

B32 WATCHING MEN MAKE A MORGAN

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

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A visit to the factory where they make Morgan sports cars was second best to our original plans some 53 years ago. At that time I whispered in the ear of my new bride, "At one time in his life a man has to own a red MG." Happily she agreed and we bought one. What she didn't know was there was another part of that wish list. It took some time before I whispered the second part. "Then, just before we go back to the States, we'll sell it and buy a new Morgan."

I must have caught the moment right because, again, she agreed. Unfortunately, we spent so much of our meager income careening around Europe during that year, that when the time came we had no money for a new car. In brief, that's how the MG became such a large part of our lives. Today that early dream was about to be revisited. We were on our way to tour the Morgan factory.



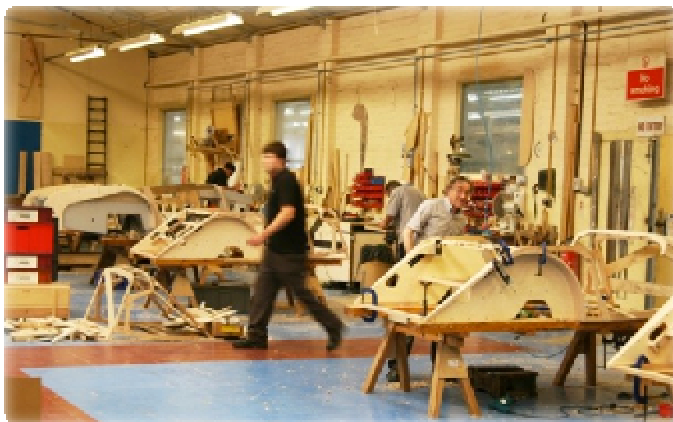
At this point some of our female readers may be rolling their eyes, thinking "Not another car guy thing" and Louise reminds me that the women on the tour were beyond boredom but she maintains it was "interesting." Great Malvern, a smallish town, is in the beautiful hill country of mid England. Morgan has



been building cars of all sorts since the early twentieth century in this town. A distinction is that it's one of the last, if not only, car manufacturer still owned by the founding family. The original factory was built on a hillside and as it expanded it grew down the hill making it easy to roll an unfinished car to the next workstation, sort of an early version of Henry Ford's assembly line.



The Morgan that our friends Helen and Al Stauderman bought over fifty years ago bears a great resemblance to those made today.



The surprise is that they are still built the same way. Once the steel frame is laid out, most of the rest of the car is made of wood secured by jigs and templates still in use over decades.

Those wooden parts are put together with screws and glue, just like always. The men working in the shop have spent years in apprenticeship before becoming a master at the craft.





The metal parts, like body panels, doors and fenders, are formed bent and hammered into shape by men who know the exact curve a hood has to be to go on the car. No wonder replacement parts are so expensive.



Other body parts are screwed and nailed to the wooden frame and by the time it rolls into the trim shop you cannot see any trace of the original ash framing.



Usually one person does the interior trim on each vehicle and by the time it rolls out the last door at the bottom of the hill it is a finished car.

Many Morgan owners buy their cars to enjoy the fun of racing and Morgan maintains a special shop to breathe a little extra fire into those intended for action on the track.



Most of the finished Morgans sit impatiently in a holding room awaiting distribution to the dealers who will deliver the cars to their new owners. If there are special paint requests a factory this small can honor them...even for owners who have a psychedelic bent.

While Morgan sticks to the traditional it is not afraid to expand it's production line to include new materials and advanced design. Their latest model is all aluminum including the pre cast frame and has drawn many differing opinions. Like it or not, it is still a Morgan.





For those completely stuck in the past, Morgan is releasing a model they first introduced in 1933 and last produced in 1953. It's commonly known as the "Trike" and was first conceived to get around English vehicle tax laws. The three-wheeler has a motorcycle type engine, carries two people and does have side curtains and a top. The original model was sold as a kit car and, with the air-cooled engine, was classified and taxed as a home built motorcycle.



While the Trike has obvious tax advantages, comfort and convenience are not high on a list of attributes. It's often said of three wheeled cars, "You can be sure of one thing with a Trike; you'll never miss a bump."

Non-traditional revenue resource planning has turned the factory tour into a cost center at the Morgan automobile factory. Unlike most manufacturers, Morgan charged us \$16 apiece to be guided through their facility. Not only that, they wouldn't allow us to keep the lanyards as souvenirs. I'll bet MG wouldn't do that today. Of course, Morgan is still in business and MG is long gone so who's laughing now.



We're off to England's Lake District to see some beautiful scenery first hand.

We'll also visit with some terrific new friends.

Louise and Ray