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Cooper World





Ex Works and Competition Car Register



Robert Young

OBL48F's history

I was recently contacted by the new owner of OBL48F, who is delighted with the car, but was asking me if I had any further history on the car when at Abingdon and in its early life once it left those sacred gates. From consulting my files it tells me OBL48F was one of the last Works Minis built by BMC Competitions Department at Abingdon. However, the car never actually bloodied its competition nose whilst a Works car at Abingdon, being one of the few unused cars still around when Lord Stokes, the then British

Leyland Chairman's axe fell in 1970. Used for mainly recce work and demonstrations thereafter, the car was used for more serious competition work once it left Abingdon. It was driven by Mike Briggs on the 1973 RAC rally, together with numerous appearances on Motoring News rallies, driven by Geoff Grundy, with some considerable success. It has also rallied in the Isle of Man when owned by Doug Baird.



OBL48F on the 1973 Motoring News Illuminations Rally where Graham/Rowe failed to finish



OBL48F on the start ramp of the 1873 International Scottish Rally



OBL48F on an unknown event in an unknown year with an unknown crew!



OBL48F on the 1973 RAC Rally with Mike Briggs and John Graham

Gerry Braithwaite, the car's then new owner, used OBL48F on the Golden 50 Rally in 1982, which is generally accepted as being the start of historic rallying. Gerry kept the car in beautiful original condition and it was shown at the 'Mini 30' Celebrations at Silverstone in 1989. The car was kept much as it was when it was driven out of the gates of Abingdon, complete with its beautifully trimmed Works seats, eight port head and works wiring loom and retaining its original Works bodyshell, which it still has to this day.

Norman Grimshaw, the last owner before it recently changed hands, acquired the car in the mid 90s, to add to his then collection of Ex-Works cars, and kept the car much as it had been until he too decided to use the car on more serious events. The car was subsequently prepared for the 1997 Tour Auto and as this event was a half way house between a race and a rally, where numerous race circuits were visited around France, the car was prepared accordingly. A proper FIA roll cage was fitted, along with more appropriate FIA seats, the car also had a plumbed in fire extinguisher system fitted, all in the aid of crew safety. The car was also used as a training car in 2002 for the Nurburgring 24 hour race, so that Norman could learn the circuit, prior to racing there in another Mini. The last showing of OBL48F was at the 2005 Goodwood Festival of Speed, where the car was driven by Lord March and Barrie Williams to good effect on the Goodwood rally stage.

The car is in Mk2 guise, although originally built as a Mk1, it still retains the smaller Mk1 rear screen but with later rear lights, grill and badges. Needless to say, those unique lovely original Works seats and the original John Aley cage etc are still with the car, should the need arise to convert OBL48F back to its original trim. It would take little work to convert this original Works bodyshell back into Mk1 trim. As all of the modern seats, multi point roll cage etc have been left on the car, OBL48F can be used in current historic rallies, without any additional preparation. The car is probably ready to be used in most levels of competition. The new owner also tells me that the car drives superbly well!

As this car has not had a fully documented Works history and its post Abingdon history is perhaps a little patchy in the early days, it would be nice to hear of any other events the car did prior to Gerry Braithwaite using the car on that Golden Fifty event way back in 1982. I will of course pass this information on.

Electronic Ignition

Although not strictly a period correct item for our cars and still not permitted in certain forms of racing and rallying, I can see the benefits if they are proven to be reliable. I have written here in the past about the potential unreliability of these things and because of what I had written, I was approached, at the recent NEC Classic Car show, by a company called CSI-Ignition, who now markets what they feel is the perfect electronic ignition system for the Mini. This is not, in fairness, a subject that I know much about, being a points and condenser man myself, but I do know many have tried to use various electronic ignition set ups on early A series engines with varying degrees of success. Crucially, from what I understand, the resistance of the HT coil has to be at least 3 ohms to avoid overheating the distributor's electronics, which is often the cause of premature failure of many electronic ignition set ups. Some swear by electronic ignition, others have given up the ghost and gone back to 'old school' technology.

