

ELVA Morris Commercial PV



— a racing restoration



**The workforce stand proudly along side one of their creations.
- The Dunbar Collection.**

Restoring an old van in a firm's original period livery has become a useful promotional tool for modern businesses; an appropriate way of stressing how successful they've been serving their customers over a long period. Sometimes the van in question may have remained in the company's ownership since it was last used, locked away in a warehouse and forgotten, or intentionally preserved as a reminder of the company's formative years.

Alternatively, if such a vehicle no longer exists, finding a substitute of the same make and model provides the answer. Roger Dunbar of Elva Racing Components, based in Worthing, Sussex, decided upon the latter route when he was searching for a vehicle to represent either the Fordson E83 W or a Morris Commercial PV van that Elva used in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Promotional activities weren't his main motivation. "This was purely due to an excess of enthusiasm and nostalgia! I was fascinated by the early black and white pictures of these vehicles and the people who drove them, which made me realise I couldn't miss the opportunity to purchase the PV van when it became available."

Roger came across a Morris Commercial PV



Fordson E83W ELVA Engineering Co pick-up with an Elva-Climax MUV sports racer on the trailer that was destined for the Sebring circuit in Florida. - The Dunbar Collection.



By David Bowers

Roger Dunbar's diminutive Morris Commercial takes its rightful place in a line up of restored racing car transporters. - All pictures by David Bowers unless otherwise stated.

that is identical to the support vehicle operated by the Elva Racing Team in those times: "It was a real find, as it was the same make, year and model as the original, which has now long gone to glory. Most probably, its last days were spent as a chicken shed," he said, tongue in cheek.

He went on to say: "The van was advertised in Hull and had recently benefited from a complete restoration in the hands of talented restorer Bill Mattravers of Taunton in Somerset. Bill carefully restored this PV during the 1990s, and his expertise ensured this vehicle had a future, for which we're all very grateful. I'd also like to acknowledge all the PV owners who contacted me, it was so nice to receive so much helpful advice from such knowledgeable sources. I bought the van from a lovely couple; they'd used it for selling items at local car boot sales.

"Once purchased, there was no stopping us, as my enthusiasm spread and various talented people became involved, contributing greatly to

the project. My overall concern was for the van to be as accurate a replica as possible, not to carry any new messages – just those written by Elva Engineering and seen in the mid to late 1950s."

Bill Mattravers' restoration endeavours included a full engine rebuild, including a reground crankshaft and re-bore as well as new gaskets and seals all round to prevent the engine dripping oil all over the place. Other tasks included replacing a bearing in the gearbox, a new clutch, re-bushing the spring shackles as the originals had seized, and a complete rewire that included changing over from a single to a twin headlight dipping mechanism.

When the van came into Bill's ownership, although it had been dry-stored, woodworm had achieved the same sort of comprehensive damage that may have occurred if exposed to the elements, as Bill went on to describe: "The body was full of woodworm for the first four feet upwards from the ground. I had to replace any woodwork at the front, also the body side support frame in places, by measuring up new wood and splicing it into shape. The original front steel panel section was then secured, also the alloy side body panels." Bill continued: "The van had been in a secure lock-up in Taunton for

20 years, so it hadn't suffered any damage or vandalism during that time, which meant all the original glass and instruments were undamaged, which cleaned up nicely.

