



The MESSage



Newsletter of the Middlebridge Enthusiasts Scimitar Set



: middlebridge@live.co.uk

January 2021

Mick's MESSage

With no car events and boredom at a premium our SE5a (111 GTE) was MOT'd, serviced and I must say I had forgotten just how quick and nimble she is add to that the glorious V8 exhaust note. Both of the Sierra's are on hold again as the garage has shut down due to COVID restrictions.

Typical example of how stupid I am, my aim was to start reducing our fleet of classics and with this in mind we have obviously now purchased yet another Middlebridge (well, Matt has) by the time you read this MB 69 will have been collected and transported to Northampton. She was formerly a very well-known concours championship winning car while in the hands of John Cassingham. The previous owner used her as a daily driver and it is Matt's intention to return the car to concours.



Matt's new purchase—Middlebridge 69

111 GTE has now been sold and with her number plate, I did not want to split the car from the plate and also it was very important to me that the new owner would really bring her back to the fore and with that in mind I'm delighted to say that Paul Turnbull is the new owner and I know that 111 GTE will soon be making herself very well known within RSSOC circles.

The reason that I can be so confident is that Paul's company GT Evolution specialise in fibreglass cars and in particular Scimitars which Paul has worked on and raced for many, many years.

Paul is delighted with 111 GTE, like me he loves the glorious sound and the performance of the V8 power-plant. I'm so pleased and I'm sure I will see her again and hopefully mid 2021. ;o)

Needless to say Paul and I discussed several current issues that have been aired by Middlebridge owners in our recent MESSages and with this in mind please see below.

Middlebridge, Wilwood Front Brake Upgrade. Wilwood front upgrade for £950 supplied & fitted!

Middlebridge, Rear disk conversion.

'I certainly do the rear disk conversion and it's £795', this includes new VW calipers, solid discs, pads, braided conversion hoses and fitting.

Middlebridge, Quaife LSD Conversion

I also do a Quaife LSD conversion which is £2195 including full rebuild of the axle.

(All prices correct at time of writing.)

EPAS. (Electronic Power Assisted Steering)

Paul is doing EPAS on a 5a in the next few weeks. I'll know more then. There was a trick when sprinting a SE6 to get a quick rack! Leave it with me, I'll do some homework.

Paul has in his time completed numerous complete rebuilds on all of the various Reliant models and has owned 2 x Middlebridge's as well, No 25 & 40. Should anyone require Paul's services, his full company details are below:

GT Evolution

Unit 24 Cliffe End Business Park, Dale Street,
Longwood,

Huddersfield, West Yorkshire

HD3 4TG

info@gtevolution.co.

www.gtevolution.co.uk

07870 181759



Moving on,

Both Will and myself are delighted to confirm that MB 15 is now in Germany and has already been TUV approved and registered. I personally think it's great that we have cars in Ireland, Wales, Scotland, France, Holland, Sweden, Germany and of course Australia. (where next?).

MB 33

At the time of writing this, Matt and I have still not has a single day off this year and we're so fed up doing nowt during the miniscule quality time we get off. (we were desperately hoping to get to the NEC for a break). I have recently started using MB 33 on any nicer days and for any decent trips.

Sadly, early November, I lost MB No 33 to outside storage to allow No 69 space as there is work to do on her prior to paint. Incredibly I do NOT have a to-do list for 33 hence she will hopefully return in the condition she left me.

Matt has decided to part paint MB69 even though it is more difficult, this is because the car is virtually totally original apart from the fitment of a CD player which will be converted back to one of the original Middlebridge Alpine stereo's. (Blimey how dear are these to buy).

While digging out material I just found a picture of MB33 in better times, I grew up next to Bettys-town Beach, Drogheda and taught my kids to drive on the beach, as did the rest of the town. Pictured is Abigail my youngest on a driving lesson.



Middlebridge 66

Please see attached a picture of the new sexy Swedish rocker covers as now fitted to Steve's Middlebridge. No 66 has certainly been transformed post arrival in Sweden and I for would love to see her back in blighty for our 35th Anniversary. (Steve may even win the furthest travelled as well). ;o)



Regalia

The Middlebridge logo'd regalia is now available, please just navigate to the For Sale area of the Middlebridge website and open the lower link.