The big disadvantage with electronic ignition is that if it fails – it's a tow truck home. With points and condensers, provided you have spares with you (and who wouldn't carry spares of these) it is fixable by the roadside – as many of us have done. The trouble



The all New 23D positive earth electronic distributor from CSI Ignition

now is that the quality of ignition parts on the market today are so poor, the occasion of them failing is no longer a rarity. Many ignition parts are being cheaply produced from across the water to standards far below those we've come to expect from Lucas. This is why 'old stock' Lucas items are much sought after. Rotor arms are still a big problem but there are stocks of good ones out there now, so this should be a thing of the past. Again, 'old stock' items or even working original old ones are favoured rather than unspecified new.

One of the issues for me, with electronic ignition, is aesthetics. The distributors just don't look right and, coupled with the associated wiring, I've never been tempted to fit one. The other big issue is that I, along with quite a few folk, still run my car with positive earth, which has restricted the choice of products considerably. However, that is now set to change as CSI-Ignition are producing electronic ignition within new distributor bodies that are exactly the same as original items – you'll have to take the cap off to see the difference!

The range for the Mini includes 23D and 25D bodies and the later 43D and 45D bodies plus there is also the A+ 59D model available. The 23D and 25D can be specified as negative or positive earth, which is a real bonus. And the other attractive function is that the distributor will have no less than sixteen different ignition curves programmed into the distributor, as well as the standard curve. These can easily be selected by the turn of a screw once the cap is removed. The standard curve also has a rev limiter built in. The final nice touch is that the wiring is very neat and discreet and is very similar to that of the standard distributor. On the 23D sample I have seen the wires exit the distributor by the LT connection which cleverly disguises them. You'd be really hard pressed to know it wasn't a standard 40819 Cooper S distributor.

The performance of the system is claimed to give more torque with less emissions plus smoother running, better fuel consumption and not least, make starting a breeze (no bad thing!). The retail price for the non vacuum distributor should be £225 including VAT and £250 with the vacuum advance, which considering it is also a brand new distributor seems good value to me. They plan to have them available via Swiftune in the very near future, who will also be offering a 'special turning curves' model at a modest additional cost. I hope to be able to let you have a working report on the distributor next month.

A Series Engine book

In closing, I thought I'd bring to your attention a new book written by Graham Robson on the 'A' series engine. There is a full review of the book earlier in the magazine but in case you missed it, I can't recommend this book highly enough. It's totally absorbing with the depth of detail so often missing in many car books these days. It brings home what a great engine this lump of iron really was, considering it started life way back in 1951. With over 14 million 'A' series engine being built in nearly 50 years of production, it reinforces just how good it was. The book also has a nice chapter on competition cars. A must have book.

Robert Young



Swiftune
Engineering

CLASSIC SPORT IGNITION

CSI-ignition is a fully electronic ignition built in an original housing. You will have to remove the cap to see the difference! After removing the cap you can select between 16 different curves by using a screwdriver. A bright flashing led light shows which curve you have selected.

For the Mini we developed, together with Swiftune, special tuning curves. These special Swiftune distributors can be ordered on the web shop of Swiftune, see www.swiftune.co.uk. We deliver them in an original looking housing for the Lucas 23D/25D, 43D/45D and the 59D.

The CSI-ignition is easy to install and will bring you a lot of advantages. Your car will have more torque and power, better emission, smoother running and starting, less fuel consumption and the ignition is maintenance free.

The CSI-ignitions are tested in classic rallying. Cars with our ignition competed in long distance rallies like the Monte-Carlo Historique the Tulip Rally, the Wintertrail, Carrera Copacabana and Amsterdam-Beijing.

The CSI-ignition is available for most cars with a 4 or 6 cylinder engine with Lucas, Bosch or Ducellier ignition.

Please visit www.csi-ignition.com to see if the CSI-ignition is available for your car.



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