



Media Information  
8 March 2013

## **A CENTURY OF CAR-MAKING IN OXFORD**

- Plant's first car was a Bullnose Morris Oxford, produced on 28 March 1913
- Total car production to date stands at 11,655,000 and counting
- Over 2,250,000 new MINIs built so far, plus 600,000 classic Minis manufactured at Plant Oxford
- Scores of models under 14 car brands have been produced at the plant
- Grew to 28,000 employees in the 1960s
- As well as cars, produced iron lungs, Tiger Moth aircraft, parachutes, gliders and jerry cans, besides completing 80,000 repairs on Spitfires and Hurricanes
- Principle part of BMW Group £750m investment for the next generation MINI will be spent on new facilities at Oxford

The MINI Plant will lead the celebrations of a centenary of car-making in Oxford, on 28 March 2013 – 100 years to the day when the first “Bullnose” Morris Oxford was built by William Morris, a few hundred metres from where the modern plant stands today. Twenty cars were built each week at the start, but the business grew rapidly and over the century 11.65 million cars were produced. Today, Plant Oxford employs 3,700 associates who manufacture up to 900 MINIs every day, and has contributed over 2.25 million MINIs to the total tally. Major investment is currently under way at the plant to create new facilities for the next generation MINI.

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# **MINI**

## **United Kingdom**

### **Corporate Communications**

#### **Media Information**

Date

Subject

Page

## **A CENTURY OF CAR-MAKING IN OXFORD**

**2**

Over the decades that followed the emergence of the Bullnose Morris Oxford in 1913, came cars from a wide range of famous British brands – and one Japanese – including MG, Wolseley, Riley, Austin, Austin Healey, Mini, Vanden Plas, Princess, Triumph, Rover, Sterling and Honda, besides founding marque Morris – and MINI. The Pressed Steel Company, part of the Cowley operation, also built bodyshells for Rolls-Royce, Bentley, Jaguar, MG, Standard-Triumph, Ford and Hillman, as well as tooling dies for Alfa Romeo. At various stages in its history it has also built Tiger Moth aircraft, ambulances, military trucks, jerry cans, components for Horsa gliders, parachutes and iron lungs.

The plant has produced an array of famous cars, including the Bullnose Morris, the Morris Minor, the Mini, India's Hindustan Ambassador and today's MINI. It also produced Hondas for a short period in the '80s, as well as some slightly notorious models including the much-derided (though far from unsuccessful) Morris Marina, the startling '70s wedge that was the Princess and in the Austin Maestro one of the world's earliest 'talking' cars.

There have been eight custodians of Plant Oxford over the past 100 years, beginning with founder William Morris who owned the factory both directly and through Morris Motors until 1952, when Morris merged with arch-rival Austin to form the British Motor Corporation. Morris himself, by this time known as Lord Nuffield, was chairman for six months before retiring. He died in 1963. During the early '60s the plant had as many as 28,000 employees producing an extraordinary variety of models.

In 1966 BMC became British Motor Holdings after merging with Jaguar, and the following year that group was merged with the Leyland truck company (which also included Triumph and Rover) to form the British Leyland Motor Corporation. The government became a majority shareholder in 1974, with



# MINI

## United Kingdom

### Corporate Communications

#### Media Information

Date

Subject

Page

## **A CENTURY OF CAR-MAKING IN OXFORD**

**3**

the group undergoing several renamings until it became the Rover Group in 1986. Boss Graham Day was charged with privatising the company for the Thatcher government, which was completed in 1988 with the sale to British Aerospace. They in turn would sell the Group, which included Land Rover, to BMW in 1994.

BMW Group invested heavily in Rover, deciding early on that a replacement for the Mini would be a priority. But considerable headwinds, including an unfavourable exchange rate and falling sales lead to BMW selling both Rover and Land Rover in 2000, while retaining the Mini brand, Plant Oxford, the associated Swindon pressings factory and the new Hams Hall engine plant that was preparing for production.

Today, Plant Oxford is flourishing with the manufacture of the MINI Hatchback, Convertible, Clubman, Clubvan, Roadster and Coupé. It is currently undergoing a major investment that includes the installation of 1,000 new robots for both a new body shop and the existing facility in readiness for the next generation of MINI. This represents the lion's share of a £750m investment programme, announced in the last year, which also sees the significant upgrading and installation of new facilities at the company's Hams Hall engine plant and the Swindon body pressings factory.

The Oxford plant has generated many billions of pounds for the nation, as well as considerable wealth for many other countries around the world during its 100 years, providing direct employment for hundreds of thousands of employees and tens of thousands more through indirect jobs. The plant has a long history of export success from the 1930s onwards, Morris products accounting for nearly 30 percent of the nation's total exports by the mid 1930s. In 1950, the plant produced its 100,000<sup>th</sup> overseas model – a Morris



# MINI

## United Kingdom

### Corporate Communications

#### Media Information

Date

Subject

Page

## **A CENTURY OF CAR-MAKING IN OXFORD**

**4**

Minor – and by 1962 BMC was shipping 320,000 examples of its annual production of 850,000 vehicles to over 170 countries, Oxford contributing a major part of that total. BMC was the UK's biggest exporter in the early '60s, just as Morris had been in the '30s.

