




The MESSage

Newsletter of the Middlebridge Enthusiasts Scimitar Set

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April 2020

MICK'S MESSage

Well, here we go again, it's another year and after our success at the NEC we were looking forward to onwards 'n' upwards and full steam ahead with new cars helping to forward the marque at both outdoor and indoor events during 2020. We were also looking at the feasibility of a few very interesting and mouth-watering events throughout the coming year but it looks like the Coronavirus will have put paid to that. Here's hoping we can salvage something later in the season and that Curborough and the NEC in November will still take place...

My Cars & MB 33

It was the end of November and minus 6 degrees when I headed north to Yorkshire to my friend, Mark Wilson who was to be carrying out further fettling to my car in preparation for the 2020 season.

I was hoping that when Mark had completed the list on 33 I could twist his arm to prepare and MOT my SE5a in time for July as I have not driven her for seven years. During our extended Xmas break Matt and I dug her out, fitted a new battery and stole the whole supply of mower petrol, incredibly within 10 minutes she was ticking over and revving up nicely. (Mick sent a video, it sounds very nice! Ed.) Next we will have get the tyres pumped up and hopefully get her mobile, we did note that the brake master cylinder was empty but that's a matter for the future. I just wanted to make sure I could get her up and running.

However events have conspired against us. MB 33 is still in the hands of Mark and I'm hoping to have it back towards the end of April, 'fingers crossed' Mark is suffering dreadfully at the hands of his landlord who has decided to evict him. Needless to say Mark has literally tons of machinery to re-locate in the next two months. Crazy times for Matt and me too as, with the Coronavirus, we are continually manufacturing hand gel at work for the front line services.



Mick's SE5a, with ET passing by on another Tom Karen Design!

MESSsembly

A monthly MESS meeting is held on the first Monday a month in The Beavers Fayre, Central Park, CV23 0WE. Every enthusiast is welcome to join us, however you do not have to be a member and encouraged.

Cancelled Until Further Notice

Matt's Car

In the last MESSage we said goodbye to Matt's MB66 to its new enthusiastic owner in Sweden. Matt has taken a temporary side step from his MB's but already has a plan which I'm sure will keep us and Scott (Obsessive Car Care) very busy this year. Due to the weather, Matt's new car was delivered directly to a Classic Car Storage Specialist and will stay there until April. She has never been used in the rain, and has been in de-humidified storage for many years + never welded. (See picture).

Regalia

I was also delighted that we finally put to bed the regalia issue that had been dragging on for far too long. Now that our online shop is up and running we can finally address the issue of supplying embroidered Middlebridge regalia. For 2020 we have now purchased a new lightweight gazebo, 6 x 3 metre and it is currently being printed for the MESS. Hopefully you will be impressed when you see it at future events.



Wilwood Brake Upgrade

Several owners have already upgraded to the Wilwood system and clearly it is a very effective kit, as demonstrated to me by Peter Humphries. We know more owners are considering this upgrade, myself included, and armed with this knowledge and while at the NEC we took the opportunity and visited the company that supply the kits and have come away with a 'MESS' deal as below.

The link below will take you to the BK34 kit

https://www.rallydesign.co.uk/product_info.php?products_id=3976

Be sure to confirm which bolts you require, 7/16 or M12, apparently there are both types in use.

Standard brake pad.

https://www.rallydesign.co.uk/product_info.php?products_id=12709

And finally the Goodridge hose conversion. The brake lines have to be made to suit the kit due to different fitments on the callipers so the standard Goodridge do not fit.

https://www.rallydesign.co.uk/product_info.php?products_id=17074

Prior to purchase please confirm ALL details with Rally Design, Unit 4, St Augustine's Business Park, Estuary Way, Swalecliffe, Kent, CT5 2QJ. TEL: 01227 792792.

WEB: www.rallydesign.co.uk

Kit - £451.03 (+£26 for X drilled discs)

Pads - £49.50

Hose - £45.79 - Total £546.32

10% off - £491.69, Plus VAT—Total - £590.03

Louis Guigoz R.I.P.

We received some sad news that Louis Guigoz, the previous owner of MB29, passed away recently.

