

British Cars



British cars were designed on the precept that suffering builds character. There is no other reasonable explanation for the years of diabolical designs inflicted on the people of Britain and her colonies.

Simple, yes, practical sometimes, lovable even, but never easy. Unlike the Japanese system, whereby the man managing the assembly line probably used to work there, the rigid British class system ensured that the people who made the decisions were almost always completely out of touch with reality.

Probably the best example of this is the Morris Minor. You probably think of the Minor as a traditional British design, yet if Lord Nuffield, (head of the company that owned Morris) had had his way, the Morris Minor would never have been built. Lord Nuffield fought tooth and nail, first to stop this silly new design from being developed, and then to stop it going into production. It was only the sheer will of its designer and his allies that gave

the public the chance to vote with their chequebooks.

The reason that early Morris Minors never had heaters was because management felt that such luxuries would not be wanted by the British people. Is it any wonder the Japanese took over?

To say that the British built their old cars well is not true – they built them solidly, which is not necessarily the same thing. The reality is that the British designs of old, with a few exceptions, always involved horrible compromise between the progressive attitudes of the young designers, and the stuck-in-the-mud attitude of a completely out-of-touch management. Couple this with a trade union movement that saw any attempt at economic rationalisation as a dire threat, and you have the debacle that all but ended the car industry in Great Britain.

This was sad, because on the positive side, British cars were among the very last to have that elusive quality known as character. Somehow, computer-designed cars almost never have it.

Old Morris Minors exude a friendly charm that has a lot to do with the fact that before the age of computers, designers

tended to unconsciously build mechanical creatures, rather than bland boxes on wheels.

It's no accident that the headlights on a Morris Minor look curiously like eyes. The designers, in a way, were sculptors who built their own hopes and fears into their vehicles.

This is why we have a two-sided view of British cars. In terms of practicality, older British cars tend to be among the least reliable you can buy. In terms of charm, they are among the best you can buy. If you want charm and reliability, then buy a VW Beetle, because few British cars are capable of providing both.

Many of us would love a Rolls Royce or Range Rover, but for sheer value-for-money, you still can't beat the cars from Asia. Sorry •

