

# Tiny Tender



Words and photos by Iain Ayre

This ultra-rare Mini-based fire engine spent all its working life in the UK, but it now resides in the USA.

At the 2003 All British Field Meet in Van Dusen Gardens, Vancouver, Canada, an expat Pom looked at a Mini, changed colour and stepped back in amazement. In about 1968, at Bexley Hospital in England, he'd been the driver of this little fire engine.

Some years ago it had been imported into Seattle, USA, and had been taken up to Vancouver for the weekend to be displayed with the Vancouver Mini Club.

It seems extraordinary that it had survived unrestored for this length of time, but it makes sense when you think about it. The reason there are so many ancient fire engines still around is that they have a pretty

easy life. Unless something's on fire, they just sit in a shed. They're serviced, given a little gentle exercise now and again to keep them running, given an annual MOT (the UK's equivalent to our roadworthy test) and then put back in the shed.

This particular vehicle probably didn't see much fire fighting action – the main reason it existed was that Bexley Hospital was of a size that meant it was required to have its own fire tender, because it was some distance from the nearest fire station. I reckon they would just call 999 if they smelled smoke.

For 31 years, the Firefly Mini sat in its shed, accumulating mileage at the recorded rate of 51 miles per annum. Its current mileage reading is 1592.8. The speedo is currently broken, so there may have been a few more miles – who knows?

The Firefly's origins go back 1,600 miles and 40 years to the Angus Fire Armour company,

whose London Fire Engine and Sprinkler Department announced a brand new 'compact and capable fire-fighting unit', the Mini-based Firefly. With an optional fourteen-foot alloy ladder (sadly, lost many years back), pump, water tank, hose, ladder gantries and rear canvas roof or tilt, the converted pickup retailed for the grand total of £829.

Although the Mini-based fire engine was a new concept, the Angus Firefly was an established brand: the 1960 Angus Firefly was the same sort of design, but based on a Land Rover.

The big nobs at Bexley Hospital, at Dartford in Kent, saw the demonstrator (possibly also the prototype) Firefly Mini at the British Fire Services Association Conference at Hastings, and they liked the look of it. They asked for a brochure on 16 January 1964, ordered their Firefly on 20 February, and took delivery in June. For the next 31 years the Firefly potted around the hospital, occasionally extinguishing a dustbin fire, but mostly parked in its shed.

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AFA company newsletter report on the release of the Firefly Mini



Builder's plate on the rear tailgate.