A number of years ago I met with Louis and Josette in Geneva and we had a great time discussing Scimitars generally and also the Middlebridge marque. Louis was a true enthusiast and he and Josette travelled many thousands of kilometres throughout Europe in MB29 and really increased the marque awareness at the same time. Louis was sadly forced to sell his unique Middlebridge some time ago as it became too low to the ground for him to get into and out of with his condition.

R.I.P. Louis and deepest sympathy to Josette and family at this time.

Louis' Middlebridge is unique as it has been registered in the UK, France and Switzerland. It also ran the later engine with catalytic converters fitted to pass the very strict emissions controls in Switzerland.



Louis and MB29 in Happier Times
(Photo: Chris Johnson)

Coming and Going

At time of writing MB43 and MB70 are still for sale but there has been some interest in these. They have been joined by MB19 which is a lovely looking car in a strong colour with low mileage and a good history. All adverts are on the Middlebridge website.

It is likely that MB22 will be joining them later in 2020 as I have been advised by the current owner he is intending to put it on sale in the spring; this is another prize winning car and one that has been well looked after.

The owner of MB69 has also confirmed they are considering selling and we are awaiting details of this car to put together an advert.

If anyone would like details then please contact me and I will put you in touch.

There still remain a couple of other cars that are not being actively marketed, including Will's MB42.

Valuations

Dan Mitchell has let us know that his work with the classic press on MB valuations is bearing fruit.

Practical Classics dated, April 2020, has now listed Middlebridge Values at the bottom of the Reliant table of Scimitars and Sabres.

Previously it was in the middle of this list. They don't have the space to list Middlebridge as a separate marque but I think it stands out better and is more historically accurate at the end of the list.

MB27, the trials and tribulations

The history of this issue started on the way back from the Lancaster bomber visit in June 2018 as an intermittent fault and finally, early last year, the engine cut out and would not restart. Pete got a mobile engine tuner who diagnosed a fault with the distributor or module. A new old stock distributor was found courtesy of Mark Wilson and when fitted the car would start but still stalled at idle. Irritatingly it would stop stalling when it was warm. However, another trait was that it would not rev above 4,000rpm. After a bit of playing around the limit became 5,000rpm. Not normally driving at these revs (Oh yeah? Ed.) Pete did not know if this was new or a pre-existing condition. He borrowed a known good distributor and got the same symptoms, so back to the drawing board.



To cut a long story short, in various combinations he swapped 3 rotor arms, 3 potentiometers, 2 coils, 2 throttle pots and cold idle valves. He also replaced the air flow meter with a known good one to no effect. He also replaced the air filter, petrol filter and several sets of plugs with different gap settings and new plug leads and a distributor cap. The only change after all this was that the car would now cut out when hot as well as cold.

Admitting defeat, Pete sent the car to a Scimitar specialist where it resided for 3½ months. They repeated much of what Pete had tried but in different combinations, plus 2 coolant sensors and two ECUs. The car was tried without the exhausts on and with the engine earthed to the battery. There was a suggestion that the camshaft might be worn leading to the high rev issue. So, out with the engine and in with a replacement sourced from a TVR S2. This engine, having only covered 60,000 miles, came with all the ancillaries. The only change was that the cold start was even worse.

The compression was checked, fine. The fuel pressure was checked, fine. Then an auto electrician was brought in to check the loom and repaired several “dodgy” connections. No improvement. The car was run with the fuel cap open, fuel pump relays changed and two tanks of different petrol. It was getting desperate now and straws were being clutched big time so he toured the NEC in November 2019 for Ford specialists who might be able to help.

After the NEC he had two 3 hour round trips to a specialist in Swindon. The initial visit identified the issue with the cold start but the ECU could not be put into service mode until that was fixed, hence the second visit. By this time it had started surging and would still not rev properly. It had also started cutting out when hot or cold at low revs and was juddering at low revs that coincided with the volt meter dropping from 13.5v down to 12v and then bouncing straight back up again.

Pete says that this problem with the voltmeter had appeared on and off for the past 12 years. A long time ago it was found that water had dripped through the driver's side wiper gear box and into a multi plug for the main ignition circuit. This occasionally arced and stalled the engine. So, to eliminate this out came the speedo and all the wiring was renewed. Well, it still juddered occasionally.

As regards the surging - yet another new potentiometer fitted and this improved things slightly but he was sure he could hear air being sucked in so also did the inlet manifold and plenum gaskets. He found 3 bolts finger tight that were holding the fuel rail in, hooray! Surging fixed.

