

FINDS & DISCOVERIES

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by Marcus Rowe

UNUSUAL ULSTER

Good friend of *The Automobile* and indefatigable balloonist Robin Batchelor has brought to our attention this Austin Seven special, the subject of a lively and thought-provoking debate online, on the Austin Seven Friends forum. But this is no ordinary special. Its new custodian, the aptly-named Austin Harris, has determined that beneath the later homemade body are the chassis and mechanicals of an original Ulster: matching numbers and 10-stud engine, with most of the floor still present. It even retains its original ignition coil.

But herein lies the conundrum. It is an original Ulster chassis but it has a later body. Perhaps it was crashed at some point, and an owner decided to build their own coachwork. So should the car be returned to its original specification? Or is the later body integral to its history and just as deserving of preservation? This issue has divided opinion, but Austin Harris has not shied away from presenting the dilemma to fellow enthusiasts online. And he has received every opinion you might imagine.

The deciding factor has been that the car must at least be drivable. But the current body could only really be used by a very tiny driver, so it has been decided it will be removed and preserved, while a separate TT Ulster body which has been dormant for some time will be fitted in its place. This seems a sensible compromise to give a useable car without resorting to the destruction of anything historic.

By now the car is disassembled for inspection and has been found to be in excellent condition. Items such as the cylinder bores and spring shackles show very little sign of wear and the original crankshaft and connecting rods are present. But one missing piece is the steering arrangement. This has been very badly modified at some point, so Austin is on the lookout for the hen's tooth that is an original Ulster steering box. We are happy to know that this car is in the hands of a real enthusiast who will treat it with the respect and care it deserves.

ENTICING ESTATE

Prewar estate cars are few and far between, most being 'shooting brake' bodies fitted to expensive machinery designed to transport wealthy sportsmen and their guests about their shooting estates. As usual, for some time the more ordinary and practical cars of the era were overlooked by collectors. So here it is delightful to see an undisturbed example of an extremely useful body style. Most automotive designers of the 1930s were only just beginning to think about luggage space, so seeing a proper estate car on the roads before the war must have been an unusual occurrence. Of course, it's entirely possible this car was converted postwar, when many saloon cars were re-bodied in an estate car style.

This Hillman Minx is said to have had been



1 This unassuming Austin Seven special hides a secret...

2 ...it is built upon an original Ulster chassis

3 The dilemma: return to original Ulster body, or conserve the later homemade one?

4 It mostly looks original except for this badly-welded brake pedal and the steering box