldest model, still manufactured, by any automaker in the world.

During the factory tour I asked a number of questions about our car back home. If the tour guide did not have an answer he'd stop the tour and ask one of the factory workers. "Say Lyle, you were here in 1989, we have a question about the door beams, do you recall?"

With work completed in the Wood Shop, the cars are rolled downhill to the next building, the "Tin Shop." Here



each car receives the metal panels, which form the car's exterior. Working with small hammers, the metal panels are fitted to the wood frame. The swooping fenders had for years been hand formed using what is called an "English Wheel"



to stretch, bend and shape flat metal panels

into compound curved fenders. Today, a process of machine forming the swooping front fender takes place at a vendor facility. Fender panels arrive at Morgan where they are individually hand fitted to the rest of the body. These cars are very organic. Every piece of the car is hand fit and the finished pieces from one car will not fit another car. It is a joy to watch the men hand fitting, sanding and hammering away on the panels.

The entire body is fit to the car and much effort is put into aligning the doors, panels and seams. The body is then disassembled and the pieces of the body are taken to the "Paint Shop" where they are painted in an endless variety of colors to the new owner's specifications. This includes traditional and totally outrageous colors. Each car at Morgan is what is called "Bespoken." That is to say it is custom created to the specifications of whoever ordered the car

Every day, paint is delivered to the paint shop from an outside vendor. Only a day's worth of paint is delivered at a time, specifically for the cars that will be painted that day.



If you want, say, a bright orange Morgan to match your girlfriend's hair color, with electric blue leather seats with magenta stitches and orange seatbelts with a purple cloth convertible top... they will build it that way for you and you will have the only one in the world like it.

On a good week, Morgan completes about 14 cars. There is no stockpile of unsold cars at the factory or on dealer lots. Cars are sold before they are built. You order a car and wait 6 to 8 months for delivery. If you are very lucky, your local Morgan dealer may have "reserved" a build slot in Morgan's calendar that is unspoken for. But better hurry!

You can choose from 3 models in the Classic Line, The 4/4 has a Ford 1.6 liter motor, the +4 has a Ford 2000cc motor, and the "Classic" now has the powerful Ford Mustang V-6 engine. A +8 version features a BMW V-8 engine and although the



body looks like a Classic Morgan, the frame engineering and construction is borrowed from the modern Aero model which boasts a composite laminated metal panel box-frame to create a nearly indestructible “cabin” for the passengers of the vehicle. However, if you live in the USA, you can only order a 3-wheel Morgan.



With roots in racing and competition, Morgan returned to Le Mans once again in 2004 and the Aero8 racer completed the Challenging 24 hours of Le Mans. And since then two modified Aero Super Sports competed in the 2009 GT3 race series, winning the first two races of the season at Silverstone. This was a magnificent achievement, and throughout the season the Morgans ran in the top five of a grid of 35 of the best sports cars in the world. These are remarkable feats of engineering excellence when you consider that they have been achieved competing against the largest companies in the world with financial resources that dwarf Morgan. During our factory tour, it was mentioned that in the last major race Morgan entered, the catering budget alone for the Audi team was larger than Morgan’s entire budget for participating in the race (cars, parts, support, drivers, mechanics and the like.)

*Seen here on the left are painted fenders that have been hand carried from the paint shop over to final assembly where they hang on the wall waiting for their turn to be fit.*

The 3-wheel Morgan stopped being produced sometime in the 1950s. But in 2010 Morgan reintroduced a 3-wheel car as a commemorative salute to their past. At the time, they anticipated building a very limited number of this model, as they couldn’t dream that people would want this old design. When the new 3-wheel Morgan was unveiled at an automobile show, the crowd went wild and hundreds of orders were taken on the spot. Everyone at the factory is still dumbfounded by the success of the new 3-wheel Morgan. As of

the end of 2016, they have built 2175! And that is a very big number indeed for a company that completes only a few cars a day.

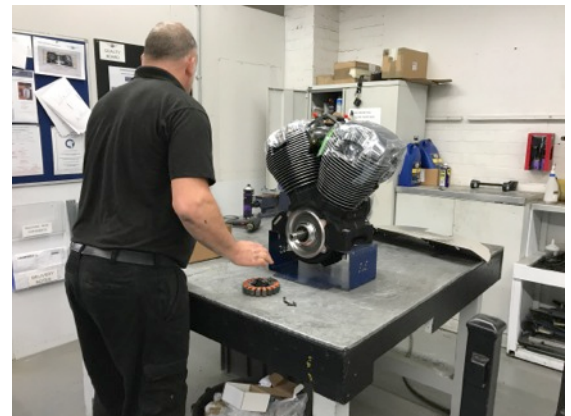
The 3-wheel Morgan also has been received well in the USA because 4-wheel Morgans have been unavailable for many years as the cars simply do not comply with high-speed crash tests, air bags, high impact



bumpers and all the federal regulations of the day. But the three-wheel Morgan is considered to be a motorcycle trike, so it meets the USA standards of a motorcycle.

We saw our first new 3-wheel Morgan a few years ago at an Antique Motorcycle meet in Reinbeck, New York. I found it interesting but not as attractive as the old original 3-wheel Morgans from the 1940s with classic Matchless and J.A.P. V-twin motorcycle engines. The body lines on the original cars are also more pleasing. But after one drive in the new 3-wheel Morgan I’m sold on the virtues of this exciting little car.