Anniversary Zoom meeting

We do hope that some of you will join Will and the rest of the Messy mob on 06.02. 2021 as this

is actually the anniversary of the formation of the MESS at the Countryman Pub in Staverton, we have come a long way in 8 years!

GEORGE'S JARGON

A Happy New Year to all, despite the recent and understandable declarations by Government to prevent such joy ever happening again...

Even more suspenders...

As mentioned in a previous epistle my Middlebridge gained an advisory on an Avo shock absorber that was slightly leaking oil. After some research into alternatives, I decided to continue with Avo products, so a visit to their factory in nearby Northamptonshire ensued, armed with both rear units for an overhaul. In the end I had to fit new shocks as the adjusters had seized and snapped off during the dismantling process.

Whilst there I discussed with Avo staff the failed experimental multi-rated-spring set-up that I had tested some years ago.

For those not familiar with the experiment it was basically 2 differently rated springs fitted to each shock absorber. The weaker spring was always under compression until (say) the wheel dropped into a pothole where it then came into

play. The stretched weaker spring then eased its way out of the pothole before the main spring came back into full use again.

It certainly improved the ride, indeed I took Micky G for a trip in my Middlebridge around the appallingly maintained country lanes near to Rugby deliberately aiming at potholes, drain covers and the like – the sort of hazards that we would normally avoid for fear of loosening teeth. He was also mightily impressed!

In those days, my Scimitar was my everyday car so it clocked up some considerable mileage. Over time all the weaker springs failed, indeed one had broken into 7 pieces. I removed them all and my Scimitar currently runs on just the shorter main spring as supplied by Avo. They are just as powerful as the original Reliant-type spring, however they are not overly long nor coil-bound, consequently they are very easy to fit and adjust. Quite frankly, I think they are a superior and a better spring.



George's Multi Rated Spring Set Up

You may be intrigued to know then that I am now in the process of a new Avo multi-rated-spring experiment which *may* solve the original problem. The previous spring was of a *round* profile, this new spring is a *flat* profile. By being flat, and always under compression as before, there is more metal actually in touch than the round profile - which is just a thin contact (try placing some round pencils side-by-side to see how little there is actually touching). Avo suggest that this could have been the reason for the round profile spring failing, so I shall see what happens in this particular set-up.

The drawback to this, however, is that I don't travel in my car as much as I used to, since I retired. Many of you know that I've been converting my 4WD VW T5 van into a motorhome and is used to tug my caravan around Britain and the World. It has become my daily driver whilst doing the conversion. Covid 19 has stopped all that fun for now, so it may mean that the Middlebridge is used more – it's a car I enjoy driving anyway and it's more economical than the VW to run too, but I shan't be knocking up 10,000 miles annually either.

If there's anyone reading this who fancies testing/trying this particular exercise/experiment, especially if using the car more frequently, please

contact me to discuss it. I should add that I actually bought the set-up, it wasn't a freebie from Avo. I believe it was costed at a preferential rate though.



Apology

The MESS have a very good chum by the name of Richard English who has a thing for Nottingham and especially a passion for Beeston where our cars were born. In the past I have mentioned that there is some interest in Princess Annes' Middlebridge being displayed within the city's museum. Richard has kindly pointed out that it would be within the Industrial Museum at Wollaton Hall and not at the Castle Museum, which had

I stated incorrectly – sorry, it's my mistake. Both premises are currently being renovated, one by lottery funding, whereas Wollaton Hall relies on volunteers mostly to both fund and man it. With Covid 19 dominating all our lives there has been little progress at either venue. I shall keep you posted with any worthwhile changes.

It's worth mentioning that The MESS have supported many Autokarna events held at Wollaton Hall, and it has been a very nice place to camp or caravan over the weekend. If all goes to plan, as envisaged above (eventually), it could be particularly worthwhile that 'The MESS' support Autokarna again, and especially so if the Royal car is amongst the museum's exhibitions. That's only if the Organisers can get it sorted properly – as they did once-upon-a-time!