Then he went into earthing mode in the engine bay: coil, alternator distributor and extra straps to the battery and both sides of the engine. By accident he found, once the car was warmed up, that if he unplugged both the potentiometer and the idle valve connectors, the car drove very well with no stalling issues or juddering.

So, into earthing mode on the ECU, six found in total, did all them. No good. Stripped back what he could of the wiring loom to look for damage. None found.

So that's when straws stopped being clutched and the white flag was hoisted. Pete delivered the car to another specialist who suggested a complete new ECU and control system including:

Installation of a DTA ECU to take full control of the engines fuel and ignition system with data sensor feeds from the throttle position sensor, water temp. sensor and air temp. sensor.

Installation of a crank trigger wheel on the front pulley for a crank position sensor. A new wiring loom to all sensors and auxiliaries in the car and the ECU set up to control pumps, fans etc.

Finally, the car would be mapped on a rolling road to gain the best performance from the engine.

The photos show what came out, above is the loom, including the control unit for the Kenlowe fan. Next pictures are the sensor with a bespoke mounting bracket and the laser cut pulley. The wiring for that sensor is special, coming in at £38 a metre, then the ECU and associated relays.



It is not a wasted spark system. The specialist had a rethink and decided to keep it as original looking as possible. At first glance you would not know it has been modified. It now has a bespoke wiring loom with all new plugs and connectors, even for the injectors. The company had to source bits in from all over the place, including a different temperature sensor in the cylinder head for the fan as they reckoned this is a better place to take the reading from in case the thermostat ever packs up.

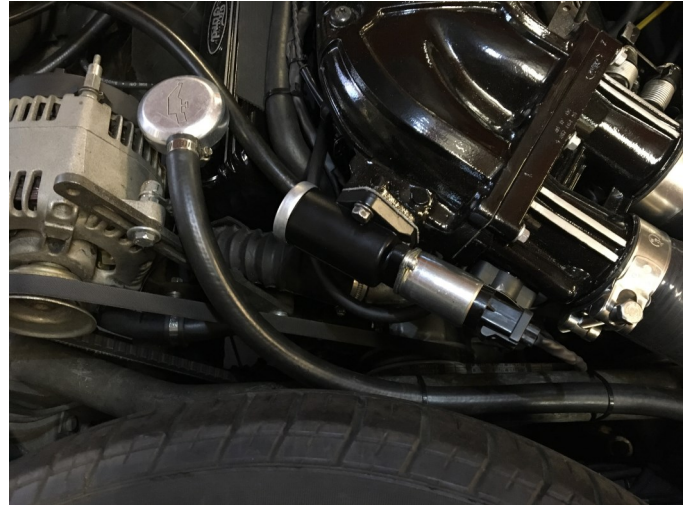
They checked with the manufacturer of the ECU and this is the first time it has been fitted like this to a V6. They spent 6 hours mapping it on the rolling road and confirmed it is producing 162 BHP at the flywheel. It has been electronically limited to 6,000 revs and the ECU can be bluetoothed to a mobile phone to show real time data if you so wish. A laptop can be plugged into it and the company can remotely access it from anywhere in the world. On the initial test drive they checked and Pete had hit 5,248 revs. (Never normally drives at >5,000 revs huh? Ed.)

So, after all this what did it drive like? Pete says like a gas turbine. The engine that came out was 3.1 with stage two heads and a rally cam shaft that originally produced 210 BHP. This TVR engine, although way down on BHP, felt just as fast; turning right at a junction on a wet road and the wheels spin, loose gravel when pulling onto a roundabout and the wheels spin, just like the old engine used to. It's best described as fifth gear being more like fourth gear.

There was an issue with hot starting and stalling at low speed pull off. Two more hours on the rolling road cured these issues. It is now mapped it to pull away at 800 revs without stalling!

So the car has retained its original look and with the spare wheel in situ you will struggle to see the crank sensor. It has retained and uses the distributor and coil but has done

away with the air flow meters and the idle control valve. If you look closely at that you will see a dummy wire cable tied to it and Pete intends to put the old plug on it to make it look original. It absolutely flies.



We will leave the cost element out of this but the final bill for the rewire and ECU was about 30% of the cost of all the work prior to that. All I can say is that Pete must really love the car because at various points during this saga when he was contacting some of the owners for help and support at least two of the suggestions (One of which might have been mine! Ed.) involved the Samaritans and/or a box of matches. It's nice when your fellow owners are so understanding!



