

Age and Beauty

When you own one of the first Minis made, and one of the last, it indicates a certain passion for the Mini. One that has survived across the world, and through a fair bit of adversity.

Words and photos by Craig Watson.



Kevin Barry got his first Mini, an 850, from a policeman in Southern Rhodesia in 1973, and had sixteen of them over the next ten years. He's had more than 30 in total now, but had to leave most of them overseas.

He'd moved to Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, with his parents in 1969, and lived through some turbulent years in the country.

He recalls one incident in the 1980s when he and his friends were chased by three Mercedes, each full of gun-wielding angry men. "I only found out later that one of the guys I was with, who was sitting in the back, was giving them the two fingers all the way down the road. We got away, and spent a couple of nights sleeping in the bush."

Other problems were less life threatening. Next time you complain about the price of petrol, spare a thought for the people of Zimbabwe. "It would be thousands of dollars now, for a gallon of petrol. It's like Monopoly money there, it's not currency anymore."

Even before he left there, Kevin said petrol was a major concern. "Because of fuel rationing,



Left-hand-drive on Aussie roads is a bit unnerving, but Kevin has it sorted.

you used to get these little coupons. The seven coupons which I would get for the Mini, each month, would get seven gallons of petrol. But, if you had a second car, you would get another three coupons. You'd find a lot of people, all the Mini guys over there, had five, six or seven Minis registered on the road at any one time, but they'd only use the one that was cheapest on petrol. I had five, and my 1480cc Mini sat in the shed."

"Numerous times we would sleep on the side of the road in the Mini, one in the front, one in the back, waiting for the petrol station to open, and when it opened the bowser would be empty. One time I ran out of petrol near the border of South Africa. I pushed the car across the border in order to get petrol, helped by my best friends Brett and Inge, and it was about a kilometer between the two border posts."

But it wasn't the petrol rationing, or even the day-to-day concerns of violence that made him leave the country, as he explains. "In 1982 I was running the Chief Civil Engineer's drawing office for the railways, in an active but unofficial position. I'd been doing it for fourteen months, but when I asked if we could formalise it, and give me a promotion, I was told that Mr Mugabe's government had just passed a law, saying no promotion for whites until further notice."

"I said that's the end of my railway career really... So we decided to leave. We could see that if that was the way it was going, there wasn't any future in it for us. Alison's parents lived in South Africa, but we all had British passports, so we decided to go to England."

However, leaving the country wasn't quite so simple. Firstly, there was a ban on taking money out of the country. "We could take a car with us, but all my friends who were into Minis would have killed me if I'd taken any Mini stuff out, so I sold all my Mini stuff to them, and bought this beautiful little Triumph Spitfire. It only cost me about \$1200 at the time, and I could afford to fly it over."

"We arrived on the plane one day, with about £70 between us, and the car arrived two days later. We picked it up at Heathrow, and that was it. We had the Spitfire for a short while before selling it for some ready cash, and we picked up with the Minis again. I bought a Clubman Estate, and ran that for a little while, then in about 1984 we decided to save up the money to buy a new one."

Kevin and Alison bought a brand new Mayfair, the top of the range at the time. "We drove to John o' Groates, the top of Scotland, and back. We had a fabulous holiday, Scotland was great, and we ran the Mini in on that trip. Then we thought, it's a good little car, so we took it to Switzerland. We've got pictures of this little Mini covered in snow, and you could hardly see it."

In 1984 the couple attended the Mini's 25th Birthday celebrations, and have been to each big bash at Silverstone, held every five years since. After attending the 30th they decided to buy a Mini 30, so traded in the Mayfair. The Mini 30 was traded in on another new Mayfair for Alison in about 1992.

Meanwhile, Kevin had worked for a bottling and capping machinery company, and British Telecom, before putting himself through



Kevin with the two Minis.

horticultural college. "I always liked being outdoors. I was often outdoors in Rhodesia. When I worked for the railways, I'd be away for 10 days at a time. With the bottling and capping machines I was inside every day for three years. It nearly drove me mad. With telecom I was outside all day, every day of the week – just fantastic."

He started a small business, doing garden design and general handyman work, and had a tired Mini van and a trailer. "It had a tow bar on it, that I bought at the 1995 London-Brighton Mini run, for £8 - and what you would call Sunrasia wheels. I said we really should look for a good van."

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