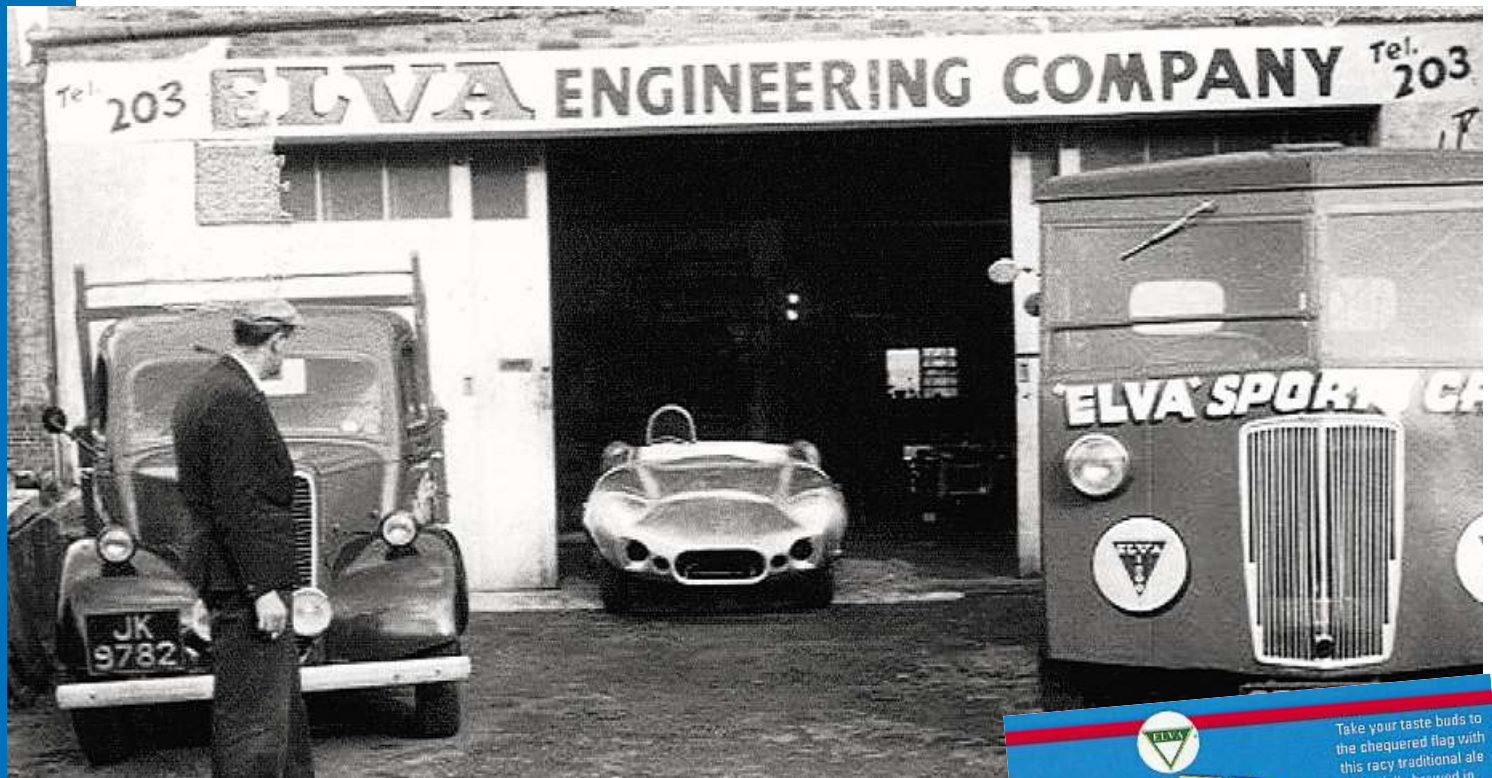
"The PV was the second walk-through van design on the market as there wasn't a passenger seat, and it's believed that the van first saw service with a carpet and linoleum warehouse in Bristol – The Bristol Carpet & Bedding Company, and had various owners over the years until it was eventually laid up, and I bought it in 1993 and restored it over the next four years."

Bill's other restoration projects have included a Unipower timber tractor and an Albion Chieftain.

Elva Racing Components acquired the van in 2006 and Roger Dunbar was really impressed by its roadworthy condition, which left the way open to proceeding with all the cosmetic details of transforming it into a clone of the original works van, a task made easier by access to old photos and the reminiscences of former employees who drove the original. Roger commented: "After checking the van over, and liking what we found, it was repainted in the original colours of Elva's PV by David Cooper and Tony Brooks, with expertly applied signwriting by the artist, Mark Weston."



As found by Bill Mattravers.



A Courier leaves the works ready for delivery. - The Dunbar Collection.



Roger has taken a very pro-active approach to the continuation of the Elva marque, and the van will feature at many motorsport events in future, most likely carrying a few crates of specially brewed ale which also carry Elva's trade mark logo. It's also planned to take the van on the 2007 RCVS London to Brighton Run.

As a by-product of validating the original van's colours and signwriting, Roger also turned up a few interesting accounts of how the PV and the Fordson E83W pick-up truck assisted the company in its formative years by collecting and delivering all the many parts that went into making Elva's competition and customer sports cars.

Roger continued: "From steel chassis tubes through to Coventry Climax engines, a typical trip for the PV would be to tow the latest Climax engined sports racer to the London docks for export to the States, then dump the trailer before heading north to Birmingham and returning via Coventry to load up with new parts before returning to London, where the trailer would be

collected before the driver headed, somewhat bleary eyed by now, towards Bexhill-on-Sea, where a couple of hours' sleep were snatched before the start of the next working day.

"Members of that small workforce remember those times with great affection, and as a result of their total commitment, regular race trophies and a full order book ensued. Their long working days were rewarded by knowing that they were creating something that was exciting, unique and special."

Roger kindly put me in touch with Jim Hearn, known as 'Tosh' to the small workforce in those far distant days. Jim's duties included driving the E83W pick-up, then the Morris Commercial, and finally an Austin three-way loader, which was modified with an extended load bed to accommodate sports racing cars, thus allowing two cars to be delivered at the same time, the second one following behind on a trailer.

Jim recollected that most of the employees, such as Mick Stevens, David Peckham, Len Sayers, Mick Moon and Bob Townsend, who still live in roughly the same area, were each allotted nicknames such as 'Bluebottle' and 'Eccles' from the popular BBC Radio's groundbreaking and successful 'Goon Show'. Jim's moniker, 'Tosh', was bestowed on him by the late Bill Meece, who was in charge of the workshops.