GEORGE'S JARGON

It will be obvious to all that planned visits to shows and events have been postponed or cancelled completely. No-one has any idea when some kind of normality is likely to return either. In the meantime we (The MESS), will carry on as best we can and be prepared for the future shows we hope to attend.

Just before my recent holiday to Spain, Bruce, Matt and I visited Mick's workplace in Northampton to erect his latest acquisition – a custom printed MESS gazebo that, once again, Mick has personally financed!!! Having seen it in the flesh a decision was made to add a few more logos to make it even more noticeable. It's back at Tailor Made – the suppliers of our smart, new-style regalia, to be overprinted.

It is 3m x 6m and could be used inside or outside, it's lighter than the one we borrowed for Silverstone, consequently it's easier to manhandle. I've donated a redundant, wheeled-suitcase in which to store the fabric, ropes and pegs, etc. I've also built a folding trolley to take the framework, plus any other heavy stuff – such as some inch-thick steel plates left over from the ballast destined for my narrowboat. Our frustrating experience at Silverstone, last year, meant that the ropes and pegs were useless in holding anything secure as we were foisted onto mainly hardstanding instead of mostly grass. The plates should solve that one if it happens again.

MOBY MESS

Mick's talking about having a 'MESSEMBLY' using our phones. Sounds far too clever to this old chap who is regularly challenged by new technology. If it happens, I wonder if it is then possible for the whole MESS membership to join in with every future meeting held at The Brewers Fayre?

If it is possible, would that be of interest to you?

TRYING TREASURES

The problems experienced with Lloyds Bank seems to have been rectified, or to be more accurate, I've not had any more difficult correspondence to ponder for a while. There are two places to donate to the MESS funds now. One is PayPal, which should be back on-line when you read this. By cheque or transferred electronically to Lloyds Bank.

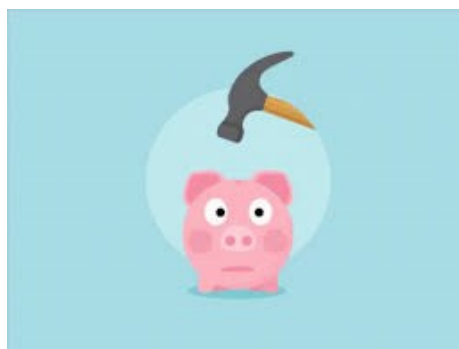
Details are:

Account Number: 49350668.

Sort Code: 30-90-89. BIC: LOYDGB21256.

IBAN: GB79 LOYD 3090 8949 3506 68.

For now the Account name must be spelt out in full, however I have made attempts to have the acronym accepted. Twice I have submitted the necessary paperwork, but it still hasn't been confirmed as usable. Cheques can be sent to my home address, please.



MESS CONSTITUTION, as we were...

At our last MESSEMBLY Mark proffered an acceptable Constitution for us to consider for our own use. It is possible that such a document is required/expected by the likes of PayPal and/or Lloyds Bank to give 'The MESS' some kind of integrity and respect. Indeed, it has been suggested that this is the very reason why we have had problems with both the above, due to the lack of a pukka Constitution.

From its inception, we have tried to make The MESS organisation a low-key affair, hence we deliberately do not call ourselves a 'club' except where absolutely necessary...we are simply custodians and enthusiasts! We are still reluctant to make it more 'official' (and all that that can translate into), but some people now have titles, if only on paper.

Once we finalise the Constitution copy it will be published for your perusal.

SPANISH AFFAIRS

As mentioned above, Maggie and I were in Spain when this pandemic all kicked off. We were forced to stay in the hotel for the last 5 days, the last 3 confined to our room. The last night, however, we were transferred to another hotel a few miles away as our hotel decided to shut early! This was worrying as it was a much busier hotel in a town that had a corona victim. Spanish Police were patrolling the beaches in speed boats bollocking anyone seen on the beach. Our Jet2 rep was stopped by the Police to check her work permit, despite her wearing a uniform.

The Spanish were not allowed out except for food or medicines. The exception to that

ruling was that should you own a dog, which needed exercise, then you could go out.

