



## The 1948–61 Morris Commercial 'J' type Forward Control Vans

By Rick Feibusch

The Morris Commercial "J" type Van was one of the many new postwar designs that were introduced by the Nuffield Organization in 1948 along with the Morris Minor and Series MO Oxfords and Sixes. While first sold during the England's early "Export Or Die" era, a program that linked steel allotments to export sales volume, few exported to the USA. Most Americans enthusiasts know this little truck because of the Dinky Toys model that was offered from 1956 in a number of liveries including a Royal Mail GPO van. (pictured at the top of the next page). While a number of smaller vans were available in Europe before WWII, this is one of the earliest examples of what we call a "minivan" today. It predates the VW microbus, widely accepted as the grandfather of the modern minivan, by two years!

The 'J' type was introduced at the 1948 Commercial Motor Show at Earls Court. The preproduction version that Morris Commercial exhibited on their stand at the show differed in many details from the production vehicles that were to hit the streets in late 1949. The prewar style Easiclean (steel spoked artillery style) wheels gave way to pressed steel disc wheels, and the grille, headlamps and sidelights, as well as other items, were redesigned before full production commenced.

It followed the emerging trend of having forward controls and sliding doors on each side and was made in both left and right hand drive versions. Morris Commercial had introduced the larger 15/20 cwt 'PV' model with a similar forward control layout in 1939, although few were made before the outbreak of the Second World War brought civilian production to a halt. Production resumed in 1945. This flat-fronted, engine-in-the-floor design was subsequently used in the new 'J' type,

Morris Motors at Cowley, the car-building branch of the same Nuffield empire, had been manufacturing a 10cwt van since the mid-1930s. Although not fully forward control, the van had many similarities with the 'J' type, which mirrored its overall compact size and its offset engine.



Photographs exist of two prototypes, one of which shows that the designers had considered incorporating the company's then-current frontal styling, featuring a vertical slatted grille that resembled the larger 'PV' van, though much improved by the stylishly curvaceous pressed steel body.

The "J" type was fitted with a 1476 cc four cylinder side valve engine based on the unit used in the contemporary Morris Oxford car. It was mated to a 3-speed gearbox. "J" types were originally fitted with a "banjo" style rear axle, although after 10,472 units had been built, it was changed for a hypoid-bevel axle. Initially vans had a cable linkage for the accelerator, but this was soon changed for a rod mechanism.

Another difference on early vehicles was the fitting of rectangular Lucas sidelights (as fitted to the Austin Atlantic) under the headlamps, rather than the later round Morris Minor units.

In June 1954 the engine cowling was revised, the attractive angular hinged item giving way to a more rounded, liftoff one.

As well as complete vehicles, the "J" type was also supplied in basic chassis form to external body makers and it appeared, amongst other uses, as pickups, tipper trucks, ice cream vans and milk floats.

Fleets of "J" type vans were purchased by the British Post Office. These differed from a standard model in having rubber front and rear fenders. Images of examples can be found throughout this article.





In the immediately postwar years, since export sales were so vital to the economy, many 'J' types were shipped to export markets usually as C.K.D. (Completely Knocked Down) kits for assembly at their destination. They were marketed in the following countries:

Australia; Bahamas; Belgium; Burma; Canada; Ceylon; Cyprus; Colombia; Denmark; Eire; Finland; the Gold Coast; Holland; Indonesia; India; Italy; Kenya; Malaysia; Malta; Mexico; New Zealand; Nigeria; Norway; Pakistan; Perak; Rhodesia; South Africa; Sweden; Switzerland; and Thailand.

After the formation of the British Motor Corporation in 1952, by the merger of Morris's parent company the Nuffield Organization (Morris, Riley Woseley, & MG), with Austin, the "Commercial" name was dropped and the van was now sold as the Morris J-type.

The van was updated to the JB in 1957 when the BMC, B-Series overhead valve, 1489 cc engine was fitted along with a new four-speed gearbox.

An Austin badge engineered version of the van also appeared in 1957 known as the Austin 101 and differed from the Morris only in the grille (Images are on the final page).

Production ceased early in 1961 after over 48,600 had been made and was replaced by the Morris J2. A picture of a J2 bus is on the last page of this article. Below is a "J" series that has been completely rebodied as an ice cream vendors van.





## The Spirit Of 1950s Great Britain

These friendly-looking Morris "J" type vans, in GPO Telephone and Postal livery are redolent of Great Britain in the Fifties. Thousands of these useful vehicles graced Britain's roads at that time, most notably in the Post Office Red of the Royal Mail that was immortalized in the Dinky Toys model that was first released in 1956.

The GPO had turned to Morris for its vehicle fleet from the 1920s, staying loyal through the company's subsequent incarnations within the BMC and British Leyland empires and later as Leyland DAF. For the GPO, it all changed in 1969, when reorganized from a government department to a nationalized industry with separate postal and telephone businesses. The Post Office Telephone livery changed from dark olive green to yellow.







Austin 101 “badge engineered” versions were available after the BMC OHV running gear was fitted in 1957. The lorry example on the left shows the size with the Minor GPO van box in the back. Image below left is of the BMC J2 van that replaced the Morris “J” and Austin 101 in 1961. A full custom bodied 1956 Morris vendors van is pictured to the right.



To finish this article, I felt that I should show the reason that I started looking into these iconic British Vans. An enthusiast in the UK went on a tear and COMPLETELY rebuilt a very rusty example into this wonderful and dependable example for his business (pictured below). Most of the lower sides and floor had to be replaced with new metal. The van features late model Ford (UK) V6 power, an automatic transmission and updated suspension and brakes. Back to the Fifties, British style!

- - Rick Feibusch

