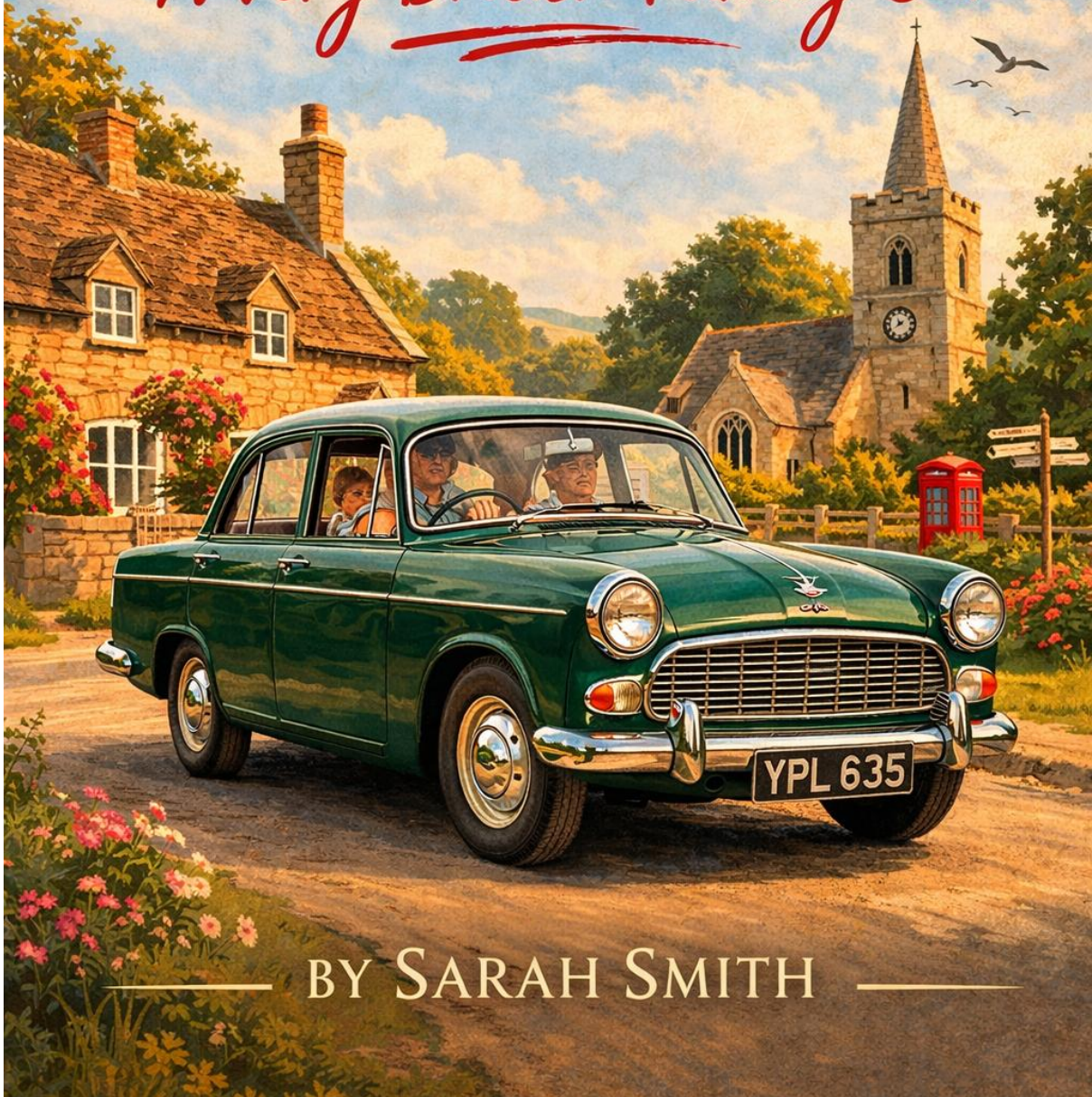


— THE HISTORY OF —
**THE MORRIS
OXFORD**

A Very British Family Car



— BY SARAH SMITH —

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Introduction

The Morris Oxford was never meant to be flashy or exciting. Instead, it was designed to be practical, reliable, and comfortable – the sort of car that families, professionals, and businesses could depend on every day. In many ways, it was the definition of a sensible British saloon.



