

Jowett – The Yorkshire Car



I started to become aware of Jowett cars at around the time I started at Crossleys in 1961. The newsagent on the end of Essex Street where I lived owned a Jowett Javelin saloon and it was different from the other ten-year-old second hand cars running around then because of its streamlined styling and it made a distinctive noise as it drove by – a throbbing exhaust beat like a modern Subaru. During my first year at school, the Head Boy, Peter Livesey, started driving himself to school in a Javelin, which he parked by the end of the cycle sheds at the bottom of the boys' playground. If he happened to be leaving at the same time as I was, I used to wait and listen to the exhaust beat as he started it up and drove up the incline to the back gate.

My walk to school took me through King Cross and occasionally I would see an ancient grey van potter up Haugh Shaw Road and head out along Burnley Road. I discovered that it also was a Jowett, called the Bradford, and it was not as ancient as it looked, being about the same age as the Javelin. It also had a distinctive exhaust beat, but not as dynamic as the Javelin, more a puttering sound. My father worked at the Yorkshire Electricity Board at Highroad Well and told me that they used to have one Bradford in their fleet of vans but that it was unpopular because it was harder to drive, slower and more uncomfortable than the newer Morris Minor and Austin J-type vans. The gearbox had the gears in a different layout from most cars and vans and the story went that one driver was bowling along and went to select what he thought would be third gear. But on the Bradford, reverse gear was in that position and there was an almighty bang and the gear lever shot through the canvas roof, bringing that van's career to an early end. Over the intervening sixty years, I have learnt more about the Jowett company and their vehicles and I have owned a number of them.

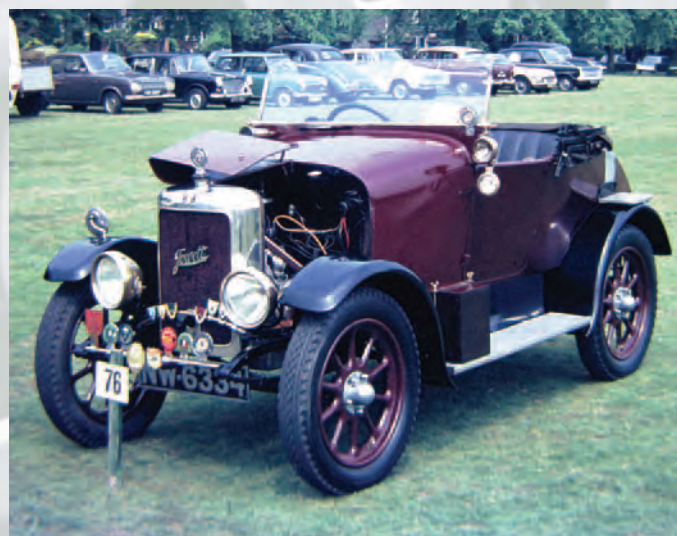
In the earliest days of motoring, experimental cars were built in many towns and cities. In Halifax, William Asquith Ltd, built a prototype car in 1901. Gradually, car production gravitated towards the Midlands, and Coventry in particular, but Jowett were unusual; they started in Bradford and stayed there throughout their life.

The Jowett brothers built their first car in 1906 and tested it over 25,000 miles during the next four years. During 1908-09 they had a brief collaboration with Alfred Angas Scott, also of Bradford, to build Scott-Jowett motorcycles to Scott's design, using his side-by-side twin-cylinder, two-stroke engine. This manufacturing experience gave them the confidence to start making their own cars and the first production model was completed in 1910. The early cars had tiller steering, rather like

a boat but by 1914 a conventional steering wheel replaced this. During World War I, the factory switched to munitions work, which proved profitable and enabled Jowett to move to a large factory at Idle on the outskirts of Bradford in 1920, as Jowett Cars Ltd., where they remained for the rest of their life.