Richard also recently sent Will a picture of Scimitar House, the old Middlebridge Factory as it has undergone a "Facelift". See Richard's 2020 picture and compare it with Will's 2013 and I will leave it to you to decide which looks best.



Scimitar House 2020, above and 2013 below



Lecky rack rules

A common item discussed amongst the MESSZoomers is the steering rack problems, leaks being the main one. Sorting through some paperwork recently, I found details from 'EZ Electric Power Steering' who studied Bruce's car at

the NEC. The electric conversion is doable, according to EZ. I shall contact them soon to discuss the problems that we know that will need addressing, how to solve – and costs, of course.

Peter Freeman has fitted electric units to a few Reliants, however they are all manual racks. Power assisted racks not only contain oil (which creates a major problem), but the steering geometry differs from a manual rack, so many questions to answer. Findings will be published so all PAS Scimitar (whoever made them) car owners are aware of a possible route that can be taken.

Banking again...

The suggestion of actually having a 'Donation Day' seems to have been accepted as a 'Good Idea' and having chosen the MESS birthday, 6th February (as THE day), makes some sense too. Since being published in the last MESSage, I have already received a cheque, plus Electronic Transfers which has swelled the funds to just over £700. Clearly some folk are anxious to comply with requests, sooner rather than later, wonderful... and many, many thanks!

I had no problem contacting the sender of the cheque, but the ET's were another matter. Firstly, I had no knowledge of such transfers until I recently physically collected a Statement from Lloyds Bank in Rugby. Secondly, no easy identification of the donor either.

Does it matter, you may ask? Well, yes to me it does, because it is essential to acknowledge every donation and to thank the donator too, it did get sorted eventually. To avoid this problem again, I would ask that you let me know (by email or text, please), when you have transferred a donation so I can confirm its arrival and most importantly, to sincerely thank you...

We have yet to overcome the problem with PayPal, so for now please only use our Lloyds Bank Account – please see details in the 'banking box' on the last page.

Donation (Birth) Day

We were all hoping that Covid restrictions would be lifted by February so that we could have a physically significant 'Social Get Together' on our Birthday, 6th February – it's not to be, sadly. It will probably have to be yet another scintillating Zoom meeting instead, nevertheless it remains

to be the chosen day to donate, if you wish to, but you can still donate at any time and any amount that suits you...

Take Great Care everyone
George

MB66- A Scandinavian Scimitar Saga

First the good news. The new Wilwood brakes are superb. In fact they are so good that that they have revealed a new problem - on heavy braking the seat backs now tilt forward under the strain.

As has been mentioned on the MESS site previously, if you buy the kit QRG sell then you need to reuse the old disc fixing bolts since the ones with the kit are too long and foul the hub. The supplied spacer is excess to requirements as the caliper sit centrally without it. Neither could I get the anti-squeal pads in place with new Greenstuff pads but am using a bit of copperease and have not had any squealing issues yet. The only thing I would do different is to change the wheel bearings at the same time. Mine are of unknown age and since all was stripped down it would have been an ideal opportunity to replace them. But then all is clearer with hindsight.

Other fiddling has included swopping the radio to a 'period' Alpine radio (7179MS) sourced from all places Germany (eBay). Not the actual correct model but sufficiently close for me. The alternator was a bit low on power and struggling but rather than changing brushes I plumped for the simplicity of an exchange unit.

I was also a little concerned about the power of the tail lights. Here in Sweden, you need to have side lights on while driving but the Scimitar's were a little pale in comparison to most modern vehicles so the bulbs have been changed for LEDS from Classic Car LEDS.

What was less fun was the continuing saga of the gearbox. Over the last few months, it had



MB66 waiting in line for some gearbox TLC

been refusing to change properly. Fiddling seemed to make things better for a while and then it would revert to type. Primary symptom was a failure to select second and a large surge on going from third to fourth. But it was generally 'playing up'. Changing the vacuum pipes from the throttle bodies helped. For a time. Part of the gearbox problem was certainly a leaking EGR valve sensor since this is plumbed into the vacuum line to the gearbox. The leak presumably meant there was an inconsistent vacuum going to the gearbox modulator.

