

Austin Gipsy

A Road Less Travelled

By Bob Vitrikas

Everybody on the planet knows a Land Rover when they see one but this Austin Gipsy had me fooled for a moment. Similar to the Landy, the rounded front fenders, inset headlights, flat side panels and upright windscreen had me doing a double take when I first spotted it on the show field at the Batesville British Car Show.



Brian Morse's long wheelbase Gipsy looks so veddy British in its BRG paint with white wheels and bumper!

It looked splendid in its shiny dark green paint and a closer look showed this was not Land Rover but an Austin Gipsy. A like new sales brochure displayed on the dashboard gave the game away! A quick peek inside showed that it had been lovingly restored by its owner, Brian Morse. Let's investigate further and learn things shall we?



A nice surprise to see a like new Gipsy sales brochure propped up on the dashboard!

The Gipsy traces its origins to the Austin "Truck, 1/4 ton, CT, 4X4, Cargo & FFW, Austin Mk. 1" commonly known as the Champ which was a military general purpose vehicle inspired by the much loved Willys Jeep. Like its formal name, the Champ was anything but simple and its complexity and cost was ultimately its downfall leading the British military to adopt the much cheaper and simpler to maintain Land Rover. Produced from September 1951 to May 1956, just 4,000 of the originally contracted 15,000 Champs were produced for the British Army. Enter the Austin Gipsy.



The Austin Champ resembled the American Jeep but was far more complex, difficult to maintain with its four wheel independent suspension and Rolls-Royce sourced engine, and too expensive to continue to serve in the British Armed Forces. Photo courtesy Wikipedia.

The Austin Gipsy, inspired by the success of the Land Rover, was produced from 1958 to 1968 to compete with the rival Land Rover in both civilian and military markets. Unlike the Land Rover, the Gipsy had a steel vs aluminum body. An innovative independent suspension designed by Alex Moulton used “Flexitor” rubber springs enabling it to traverse rough terrain at high speeds. Around the same time Moulton famously collaborated with Mini designer Alec Issigonis, to employ the rubber spring design on the revolutionary Mini which was introduced in 1959. Conventional leaf springs were subsequently offered as an option on the Gipsy. Similar to the Land Rover, the Gipsy was offered in short (90 inch) and long (111 inch) wheelbase versions. In 1968 when British Motor Holdings merged with Leyland Motors to form British Leyland Motor Corporation, the Gipsy was discontinued in favor of the Land Rover. All total 21,208 Gipsy’s were assembled in the UK, New Zealand, Australia and interestingly Bogota, Colombia.



This is a short wheelbase version of the Gipsy with canvas top erected. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

P.S. Alex Moulton also designed the innovative Moulton bicycle which, like the Mini, featured a rubber suspension and small wheels.