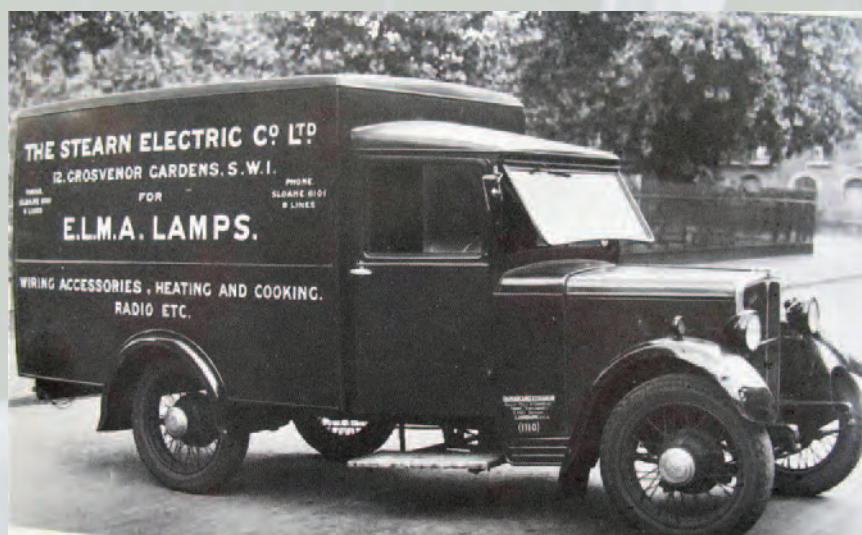
The 1920s saw increased output and attendance at motor shows, along with some quirky publicity stunts, one of which involved taking the Mayor of Bradford and his party three miles through the new sewerage system at Esholt in Jowett cars. Other competitive events entered included hill climbs, trials, rallies and races. The cars were advertised nationally in an idiosyncratic style that was distinctive and often didn't even include pictures of the cars. A fleet of cars was supplied to the Metropolitan Police and Jowett's name gradually spread beyond its native Yorkshire.



Frank Gray, a former MP for Oxford, laid down a challenge for the British motor industry in 1926 – to provide him with a car capable of crossing Africa from the west coast at Lagos to the east coast on the Red Sea, a 3,800 mile journey never before attempted by motor car. Only Jowett accepted the challenge and supplied two cars, which had to tow trailers carrying over half a ton of fuel and water, spare tyres and supplies. This monumental task was achieved in 49 days driving plus 11 rest days.

In 1927 a saloon with an opening hatch at the back was introduced for commercial travellers – a precursor of the modern hatchback. The commercial vehicle market became important to Jowett; by the mid-1930s vehicle production was about equal between cars and vans

The 1930s had not started well for Jowett. On September 3rd 1930 a massive fire devastated the factory; only the office block escaped the blaze. William and Benjamin Jowett were in their



Car Club and the grounds for my permit application were that I needed to have my car in Cambridge to take part in their activities. This was accepted and a permit was issued. I had that car for about 15 years and now it lives in Chorley, where it has had a fresh coat of paint and new upholstery.

During the World War II, the factory expanded, taking on many women workers and turned to munitions work again, producing a diverse list of equipment. When the war ended, so did the regular revenue stream from the Government and Jowett needed a vehicle that would earn them money quickly. They had been planning a brand new car since 1942 but that needed two more years' development, so a decision was made to manufacture a light commercial vehicle – the Bradford. Farmers and small tradesmen

were crying out for such a vehicle. In the next eight years 40,000 Bradfords were built, as vans, pick-ups (the Lorry) and estate cars (the Utility). Many were exported, either fully assembled or in CKD (completely knocked down) form for completion abroad. Significantly, it was the only Jowett model to make a profit in the post-war period.

fifties and questioned whether they wanted to restart production, but in the end decided to go ahead and marshalled the workforce to salvage any usable parts and recommission machinery. Commercial vehicles were back in production by the end of November, less than three months after the fire.



Many new models were introduced in the 1930s, which looked a lot like other makes – square in the early 1930s and more rounded towards the end of the decade. Most models were named after birds, including the Blackbird, Kingfisher, Kestrel, Curlew, Plover and Wren. I bought a 1934 saloon in 1971 (my final year at university) and it was my only car for the next few years, covering many miles in everyday use. You had to have permission to have a car in Cambridge at that time, because of the congestion and shortage of parking. Fortunately I was a member of the Cambridge University Austin Seven and Vintage



I bought my first Bradford soon after I left Crossleys, when I did a year's training at Leyland Motors before starting university. I found two vans on a farm, one half-buried in the ground but the other on its wheels and capable of being towed back to where I was living. The sum of £10 changed hands and I became a Jowett owner. My plan was to restore the van and get it going again but I soon discovered that the chassis was rotten at the back and I did not have the skills (or finances) to repair that. Luckily I found another two Bradfords in a back yard in Leyland and persuaded the owner to part with the better one for £30 (including a box of spare parts, which I later sold for £40). This one looked rough but was much sounder and was soon running, MOT'd and taxed. I had a spare engine from the first Bradford and I was reluctant to scrap it, so I thought of Crossley and Porter and donated it to Mr Rushworth for his after-school Car Maintenance Class, which I had enjoyed in the sixth form. I brought it to the school in my Bradford from Leyland and drove across the grassed area by the boys' fives courts to deliver it to the metalwork room. In the summer of 1969 Paul Ogden (C&P) and another friend joined me on a tour around Scotland in the Bradford, reaching Aberdeen at the farthest point.