These sensors seem to be extremely hard to come by since they are no longer available new and most breakers seem to just dispose of them. However, and due to a mix up in contact with two suppliers, I unexpectedly ended up getting a couple. One locally in Sweden and one from Turkey. Swopping this out also helped with gear selection. I was recommended to adjust the bands which is straight enough with a small torque wrench but this also had no noticeable effect. Expert advice suggested that the oil, filter and first reverse servo seals should be changed. These were done although there was a slight delay when it turns out my A4LD box is a very early unit with a difficult to obtain a spout-less oil filter. But, finally all back together. Gearbox

much better albeit still with the small flare. The rather large clonk on taking up reverse disappeared, selected first quicker and, since there was a large hole in the old filter, I figured it money well spent, or so I thought to begin with.

After working like this for a couple of weeks the gearbox suddenly, and without warning, decided to suddenly throw its oil out of the pram. Quite spectacularly in front of my mother-in-law's branch of the Co-op supermarket in mid-June. A temporary get-me-home fix was to top up the gearbox and then limp home with occasional refills. By the time we did arrive home the oil was a constant stream from the gearbox – not just drips.



Oh the Humiliation!

So, now to find a specialist to rebuild the box and fix it once and for all. After a bit of searching, I found a local specialist. Pretty much a one-man-band but a very experienced engineer one who normally works on heavy plant gearboxes while playing with cars on the side. He is one of the few who specialize in hydraulic transmissions (I was quickly corrected for using the term 'automatic gearbox') of Volvo loaders etc. The gearbox he was working on when I delivered MB66 weighed in at 1,800kg.

However, due to the summer holidays (Sweden shuts down for all of July and the first half of August) the 'box took some time to be fixed but does look rather good in a fresh lick of paint. Not cheap, but then our Golf Bluemotion daily driver, has dumped us twice over the last two years with failed diesel injectors. The cost of having these two replaced has been equivalent to 75% of the cost the complete gearbox rebuild. I need to keep repeating this to myself to help justify the costs! But, the new 'box is working beautifully and fingers crossed will continue to do so.

Other recent essentials have included a new wiper motor. I almost certainly could have got away with new bushes but figure this is future-proofing the system. I have had failed wiper motors in the rain before and it's not much fun. After so much 'essential spending' recently I felt the need to blow a little more on totally pointless engine bling and two alloy rocker covers from John at Redmond Metalcasting. Very happy with the results but, as has been mentioned before, you do have to be patient to get delivery.

Fitting them was a bit of a job since you need to adapt a bit. If you are considering these rocker covers.



So shiny it is a shame to hide it under the car

I found that the original alternator belt will just fit but only after removing the original and trying a couple of longer ones that turned out to be too long for the alternator mount. But, of course, only discovering this after removing the power steering belt to get the original fan belt off, the throttle cam fouls the nearside rocker cover and needs about 2mm grinding away to clear. I only discovered this after chipping a small corner of the new rocker cover so be warned.



I also came across an original service record book being sold by Paul Matty Sportscars. Seemed reasonable at £12 including P&P on eBay. I suspect they probably have a pile of them somewhere so they may have others available.

However, a recent unexpected career change means that I am on my way back to my old organization in Norway, UNIS, Svalbard, but this time as head of the department Arctic biology and

am relocating there early 2021. This means that MB66 will be tucked up in our garage in Sweden and will now be a holiday car but the planned improvements will continue (the list seems to keep increasing as I come across more 'good' ideas). Still planning to bring MB66 back to the UK for any future MB reunion in 2024.

(Hmmm, we better get out thinking caps on for the 35th anniversary in 2024 then! Will)

Steve Coulson MB66



Steve's New Workplace—Svalbard

Power Steering Reservoir

Dr Dan Mitchell recently assisted George Sampford in sourcing a replacement power steering reservoir. Apparently, it was originally fitted to the Ford Sierra Cosworth and has a part number 88GB-3R700-AD. These do come up on eBay etc, from time to time and occasionally an alloy tank can be found.



