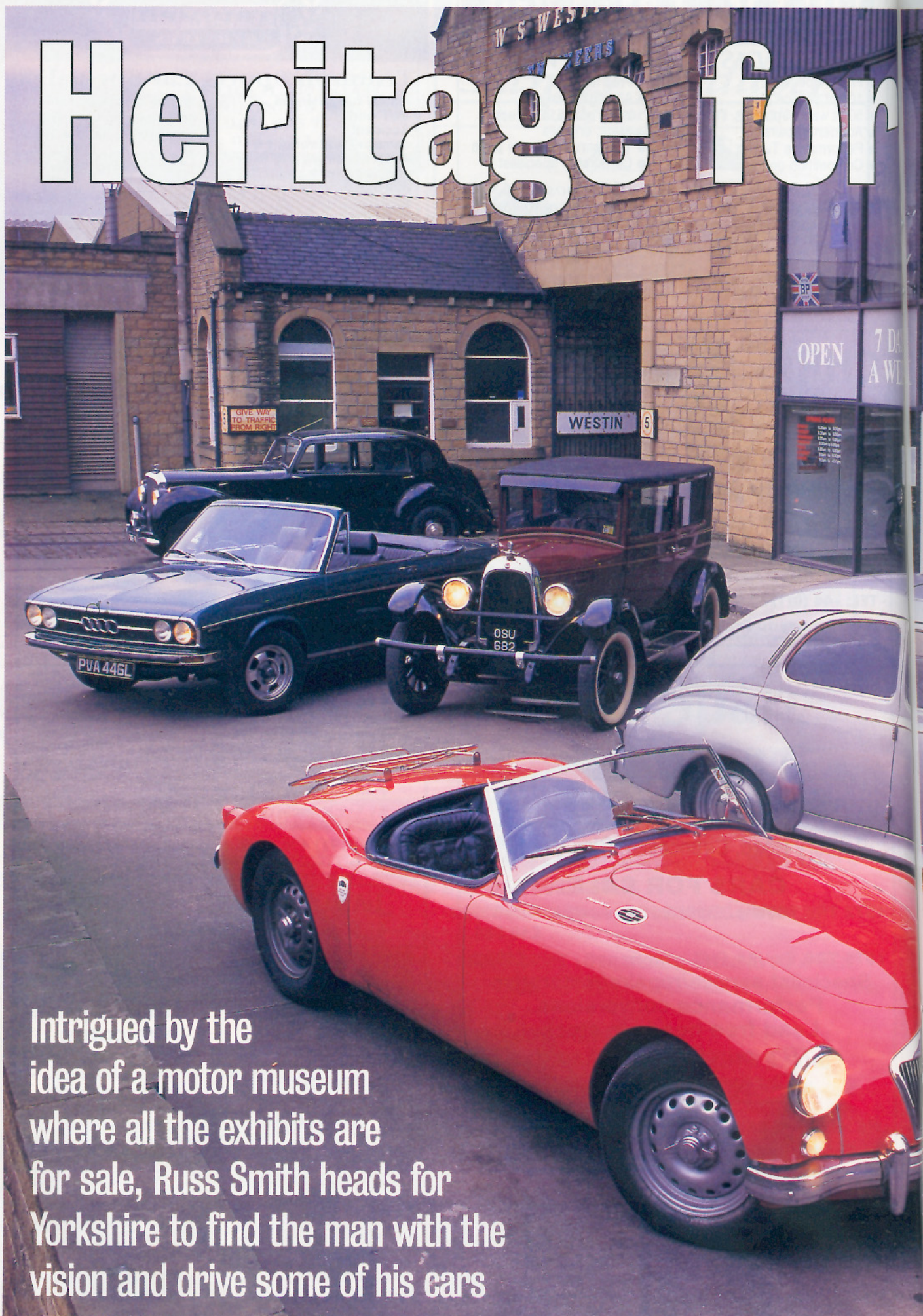


PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK DIXON

Heritage for



Intrigued by the idea of a motor museum where all the exhibits are for sale, Russ Smith heads for Yorkshire to find the man with the vision and drive some of his cars

sale



DAYS
WEEK



MAIN PICTURE: five go mad in Yorkshire — anticlockwise from front, MGA Twin Cam, Peugeot 203, Willys Overland Whippet, Audi 100 Crayford convertible and Bentley Mk VI.



Grundy Mack boss Nick Szkiler reckons Rolls Shadows are top value.

