

INSIDE: Lancaster Insurance NEC Classic Motor Show, Carole Nash Irish Motorcycle & Scooter Show & Lots More!

PLUS CONCOURS-WINNING MERCEDES C124

IRISH VINTAGE *Scene*

MAY 2019



IRISH-ASSEMBLED PLYMOUTH UNCOVERED



1959 CORONADO SURVIVES IN AMAZINGLY
ORIGINAL CONDITION



FERGUSON FE 35
COPPER BELLY RETURNS TO
ITS ORIGINAL FAMILY



FARMALL CUB
AMERICAN-BUILT MODEL
FROM 1951



50
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1976 BEDFORD TK570



1985 HONDA 250N



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A few years ago Ronnie Nesbitt embarked on a quest to find a special tractor that had been bought new by his father in 1957: a 'Copper Belly' Ferguson FE 35. Would he find it? What state would it be in? Would it still exist? Well, read on...

48 Concours Coupe

When Philip Wheatley picked up this Mercedes E220 coupe cheap at a UK auction all he wanted was a four-seater classic runaround with room for his granddaughters' baby seats in the back, something his SL320 roadster couldn't manage. However, things got slightly out of hand some-where along the line...

54 Forward Vision

Famously small and light, yet for many forties and fifties farmers the sole tractor to rely upon, the Farmall Cub was a revolution when it was launched in 1947, and carved out a unique niche for itself in the years that followed. It's a sought-after model on the classic scene today, including this cherished example from Co. Cork.

60 Living the Dream

Limerick's Eddie Madigan has owned dozens of motorbikes over his 35-plus years on two wheels, from his first Honda 50 up to Goldwings, Blackbirds and CBRs. However, by his own admission the humble Honda 250N Super Dream holds a very special place in his affections, and he pulled out all the stops in this, his most recent restoration project.

66 The Life of Bryan

Even if you don't know Bryan Oliver you'll probably know his cars, as his previously-featured 'Shortina' and his Starsky & Hutch Ford Grand Torino are two of the most distinctive classics on the show circuit. Well, his stable also houses a lovely example of one of the most fondly-remembered lorries of all time, and Adrian Crawley paid him a visit to find out more.

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*Contents subject to change

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- Newcastle Indoor Classic Show

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STRETCH

Words & Photos by Andrew Pollock

Survivor



Regular readers of Irish Vintage Scene might remember our feature back in late 2015 on the unique story of a surviving Irish-assembled 1959 Plymouth Coronado limousine, which had been owned from new by the Earl of Rosse at Birr Castle. Well one of its few siblings has now surfaced after decades spent in storage, and what's more is in amazingly original condition. Well, for the most part...



Pat's had a thing for these Plymouths ever since he bought a '59 hearse restoration project at the tender age of twenty, and he's delighted to have uncovered this very original limo recently.



I'm a lover of cars of many genres, including those that come in from foreign shores. However you have to admit that there's a special something to an original-Irish classic, whether it's because of our nostalgia for the registration numbers of old, pride in the long-gone assembly industry in this country or simply the fact that these Irish survivors are in the minority on the classic scene, such cars having usually been treated far more harshly in their working lives than their more numerous equivalents across the Irish Sea. So, when something like this 1959 Plymouth limousine comes along with an Irish assembly history, it's a rare treat indeed.

Plymouth isn't a marque that you'd readily associate with Ireland or Irish motor production, but in fact it was one of several American car makes that were put together here between the 1930s and 1950s. Large and expensive, these saloons were primarily the preserve of state departments, embassies, funeral directors and, in their later lives, taxi and hackney operators thanks to their commodious interiors with seating for six or more. Their popularity waned in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the increasing face of competition from the likes of Mercedes-Benz's W120 Ponton and the British Ford Zephyr/Zodiac, and their large engines and associated running costs meant that they faded from view pretty quickly after that, usually once the taxi operators had run them as far as they could go.

