

# The Forgotten Sportscar

FOR TWO BROTHERS to have owned four Aero-Minxes is probably a qualification for the Guinness Book of Records. So if the writer, (one of them), seems slightly biased towards this car, then perhaps also consider the words of the late Gregor Grant. In his classic book "British Sports Cars" he mentions "the grand little Aero-Minx" – an opinion not lightly awarded by such a motoring sophisticate. The Aero-Minx was one of the first 'soft' Sportscars.

Who regards it now with any esteem? It seems almost forgotten, while M.G., Singer, and Wolseley rivals continue to flourish enthusiastically.

Introduced in September 1932, it missed the Vintage Sports Car Club's qualification – by only nine months. Unlike its vintage forbears, the Aero-Minx's designer did give some thought



# AERO-MINX

NEW  
Research

to ride comfort and road holding, as well as performance. For this was the new generation of modern sportscars, with brakes on all four wheels, and bearing no allegiances to flimsy construction, final drive by chains, elastic bands or any other agricultural engineering approaches!

Developed from the 'new' 1185cc engine Hillman Minx Saloon – incidentally the first small car from the parent company for many years – the Aero-Minx predated William Lyons in the cut and shut chassis stakes. Wheelbase was shortened from 7' 8" to 7' 4", whilst the chassis was fully underslung at the rear. Altered springs also helped to reduce the ground clearance from eight to 5½", giving a much lowered centre of gravity, the 4.0' track of the Saloon was retained. The four cylinder, three bearing, side valve engine was the next item for attention. An alloy cylinder head raised the compression ratio from 5.78 to 6.3:1, whilst the addition of a D36 Stromberg downdraught carburettor (on an alloy manifold) together with stronger valve springs raised the engine's output from 27bhp at 4000rpm to a healthy 41bhp at 4400 rpm. By comparison the contemporary six cylinder 1087ccs MG Magna engine could do no better – even with overhead camshaft valve operation – whilst the bigger 1343cc Standard side valve engine of the Swallow SS II managed 5bhp less! With a fiscal rating of 9.8HP, the Aero-Minx engine proved very reliable and long lived. Its last use was in the 1946 Sunbeam Talbot 10 saloon, though it lived on in 1275cc guise to power Hillman Minx saloons into the late Fifties.

During its short life in the Aero-Minx, the Hillman 1185ccs unit saw a few changes. The early 18mm sparking plugs were replaced by 14mm square inlet and exhaust ports became round, and by 1935, the original distributor with .032" contact breaker gap changed to a .025" setting, whilst an updated larger Stromberg DA36 carburettor completed the picture. Some Aero-Minxes have been fitted with shell rather than white metal con



*Original Aero-Minx coupe. From a ca. 1956 colour transparency. This (then) twenty three year old car covered considerable mileages for both business and pleasure. This picture was taken during the course of a 700 mile tour.*

*Burlington (Tickford) drophead coupe – from a duplicate of a 1950's Kodachrome colour transparency.*

OD9526. A Zoller supercharged car. Copy from an original pre-war print.

NEW RESEARCH INTO A RARE MARQUE

*Dashboards of a Burlington drophead coupe, with some non-standard additions. An advance and retard control, fitted to the steering wheel centre was a standard feature.*



Other rivals included the Coventry Climax engined Morgan and Triumph. Also the Avon Specials. I exclude the Vale and Riley Imp on price. It is obvious that those cars with overhead camshaft engines could 'rev' higher in the gears, and therefore provide better third-gear figures than the Aero-Minx, which only had 4400 rpm at maximum

limit was reached, whereupon it had the nasty habit of going up on two wheels, though fortunately for us, never turning over. This was the reason for yet another Aero-Minx, with its low centre of gravity, it was safer!

