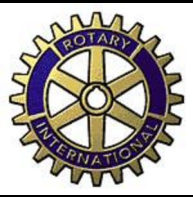


Owners Club Feature

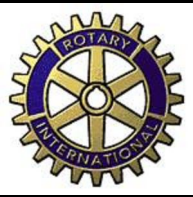
This month, Cars in the Park talks to Elvis Payne from www.3-wheelers.com We sent Peter Fox from The Rotary Club of Lichfield St. Chad to ask the questions...



Your family and girlfriend are mentioned a lot on your site. Can you tell us a little bit about them?



My mum and dad are Kath and John and I have a younger brother and sister, Geoff and Sharron. I met my girlfriend, Caroline in a bar and on the first night she asked me what car did I drive. I was thinking do I say Jaguar or Reliant so I whimpered out and said a Jaguar.



We're using Caroline's pictures on our site so she's obviously a three wheeler fan now. But how did that come about? Did you say something to her along the lines of "I love you very much but there is a dark family secret lurking in the garage which means we can never be together" or did you just get a mate to tell her?



After we first met I was then working in Dubai for about 6 weeks so didn't see her again although when I got back I took her round the garage to see my other car (It was a 1972 Reliant Regal Supervan III at the time) and she loved it. I then discovered that her dad used to work at Reliant and he had a Mk V van which is very similar to the Mk VI along with other Reliants so she was already well versed in them. Thankfully, Caroline enjoys looking at classic cars and photography so she really enjoys events like CitP. At one point I did buy Caroline a bright pink 1974 Reliant Robin (not quite the vintage Aston Martin she dreams about) though after it stalled half way across a junction she lost her nerve with it a bit and preferred to just be a passenger in my Reliant.



I suppose everyone asks you about your Christian name – who chose it and why?



My mum chose it as she was a great fan and yes everyone does ask. As folks get to know me, Elvis seems as commonplace as any other name. It is definitely an icebreaker but the only down side is that everyone does remember who you are and folks I meet will often say "Hi Elvis" and I say hello and think, "I wonder who that is." There have been quite a few magazine and newspaper articles about my interest in Reliants or about my web site at 3-wheelers.com and often the headline always has an Elvis quip i.e. "Elvis is all shook up about 3wheelers"



You refer to your cars by name. A friend of mine used to call his three wheeler "the pig" and would tell people with great pride that he drove a pea green plastic pig.



Yes, all my Reliants have had names as they all seem to have their own little characters. It started with my first Reliant at university. The reg number was GRE 33N and one day one of the girls I was with read it as Gwen. Since then it just stuck and the car was always known as Gwen and then every other Reliant after also had a name. My latest

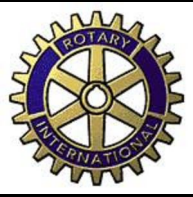
one is called Lucie. The reg number is PSL 879 and when I googled PSL the first hit was "Port St Lucie" and so Lucie it was. Lucie has always been well behaved but my last Regal "Ole Blue" occasionally had her moments where a few choice words were chosen.



So how did ole blue let you down?



One was breaking down by the church a few doors down from my house as a funeral possession gathered outside. Every one stopped and looked and started smiling and some laughed as I pushed my Reliant passed them back to my house. I felt really bad for any close relatives of the deceased that I had cause such merriment. As for the van it turned out to be damp inside the distributor cap. Once I dried it all was fine and after that I sealed it with one of those sprays.



Was that the only time she let you down?



There was also the occasion when I was visiting friends in Newark in a Reliant Robin and the back axle seized. That got called a few names indeed. I managed to get a lift home and then visited a local scrap yard and pulled an axle off a Reliant Robin they had. I then got on the train from Tamworth to Newark carrying an axle and then changed the axle in my friend's front garden. Thankfully the task went without a hitch.



The three wheeler isn't your everyday car. How often are you out in the three wheeler and where do you go? Ever been abroad in it?



It depends on the time of year. In summer I may use the Reliant every weekend and also occasionally drive to work in it. In winter it tends to get used about one to two times a month depending on the weather. I have not been abroad in Lucie though in 2008 my brother, Geoff and I spent three weeks in his 1990 Reliant Robin (New Blue) driving 5,500 miles to the North Cape and back. The car was amazingly reliable, especially given the weight she was carrying and the severe weather conditions and steep mountains we faced. We only had one issue in 5,500 miles and that was just inside Norway when there was no fuel getting to the carburettor. We soon discovered the breather hole in the petrol cap was blocked thus causing a vacuum. My brother drilled a 1/8th hole in the filler tube and voila, we were back on the road again. We actually wrote a book on the journey that was published in 2008.