On our return I sold the van to the other friend, as I was off to start university. That Bradford still exists, in a much more restored form, in Whitby.



The Jowett Javelin was conceived as a car for export to the colonies, with good ground clearance and independent suspension, to deal with inferior road conditions, and seating for six passengers within the wheelbase. It was designed and developed from 1942 to 1947, when it was launched onto an eager market. The Javelin body (like the Bradford) was made by Briggs Motor Bodies, in Doncaster, and arrived at the Jowett factory finished, painted and trimmed. The mechanical units were fitted by Jowett to complete the vehicle. In the event, production never reached full capacity and only 23,000 were made. I have never owned a Javelin; they are expensive to restore when the bodywork has corroded and the engine is more complicated than the two-cylinder models. The Javelin's lively performance and good road holding suited it to motor sport and it had great success in many of the top European events.



This sporting success prompted the development of a sports car using the Javelin's mechanical units. A sturdy tubular chassis came from a brief joint venture with the racing car firm ERA and Jowett proceeded to design a sports car body to fit this. The brief to the body designer was that it should resemble a Jaguar XK120 as closely as possible without risking prosecution. The end result was the Jupiter, with a head-turning aluminium body, hand-made in the Jowett factory. This was the only post-war model of Jowett to be built entirely in-house and only around 900 were produced. The Jupiter also enjoyed tremendous sporting success, winning its class in the Monte Carlo Rally and the Le Mans 24-hour race three years in succession. Members of the Jowett Car Club still take part in historic motor sport events in restored Jupiters. I owned a Jupiter for about seven years recently but I never really took to it; I much prefer



the older, simpler flat-twin models.

The Bradford was only ever intended to be a stopgap and by the early 1950s it looked its age compared with other manufacturers' new van models. Its

replacement was planned to be the CD range – a saloon, estate car, van and pick-up all on the same platform. Prototypes were built and testing started by 1953 but development of the Jupiter and issues with the Javelin got in the way of further development.

Briggs Motor Bodies, makers of the Bradford, Javelin and CD bodies, were taken over by Ford, which made future body supplies difficult. Early Javelins earned a reputation for unreliability, many with broken crankshafts. Jowett decided to start making their own gearbox for the Javelin and Jupiter but their elderly machinery could not produce the tolerances required and they also became unreliable. The Javelin and Jupiter were expensive (in part because of high purchase tax) and never sold in break-even quantities. By this time, Jowett was effectively owned by the merchant bank Lazard's, who decided that it was a better financial move to liquidate the company, rather than to fund the development and production of the CD models.

Therefore, the Jowett factory was sold to International Harvester in 1954, for tractor manufacture. Premises were acquired in Batley to operate a Jowett spare parts service (maintained until 1963) and all creditors and shareholders were paid out in full. The Idle works were eventually demolished and Ken Morrison built the Enterprise 5 Business Park on the site, including one of his own Morrison's supermarkets, which displays photographs of the site's Jowett days inside.

The Jowett Car Club is the world's oldest one-make car club, dating back to 1923, and is very active today supporting Jowett owners and holding and re-making spare parts to keep the cars and vans on the road. Jupiter owners also have their own club, with its specialist parts section. Both clubs organise social events and produce regular magazines for members. A National Jowett Rally is held on the late-May bank holiday in a different part of the country each year but this year's planned gathering near Preston is still undecided (as at January 2021) because of the Covid-19 pandemic. An annual reunion for former Jowett employees is held in August each year at the Bradford Industrial Museum, when many Jowett owners take their cars back to their home city, but this is also uncertain for 2021.

About a year ago, I decided to go back to my Jowett roots and have another Bradford. I found a partly-restored Utility (estate car) with a refurbished chassis and restored body panels on a new wooden body frame.



I am finishing off the mechanical and electrical components and I have a bodywork expert from the Jowett Car Club lined up to complete the bodywork and paint the whole vehicle. I am looking forward to pottering around the Devon lanes in style!

Finally, I should like to thank Paul Beaumont, the Chairman of the Jowett Car Club, for permission to use parts of a presentation that he created, telling the Jowett story.

I would very much like to hear from anyone who remembers Jowetts, or has old photographs of them in everyday use.

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