

March 2011

WHAT EXACTLY?



Matra and what?

Seen at a classic rally in the Ardennes, the car on the right has Bertone bodywork similar to that supplied to Lancia but what's underneath? The only obvious clue is badging at the back – the make and a number.



Why?

Six of these devices stand in line on a mountain side in North Wales. What are they and who put them there?

Chairman's chat

It's Annual General Meeting time and a full twelve months that you have tolerated me as chairman.

I began the year by inviting all to get involved and this produced an excellent response, enabling us to give full support to the Museum's calendar of events, ranging from a school fete to the Coventry Festival of Motoring and exhibitions at NEC as well as our own activities - Maudslay, Motorcycle and Archive groups and club nights are perhaps the most obvious examples. There is quite a lot going on behind the scenes too, and always room for more to get involved.

Last month's newsletter focused on the Maudslay Group and this month it's the Motorcycle Group's turn.

You will see from Steve Bagley's column on the back page that there's a lot going on already this year, including the start of the long awaited stores move.

AGM's boring? Hopefully not this one but if you need an extra reason to come along, it will be your first chance to find the answers to What Exactly opposite. Meanwhile, if you think you know either answer, email us or hand in your answers before the meeting.

**NEXT CLUBNIGHT
THURSDAY 17 MARCH AT 7.30
ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING
FOLLOWED BY
FILMS FROM THE
ARCHIVES**



The Schilovski Gyrocar



During the first years of the 20th century, the Wolseley Tool and Motorcar Company was already notable for engineering expertise and production of a wide range of motor vehicles. Perhaps it was inevitable that, in 1912, the Russian Count Peter Schilovski should visit Wolseley and present them with his plans for a gyroscopically-stabilised motorcar running on only two wheels.

With possible military contracts in mind, the Count credited his yet-to-be-built invention with a number of exciting characteristics that he claimed would be superior to normal vehicles. Once the Gyrocar was built, it proved to be a rather ponderous machine according to contemporary accounts, but perhaps this is of little importance against the fact that the principle of a gyroscopically-balanced vehicle was proved workable.

The Gyrocar was driven by a Wolseley (approx.) 20hp engine mounted behind the front wheel and driving the rear wheel via an offset driveshaft. This would seem to be a rather feeble engine for a vehicle weighing 2.75 tons but, again, anything that was sufficient to prove the theory would be deemed successful. The gyroscope itself, powered by a 1.25hp electric motor, was mounted amidships and revolved at between 2,000 and 3,000rpm.



Inertia/balance was maintained between the gyroscope and the body of the car through a rack-and-pinion system linked by cords to two pendulums. If the gyroscope was to stop, sprags automatically lowered on each side to stop the car tipping over, though there is no mention of such provision if the car was to tilt too much with the gyroscope still spinning.

The first public demonstration is recorded as being in Regent's Park in central London on 28 April, 1914 and by all accounts it was a great success. A newspaper report at the time described how people could jump on and off the Gyrocar when it was driven slowly, and it would still maintain its balance – this must have been quite a sight to behold.

Despite the initial success of the gyroscopic principle applied to a motor vehicle, the Gyrocar was put aside by Wolseley when the First World War broke out. The

Count disappeared, possibly to return to Russia, while Wolseley naturally turned to war work.

For a number of years, the Gyrocar lay abandoned in the factory and eventually the Wolseley directors decided they needed to be rid of it. Not knowing what had happened to Count Schilovski – but mindful of the fact that he could therefore still reappear at any moment – it was decided to bury the Gyrocar complete, instead of dismantling it or breaking it up.

In 1938 Wolseley had second thoughts and decided to resurrect the Gyrocar. By then a railway yard had been built on top of the site, but the tracks were lifted where need be, the car was unearthed and hauled out and it was restored by Wolseley to be displayed in the company's own museum.

And there it stayed for a few short years until – astonishingly – Wolseley broke it up for scrap metal in 1948!

Much more detailed information on the Schilovski Gyrocar – including drawings and close-up photographs – can be found at:
www.dself.dsl.pipex.com/MUSEUM/TRANSPORT/gyrocars/schilovs.htm

Count Peter Schilovski did indeed survive the Great War and returned to live in south London with his wife and family.