Apart from CitP which is your favourite car show? What's the best thing about any show you go to? What's the worst thing about any show you go to? How many shows do you go to each year?



If I am allowed to be biased it is the Reliant gathering in Tamworth each year as part of the Tamworth Heritage Weekend. Why am I biased? I organise it! Last year we had 81 Reliants of all types (both three and four wheelers) from 1935 – 2001. This year with it being Reliant's 75th anniversary we hope to have around 200+. It depends on how busy

I am or what I am up to as well as to what shows we go to. Last year we did a few Reliant Owners Club rallies, Cars in the Park in Lichfield, the Tamworth Heritage Reliant gathering, the RUM micro cars celebration in Kent, and displayed Lucie at a few local events like Dosthill boys club, Tamworth anniversary weekend and Drayton Bassett fete. There is also a large classic car show at Lupin Farm near Burton though sadly we were on holiday last year when it was on.



How many members do you have in the Club and how many of you always turn up to the events?



I belong to the Reliant Owners Club, I'm not sure how many members they have and I also belong to the R3W forum (www.r3w.co.uk) and both organise rallies and events. Last year at CitP we displayed as R3W. Sadly I do not attend all the events due to one thing or another though there always seems to be a core group of around 40 - 50+ folks who are always there.



The Club - do you see each other - are you all friends - even when three wheelers aren't involved?



One thing I like about Reliant circles is that it isn't just purely about the cars. I have made some great friends over the years and people who I would genuinely class as friends rather than just acquaintances who happen to own a Reliant. These are people who will go out of their way to help you if they can and indeed when I have needed help they have been there.



You and Caroline will be settling down one day. Will you still do the shows?



Yes, Caroline and I plan to settle down one day. As Lucie is almost 50 years old with a side-valve engine with shows like CitP and local shows, I will drive to them although my brother recently made a trailer up for me so that I can also trailer Lucie to events further a field (usually those more than 20 miles away). I have no qualms in her abilities in making a long journey, I just question what my back and ears (from the noise) will be like when I get there!

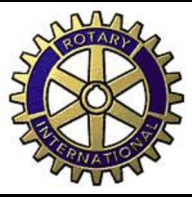


Your car is starring in The Royal soon. How did that come about? Did you advertise or did they contact you via the website?



It was a case of being in the right place at the right time. I'd only had Lucie for about two months when I was approached via my website asking if I knew of anyone who had an old 1950s Regal van. They were quite specific in what they wanted and it had to be a Regal and not an earlier girder fork Reliant. Obviously the Regal van that most people associate with Delboy was too modern so it had to be a side-valve Regal. My Reliant is a 1961 model though similar in shape to the late 1950s ones and it was also the only one I knew of that was on the road. I sent them a photo and they loved it though they said it looked too clean. In The Royal it had to appear to be an old battered van and so as it was only covered in grey primer I didn't mind a "dirty makeover" involving brown and black paint. After that it was off to Scarborough for a few days for the filming.

Incidentally, just before the Royal was also used for filming for a commercial on British Forces TV in Birmingham and then just before that we were in Stoke-on-Trent for a couple of days where it was used in the film "Souled Out" as background furniture. I couldn't believe it. In the first three months I owned Lucie it had been involved in three lots of filming!



What's it like driving round in a three wheeler?



People always stop and stare and often smile. Youngsters either laugh or just stare in bewilderment whilst older folks just stop and stare. If I stop and get out, anyone passing will always ask about it as whilst they smile they are also most curious. As I live in Tamworth a lot of folks have worked at Reliant at one time or another and so they will come across and tell me stories. There is an elderly lady a few doors down who used to make the seats for the Mk VI and I also met a chap who made the wooden frames and another who put them together. Even the chap who MOTs it looked at Lucie and said, "I had been at Reliant for four days when this model was introduced". I also find at classic car shows Austin 7 owners are interested in the engine as Reliant used to use the Austin 7 engine before they developed their own side valve engine from it. Both engines therefore are quite similar.



Do you get asked to do any taxi-ing or other jobs for the cars apart from filming?