MB22

Au Revoir Rather Than Goodbye?

After 5 years of being the custodian of Middlebridge 22, I decided it was time for a change and so sold the car to a new enthusiast in the South of England. I believe 22 to be in safe hands and its improvement, I'm sure, will continue. The photo was taken as I said good bye and it was put on the transporter to its new home.

I have enjoyed my time with 22 and it has been a privilege to look after her. There certainly have been some highs but also some lows! Losing the right hand exhaust on a speed hump causing it to fracture at the manifold and pull back through the rear bumper whilst 400 miles away in Devon was probably the worst low.

Trying to find a reputable trustworthy garage proved a problem with two or three tried in my vicinity. One was knowledgeable but the working conditions dreadful and when the car came back with damage not there when I took the car in, it was time for a change. The next place had a fantastic working environment and again the people had knowledge and skill but on getting ripped off for labour charges and asked to pay for

parts the car was never designed and likely to have, I again was on the lookout for a new garage. (It's also nice to have the marque name spelled correctly!) Ironically just prior to selling the car I found a place which had everything in ML Motorsport just outside Edinburgh and since they deal with many rally and performance cars, I can continue to use them with our new "toy".



The highs were many including many trips, runs and Shows with the highlight being the 30th anniversary trip to Silverstone last year. It was great to meet up with all the people who work so hard to keep the Middlebridge flag flying and put faces to names.

At present, I am in one of those strange times for me being without a Scimitar, as over the past 40 years this is a very rare occurrence. I think at one time I actually owned seven, so who knows I will probably return to the fold at some point. However, for the time being I have gone back to my other marque interest over the years, Subaru. Twice the horsepower of the Middlebridge but of course not so exclusive and rare, so if you see a white Impreza flashing its lights and waving at you..... it'll just be me!!

Good luck to all owners, especially Andrew, the new custodian of MB22 and let's hope 2021 will allow us all to get out more to enjoy our cars.

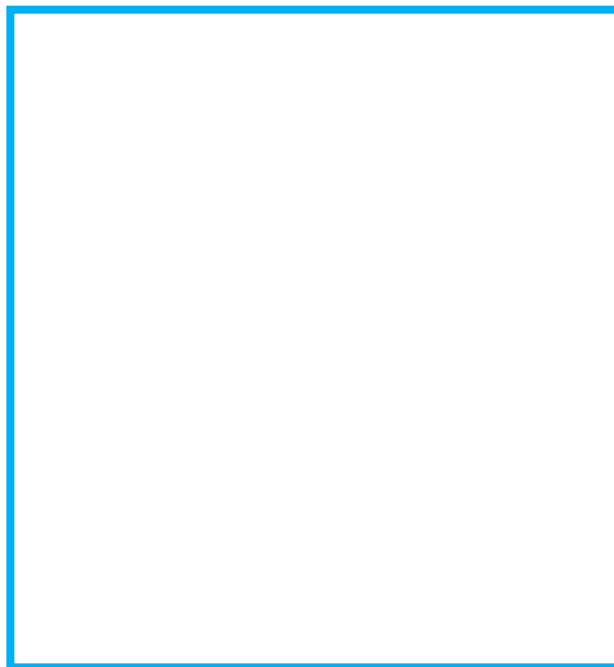
Ashley Edwards MB22 P.O.



MESSEMBLY and Donation Day

As you will have seen in George's article we have canvassed the opinion of the MESS and the support for an annual "donation day" has been great with many of you already making donations, for which we are extremely grateful.

The intention is for owners and enthusiasts to make the donation on the 6th February, which is the date the MESS was created. We have included the bank account details below.



In addition, it is planned to have a Virtual MESSEMBLY on that date too and we will send out the usual invitation to the MESS mailing list.

Thank you all once again for your support, we really appreciate it, and look forward to seeing some of you at 8pm on the 6th February.