Plant Oxford has contributed to the industrial activities of a surprising number of far-flung countries too, by producing tens of thousands of cars for export in CKD (Completely Knocked Down) kit form for assembly in overseas factories. Countries that have built cars from kits include Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Cuba, East Africa, Ghana, Holland, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Malaya, Mexico, Nigeria, Spain, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad, Turkey, Uganda, Uruguay and many others. By 1967 CKD cars formed 40 percent of BMC's exports, the kits assembled in 21 plants around the world. Morris Oxfords, Minors, MGAs, Minis, Morris 1100s and commercial vehicles were among the many models built in these distant factories. Plant Oxford's export record is equally impressive today, no less than 1.7 million MINIs having been exported to over 100 countries since 2001.

The plant has also had a positive and remarkable impact beyond car production, too. Founder William Morris, later Lord Nuffield, was one of the country's most generous philanthropists. He manufactured iron lungs at Cowley to donate to hospitals, while Nuffield Health, Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust and Nuffield College, Oxford University, were all founded by Morris, whose philanthropic gifts are estimated to be the equivalent of £11 billion at today's values. The Nuffield Health organisation flourishes to this day, as do Nuffield College and many other Nuffield-founded philanthropic enterprises.



# MINI

## United Kingdom

### Corporate Communications

#### Media Information

Date

Subject

Page

## **A CENTURY OF CAR-MAKING IN OXFORD**

**5**

During World War II the plant played a role, building military equipment that included Tiger Moth aircraft. Parachutes, jerry cans and aircraft sub-assemblies were also manufactured in large numbers. Cowley also carried out over 80,000 repairs on damaged Spitfire and Hurricane aircraft.

Plant Oxford has employed a number of motor industry luminaries, besides founder William Morris, including Sir Alec Issigonis, who designed the Morris Minor and the Mini that were built there, Leonard Lord, who would go on to run the British Motor Corporation, Eric Lord, who ran the plant when it reached a production peak of 6,000 cars a week during the '60s, and plant director Sir George Turnbull, who went onto help Hyundai become a manufacturer of own-design cars rather than licence-built models during the 1970s. A number of senior figures in the motor industry and in BMW Group today are former Plant Oxford employees, including Herbert Diess, a previous MINI Plant Oxford director and now a member of the BMW AG board of management responsible for development.

Today, Plant Oxford forms the central element of BMW Group's UK production network, which includes the Hams Hall engine factory in Birmingham and the Swindon pressings plant, formerly a part of Pressed Steel. The network faces a bright future as the next generation MINI family enters production over the coming years amid a trend of rising sales and exports.



Media Information

Date

Subject

Page

**A CENTURY OF CAR-MAKING IN OXFORD**

**6**

**The Cars**

Many famous cars have been produced at Plant Oxford, several of them revolutionary. Here are some highlights:

**'Bullnose' Morris Oxford 1913-26**

William Morris's first car, actually named the Morris Oxford but known as the Bullnose because of its distinctive, rounded radiator cowling in brass. A bold series of price cuts saw Morris becoming the UK's biggest selling marque by 1924.

**Morris Minor 1928-32**

A small, affordable car whose price Morris eventually cut to £100, ensuring considerable popularity. Together with the baby Austin Seven, it made the motor car significantly more attainable in Britain.

**Morris Eight 1935-48**

A big pre-war and post-war hit, this barrel-bodied Morris developed through several iterations and remained a common sight right into the '60s.

**Morris Minor 1948-71**

A major step ahead in handling, steering, braking and roominess, the Alec Issigonis-designed Minor was a huge success. The Minor was the first British car to sell over a million, a milestone celebrated with a limited run of Minor Millions painted in a dubious shade of lilac. It was sold as a saloon, a semi-timbered Traveller estate, a convertible, a van and a pick-up.



Media Information

Date

Subject

Page

**A CENTURY OF CAR-MAKING IN OXFORD**

7

**Morris Oxford III 1956-58**

The '50s Oxford was a family car staple of the Morris range, besides continuing with the model name that had started Morris off. An unremarkable car, except that it was the basis of India's once hugely-popular Hindustan Ambassador, Morris shipping all the Oxford III tooling to the company in 1957. The Ambassador – or Amby, as it is fondly known – remains in small-scale production today.