IT'S always seemed clear to me that car museums are dusty places you visit perhaps once or twice in a lifetime. Classic car dealerships are interesting enterprises with a hint of wallet-danger, usually run by eccentrics, hopeless romantics or Arthur Daley's older brother. Combining the two is just plain confusing. Nick Szkiler, the brains behind Grundy Mack, has a clearer view of things, and a nose for making a bob or two at the same time. The firm now supports a staff of 12, most of whom are real enthusiasts.

'The beauty of it is that people can come week after week and see something different every time.' Having run Grundy Mack as a regular classic car dealership for four years since May '92, the move to their current premises prompted the idea to do things differently.

'We got together with Brian Collins who had run an automobilia museum at Hebden Bridge for 15 years. His visitor numbers had been declining, so I asked him to bring his Austin Sevens and automobilia here to display. That fulfils enough of the criteria for a museum to keep the local authority happy — there must be a core display with a theme. It was their suggestion to put the road signs up, which is good for us.'

Pedants in the museum profession may disagree with this, citing their long-winded definition of what does constitute a museum. 'Non-profit-making' is a notable part of it. In fact, Grundy Mack make no admission charge, merely suggesting a contribution of £2 for adults, OAPs £1.50, children £1. There's no pressure attached to this, though, just an old petrol can to drop money in, chained to a table by the exit.

Not far along the row of cars that starts by that table, I spot a most unusual exhibit. Something you don't see every day in Yorkshire, or anywhere else for that matter, is a 1927 Willys Overland Whippet. Good value for the name alone, this was the cheapest new car you could buy in America in its day at \$495, launched to undercut Ford. History and the overwhelming number of blue oval badges about today tell who won that war. Willys made the fight interesting for a while, but were overwhelmed by the Depression and the success of Ford's Model A.

My interest does not go unnoticed. 'Take it for a drive,' suggests Nick. 'We'll bring it round the front.'

This should be interesting. I've not driven a car this old before: at least not a real one, still as its maker intended it. No big Chevy V8 here, just a four-cylinder sidevalve reputed to be worth 30bhp. Still, all the pedals and controls are in the right place; just remember that the three-speed gearbox has first where you'd normally find second, as on a Ford Pop. And you have to double-declutch, I'm reminded.

Out on the road, the roar of the engine and whine of the gears remind me of one of Larkin's buses. The performance feels similar, too, though these cars were actually noted for their speed back in the

Twenties. To my mind the men who set journey averages of over 70mph in these cars were real heroes. You'll probably agree after reading on.

The steering manages to be both heavy and vague, not helped by the car wandering, quite a bit of which is due to primitive sprung reel dampers — Gabriel Snubbers — which look a bit like surveyors' tapes.

Growling along with 40-45mph wavering on the tiny revolving drum speedo set in one of three upright ovals in dash, I apply the brakes with much trepidation. At first a





**NICK SZKILER:
THE BOSS**

Nick is a real Jaguar man at heart, and worked for a Jaguar dealer before setting up his own business six years ago. His favourite toy is a rather special Jaguar: 'It's the only surviving XK140 to have done the Monte Carlo Rally. I'll probably never sell that. Can you imagine a car dealer with a conscience?

'The guy I bought it from had an illness and wasn't going to be able to drive it much longer. I suggested it should be in a museum, but Jaguar weren't willing to pay enough for it. I bought the car on the understanding that it will stay as part of the display here as long as we're in business. He still comes in from time to time to see it.

'I'm also now becoming increasingly interested in the older classics, from the Thirties and Forties, as my knowledge of them continues to grow.'



Russ couldn't resist a car with a name like Willys Overland Whippet — strangely appropriate to the Yorkshire location. It cruises well on the flat and allegedly could reach 72mph, given a long enough road. Interior has been retrimmed in 'ironed Womble'.



right one grabs and the car lurches towards the centreline. A second application has it pulling up straight and, you know, the brakes aren't actually that bad — certainly up to coping with the performance.

The interior is very spartan. There's not much apart from seats, which have been recovered in a material typical of Eighties American restorations. The best way I can describe it is a sort of ironed Womble.

Perhaps they roamed the plains of Texas as well as Wimbledon Common.

Back at base, I ask about other museum definitions. For example, they are supposed to be 'in the service of society... for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment'.

'We do quite a bit with the local community, making it available pretty much free of charge. We get school parties and handicapped groups. Everything from cub

scouts to local motor groups use it in the evenings by appointment.'