The Plymouth brand came into being in 1928, created by parent company, Chrysler in order to market its lower-priced models. Chrysler already had a presence in Ireland for several years at that stage, with an agency for Maxwell cars (another sub-brand of Chrysler's) having been established in Dublin by FM Summerfield's Ltd of Lower Baggot Street in Dublin, a company that would go on to assemble American-based Chrysler vehicles here until 1960 (separate to the Rootes Group-based Chryslers of later years). In 1935, a year after Minister of Industry & Commerce Sean Lemass had passed legislation that favoured the local

assembly of partially-assembled imports over the importation of fully-built-up cars, Summerfield's began assembling Chrysler and associated models from CKD (completely-knocked-down) kits shipped in from the US, and this would continue until the advent of WW2 interrupted production. Assembly operations returned anew in 1945, with good numbers produced until the 1949 currency devaluation crisis saw sales drop off considerably, a drop from which the Irish Chryslers and Plymouths never really recovered, and in 1960 the last were assembled here.

In 1959, a penultimate batch of twelve Plymouth Belvedere saloons and twenty-four Plymouth Coronado limousines were assembled here. Although the rolling bodysells for these were shipped from Chrysler's Windsor plant in Ontario, Canada, those for the limos had a slightly longer journey in that their first port of call wasn't Summerfield's in Dublin, but Chrysler's European plant in Antwerp in Belgium, where the shells received their extra 24 inches of length to become Coronados, eight-seater behemoths with a 142-inch wheelbase. The Belvedere was an ideal candidate for such conversions as it still rode on a separate chassis, making the body very strong – the Coronados also received uprated suspension to cope with the extra weight, plus a heavy duty rear axle. However, while the 5.2-litre V8-powered models were provided with power steering, lower-spec versions with the old side-valve 3.8-litre straight-six weren't so endowed, undoubtedly making them more of a handful for the driver to manoeuvre. Once stretched in Belgium, the Coronados then completed their journey to Summerfield's for final assembly as normal, utilising locally-produced paint, upholstery, batteries, tyres and the flat side glass, complete with Irish shamrock logo. Although all of the Plymouths assembled here in 1959 were right-hand-drive, the final few that were assembled in 1960 were in less-than-ideal left-hand-drive format as RHD cars were no longer available from the Windsor plant, which was yet another nail in the coffin for these cars in the Irish context.



The "Plymouth Brethren": Pat's now got three Irish assembled Plymouths in the stable. (L-R) WYI 609, his original hearse-converted saloon (which has now been reroofed and nearing completion – see inset photo), WYI 542 the limo featured in this story, and the most recent addition, UZC 723, a 1960 LHD limo that was famous for being painted pink and displayed outside a Dublin nightclub in the 1980s.

As Found...



You want to see a "barn find"? These amazing images show how the car sat in storage for almost twenty years, which resulted in it having no major rust at all to speak of, and indeed it was coaxed into life surprisingly easily too. In his wildest dreams, Pat couldn't have predicted how well the car had lasted, and has preserved its originality as far as possible.



The Coronado was marketed as having seating for eight – three across each bench and two on the fold-out seats in the middle of the cabin. This is the only example Pat's come across that has a red interior.



The purists might frown on the straight-six Toyota engine and auto gearbox sitting under the bonnet, courtesy of the car's previous owner who operates a Toyota dealership, but Pat reports that it runs beautifully and is an ideal powerplant with ample power, far better than the original side-valve engine and three-speed manual.

As mentioned in the info, the '59 limousine we featured in 2015 was registered IR 9323 for the Earl of Rosse at Birr Castle, and still survives to this day in the hands of an enthusiast. However, the car you see here, one of that same batch of twenty-four, only recently emerged from decades in storage in Galway, and is now owned by Pat Conroy from Co. Limerick. It turns out that Pat has some "previous" with these cars, as in his early twenties he bought one of the '59 Belvedere saloons, also on a WYI registration but which had been turned into a hearse during its working life (but is now on its way back to becoming a saloon car again – more on that anon), and also owned one of the LHD limos produced in 1960 with a UZC reg (which he subsequently sold but bought back again only recently – also more on that anon!) so always had an interest in these unusual Irish 'Yanks' and their story. "They're a fine big hulk of a yoke" he grins; "badly designed in places for mud and rust, but they're an awesome looking machine."