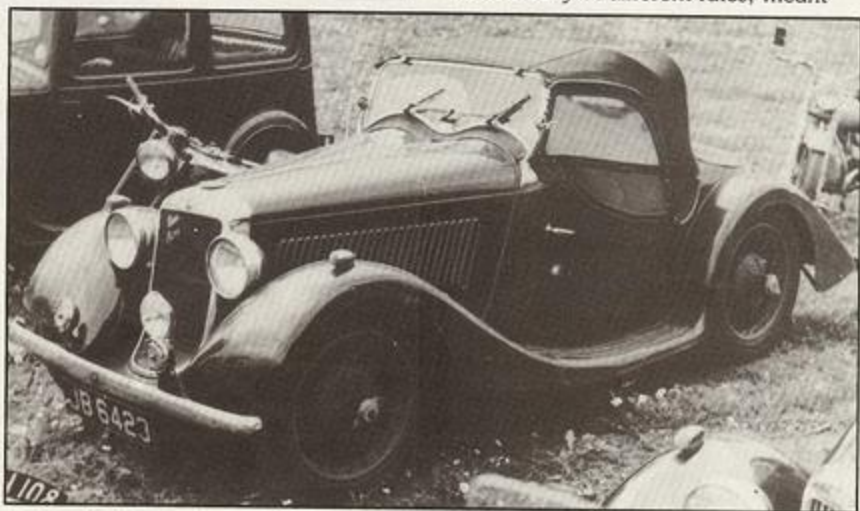
The Aero-Minx brakes were its weakest point. As with so many cars of this period fitted with the Bendix duo-

servo cable operated system, you never knew how they would react, except in reverse when one always took it easy. Early Aeros did not have grease nipples on the cable outers, which called for an extremely messy Saturday every so often. Setting up and greasing were/are crucial, though the discovery of graphite grease did help to avoid the syndrome of both feet on the brake pedal and both hands on the handbrake. Perhaps I am unfair, for the Aero-Minx's brakes were probably no worse than most, though a combination of smallish brake drums (c.f. MG and others) and cables which seemed to stretch daily at different rates, meant

CAR	engine capacity	B.H.P.	no. of cylinders	valve operation	0-50 secs	top M.P.H.	3rd M.P.H.	approx M.P.G.	weight cwt
Aero-Minx	1285ccs	41	4	Side	20.0	75	55	27/30	17/18
MG J2	847ccs	36	4	OHC	20.0	77	60	30/40	11.1
MG PA	847ccs	36	4	OHC	20.8	74.3	60	30/35	13
MG PB	939ccs	43	4	OHC	17.0	76	60	30/35	13
MG Magna	1087ccs	41	6	OHC	18.0	75	60	22/24	16
Singer Le Mans	972ccs	36	4	OHC	22.0	75	62	30/35	16
Worseley Hornet	1271ccs	47	6	OHC	—	76	—	18/22	—
Swallow SS2	1343ccs	36	4	Side	26.6	63.3	53	30	15.9
B.S.A. (F.W.D.)	1204ccs	26	4	Side	—	61.0	—	30	—

power with an absolute limit of 5000 rpm. Taking power/weight ratios into account as well, then the Aeros performed rather better than a paper specification would suggest. MG fans should remember how the J2 had a reputation for "rubber cranks" when owners tried to match the performance of the Press Demonstrator! A polished engine for the Press?

When it came to the matter of roadholding, the Aero-Minx, with its short wheelbase and wide track, was basically an oversteerer. A tail slide was easily corrected by using opposite lock — and/or backing off the loud pedal. The light Marles steering assisted in the correction of over enthusiasm. By way of comparison the J2 MG, we also owned, cornered as if on rails until the



*Hillman variant of the March two seater, photographed ca. 1956 probably at Brands Hatch. Note the lack of louvres in the top of the bonnet.*

*Aero-Minxes belonging to the brothers Glanfield ca. 1954. The lower build of the special bodied BLA 402 is apparent.*

that brake adjustment was a constant chore. In comparison to my cousin's Morris 8 tourer — with Lockheed brakes, the Aero Minx was not good in this respect. During the nineteen fifties an hydraulic brake conversion was available from Girling, though our student finances could not run to this sort of luxury.

What is the Aero-Minx like to drive in today's road conditions? So many of yesterday's memorable driving experiences become a disappointment when repeated. But this would probably be true of other physical adventures — if one were still able... Due to the courtesy of one owner, my brother and



# AERO-MINX

I were able to drive an Aero-Minx again after a lapse of thirty odd years. Upon sitting in the car, the first impression was of the superb view of bonnet, headlamps and wings, which had always enabled placement to the nearest inch without risk of damage to the bodywork. We moved off, conscious of mechanical and exhaust noise even with the lid down and with wind in the hair. All the old skills of double-declutching returned, though the back-to-front gearchange pattern needed concentration. The brakes, at urban speeds were not nearly as bad as

remembered, whilst the steering was light and reasonably precise. After all there are M.O.T. tests even for forty-nine-year-olds.