Noble stuff, but another unusual vehicle has caught my eye. A Peugeot 203, which I've always thought of as a kind of French Morris Minor. Something to do with the shape and era — it was produced from 1948 to '60 and was Peugeot's only model for much of that time. Actually, up close it's

more like a garlic-flavoured Jowett Javelin; bigger (certainly longer) than you think it's going to be from photos. Nick runs through the complicated starting procedure.

'The key turns the steering lock off, push the button with sparks on, pull the choke out, turn the advance/retard knob anti-clockwise and pull button D — I don't know how that's 'start', even in French.' Not a car for fast getaways, then.

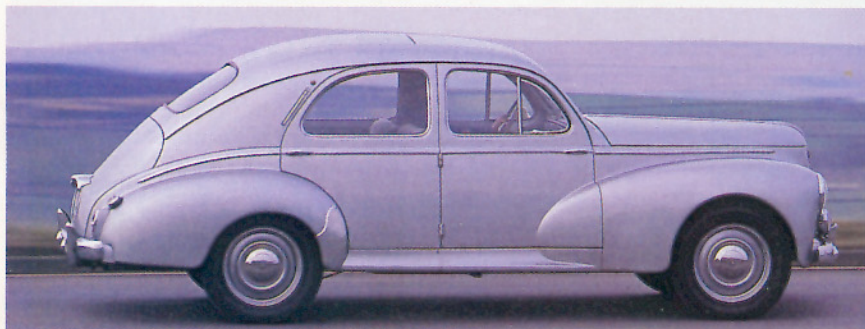
With that out of the way I find it quite a friendly car to drive, easy to get used to and smooth-riding, as you expect a French car to be. Under the long bonnet is a mere 1300cc, but the hemi-head design (like a Daimler V8) makes this look grander than it actually is, and helps it perform well too.

The three-speed column change is not bad, as they go, though it really needs an extra gear in the middle somewhere, which later 203s got, as third is very long-legged and runs out of puff on the steep hills out of Huddersfield. It's alright coming back down, though, with very good brakes and



ABOVE: line up of Austin Sevens is not for sale, but lovely Alvis TA14 tourer certainly is.

BELOW AND RIGHT: Peugeot 203 is appealing blend of Forties American styling and Gallic eccentricity. Modestly sized 1300cc engine gives lively performance thanks to hemi-head design; column 'change stirs three speed 'box.



SPECIFICATIONS

	WILLYS OVERLAND WHIPPET	PEUGEOT 203	BENTLEY MK VI
ENGINE	4-cyl	1290cc/4-cyl	4257cc/6-cyl
POWER (bhp/rpm)	31/not known	45/4500	not quoted
TORQUE (lb ft/rpm)	not known	59/2500	Sir doesn't need to know
TOP SPEED	72mph	71mph	94mph
0-60mph	not known	34.5secs	25.8secs
CONSUMPTION	30mpg (allegedly)	33mpg	16mpg
GEARBOX	3-spd manual	3-spd manual	4-spd manual
LENGTH	13ft 4in (4.06m)	14ft 3in (4.34m)	15ft 11.5in (4.86m)
WIDTH	5ft 6in (1.68m)	5ft 3.5in (1.61m)	5ft 9in (1.75m)
WEIGHT	2085lb (946kg)	2190lb (994kg)	4004lb (1818kg)



steering that turns out to be much better than it feels at first — as if the end of the column is stuffed in a bowl of porridge.

I like it. But time is moving on and I've only got round half the upper of the two display floors so far. That begs an obvious question: how many cars are there here? Nick's finger is on the pulse: 'We have a minimum of 100 cars on the premises; today there are 119. They range from £200 restoration projects to cars costing about £30,000. Typically we turn over 30-40 cars per month, and they're a real mixed bag.'

That's a lot of classics — a car every day on average — so where do they come from?

'Now we've been in business five years, the cars find me; we don't need to go looking. Every day the phone's ringing with people offering us things. Modern car dealers get us to underwrite old cars they take in part-exchange. Or we get people with cars they've had a long time who are now too old to drive and want to sell outright. We've gone past the stage where we buy from auctions; we very rarely do that now. Some early mistakes we made came through buying cars from auction that turned out not to be quite as they were billed.'

So what are big sellers at the moment?

'There's quite a demand for Fifties and

At a whisker under eight-and-a-half grand, Bentley Mk VI is a lot of car for the money. Changing gear requires a bit of a stoop and the steering isn't feather light, but driving this car would make the most committed socialist vote Tory.