Pat had heard of this car, WYI 542 on the grapevine many years ago, knowing little more than it had been fitted with a Japanese

engine at some stage, but as it hadn't been seen in circulation in many, many years no one was sure as to whether it still existed or if it had been scrapped since then. Fortune has a funny way of working, and last year a random photo of the car appeared on the Facebook page of the Limerick Classic Car Club, to trigger a whole new chapter in the car's life... "A friend rang me and told me there was a photo of a car like mine up online" Pat explains; he managed to get a phone number for Colin Williams of the club, and was amazed to discover that Colin was the same guy he'd bought his hearse Belvedere from twenty-odd years ago! It turned out that Colin had taken the Facebook photo in a garage in Galway in the early nineties, and knew the owner's name, giving Pat a lead to chase up. It should be pointed out that Pat still had no idea if the car still existed or not, or what kind of condition it was in if it did, but as he was looking for parts for converting his hearse back to a saloon he figured it might be worth consideration for the roof alone. However, the sight that met his eyes when he finally got to see it proved to be more interesting than he could have imagined.

It turned out that the car had spent two decades sitting in the garage of Frank Parsons, who runs a Toyota dealership in Tuam. The original 3.8-litre "boat-anchor" sidevalve and three-speed manual column-change gearbox had been ousted at some point in his ownership and replaced by a far lighter, smoother and sweeter 2.6-litre overhead-cam straight-six from a Toyota Crown, complete with automatic gearbox, but Pat tells me that the swap hadn't been fully finished in all aspects before the car was stored away. However, Pat was blown away by how well the car had survived overall, with the dings and marks it had picked up in storage being more than offset by the lack of any serious rust or rot. A roof donor, this most certainly was not! Although reluctant at first, Mr Parsons was eventually convinced that the Plymouth would be going to the best of homes, and Pat was able to bring it back home to share its garage with his old hearse conversion.

Since getting the car home last April, Pat got busy recommissioning it and cleaning it up while not messing unduly with its patina and originality, a process that took a surprisingly short time. "It had been the early nineties since it was last driven, but on day three after getting it here I had it driving, with the brakes working" he enthuses. "I went at the bulbs and the lights started coming on. It's a remarkable car because I've only cleaned it really." The legendary reliability of the Toyota engine has been proven too, as it ran sweetly from the get-go, and the automatic

gearbox is similarly a pleasure to use, and far more in keeping with the style of this car than the original manual. Preferring to leave the cosmetics as they are, Pat's been concentrating on finishing off some of the rough edges mechanically to make the Plymouth as reliable as possible, including redoing the engine mounts, installing a brake servo from a Toyota Hilux jeep and removing the previously-installed floor-mounted gear shifter in place of a linkage that utilises the standard column selector. In this guise, it's attracted lots of attention at several events last year including the Charleville Vintage Show and the Nenagh Classic Car Club Show.

However, one crucial aspect of the project remains unfulfilled, and that's the history of the car. It's come to Pat with no paperwork whatsoever, and even though he was lucky enough to be able to retain the original registration number instead of resorting to a ZV, he's still none the wiser as to the car's first owners, be it an embassy, a funeral director or even the government. A couple of people have mentioned to Pat that they thought the car could have been part of the JFK cavalcade in 1963, and Pat has tracked down photos that may show this car at that time, but unfortunately without the registration visible. The fact that the car has a red interior is also puzzling to Pat as all of the others he knows of had grey or green trim, so if any of our readers could shed any light on this he'd be very grateful. Any information can be forwarded to us here at the magazine.

Thanks...

Pat would like to thank everyone that's contributed to this project for their hard work, support and guidance, including Brett Ralph, Pío McCarthy, Kevin Herron and Richard O'Donoghue. Irish Vintage Scene would like to thank the owners of Castle Oliver for their hospitality when providing the location for our photos.



The tall fins of the '59 Plymouths are very much of their time, as this styling had reached its pinnacle at the end of the fifties and would gradually be toned down thereafter.