One suprising feature was the engine flexibility, but then how many modern road tests will quote 10 to 30 mph figures in top gear, as happened in 1934. A stranger to the car could certainly be forgiven for thinking that six, not four, cylinders were under the bonnet. The roadholding was still fun, even though, in deference to the owner's pride and joy, we did not engage in the automobile acrobatics of

yesteryear: in spite of the fact that the old lady herself still felt willing for a bit of fun.

Some of the verve of being bachelors gay again – from those times when this expression was still acceptable – evaporated, when it became obvious that the Aero-Minx could be out-dragged and out-cornered by a Renault 5 full of mums and kids, or worse still by a Transit van with a complement of yobboes and agricultural machinery. To be fair to the Aero though, their loads rolled rather more on bends than we did.



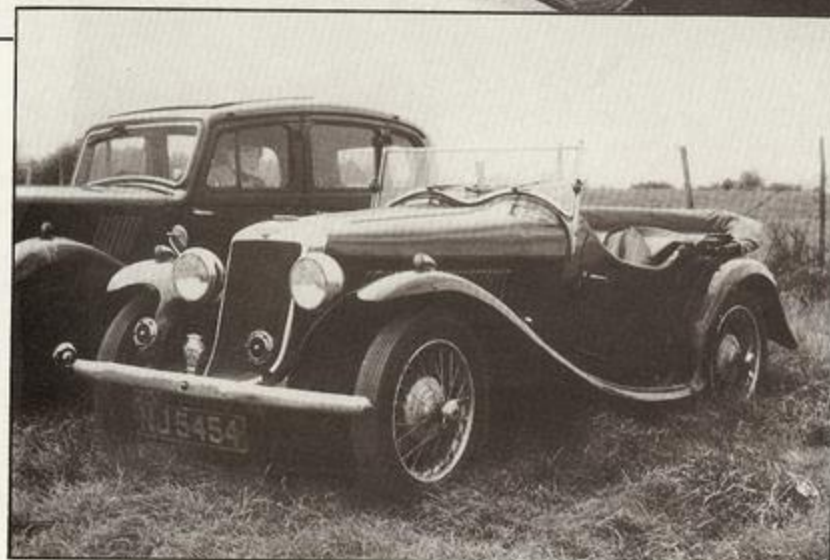
1935 Cresta saloon, photographed at Poole, in Dorset, during the Fifties, clearly shows the pillarless construction.

March four seater at Brands Hatch, with a contemporary Morris Eight for company.

Returning home after this delightful experience, I decided to check the Aero-Minx's 'new' performance with current cars. The sad fact is that the acceleration is comparable to a Fiat 126 or Citroen 2CV, whilst the top speed can be equalled by, at best, a standard Renault 5 or, at worst, a Skoda.

A Zoller supercharged Aero-Minx would have about the same urge as a Metro L, Fiesta Popular, or a VW Polo C, but are they as much fun to own and drive? Two brothers, at least, would say definitely not. □

My thanks for assistance in the preparation of this article to: Malcolm Glenfield, Brian Ayres, Alan Ayres and Bob Bouey.