Sixties family saloons. We can't get enough good-quality Crestas, Consuls, Wolseley 1500s and Riley 1.5s.

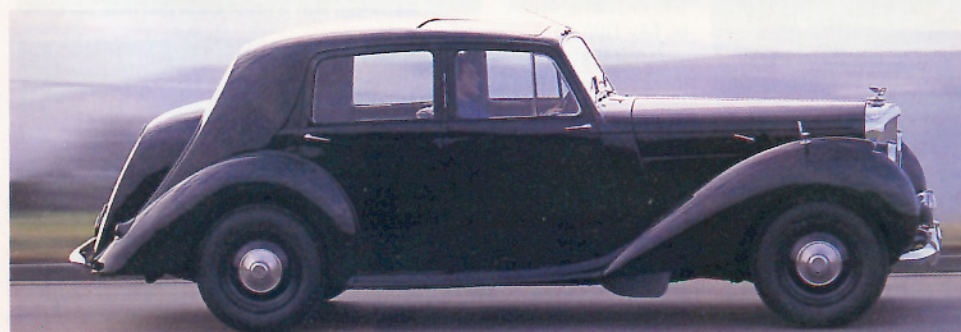
'I'll tell you what's cheap at the moment: Rolls-Royce Silver Shadows. Hardly a practical classic, you'd think, but you can buy a good one now for under £7000 and insure it for under £100. They're great value.'

I have to admit not being turned on by the ubiquitous three-box wedding cars, preferring the more upright and regal earlier cars from Crewe. 'Like the Mk VI Bentley over there? That's a lot of car for £8495.' I should have known Nick would have an answer, and another key to hand over.

I should perhaps also have kept my trap shut about wedding cars, as this is almost identical to the one my wife and I borrowed for our wedding in 1985. It proved a hoot for a couple of days beforehand, ferrying mates to local Chinese, chip shop and greasy chicken takeaway joints.

This one was just as I remembered: very heavy steering, despite having a wheel the size of a dustbin lid, but other than the free bicep workout, a splendid car to drive — there is no other suitable description. The ride is as Sir would expect, though it bashes and crashes at the back more than you'd think on rough road surfaces.

The floor-mounted gear lever is unusually by the door, not in the centre, and quite short. You trip over it getting in, then have to bend down to change gears. It feels beautifully



Cars are the main attraction, but memorabilia is intended to appeal to the whole family — so there are pushbikes on the wall, old radios and other domestic artefacts. Grundy Mack can be opened to groups like cub scouts and motoring clubs, by appointment.



KEVIN HEWITT: SERVICE MANAGER

Another Jaguar enthusiast, Kevin has been with Grundy Mack almost from the beginning, joining Nick from the same Jaguar dealership. He is also into Japanese classics.

'I run an early MA61 Toyota Celica at the moment, and I will buy an XJ-S when the timing's right. I'm quite happy to play with other people's for now and see that the operation here is run as well as possible.'

'Part of the attraction of this job is the wide variety of cars we get to work on. It makes it very interesting. It can be difficult, not from a technical point of view, but more from trying to fulfil people's expectations of an old car.'

'The cars go out from here as good as you could expect. We spend a lot of time with them up in the air on the ramps, doing bush work and the odd bit of welding, or perhaps changing hydraulic pipes.'

'With the changing legislation it is becoming harder to get cars through MoTs. It helps to have a sympathetic MoT inspector, but to be fair to customers we use four different testing stations.'

Do they service or restore customer cars? 'Not restoration. We do offer a service facility for the public, but we don't really advertise it. We just use word of mouth. We've usually got plenty to keep us occupied simply in preparing cars for sale.'



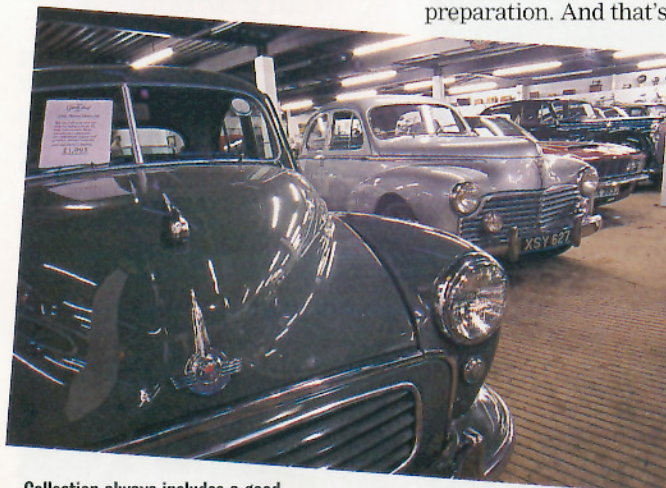
**MATTHEW ALLISON:
SALESMAN**

'If you cut me down the middle you'd see classic cars written all the way through, like Blackpool rock.' At 27, Matthew has owned 24 classics, almost all sports cars. He was a regular customer at Grundy Mack before joining the staff two years ago. He's one of life's natural salesmen, but doesn't think of himself that way.

