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SCAMP CHAMPION

Andrew MacLean interview – the man who put the Scamp on the map



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The kit car that raced against the best at Le Mans and beyond



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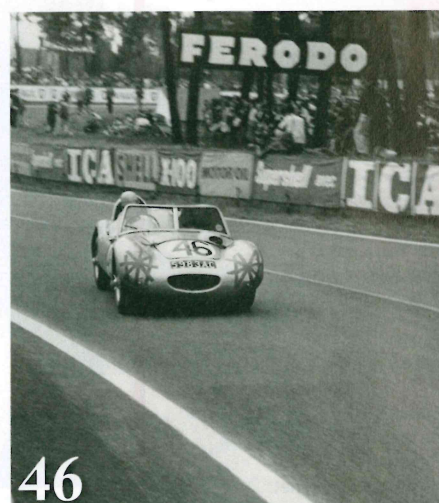
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HAPPY SCAMPER

30 July 2020



He's been building Scamps for over 40 years and simply won't stop. We catch up with Andrew MacLean, the man who put the Mini based utility car on the map.

Words and pictures: Jeroen Booij



The RTV (Rough Terrain Vehicle) had incredible off-road ability...



...and got as far as being considered for military use.

You may not have recognised him with his hands in front of his face, but a few years ago Andrew MacLean was one of three chaps re-enacting a classic picture for *Complete Kit Car* magazine. Three clergymen can be seen standing in front of a picturesque Sussex church with a yellow Scamp Mk1. The original picture was taken for a 1971 *Custom Car* magazine feature headed 'The vicar wouldn't like it' and, as a lifelong Scamp builder and the son of a vicar, a couple of things came together for MacLean that day. The first Scamps that he built actually materialised in the old vicarage at Turners Hill parish church while his dad held his sermons. But his spiritual background did not deter Andrew from becoming a mechanic. An engineering degree at Oldham College of Technology was followed up by one in Mechanical Engineering at Kingston College. Andrew: "I remember we had six weeks' work experience during which we had to make a test piece. I'd finished mine

BELOW: Andrew MacLean attended a Complete Kit Car photoshoot back in 2011.



Andrew with company mascot Charlie, who was depicted in Scamp's advertising in the 1990s.

in one day." An excellent welder with a keen interest in cars, his first project car did not take long then. "My parents bought my first car, a Mk1 Mini in 1967. I was 16 at the time and still know the registration number – GEB 907E. But it was absolutely rotten and I was looking for something to turn it into. I had come across advertisements of the CS2 buggy, which was made in a lock-up near Oldham. I went there several times, but there was never anyone there. I could only look through the window."

But the CS2 certainly wasn't the only Mini based vehicle being marketed in the 1970s. MacLean: "I worked for David Boler, who ran an exhaust centre in Oldham and used to make the T-Bucket. He was friends with Harold Dermott back in 1977, who was developing the Midas. I saw the prototypes and was quite taken by it but there was no chance I could afford it. But when I learned that the Scamp was made close to my parental house, I decided to have a look and that's when I bought my first Scamp from Robert Mandry. This was in 1979." The story of picking it up is worth telling, adds MacLean: "When I went to Mandry's place in Ottershaw, I used the rotten van to pick it up on the roof, as you did in those days. When I passed a hitchhiker on the way up I picked her up. We had a chat and I dropped her off after a couple of miles. She was absolutely lovely! Once I'd bought the Scamp, strapped it on the roof of the van and drove back, she was there again, now hitch hiking back! I picked her up again, she climbed in through the window and now I thought I really liked this girl. So we went to a pub but she soon got bored, took my keys and drove off in the van, with the Scamp

on top! Luckily I found her, but it led to nothing as I never saw her again. The Scamp was a good conversation starter though." That first build certainly inspired MacLean and, over 40 years later, he's built hundreds of Scamps: "Robert Mandry says he built about 3000, and I think it's imaginable. I started in 1987 and built around 400. Not bad either." So how did he get to become the owner of the company? MacLean: "When the importer of Portuguese Mokes asked me to build Mokes with 50 percent local parts, I thought of the Scamp again. They had been out of business for two years at the time and I went to see them and simply took over the business in the end. We lined up production at the old vicarage and it grew from there." The Scamp was not the only model Mandry's business had brought forth, though, as there was also RTV – the Rough Terrain Vehicle – the brief for which was to prove that a four-wheeler could perform better than a tracked vehicle. It used a galvanized square-section steel tube frame with a 998cc Mini engine mounted north-south under the rear deck, driving all four wheels through a centrally positioned Mini differential: the front ones through a hole in the swivelling articulating centre bearing to a Triumph Herald diff and the other driveshaft to a rear mounted Triumph diff. This created a double reduction and very low-gear four-wheel-drive! The body twisted independently to the cab, with as much as 40deg of twist possible, making ditches seem non-existent. The gearbox had to be an automatic though as the linkage otherwise would become too complicated. With massive (at the time) 13in Goodyear



The Scamp workshop in West Sussex is still a hive of activity, even if the Scamp's days of high volume are behind it.