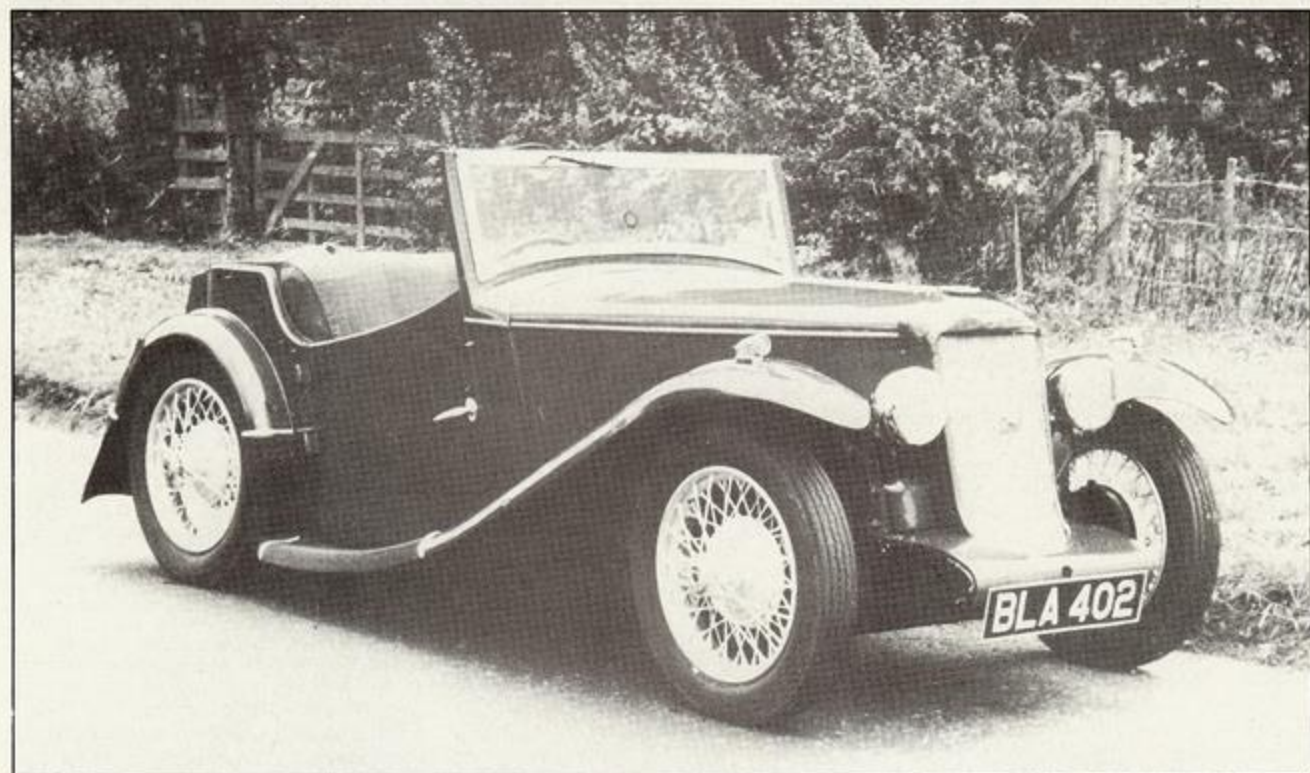
rod bearings, and also the 30 VIG Zenith carburettor. These were almost certainly later modifications as fitted to the Talbot (later Sunbeam Talbot) engines. Perhaps the greatest tribute to the longevity of the Minx engine is that one Aero-Minx is now approaching the 250,000 miles mark – and still without a crankshaft regrind!

From its beginning, the Aero-Minx was offered in chassis form at £145; mostly because this was still the coachbuilt body era. The original Hillman made body was a streamlined two seater fixed head coupe style of ash

and alloy construction with steel wings. Other features included a sunshine roof, transverse rear seat for a third passenger, Rudge Whitworth 48-spoke 4.50 x 18" wire wheels, a revolution counter (for the passenger) and a remote change three speed gearbox. A special 5.00:1 rear axle replaced the 5.44:1 unit of the Minx saloon. The overall weight was just over 17 cwt. The decision to produce an aerodynamic saloon body shape – hence the 'Aero'-Minx? was a brave decision by Hillman and followed later by M.G., Swallow and others.

Introduced at almost the same time was a four seater open tourer produced by Kevill-Davies & March Ltd of Bruton Street in London, to a design by motoring enthusiast The Earl of March. Price of the March tourer was £227, whilst the Aero saloon was £245. 1933 saw the introduction of the stylish March open two seater at £225. The four seater continued unchanged.

In 1934, the Hillman factory produced not only the original fixed head coupe but also variants of the March two and four seaters. The new Burlington drophead coupe at £280,



Two unusual features of the Aero Minx, were the wheel hubs which shrouded the brake drums, and the knock off hubs which were drilled in order to allow ingress of a grease gun. The slab tank at the back was false and only for looks!

was almost certainly made by the Tickford company. With all the hallmarks of their construction, it had a three position hood, with straps provided to hold the furled material when in the open modes. A separate winding handle was provided in order to lower the hood to its fully down position, once the 'pram struts' were broken open. The Burlington drophead was the most luxurious of all the Aero-Minxes and at 18 cwt (unladen), the heaviest.