'I don't consider myself a salesman because I'm not at all pushy, I'm quite laid back. I don't think I could do it if it wasn't something that I'm really into. I couldn't go from here and sell Toyotas or fridge-freezers or whatever. As a dealer you have to sell yourself. Then if the guy likes the car, enjoys driving it, he'll buy it. It's as simple as that. I do have trouble sometimes with blokes who are 40 or 50 and looking at a car of the same age. They wonder what I can possibly tell them about it, but I surprise them and win them over.'

'Practically all my wages go on my hobby. I'm single, which helps. I would like a nice classic car-loving girlfriend, but there aren't any, are there?'

'I work Friday, Saturday, Sunday and it's usually chaos, but we have fun and that's what it's all about. The rest of the week I mess with my toys. My fleet is down to four cars now: Rover P5B coupé, MG M-type, TR6, and an MX-5 Mazda that I use every day. At one time I had seven classics, a motorbike and two everyday cars. My girlfriend at the time told me it was getting silly, then she left me. She was right, though!'



Collection always includes a good selection of affordable classics like Minors — or 'our' Peugeot 203.



Twin Cam looks much like any other MGA to the ill-informed, but goes like a bat out of hell. In its day, engine was renowned for burning pistons, but that can be cured now — this one runs very well.



precise and well engineered, though. Up front, nearly 4.3 litres of straight six is more than man enough for the vast bulk of this car, and does its job with the smooth, quiet, assured air of a well-trained butler.

Hmmn, butler... reminds me of the need for a coffee, and a look round the lower floor at Grundy Mack. This seems to be where the newer and sportier stuff lives. I'm also keen, having found out what is in demand, to ask Nick what isn't.

'If there's an over-supply of anything, it's cars that need work. For every car that we buy, we've looked at five that we won't. Nobody seems to want Condition 2 cars. They're willing to pay a slightly higher price for things that are perfect. People are realising that the cost of bringing C2 cars up to scratch outweighs their value.'

'It's very fortunate for us that in the boom cycle of the Eighties lots of speculators put money into getting restoration work done. We're finding a lot of cars coming onto the market now that were restored in the late Eighties or early Nineties.'

'Even so, people don't realise how much it costs to put cars into the condition we demand of ourselves. There isn't anything that goes out without at least a day's preparation. On average, six percent of the value of the cars we sell goes into preparation. And that's excluding labour.'

'Everything we sell is serviced and prepared for a new MoT, no matter how long the existing one is. My five technical staff spend all their time bringing already nice things up to our standards.'

Things like that red MGA Roadster? 'Ah, you'll like that, it's a Twin Cam. Only came in

yesterday, but it's a lovely driver.'

I heard those two magic words and was gone. Stuff their engine's reputation for unreliability, this is the MG I've always wanted to drive.

For once I am not disappointed. This rare beast — only 457 were made in righthand-drive against a total MGA production of over 100,000 — even has the optional close-ratio gearbox. This short-shifting delight makes the gearing feel surprisingly tall and the car is a pleasure to drive. I stay out longer this time, glad of the efficient heater. After almost an hour, top down with the temperature barely above freezing, only my ungloved right fingers are suffering.

It really is a pity that MG didn't develop this engine further. With their habit of burning pistons designed out it could have been a real contender rather than merely an ambitious quirk in MG's history. And just think how good the 1800cc MGB would have been with a twin-cam head.

This would be a really good choice if you can't quite afford to buy and run an E-type. I cannot currently raise the cash to buy and run a Morris Minor, so it must go back.

I'm still raving about the MGA, but Nick wants to talk technology. 'We must have the most sophisticated database of any classic car dealer. If somebody rings in and says "have you got a so-and-so," most dealers will just say no, sorry, and put their details on the back of a fag packet which then gets

RIGHT: Crayford conversion of Audi 100 produced a really clean-looking car — the poor man's Mercedes SL? Interior is stock Audi, which means it's hard wearing but a bit dull. BELOW: surprisingly, MGA is cosier inside than Audi, top down.