While the Morris Minor often steals the spotlight today thanks to its charm and character, the Oxford played a slightly different role. It was bigger, roomier, and a little more grown-up. If the Minor was the cheerful runabout, the Oxford was the car you upgraded to when you needed a bit more space for the family – or simply wanted something that felt a bit more substantial for the road. Think

of it as the Minor’s bigger, steadier older brother (or sister!).

The Oxford name itself actually goes back much further than the models most people picture today. The badge first appeared in the early twentieth century, when William Morris was building what would become one of Britain’s most important motor manufacturers. Over the decades, the Oxford evolved alongside the company, gradually growing larger, more refined, and better suited to the needs of everyday drivers.

By the 1950s and 1960s, the Morris Oxford had become a very familiar sight on British roads. It was the sort of car you might see parked outside a doctor’s surgery, a small business, or a semi-detached house on a quiet suburban street. It wasn’t glamorous, but it was dependable – and for thousands of drivers, that was exactly what mattered.

The Oxford may not always get the same nostalgic attention as some of its contemporaries, but it played a huge role in everyday motoring. Its story is really a story about ordinary journeys – school runs, family holidays, work commutes – all carried out with steady reliability.



The Morris Badge was designed to directly reference the heraldic coat of arms for the city of Oxford, where William Morris established his first workshop and factory. The design historically incorporates a red ox crossing blue, wavy lines representing the River Isis.

The Oxford Before the War

Many people will be familiar with the post-war version of the Morris Oxford, but did you know, the Oxford badge first appeared as early as 1913, when William Morris introduced a new car from his factory in Oxford.

At the time, Britain's motor industry was still finding its feet. Cars were expensive, often unreliable, and generally considered a luxury for the wealthy. Morris had slightly different ambitions. His goal was to produce simple, practical cars that ordinary middle-class families could realistically afford, and the Oxford became one of the models that helped move things in that direction.

The Early Oxford (1913)



The very first Oxford was a sturdy little car with a 1-litre engine and a top speed of around 45-50mph – a leisurely pace today, but by the standards of the time it was considered modern and dependable. Morris relied on components supplied by other

manufacturers – engines, gearboxes, and axles – assembling them into a finished car at his factory. This was common practice in the early days of British car production.

Despite its modest performance, the Oxford helped establish Morris as a serious player in the growing motor industry.

Between the Wars

Then came World War I and factories across Britain turned to wartime manufacturing. But after the war, Morris quickly returned to car production and continued developing Oxford range.

During the 1920s and 1930s, several updated versions appeared. Engines became larger, and the cars began to gradually resemble the familiar saloon shape we associate with classic British cars today.

By the late 1930s the Oxford had evolved into a respectable mid-sized family car which was practical, solidly built, and very much in keeping with Morris' philosophy of sensible motoring.

A Car for Changing Britain

The interwar years were a time when car ownership began slowly expanding beyond the wealthy. Roads were improving, motoring organisations were growing, and more families were beginning to see cars as something useful rather than extravagant. Models like the Oxford helped to make that possible, as they weren't glamorous sports cars or luxury machines – but they were solid, sensible, and reliable – built with everyday life in mind.

Of course, the story was about to be interrupted again by another global conflict. When World War II began, civilian car production once again ground to a halt. But when peace returned, the Morris name – and the Oxford badge – would re-emerge in a very different Britain.

And it was in those post-war years that the Morris Oxford would become the familiar car many people remember today.



1927 Oxford *flatnose* 4-door saloon
Photo by Graham Robertson

Post War Britain and the Oxford MO

When World War II came to an end, Britain was a very different place from the country that had entered the conflict six years earlier. Cities had been bombed, industry stretched to its limits, and everyday life was still shaped by shortages and rationing.



1930 Oxford Six six-slight saloon
Photo by Steve Glover

Unsurprisingly, cars had taken a bit of a back seat during the war

years. Factories that had once produced civilian vehicles had been turned over to wartime production, building everything from aircraft parts to military equipment. When peace returned, the British motor industry had to start again – and quickly.

But there was a problem.

Britain needed to export goods in order to rebuild its economy. The government pushed manufacturers to sell cars overseas wherever possible. In fact, there was even a slogan at the time “Export or Die.”