On the more amusing side then - one wag offered his dog for hire to non-owners so they could get out for a walk. €10 for one walk, €20 for three! (Picture put on moby of dog with a notice around its neck advertising the going rates...). Another Spaniard earned himself an on-the-spot fine of €100. He was caught walking a toy dog on a stick, clearly the Police were not amused!



PRIORITISORY

Now that most of us are confined to quarters, an ideal opportunity has arisen to do all those unappealing little jobs that we've all been putting off, some for many years, too. So far I've removed leaves and other rubbish from the front gutters, washed them down, ditto the plastic cladding. The Velo's push-rod tube oil-leak has been addressed, new gaskets fitted to rocker box and timing chest – all spares bought last August. That's two off the list of 18 tasks to attend to.

For ages now the Middlebridge petrol gauge has always read 'Full', despite the obvious checks already done, it really needs sorting. A light's fallen from one of the other gauges and is resting on the radio. The obsolete pas tank is leaking along its seam, plus some other irritating minor faults have manifest itself since my Scimitar ceased to be my main form of transport.

There are some other things I really would like to do, but I cannot get the materials to repair the back fence, build the new steps for the garden, paint the garage door, ah well! Looks like the Middlebridge is next then, but it's mostly user-unfriendly electrics which I hate doing.

THANKS...

My very busy life in the Printing/Advertising Industry led to a complex mixture of shifts and extraordinarily long hours at work. For example: In late 1983 such was the pressure from one particular job that I worked a 32 hours day. I did my 7 hours shift, followed by 25 hours of non-stop overtime. It wrecked my Christmas as I couldn't lie in a bed, or move comfortably, due to the damage that I had done to my spine doing that job, and it remains a problem to this day.

Our very own Mick, and Matt, have been working 12 to 14 hours almost every day before the outbreak of the corona virus became so intense, manufacturing hand-gels, sanitisers, disinfectants, wipes etc, that are used by hospitals to combat this terrible disease. I know that they are both absolutely shattered by doing such intense work and for very long hours. I am proud to know them and am suitably humbled.

I ask you to raise a glass to thank them both for such dedication which has no known ending within sight. In comparison, my career pales into insignificance. (Hear, Hear, Ed.)

Painting by Numbers

Following a question on decoding the VIN numbers on the Middlebridge GTE, the issue of paint codes was raised. I have set out before the number of cars in each colour but I had never tried to correlate that with the paint codes in the VIN. The difficulty is that some cars have been repainted in the past and (so far as I am aware) there is not a definitive list of the names of the original paint colours, although they are different in most respects from the Reliant codes.



MB47 (Photo Mark Amos)

The most common code, found on 42 cars, however, is the same as Reliant and that is 99, which signifies a special paint order. I suppose that this should not be a surprise given the bespoke nature of Middlebridge's product.

There are another 12 paint codes that we know of from the VIN codes we have and I have set these out below: -

43 = Guards Red – 7 cars

This is known as I have the build sheet for MB14 and it states 43 Guards Red. It is thought this is a Jaguar colour and it appears that MB may have used several period Jaguar colours. Mark Amos managed to get a match for his MB47 using a Jaguar colour.



MB14 & 42 at home

45 = Midnight? Blue - 1 car

47 = Green – 1 car

49 = Champagne Cream – 1 car

50 = Crimson Red – 5 cars

52 = Granada Red – 3 cars

54 = Arizona? Blue – 4 cars

56 = Blade? Silver – 6 cars (Confusingly there is one late (auction) car with this paint code in grey and I wonder whether this might have been painted after the VIN was allocated?)

58 = Metallic Grey – 2 cars

60 = Green – 2 cars (both different shades of green, one is referred to as Sage Green)

61 = Blue – 3 cars (two are Renault Electric Blue as used on the R5 Turbo and one has been repainted but we can't confirm its original colour. Irritatingly, the same Blue appears as a 99 code.)

69 = Green – 1 car (has been referred to as Sage Green but different shade to 60)

99 = Special Finish – 42 cars

I am putting this out with a caveat that it is the best information I have at present so if you can add to this picture then it would be great to hear from you.

While we are on the subject of the VIN then, again, from the information we have a VIN such as

SM 9 01 01 43 K F 4500XX would decode as follows: -

SM = Country of manufacture code, in this case the UK

9 = Code for a manufacturer building less than 500 vehicles per year

01 = Body Code and 01 is for a RHD GTE with 03 used for a LHD GTE.