"TOP GEAR MAGAZINE SAID THE SCAMP IS EVERYTHING A KIT CAR SHOULD BE"

Terra tyres providing plenty of ground clearance, it had a 30mph top speed. Trouble was that development had made it very expensive. Andrew: "The army tested it, which seemed hopeful at the time, but it had to have a 50mph speed, which it simply couldn't make." Mandry sold the project to Lawrence Hawgood in 1986, who carried on developing it and came up with a patented hydraulic locking device, which fixed the centre bearing so that it could be driven controllably on smooth roads at speed, too. "Lawrence spent a fortune on it," remembers Andrew. "He just paid people to develop it for him. Harper Adams Agricultural College built seven chassis for him but sadly it led to nothing. Meanwhile, the Russians copied it. They called it the Puma RTV and it was Lada based. Lawrence told me he went to court spending lots of money on trying to stop them, but he got nowhere. Eventually he went to Reliant to see if they could make a fibreglass top for him and he ended up working for them.

He was no engineer and had a background as an accountant but he had lots of ideas flying around. I believe that Reliant was thinking of putting Nissan engines in them at some point, but they never made any. I took over the manufacturing rights but it is simply too expensive to build. I could make one, but it would have to be for someone who's prepared to pay the price. It finished production in 1993." By the 1990s his Scamp Motor Company was experiencing some bumpy rides itself, not in the last place because of the introduction of Single Vehicle Approval in 1998. Andrew: "The cost of SVA was £170 plus a retest fee if it failed which I found off-putting. I really put a lot of effort into SVA but they moved the goalposts so many times, which was really frustrating. I'd developed the Scamp Mk3 GT when the SVA came out. I wanted to sell a few before the new rules came and wanted to have it as simple as possible." And so the GT was introduced as a new family of Scamps offering a new



There's a new galvanised Scamp chassis...



...and an RTV build on the go in the Scamp workshops.



Scamp 4x4, based on Suzuki or Daihatsu, sidestepped the SVA test.



Andrew has been building Scamps for four decades.



Interest in the car is still strong and there's an active owners' club.



Classic A-series power for this Mini based classic.



generation of rugged, kit form, utility vehicles which provide a practical route into the ever growing world of all-wheel drive'. That meant a breakaway from the tradition of Mini power. Or not? To quote the sales brochure once more: "We at the Scamp Motor Company have always been ardent believers in the one-donor philosophy: the key to the longevity of our Mini-based models." So Minis after all for the two-wheel-drive versions, although Andrew chose the Suzuki SJ or Daihatsu Fourtrack as the donor vehicle for the four-wheel-drive versions. Unfortunately they did not become the success he'd hoped for: "In the end I sold only about 30 of them, of which just nine were the 4x4 versions, which was disappointing." What sort of figures was he thinking at the time? "Well, hundreds would have been nice!"

Then there was also the Jimini. Andrew: "I bought out Jimini in 1995, which had been a competitor to the Scamp, taking it on from my good friend Dave Cameron, who went on to run a pub." But the Jimini project brought in difficulties, too. Andrew: "I asked Gerry Hawkrigge to do the bodies but he was having troubles with BMW at the time, as they were stopping him from using the Mini name and building the MiniSprint replica. I asked Fi-glass in Edenbridge and we registered it as the Highlander, but we weren't allowed to use that name either. This led to it simply being called the Jimini 2, which we later built as the Evolution Cars Carimoke in Barbados (more on that in a future issue). I found that originally the Jimini didn't have any steel inserts where the body

joined the subframes, it just used thicker fibreglass at these places. I was surprised about that!"

While the Jimini 2 project was sold on, official production of the Scamp range ended in 1998/1999. Andrew: "I keep on doing it though, rebuilding old Scamps. Interest is actually rising once again and I have got orders to build three at the moment. One is an interesting vehicle as it is a racing car for the current Hartlepool and District Autotesting champion. It is made of 1.5 stainless steel chassis, which is lighter and stronger. I had the stainless in stock and always wanted to make one for myself when he contacted me about this car. But I can do them in any size and shape you like. I did a Mk1 recently and am currently also building a chassis that is 10in longer than the standard one." And how about the RTV chassis that is taking up much of the space of his garden room at the moment? MacLean: "It's one built by Mandry but modified by Hawgood. I have made some adjustments on the rear suspension as you may have

seen. It now uses double rubber balls with a plate on top of the trumpet cone. I call them load spreaders and they make the ride softer. There's doubled up suspension back and front with no shock absorbers because you are relying on the tyres. But I can make anything the customer wants, really."

Looking back, what did four decades of Scamp building bring him? "Fame, not fortune," he laughs, proudly showing a copy of *Top Gear* magazine, which typically slaughters a number of vehicles in a feature about kit cars. But not the Scamp: "It's everything a kit car should be – cheap, easy to build, unpretentious and indestructible... It's the Cliff Richard of the kit car scene that's been around for 25 years, but hasn't gone grey around the edges." That actually goes quite well for MacLean himself, who's just taken another order on the phone. "With the current interest in Minis and kit cars it's good to see younger people taking it on now. See, it brought me many happy memories and also some sad ones. But I've learned to make the best out of things!"



Andrew MacLean is still building the cars he loves.

"INTEREST IS RISING, I HAVE ORDERS FOR THREE SCAMPS"