Bill would say: "Come on Tosh, get your coat on," and Jim would be out on the road for up to 20 hours at a time

driving the Fordson or the Morris Commercial at speeds rarely exceeding 35mph. Even when Jim was given a new and powerful 'Courier' sports car to deliver by road, he was honour bound by strict instructions not to exceed 35mph in compliance with 'running-in' instructions.

One incident Jim remembers well was when the Fordson was towing a loaded trailer with almost disastrous consequences due to the poor performance of the pick-up's rod-operated brakes, and the lack of any braking whatsoever on the trailer. "I was approaching a junction where the A22 meets the old A25, and as the old Ford and trailer went down the hill towards a set of traffic lights, I knew that there was no way I could stop. The pick-up and trailer shot through against a red light, with everyone hooting their horns as I raced through with both eyes tightly closed!"

Whether it was the Fordson or the Morris Commercial, Jim recalls that the creature comforts were spartan to say the least, so during winter months he drove along wearing well-insulated bedroom slippers and with a thick blanket tucked tightly around his legs.

Departures frequently commenced before the light of dawn, as a three o'clock start was required in order to drop off a car in Fulham, where it was crated for export, then head north to Coventry to collect engines from the Coventry Climax factory, and on to Guildford to pick up a load of steel tubes which formed the ladder



Basic but it's all there.



The finishing touches are put to the re-liveried Morris Commercial.

Right: The van this one replicates was a real workhorse and its capacious cargo area was full most of the time either with engines, spares or framework tubing.



frame backbone of Elva's sports racing cars.

Roger concluded with the following lines: "It was sheer good fortune coming across this van. I've been told there are only six or so left. Since then, it has certainly attracted lots of attention, that's for sure, and we'd already commissioned a limited edition scale-model of the original before the full-sized one had actually been bought – these are being eagerly sought by model collectors."

Details on how to acquire a model of the van, or a supply of Elva bottled beer brewed by The White Brewery of Bexhill-on-Sea, can be obtained by logging onto - www.elva.com or www.elva-ale.com

ELVA HISTORY

Frank Nichols established a garage business at Westham, East Sussex, in 1947 and soon became involved in the post-war sports racing car scene, which was predominated by many home-built 'specials'. After building and competing in his own cars, Frank recognised the business potential of supplying club racing cars to other enthusiasts, which were marketed under the 'Elva' name – a corruption of the French

words, 'elle va' – she goes!

Frank produced over one thousand sports racers and Formula Junior cars and the road-going Elva Courier, based on MGA mechanicals with a similar ladder-frame chassis to the racing cars, was available from the late 1950s. This model was an immediate success, particularly with buyers who wanted a sports car they could race at weekends. A new factory was established in Hastings to produce further developments of the Courier, also a purely racing derivative, the Courier Spyder, both available in complete or kit-car form.

Later cars were built and marketed as the Trojan-Elva from 1962 to 1964, although the firm then ran into financial difficulties due to monies not received from the US importer, resulting in the Courier being built in various forms by Trojan-Elva from 1962. Trojan finally took complete control of Elva Cars in 1964 and production of the Mark IV Courier continued, although Trojan then concentrated on a new relationship with the Bruce McLaren Racing Team, building Buick and Chevy engined big

bore racing and Can Am cars. A successful arrangement, but following the termination of the Bruce McLaren agreement, the famous Elva name then faded away.

Ken Shepherd went on to produce a final run of about 25 cars during the late 1960s, and today the Elva name commands great respect once more from enthusiastic owners and enthusiasts from around the world. The cars regularly win trophies in historic events in many countries and there is a very active and busy website containing news and information.

The marque will not be forgotten and Roger Dunbar reported the firm's intention to move Elva into a new era, maybe with the Elva badge on a new road-going sports car, or perhaps as a performance version from a major manufacturer. Elva ... She Goes ... into the Future! With a Morris Commercial van as a nostalgic reminder of Elva's illustrious racing past!

RACING CAR TRANSPORTERS

At the Race Retro International Historic Motorsport Show held at Stoneleigh Park, 23-25 May this year, the Elva support team vehicle added a splash of colour to the line-up of much larger racing car transporters, such as those operated by the British Leyland and Team Tyrell; the differences in size between these and the tiny walk-through van perhaps demonstrating the competitive spirit that saw firms like Elva and Lotus taking on and beating the Big Boys over the finish line in those influential times!

In addition to the Elva Morris Commercial PV van, the Commer based Ecurie Ecosse, built for the famous Scottish team by Walter Alexander of Falkirk, that came complete with a Jaguar D-type and an Austin-Healey Sprite, was on display; a Leyland Royal Tiger based transporter once used by BMC's competition department, designed by Pinninfarina and built by Marshalls of Cambridge, once registered to the MG Car Company that carried the phenomenally successful Mini Cooper 'S' rally cars; also a recreation of the Morris Commercial that served BMC in the 1950s until the company pulled out of track racing events; and the ELF Team Tyrell's Leyland coach chassis derived transporter that carried Jackie Stewart's and Francois Cevert's racing cars.



What a superb tribute the van is to the famous ELVA name.