For companies like Morris Motors, this meant developing cars that could appeal not only to British drivers, but to buyers in places like South Africa, North America, and Australia.

At home in Britain, the needs of motorists were also changing. Families wanted cars that were practical, reliable, and comfortable enough for everyday use. The days of tiny, basic, pre-war cars were fading and drivers were beginning to expect a bit more space and refinement, if not luxury.

As roads improved, long distance travel was becoming more common, and the car was starting to become an important part of family life rather than just an occasional convenience.

In 1948, Morris introduced the Morris Oxford MO, the first truly post-war version of the Oxford name. Designed by Sir Alec Issigonis, it was unveiled at the British International Motor Show – one of the first major motor shows after the war.

Compared to its pre-war predecessors, the MO felt like a step into a more modern age. It featured smoother styling, improved comfort, and a dependable engine that made it a practical choice for families. It wasn't flashy or exciting, but that wasn't the point.

The Oxford was designed to be sensible: a car that could carry a family, handle everyday journeys, and do so without too much fuss. In many ways, The Morris Oxford embodied the spirit of post-war Britain itself – practical, hardworking, and determined to move forward.



Photo by Redsimon

The Oxford Through the Generations

Oxford Series II (1954-1956)

By the mid-1950s, Britain was beginning to feel a little more optimistic. The worst of the post war-shortages were easing, televisions were appearing in living rooms, and the idea of the family car was becoming more common.



The Oxford Series II reflected this changing mood. It was slightly more modern in its styling and benefited from a new 1.5-litre B-Series engine, giving it a little more power for increasingly busy roads.

It was still sensible, still practical – but it also felt like a car for a country slowly regaining its confidence.

Oxford Series III (1956-1959)



1956 was the year that the Oxford received its first significant visual redesign. The Series III introduced a noticeably more modern body shape with subtle tail fins and a wider stance – very much reflecting the styling trends of the time.

These design influences were coming from across the Atlantic, where American cars were becoming increasingly dramatic in appearance. While the Oxford remains fairly restrained compared to its American cousins, the Series III definitely looked more *contemporary*.

The Farina Era (Series V & VI)

By the end of the 1950s, car design was changing rapidly. The rounded shapes of the early post-war years were beginning to look old fashioned, and buyers were starting to expect something a bit more modern.

In 1959, the British Motor Corporation unveiled a completely redesigned Morris Oxford. It was known as the Morris Oxford Series V and it introduced a striking new body style created by the Italian design house Pininfarina.



The result was a car that looked *very* different from the earlier Oxford models. Instead of soft curves, you had clean, straight lines, and a much more angular shape. The windows were larger, giving the car a more spacious feel, and the subtle tail fins hinted at the influence of contemporary American styling.

Although the Italian involvement hinted at glamour, the overall design was unmistakably practical. The Morris Oxford was still intended to be a sensible family car, not a show piece.

Curiously, while there was never a Series IV saloon, a short-lived Series IV Traveller did exist. Produced as a stop-gap before the arrival of the Farina models, it was largely based on the Morris Oxford III with minor updates and improvements.

It was produced in relatively small numbers between 1957-58 and remains one of the more obscure chapters in the Oxford story.



Photo by Martin Maddog

The Farina styling wasn't unique to the Oxford. In fact, the same basic body shell was used across several models within the BMC range, including the Austin Cambridge and the Wolseley 15/60.

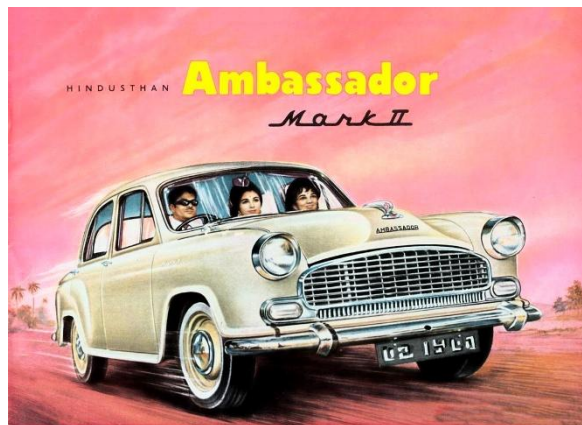
In 1961 the Oxford was updated again with the introduction of the Morris Oxford Series VI. Externally the car looked very much the same, but the car received a slightly larger 1.6-litre version of the B-Series engine, which gave it improved performance and a bit more flexibility on the road.

