



FORDIE'S FAVOURITES

CMM correspondent Grant Ford Grant Ford views the classic scene from 'down-south'; the custodians and the clubs, the cars and their construction ...

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FIAT 500 TOPOLINO - THE 'LITTLE MOUSE'



NOT EVERYONE MAY AGREE but surely most folk love the simplistic beauty of the early Fiat 500 Topolino.

Finding the advert (pictured above, right) from Christmas 1937 for a Worthing car dealership that were 'district distributors' for the

● **Young Carlo Zampa, a winner at the Malta GP Concours; his Topolino was originally purchased by his grandfather.**

brand turned up some really interesting stories around this great little pre-war Italian icon. The advert almost certainly coincided with the first of these cars arriving on our shores, with its launch being the same year.

The first thing of note, the promotion states the little Fiat was 82% British material which I cannot fathom but there is no doubt the car's design enjoyed some forward thinking. 12 volt electrics, 4 speed synchromesh gearbox and

The "500" Fiat

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leather seats all for £126.14 in a pre-war car; good value when you consider a Standard 12 or MGTA of similar vintage was another £100. The in line four cylinder engine boasting 569cc was able to offer drivers of the car named 'Little Mouse' (also the Italian for Mickey Mouse) 47mpg and a terminal speed of 53mph.

The Topolino changed very little over its life span and when production ceased in 1955 well over half a million had been produced in coupe, cabriolet or the rather rare station wagon.

The idea of the 500 was first mentioned as early as 1919 and although images often appeared in Fiat catalogues the real thing failed to materialise for 15 years. Fiat boss Senator Agnelli proposed the companys 'peoples car' the same year Hitler and Porsche began work on the Beetle. With a selling price of just 5000 lire, the car would be expected to carry two people in comfort plus 50kg of luggage; the job of designing the chassis, transmission and engine went to Dante Giocosa.

At only 29-years-old the aeronautical engineer managed to tick all the boxes and with the body designed and built separately by Fiat coachwork guru Rudolfo Schaffer the two parts were simply bolted together. Whilst the two door versions were available in right hand drive, the station wagon was mainly produced for the European market.

Firstly the model was named the Giardinetta but from 1952 became the Belvedere and only 60 RHD cars were produced; a while back I found one in Haslemere. The car owned by Jan Chantrill is exceptional and started life being shipped to Nyasaland (Malawi), a British colony in the 1950s.

It returned in the 80s and has been fully restored to perfection. Motorsport and the Topolino do not go together like 'peas and carrots' but research led me to the tough world of stock car racing where the little cars body-shell became the must have look of the 60s and 70s and they are still being used today in the Heritage series. The great Mike Hawthorn left college in 1946 when he immediately acquired a rather battered Topolino.

He enjoyed practising sliding

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Classic French Travel Companion

The timing could not have been better; whilst I am planning to hop onto several Brittany Ferries this coming season and sample classic car events 'Gallic' style for CMM, a new book has just been released to aid my adventures.

'France: The Essential Guide for Car Enthusiasts' written by Julian Parish has 200 events, shows, museums and circuits for you to ponder, all helpfully split into regions of the country, so planning your trip couldn't be easier. The author was born in Southport but has lived in France for 20 years and appreciates all things classic and has managed to collate not just the well-known events such as Le Mans and Angoulême but more interesting many you will never have heard of.

Whilst planning my trips this year I have found getting information difficult with most of the websites not responding to my Google requests and of course there is the language problem. This book carries all of that information including contacts, websites plus a detailed description of every venue, maps and even sat nav coordinates; many are within a couple of hours of the channel ports and whilst the cost of a ferry crossing has to be taken into account most are free to attend and only a few will require a Goodwood sized bank loan on entry.

I was lucky enough to speak to Julian from his came to him about 5 years ago and his research and ½ years to complete. He drew up a list of all the events he could and divided them into areas before setting out to see just what they offered.

Museum displays

Most UK visitors will look first at the area of north east France which goes from the Belgium border down to Le Havre and across by passing Paris (which has its own section) to Germany and Switzerland. Julian also pointed out the museum displays can vary from original private collections in rustic outbuildings to perfect rare machines in stately surroundings.

One thing the French are very good at is a Concours d'Elegance competition. By incorporating period attire and music with light shows they can be enjoyed by all the family and are quite a spectacle. This year I am looking at the Western region, from Dieppe to Bordeaux and inland to Le Mans, all drivable in one day if the overnight is used from the south coast ports. I had already planned my visits prior to the release of this book; I wish I had waited as Julian Parish has detailed several events and museums I had never heard about. Still there is always next year.

France: The Essential Guide for Car Enthusiasts is compulsory reading for those adventurous types that enjoy fine wines and great food with their diet of all things classic car. My advice is purchase the book and make your plans; board that ferry you really won't regret it.

Published by: Veloce Publishing Ltd, www.veloce.co.uk Priced at £14.99. ISBN 978-1-845847-42-5. Paperback; 248 pages, 503 pictures



● **David Kipling supplied this image of Andy Webb with his Topolino stock car.**

through corners in the little car, something that the world would admire him master in much more powerful machines just a few years later.

Cooper's first race cars post war were built during a time of real austerity, JAP powered 500cc Formula machines with suspensions taken from the front ends of scrapped Topolino's. A great little

car that still oozes character and charm; as one person put it 'I don't think they could come up with a better looking 'peoples car' today', (the owner of a 1937 coupe, American talk show host Jay Leno).

● **Jan Chantrill's Belvedere is not only rare but in fantastic condition.**