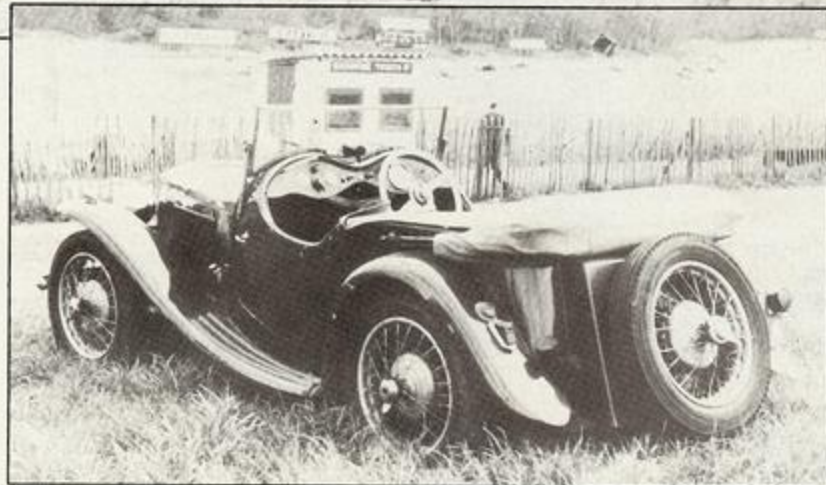
All the 1934 Aeros were fitted with a four speed all synchromesh gearbox. The remote gearchange pattern was the conventional 'H', but with first and third in the backward plane, whilst second

and top were forward. Some Burlingtons were fitted with a standard Minx 'stick' gear lever, which retained a conventional gearchange gate pattern. Apart from engine modifications, the 1934 Aeros lost the separate revolution counter, this being replaced by a combined 'speedo' and 'rev' counter which indicated r.p.m., in third and top only, by means of a concentrically engraved dial.

The 1934 cresta Aero-Minx was the shape of things to come. A two door, full four seater of streamlined appearance, it was to become, in modified form, the 1936 Talbot 10 saloon. The Cresta replaced the original 2/3 seater Aero, and whilst retaining

the sunshine roof, also offered an opening windscreen similar to the Burlington. Disappearing side rear windows were a novel feature. It was priced at £265 a figure retained by its larger successor.

In spite of a chassis option, Aero-Minxes with special bodywork were rare. Only three being known to the writer, a fourth is rumoured. BLA 402 was a 1934 Aero two seater, with cut-away doors and slab fuel tank. Apart from the ribbed steel wings (ex-MG?), the rest of the body was of ash and alloy construction. The painted radiator shell showed no signs of ever having been chromed. The whole car was undoubtedly professionally built, and a



previous owner was certain it had been made by coachbuilders Beadles, of Dartford, in Kent.

OD9526 was a Zoller supercharged two seater with a flat scuttle and fold-down windscreen. Cycle wings were fitted, which was a common modification even post-war. A similar car was seen at Bromley, Kent, in the late Fifties. The rumoured fourth car was a Zoller blown '1½ seater' stripped

for use at Brooklands. Aero-Minxes certainly competed at this circuit but, as yet, no pictures have been discovered. All the Aero-Minxes were about the same 12.0' length, the longer ones usually having bumpers, width varied between 4'8" and 4'11½", whilst dry weight was from 16 cwt to 18 cwt. Production totals of the Aero-Minx have never been ascertained, as Rootes' records were destroyed in the

*The low build of the original Aero-Minx is apparent against its 5'9" owner.*

*Left: March four seater, photographed at Brands Hatch, when an enclosure ticket only cost 25p! Similar cars were used by the Caernavonshire Constabulary in 1934. The registration numbers were JC2001-4.*

war. It is unlikely to exceed more than a few hundred of all types combined. From three recorded series of chassis numbers, only around thirty are known to the Aero-Minx Register. About the same number of sightings as my brother and I noted in the nineteen fifties.

Performance of the Aero-Minx was about the same as its better contemporaries with a top speed, on road tests, of between 68 and 78 mph. Third, second and first gear maxima were in the order of 50/55 mph, 28/32 mph and 19/20 mph respectively. In those days 0-50 mph acceleration times were paramount, the Aero recording between 20 and 23 seconds. All these figures are from Crestas and Burlingtons. I have yet to see a test of the lighter two seaters which should improve upon these times. The chart reproduced gives an average of road test figures for both the Aero-Minx and its contemporary rivals.