SPECIFICATIONS

	MGA TWIN CAM ROADSTER	AUDI 100 CRAYFORD
ENGINE	1588cc/4-cyl	1871cc/4-cyl
POWER (bhp/rpm)	108/6700	91/5200
TORQUE (lb ft/rpm)	104/4500	111/3500
TOP SPEED	113mph	103mph
0-60mph	9.9secs	13.7secs
CONSUMPTION	22mpg	24mpg
GEARBOX	4-spd manual	4-spd manual
LENGTH	13ft (3.96m)	15ft 2in (4.64m)
WIDTH	4ft 10in (1.47m)	5ft 8in (1.73m)
WEIGHT	2506lb (1138kg)	2480lb (1126kg)

lost. We put their details on our database. So if, for example, a TR2 comes in, like today, I can search the database by category for prospective buyers.'

He punches a few buttons. 'See, it's come up with one match on the TR2, but this chap only wants a concours car, so ours won't suit. That's the way the system works though, so hopefully we don't lose anybody.'

I'm keen to try one last car from the lower floor. A real curiosity, but with a more modern flavour this time. I didn't even know that Crayford had produced an Audi 100 convertible, but here's one large as life and really pretty in a Seventies way. With the easy-to-operate hood stowed, it has the clean lines of a speedboat.

On the road it is also very much like sitting in an open boat. Unlike the MGA, the Audi's heater is out of its league, overwhelmed by the task of trying to warm whole tracts of West Yorkshire. I tried to keep warm by moaning long and loud at photographer Mark, who wouldn't let me put the hood up. Apparently it would spoil his snaps.

In the summer this would be a nice car: It does everything well and is very conventional; in fact, it's much like driving a Cortina. It even sounds like one, which might be disappointing unless you like Cortinas. The interior, too, might disappoint. I found the stick-on wood truly offensive; Blue Peter meets the Black Vinyl Monster. And there's plastic chrome everywhere.

But even taking into account the scuttle



Daimlers and Rolls-Royces form the upper crust on Grundy Mack's tasty pie of savoury classics.

shake and only four gears when it really needs five, it still manages to be an appealing car. It's well converted, a job actually farmed out by Crayford to coachbuilders Carl Deutze of Cologne; and the Crayford club only knows of nine, so you'll probably never park next to another one.

I returned the Audi to what had come to seem like the ultimate toybox. I'd driven the most diverse vehicles possible: five cars spanning almost 50 years, and almost all not the usual fare served up by classic car dealers. Still, with a stock of over 100 cars, you have enough space for a healthy selection of eccentricities. So what are Nick's plans for the future for the museum/dealership?

'This site has been earmarked for a future retail park and it seems likely that at some point we shall relocate. The council wishes to encourage us to take over a former textile mill which would provide even more room than we have here — all I can say is, watch this space!'

Grundy Mack is open seven days a week and can be found on Leeds Road, Huddersfield. The five cars tested may still be for sale — phone 01484 450446 (fax 01484 454148). And if you're wondering why the name Grundy Mack, it's named after Nick Szkiller's dog... allegedly.



IAN KELLETT: SERVICE TECHNICIAN

Another man who loves his job, Ian is grateful for the escape it provided. 'Pressure of work brought me here. I was service manager for a Ferrari, Aston Martin, Lotus and Porsche specialist. Chasing budgets and so on. I like the old stuff and wanted to get my hands dirty again so I approached Nick and I've been here two-and-a-half years now.

'I prepare the older cars, the kit cars and the stupid ones. I enjoy those a lot more than the newer stuff. There's more of a challenge and you need to make things.

'I don't have anything old myself at the moment, but I have had in the past. I restored — well, customised — a Morris Minor. It was a van that ended up as a pick-up with a 1600 Ford engine, gearbox and back axle. All done to look like a standard one, but it went very well.

'It always amazes me that in this day and age we receive so many cars that people have done up, but not finished off properly. You can spend a week going through a car putting in missing nuts and bolts and all sorts of parts. It's frustrating but I enjoy doing it.

'I'm going on the Guardian Run this year, what used to be the Norwich Union, in a Bentley Mk VI. It was bought from here by a friend of mine. He's also talking about doing one of the East European rallies in it next year if we get on alright in this one. If you're going to do it, do it in style!'