**BMC Mini 1959-68**

The revolutionary Mini was another creation from Alec Issigonis, its transverse, front-wheel drive powertrain and space-efficient packaging redefining small car design. Go-kart handling soon inspired the sportier Coopers and giant-slaying, headline-making competition performances. Classless, fashionable, much-loved and widely exported, it introduced a word to the English language and became Britain's most famous and most produced car with a total production volume of 5,387,862 vehicles. Plant Oxford manufactured it for 10 years from 1959, its counterpart Longbridge, Birmingham factory remaining the chief UK source until its demise in 2000.

**BMC 1100/1300 1962-74**

The second front-drive Issigonis model, essentially an enlarged Mini with Pininfarina styling and Hydrolastic fluid suspension. The most advanced small family car on sale at the time, it sold even faster than the Mini to become Britain's best-seller for 10 years. Launched as a Morris, it was also sold as an Austin, MG, Riley, Vanden Plas and a Wolseley, and was offered in two-door, four-door and estate bodystyles.



Media Information

Date

Subject

Page

**A CENTURY OF CAR-MAKING IN OXFORD**

8

**Austin Healey Sprite/MG Midget 1966**

The vast majority of Sprites Midgets were built at MG's factory in Abingdon, but in 1966 some were also built at Cowley. Arranging this was easier than it sounds, a substantial part of the car already manufactured there by Pressed Steel. The Mk 1 Sprite – aka Frogeye - was a tiny, affordable sports car largely confected from off-the-shelf BMC parts, and to great effect despite its low power. A 1961 facelift produced more conventional styling – and an opening boot - and the near-identical MG Midget version.

**Morris Marina 1971-80**

Much derided at the time, but the Ford Cortina-bashing Marina was a top five best-seller for years despite its simple mechanicals, and a mainstay of the plant through the 1970s. Unusual for offering a coupe version that was cheaper than the saloon, it was replaced by the lightly restyled Ital in 1980, this car destined to be the last Morris. Like the Minor it replaced, the Marina achieved sales of over one million.

**Rover 800 1986-9/Honda Legend 1986-8**

These executive cars were unusual for being the progeny of an engineering collaboration between Rover and Honda, the two sharing inner bodywork, suspensions and some drivetrains while presenting unique body and interior designs. Plant Oxford not only built the Rover 800 but for a short period, the sister Honda Legend model too. The 800 was also part of a major export initiative to the US in the mid '80s, under the Sterling brand name. This much deeper collaboration furthered a fruitful period in which Japanese just-in-time and continuous improvement techniques were introduced to the plant, eventually leading to significant gains in vehicle build quality.





# **MINI**

## **United Kingdom**

### **Corporate Communications**

#### **Media Information**

Date

Subject

Page

## **A CENTURY OF CAR-MAKING IN OXFORD**

**9**

### **Rover 75 1999-2000**

The first and only Rover wholly developed under BMW ownership, the elegantly styled 75 saw a wholesale improvement in both quality and dynamic standards for the brand. Production transferred to Longbridge, Birmingham, after BMW sold Rover in 2000 and ended prematurely in 2005, although variations of the model live on in China as Roewes and MGs.

### **MINI 2001-06**

The all-new MINI recalibrated the Mini as a larger, vastly more sophisticated premium supermini in an evolution that defined a new market, just as the original car did. Widely praised for styling that honoured its predecessor with contemporary and hugely appealing flair, it also won plaudits for its handling, imaginative interior design and build quality. The MINI also introduced personalisation on a scale never before seen in a small car, firing the gun on a trend now widely copied. It exceeded its sales targets from the start – unlike the classic Mini – and was joined by a Convertible in 2002.

### **MINI 2006 to date**

Extensively redesigned for 2006, the second-generation MINI provided more interior room, increased aluminium content to reduce weight, and highly advanced new petrol engines manufactured at BMW Group's Hams Hall plant in Birmingham. It was also one of the earliest models to receive engine start-stop technology. The range has grown extensively to include the Clubman estate, with its radical door configuration, the sporty two-seat Coupé and Roadster, the Clubvan and the Convertible.

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# MINI

## United Kingdom

### Corporate Communications

#### Media Information

Date

Subject

Page

## A CENTURY OF CAR-MAKING IN OXFORD

10

### The BMW Group

The BMW Group is one of the most successful manufacturers of automobiles and motorcycles in the world with its BMW, MINI, Husqvarna Motorcycles and Rolls-Royce brands. As a global company, the BMW Group operates 29 production and assembly facilities in 14 countries and has a global sales network in more than 140 countries.

In 2012, the BMW Group sold about 1.85 million cars and more than 117,000 motorcycles worldwide. The profit before tax for the financial year 2011 was euro 7.38 billion on revenues amounting to euro 68.82 billion. At 31 December 2011, the BMW Group had a workforce of approximately 100,000 employees.

The success of the BMW Group has always been built on long-term thinking and responsible action. The company has therefore established ecological and social sustainability throughout the value chain, comprehensive product responsibility and a clear commitment to conserving resources as an integral part of its strategy. As a result of its efforts, the BMW Group has been ranked industry leader in the Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes for the last eight years.

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