Thanks to The Wolseley Register and www.wolseleyworld.com for this article.

TWO WHEELS - NO GYROSCOPE!

THE FRIENDS MOTORCYCLE GROUP



Three men and a bike! Outdoors! More specifically, Stan Wilcox, John Stubbs and Dave Parry with the Triumph T80 in the Museum yard at 13:47 on 4th March this year. The significance of this moment is that, for the first time, the T80's engine was running. Unfortunately, this cannot be demonstrated by the photo as there was no exhaust smoke or soundtrack. For a moment, nobody spoke. The first to speak summed it all up:

It sounds like a proper motor bike!

The group had been asked to complete a restoration started by someone else. They were then asked to continue with the project to get it running. Getting the engine to fire initially proved no great problem but getting it to run was a different matter.

This saga has put back work on the Omega but the group has not been idle. Several parts from the Omega and others that might come in useful have been brought in from the stores. Last month, a restored 1925 Omega was located in Burton on Trent and members of the group visited and took very detailed photographs. There turned out to be significant differences between that model and ours, though also many similarities. An example is the front fork – both are sprung vertically and horizontally (apparently to cope with cobbles) but ours has double springs, the Burton Omega has only single.



In the pictures below, you will be able to pick out a few features: rear suspension limited to the seat springs and the front of the seat pivoting on the frame; front brake ring and block, rear brake drum; double front springs.



It may seem quite a challenge to restore our machine, but the group are confident, having already restored far worse.



WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE MUSEUM?

Quite a lot! Conference bookings have picked up after a slowdown over Christmas, visitor numbers are rising and the shop is doing well.

Exhibitions

We are currently working on two exhibitions – Coming of Age at the Ace Cafe due to run from 3 June to 2 October and Surfing Vehicles . The Ace cafe exhibition is going to be a quality touring exhibition which details the story of the Cafe and its place in the youth culture of the 50s and 60s. The design of the exhibition has been put out to tender and two design consultants have been shortlisted.

Outside events

Last year, Museum vehicles went out to nearly fifty events, on many occasions accompanied by Friends. We are currently compiling a comprehensive list of events for the coming year that we might wish to attend or be asked to attend, already far more than we can attend. We shall be working with Friends to decide which we will attend.

Collection

We are working hard trying to improve our care of the collection. The Effective Collections programme continues and we are currently putting together an action plan for the next step in deciding what to dispose of, what to use in a handling collection and what to put on a loans list.

There have been no significant offers to the Museum over the last month but the Daimler Ferret has finally arrived.

New store

The Ferret has been placed in the new store. The move has begun with a number of pallets being transferred across from the current store. There is still an amount of electrical work going on in the new store and vehicles will not be moved until this is completed.

Chairman's note: A number of Friends are on standby to help with the move. "Help days" will vary, depending on the availability of Museum staff who have to fit this in with their normal duties. If others wish to help, please let me have names and days normally available.

Cycling Festival

We are also working hard on the Coventry Cycling Festival, to be held on 25 and 26 June. Lots of activities are to be staged in front of the Museum and two rides organised, one to Baginton and a 100 mile ride to Much Wenlock.

Archives

Placing the archive enquiry form onto the Museum website has generated a big increase in enquiries with 58 in February.

Memories

The online Memories site, www.coventrymemories.co.uk, where people can log on and record a memory about Coventry or an event in Coventry they lived through is proving successful with lots of material being put on.

i-factor

In i-factor, we have taken a set of inventions and invited the public to vote online for the one they consider the most important. After an i-factor Family Day on 12 March, voting remains open until the end of the month. Each invention has a short film to help you decide on our website.

Books

The new Museum guide is ready for print and Damien Kimberley is writing a car history book for publication at Easter.

Tom Sabin

We have been researching Tom Sabin, winner of the first Olympic cycling event at Much Wenlock, who was believed to have been brought up in Allesley. Census records show young Sabin living with his mother and her mother in Spring Cottage, now the home of Friends Membership Secretary David Green.

At the time, Sabin's father was living and working at Walsh Hall, later moving to Pickford Farm as bailiff. In modern times, Walsh Hall was the home of Jeff Lynne of ELO and now belongs to another well known performer from the music business.

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