*The V-Twin engines arrive from S&S in Wisconsin - a 2-liter, 117 horsepower version of their Harley derivative engine delivers gobs of torque, plenty of speed and a very sweet exhaust burble that is music to the ear. It is paired with a Mazda gearbox. Weighing just over 1100 pounds, these little cars fly along at 120 miles per hour. But the sensation is of far greater speed.*





My college roommate Jeff Craig (who I personally hold responsible for the tens of thousands of dollars I have spent on British cars since meeting him, not to mention the countless hours of wrenching on said cars) introduced me to Morgans, other British cars and vintage motorcycles. He had a 1967 +4 during our college years and we spent many mornings over coffee looking through classic car and motorcycles books and magazines. I was in college to learn, after all.

Last year or so, Jeff had a chance to drive one of the new 3-wheel Morgans during a test drive weekend with his friend Peter Egan, who is a famous author and columnist for *Cycle World* and *Road & Track* magazines. Jeff sent me a photo of himself behind the wheel of a 3-wheel Morgan with a beaming smile like the Cheshire cat. He told me the experience of driving the car was unlike any other. Perhaps the closest thing to an open-wheel, single-seat race car or an early open-cockpit airplane. I agreed at some point I would have to drive one of these crazy 3-wheel “new” Morgans.

Judy and I were on a mission to visit the Morgan Factory, an almost religious pilgrimage of touring the plant and seeing the cars being made, but I was also keen on driving a new 3-wheel Morgan and had made arrangements months in advance with the factory. The little plant in Malvern is the original site where Morgans have always been built. It is the oldest operating automobile factory in the world. The factory organizes daily tours and also rents half a dozen cars for the day as a marketing tool to help excite prospective buyers. But there is only one 3-wheeler in the rental fleet.

*The Land Rover Graphite Blue 3-wheeler had just recently completed a 3-month road-test review with AutoCar Magazine. No top and no side curtains. We pulled under some trees to wait out the rain.*



Back at the factory, this dark blue M3W was about to be taken out for its road test. “This one is shipping to the USA, over to Morgan Motors of New England in Copake, New York. I shouldn’t think they’d mind if you were the first to take her for a spin... or at least sit in it for photo,



*as I best do the test drive!”*

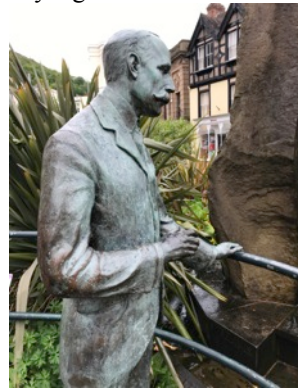
(USA regulations are now requiring the headlights to be mounted closer together than on the car we rented, (as you can see in the photos above).

Before leaving Morgan, we visited the Parts Department, while they only mail order parts through the dealer network, if you are visiting the factory you can pickup parts and take them with you. The day before I had asked the tour guide if I would be able to buy a glove box door for my car. He suggested it would be best to make my own. When he saw us the next day he handed Judy a big swatch of tan leather and said, “Should be enough to make that glove box door!



We parked the little Morgan at the curb and snapped on the tonneau cover in case the rain picked up. We walked into a local pub and asked the bar keep if he served lunch. “He sized me up and said, “Here’s what you want to do, mate. You see that meat shop across the street? You take yourself right over there and order a sandwich. Bring it back here and you can sit and have a nice pint while you eat!” That’s a new one on me.... BYOF? ‘Bring your own food!’”

Judy made fast friends with Marshall, the pub dog, when she asked the bar keep if it was OK to feed him a morsel of pork from her lunch.



*These photos are from Malvern Priory, where we walked the neighborhood and visited a few antique shops.*

As we planned for our departure, there was some concern with traffic headed back to Birmingham as a highway had been closed due to the discovery of an unexploded World War II bomb found during a construction project along the roadside. Speaking of the war, Morgan uses Ash wood exclusively in their body frames. In harvesting old Ash lumber they often have problems when working the wood, as they will run their tools into scrap metal and bullet fragments embedded in the trees during the WW II bombings! The trees grow around the



fragments only to be revealed in the wood shop as a reminder of the terror of years past.



***Next stop...  
Sweden calling!***



*But OK, first just a few more shots from the factory....*



There is no moving assembly line, which forces workers to complete the work at hand within a specified number of minutes and seconds before a car is taken from their hands to the next station. That is not how things are done at Morgan. You simply have to do a proper job of it before the car moves onto the next stage.

Yet, there are these friendly reminders

to the staff. Such as this sign posted above. The woodwork on the framing of that 4/4 should take around 705 minutes or so.... Lets see now... that is about 11 and a-half hours! And that I remind you, this is just that one phase of the build.



Wood is bent using the age-old process of steam, gluing and clamping to forms until it sets up.



A wooden car? Really? Ash wood is very strong and stable. Combined with proper joinery, the resulting structure is very strong indeed. Model T Fords and most early cars used extensive wood as did planes and the PT Boats of World War II.. But it is much cheaper and faster to stamp out parts in sheet metal and weld them together than it is to craft them from wood. But Morgan is very happy doing things they way they always have. "We sell all the cars we make." Countless other automakers have long since gone out of business. Morgan prevails and proudly stands the test of time. What more can one ask for?

(photo above is the glue table in foreground and to right is the form the wood is glued and bent to fit in)



*Do you recognize this bloke*



*from the BBC show, Top Gear?*