

British Car Dealerships In Victoria – '40's, 50's, 60's, 70's

Victoria native Wayne Watkins presents an overview of who sold which English cars in Victoria during the period from the end of World War 2 until the late 1970s.

MG

In the late 1940's, **Victoria Super Service**, at Johnson and Blanshard, was just one dealership where a new MG could be bought. The garage backed out on to Pandora and was a past home of DePape Motors. It is now the WIN store. The main front garage area was the past home of Romeo's Pizza on Johnson & Blanshard, but is now the Juliet condominiums. I owned a '49 MG Y-Tourer that was first bought by one of the young salesmen – they didn't have demos in those days. That salesman was Robin Yellowlees, who now lives in Kelowna. That Y-Tourer is now under restoration by Ken Finnigan in Kamloops.

Early MGs were also sold by Les Blow of **British Motors**. If you are from Victoria you will recognize the name of Les Blow Motorcycles. Les located his MG dealership by the Times Colonist building near the roundabout. Those of us from Victoria still call the big intersection of Government, Douglas, Gorge and Hillside what it was for years – the roundabout. It was built in the 40's and demolished in 1963. It actually worked well but it was a nightmare for tourists – they would get stuck in it and not know how to exit.

I am told that Trevor Woodruff worked for Les Blow's British Motors and would take a MG TC up to Cassidy Airport and race it. Haybales defined the temporary 'every Sunday' racetrack. I guess the TC went back on the showroom floor on Monday as a 'low mileage demo'!

Triumph Standard

Louis Nelson Motors, originally a Kaiser Fraser dealer, sold Triumphs and Standard Vanguards until 1958. There are still some TR3s in Victoria that were sold from Louis Nelson Motors.

Horwood Bros. took over Triumph and Standard Vanguard from Louis Nelson in 1958 and then later MG. My own '69 MGB was sold from Horwood Bros. in 1969. They also sold Wolseley, Riley, Morris as well. Bob Rebitt was the sales manager and he had a few tales to tell when I spoke to him recently. The cars were shipped from England and eventually made their way to Ogden Point where they were dropped off 'dry'. That means no fluids. They were all towed to Horwood Bros. and topped up with oil and gasoline and electrolyte added to the batteries. As well as Rover, Morris was one of the marques sold by Horwood Bros. Bob recalls a special model of the Morris Minor in 1959 – it wasn't the Morris 1000 – it was the Morris Minor "Million"! Three hundred and fifty Morris Minor 'Millions' were shipped to North America to celebrate the first English car to achieve the one million production figure. They were all 2 doors painted Lilac colour with white interiors. The one that came to Victoria to Horwood Bros. was sold to Tony deGoutiere, the jeweler on Estevan. Horwood Bros. became Mazda dealers in 1977.

Jaguar

One of the oldest English car dealers around, Plimleys on Yates at Vancouver was a Jaguar, Austin, and later, MG dealer. Thomas Plimley had a dealership in Vancouver as well. They also sold Austin Healey and then Rover. The business in that location now is Moxies Grill. Quite a few cars in the OECC came from Plimleys.

Rootes Group

Jamieson Motors was the Rootes dealer, selling Hillman, Sunbeam and Singer. They were in the 700 block of Courtney Street. Apparently they took over a funeral home premises. They had quite a showroom –

all in tile and with a fountain as well. Jamieson Motors is where Susan Jones' Sunbeam Rapier was sold from close to 50 years ago.



English Ford

The English Ford Centre was operated by Peter Pollen Ford. They sold Cortina, Prefect, Anglia 105E – that would be Harry Potter's car. The English Ford Centre was on Yates where the Market on Yates is now.

TVR

The TVR sports car was sold from a shop across from the Memorial Arena owned by Jack Hilliard. The TVR name was derived from the owner's name – Trevor Wilkinson. The TVR came with engines from Coventry Climax in the 50's to Ford V8s and in more recent times the Rover V8.

Morgan

I used to own a '63 Morgan 4/4 sold by George Sterne who first opened his Morgan dealership in the building on MacDonald Park Road in Sidney, which is now Coyote Canvas. He moved the garage to the very visible site on the Pat Bay Highway for many years and then moved to Vancouver. By the way, my old Morgan is alive and well and in the hands of Dave Collis of Pitt Meadows. He has owned it since I sold it to him in 1969. No, he won't sell it back to me!

Postscript: On a related note, Wayne was approached by Blair Walker at ECAIP, who had come to the show to see all the cars. It turns out that Blair is the great grandson of Thomas Plimley! Blair lives here in Victoria.

Period advertisements from the Victoria Daily Times and the Daily Colonist, c. 1939