01 = Transmission Code with 01 a Manual and 02 an Auto.

43 = Paint Code, in this case Guards Red.

K = Year of manufacture with J being 1988, K being 1989 and L being 1990.

F = Month, in this case June as the code starts with A for January, missing I and ending with M for December

4500XX = Chassis number. The last two digits is the car number, with the highest chassis number produced being 450078.

MB 66 update

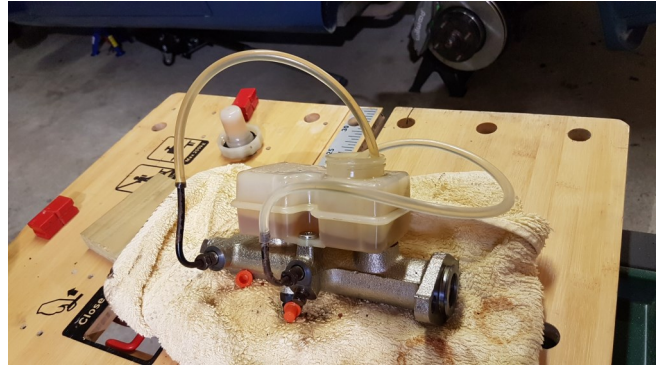
Not been driving much since we returned home, while we are having the warmest winter recorded here, it is still a bit icy and chilly.



On the project front I have the Wilwood brakes fitted and find this a big improvement even though I am only using them gingerly since they need 200 miles urban driving to bed in.



Thanks to Mick for recommending them. I also replaced all flexihoses with Goodridge and fully bled the system. All went very well except for one line that wouldn't seal so ended up buying a brake line kit from QRG since to buy the copper pipe and a flaring tool was no cheaper. I also ended up replacing the master cylinder. On stripping it the bore was too damaged and Powerbrakes were able to supply the correct MC. Bit expensive but feels good to have replaced all the brakes.



The wheel cylinders looked new so I left them in place.

I have had an odd problem with the gearbox in that it has started to refuse to change up properly. I checked for vacuum leaks first. Then I seem to have done something stupid and she stopped idling properly. I switched the idle valve around to try and fit an inflated spare tyre - still won't fit by the way - and now I seemed to have a fast idle. I left that as something to investigate when it gets warmer but I couldn't leave it alone and finally tracked down the issue to an air leak. The two rubber vacuum pipes from the throttle bodies to the various gubbins including the odd electrical thing on the bulkhead and to the gearbox were all 5mm bore and not sealing properly. Ripped them out and replaced with 4mm and all is joy again.

Stephen Coulson MB66

MB14 & 42 Update

Not much to report on the home front. MB14 went for a MOT just before lockdown and failed on rear fogs. They have always worked before and I never even thought to try them. No fogs, no telltale on the dash so I got the garage to sort that. A couple of

advisories, one on a balljoint dust cover, one on wheelbearing play, which is a common one on cars with taper bearings and MOT testers who are not used to them but also a note on “play in the steering rack inner joints”. The last one is a bit of a concern as refurbishment of the racks is becoming more difficult, especially with Mark Wilson’s current difficulties.



MB14 Awaiting MOT

MB42, like MB14 usually starts on the first turn of the key but when I went to it the other week it was totally dead. Easy to sort though as I knew the battery was dodgy when it went to Mark Wilson for repair. He had deep cycled the battery but that was only a short term fix. EBay and £52.43 later I had a square terminal 60Ah 540cca battery with 3 years warranty delivered to the door and normal service was resumed.

Just to finish, not a MB but some of you know I also have a SE5a. Sadly it has languished in the garage for the past year since the MOT ran out in May 2019. It is officially MOT exempt but I am not a supporter of that scheme and, in advance of putting it back on the road this year, I sent it for MOT. Unfortunately the light switch failed during the test and that is how it repaid me for neglecting it last year!

Thanks to Dave Speed I had a replacement switch within 48 hours and all was well—except I can’t get out and use any of them at the moment.....

Will Anderson



Future MESSages

The above brings me to my next plea. If you are looking for something to do during this strange time then any hints, tips or stories and photos of you and your MB would be very welcome both for the MESSage or Slice.



MB76 (Photos Henk Scheffer)