Did You Know?

One of the most remarkable chapters in the Morris Oxford story didn't happen in Britain at all.

In 1957, the Indian company Hindustan Motors began producing a licenced version of the Morris Oxford Series III. The car was renamed the Hindustan Ambassador, and it would go on to become one of the most famous vehicles in Indian history.

While the Morris Oxford disappeared off British roads in the early 1970s, the Ambassador continued rolling off the production line for decades – in fact production continued right up until 2014, meaning the basic design of the Morris Oxford lived on for almost sixty years!



The Morris Oxford in Everyday Life

Part of the Morris Oxford's appeal was its reputation for sensible dependable motoring. Like the Morris Minor, it wasn't designed to be fast, or flashy, but it offered something far more valuable: reliability and practicality.

For many families in the 1950s and 60s, owning a car was still a fairly significant investment, so running costs mattered. The Oxford earned a reputation for being relatively economical to maintain, the dependable B-Series engine was known for its durability and was shared with several other cars produced by the British Motor Corporation. This meant that parts were widely available and mechanics were familiar with how to keep them running.

Fuel economy was respectable for a car of its size. Later models could achieve around 30 miles to the gallon under normal driving conditions – perfectly reasonable for a mid-sized saloon at the time. Insurance and tax costs were also manageable, making the Oxford an attractive option for middle-class families looking for an everyday car.

The Oxford's roomy interior was another major advantage. Compared with smaller cars of the period, it offered generous seating for up to five passengers and had a reasonably large boot, so ideal for family holidays!

The Oxford's sturdy construction made it a popular choice for public service vehicles. Various British police forces operated Oxford saloons during the 1950s and 60s as their durability and roomy interior made them ideal for long shifts and patrol work.

In some towns the Oxford also found work as a taxi. Its generous interior space made it comfortable for passengers and it was tough enough mechanically to spend several hours on the road.

So, while it never sought the spotlight, the Oxford definitely earned its place as one of the dependable workhorses of British motoring.



The End of the Oxford

By the late 1960s, the Morris Oxford had become a familiar sight on British roads and for many years it had filled an important role as a dependable mid-sized family saloon, practical, roomy, and straightforward.

But the car industry was rapidly changing and drivers were beginning to expect more modern styling, improved performance, and new engineering ideas. Newer car models were starting to appear on the market with features such as front-wheel drive, sleeker body shapes, and more advanced suspension.

Like the Morris Minor, the Oxford was fundamentally based on a design that dated back to the 1950s and compared to newer cars on the market it was beginning to feel a little old-fashioned.

During this time, the British motor industry itself was going through a time of huge upheaval. In 1968, several manufacturers merged to form British Leyland, bringing together brands such as Morris, Austin, Triumph, and Rover. Within this new structure, older models were gradually phased out in favour of newer designs which were intended to compete with increasingly modern European cars.

Production of the Morris Oxford VI finally came to an end in 1971 and in many ways its successor was the Morris Marina, which had been designed to appeal to a new generation of drivers and compete with the popular European cars of the time.



The Quiet Legacy of the Morris Oxford

The Morris Oxford was never intended to be a glamorous car. It wasn't designed to break speed records or make people stare on the streets. Instead, it was built to provide dependable, practical transport for everyday people.

It managed to fill that role for more than two decades after the war – carrying families on holidays and commuters to work. It served in public roles, worked long hours as taxis, and essentially became part of the everyday landscape of British roads.

Through its various generations – from the early post-war models to the later Farina design – we see the Oxford adapting and evolving to meet the changing needs of British drivers through the years.

When production ended in 1971, it did so quietly, without much fanfare. Yet the car had already secured its place in motoring history. It may not be as famous, or hold as much appeal as some of its contemporaries (the Morris Minor being a great example), but with its reputation as a solid family saloon, it helped define what every day motoring looked like for a generation.

In the end, the Morris Oxford's story is much like the car itself: unassuming, dependable, and quietly significant.



Nuffield Oxford Series I. Photo by MunBill