Not so much taxi-ing although the car does earn its keep. She may be almost 50 years old but its still great for moving large items. A friend of my parents was moving and in the back on one trip I got a washing machine and several other items. Before the van I had a 1972 Regal van and the restoration of that was the main focus of a restoration book I wrote (published in 2005) and the van was also test driven by Chris Barrie (Aka Rimmer in Red Dwarf) when I was invited to a photo shoot by Practical Classics magazine for an article on "Comedy Classics". On that day we were on an airfield though they had also hired an indoor go-cart centre so we were also racing around an indoor go-cart track in the Reliant.



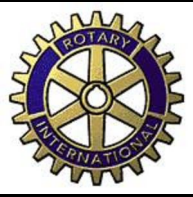
Will there ever be a shortage of three wheelers? Who (apart from your brother) has been the biggest help to your rebuild efforts and Club. Is it a dealer or a spares vendor or any particular company?



Yes there will. For a while early Reliants have never commanded a great price tag but that is starting to change with older side-valve models already increasing in value. I think one reason why Reliants have always been underestimated is that they were made well into the 2000s where as most 3-wheeler manufacturers vanished in the 60s and so those vehicles are rarer. Now Reliant no longer makes 3-wheelers and as numerous Reliants are being smashed up at Reliant banger racing events, the prices of old Reliants is now starting to rise as they become scarcer. The Robin Mk 1 (1973 – 1981) is also becoming quite scarce these days and so that to is starting to be quite collectable as will be later Reliants as they years go by and the numbers dwindle.

My Dad is a great help as he used to build and race stock cars so can build engines with his eyes closed and as you mention, my brother helps enormously and he is someone I always turn to. He is currently restoring a 1935 Reliant that has a 600cc single cylinder JAP engine though he has also raced 4x4 Landrovers he has built so

mechanically he knows his stuff. Through the R3W forum you can meet a lot of people willing to help with spare parts and offer advice though Reliant used many parts that were standard at the time so the electrics are the same as most cars of the period, some parts are the same as Landrovers, others the same as Austin or Triumph. My radiator cap was actually one that was advertised for a Jaguar XK120.



What's the most important part of any classic car show? How do you judge the shows you go to? How many shows do you go to?



My opinion on this will not match those of others. For me it is about meeting people, viewing vehicles and talking to the owners not so much scrutinising vehicles and saying that coil isn't right as it should be a XYZ type 123.



I see you landed your current job partly as a result of your impressive webmaster skills. Tell us about the site.



Yes, I am currently an Intranet Developer. Due to the sheer volume of hits my site receives I now have to host it with "one and one" on a corporate package (sadly with corporate fees). For the last 10 years these have been out of my own pocket, I did try sponsorship for a year though it wasn't reliable and I didn't always get the money. For the last few years I have had a lot of emails from companies wishing to advertise on the site and I have always said no as I didn't want visitors to be faced with a barrage of adverts. As the cost of the site increased, last year for the first time I relented and I took on just a few adverts to help cover my cost. The site is pretty much a full time job and in the past I did not use templates which was a mistake. I am currently updating 3-wheelers.com to a new format that is based on a template but it means recreating all 1,800 pages one by one which saps many, many spare hours. Due to the positive response I get from people, I can't see it ever fading away as I know of over 1,300 3-wheeler manufacturers and the site currently covers around 390 in the A-Z section. I guess it will only stop if I die or someone offers me a huge fee for it that pays off my mortgage. It's thanks to the site I have my job, I was able to do filming and indeed it has brought me other delights like being invited to the British Embassy in Paris, invited to Holland to test drive the tilting 3-wheeled Carver and many other things.



You seem to have many interests, what are they apart from work, three wheelers and the website. Do you have any other unusual interests? What is it about three wheelers? Is it that you just like them, you can work on them or is there anything else that draws you to them?



I have too many interests and not enough time. Apart from 3-wheelers and the website I am trying to complete another book, I enjoy photography (see <http://www.flickr.com/photos/elvispayne>) and I also enjoy "Kangoing". That is running in a pair of Kangoo Jumps which look like a pair of ski boots with very large springs attached to the bottom of them. (see <http://www.3wheelers.com/kango>) I get just as many looks in these as I do in my Reliant. As for 3-wheelers it is hard to explain. Folks say that once you have a Reliant its gets into your blood and so I just enjoy having one around to drive and tinker with ... and in the case of my Mk VI van, something that is probably the only one you will see on the road.

Elvis, thank you very much indeed for taking part in this, the first ever CitP Owners Club interview. We look forward to seeing you at cars in the Park in July!