



California

REINCARNATION

THE MOGROD PROJECT

- Driven off a cliff in the 1980s and then stored for over 20 years, this is a Mog that has definitely seen better days. With more than just a spot of rust and a few dings –it's the truly gargantuan quest of James Flaagan's to see that it once again drives like a dream and enjoys the open road.



This Plus 4 was exported to the state of California from the quaint Great Malvern factory in 1966, and then sadly was crashed nearly two decades later. Saving the poor crumpled Mog from scrap, James Flaagan's father bought it in the hope of one day restoring it.

Over 30 years later James has taken the mantle and set about bringing this Mog back to life. So how did the Flaagan family end up with a Plus 4 this battered? James tells of how it came into his father's possession:

"He was looking to buy a Morgan at the time and this one just happened to come up. It wasn't in a good way, it must have fallen from quite some height as it snapped both the front shock-towers clean off!

"He was going to rebuild it if he could and ordered some parts from Morgan, but other projects took priority. He never got rid of the Morgan though. He's definitely getting a kick out of the project getting underway and he likes the direction I'm going with it."

Dubbed the MogRod, James is modifying this Plus 4, but planning to keep it looking as traditional as possible. The main

aims for the project are to replace the original suspension, engine, drivetrain, wheels and electronics and replace the wooden frame with metal surrogates. These are wholesale changes, but given the condition of the car, they're certainly necessary ones.

"Overall the idea is to keep the classic outward appearance, but under the skin have as modern a setup as possible," explained James.

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For the final finish, he's planning a two-tone colour scheme of silver main body and black wheel arches, based on a Lawrence-tuned Morgan of the 1960s. Planning is an essential part of the process – but where do you begin with a car in this condition?

Cracking open the box of bits his father had ordered originally, James ogled the gifts that had come straight from the Morgan factory – still looking pretty much like new:

"To say I was surprised with what I found is an understatement. The first surprise was the luggage rack. I knew it was in there based on the invoice, but I was pleased to see it in such good condition. After seeing the front frame and fender sitting slightly rusted, and just how covered in rat droppings and plant debris it all was, I really expected things to not turn out so well. Boy, was I wrong!

"All the rubber hoses and other parts were in great condition, but what really surprised me was to find the hood strap/belt in excellent condition – one less thing to worry about sourcing! The replacement bumpers and steering linkage were wrapped up together, and even the linkages' rubber was in great shape.

"The last item in the crate was a wide, flat wooden box. I carefully popped the lid off, and man it had some gems inside! The first oddity was a couple of blue boxes with some cathead outlines on them. These turned out to be



new headlamps for the Morgan – halogen headlamps – I didn’t even realize they had halogen headlamps that far back. The real surprises were under some layers of soft wrapping paper – a shiny new grille for the car and a new windshield, frame and all!”

With these original parts giving a positive swing to kick off this daunting task, the cost of the project was reduced; the next step was to find a donor vehicle to use for the engine, drivetrain and suspension.

Using some knowledge from US Morgan importer, Isis, who swap engines and drivetrains of Morgans to comply with US regulations, James chose to take inspiration from their Plus 4 conversions which uses a GM 2.4L Ecotec unit. After a bit of searching a suitable car turned up in the form of a crashed 2006 Pontiac Solstice.

He turned his hand to stripping it down to pluck out its useful parts. When realising the condition of the car was better than expected, the Solstice became the donor car for the engine, drivetrain, suspension and wheels: “I chose to go with the Solstice initially because it’s already got a sportscar set up. Turned out to be in great mechanical condition.”



“THE LIFECAR AND THE PLUS E ARE GREAT RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT HELP KEEP MORGAN RELEVANT.”



An American engine in a used Mog has been the norm for a while now over in the US. The 2.4L GM Ecotec unit produces a good chunk more power than the original factory-fitted Triumph four-cylinder TR4, and matches a similar output to Morgan’s current Ford Duratec, the Ecotec is a torquey engine with a proven ability in Plus 4s.

Another addition is the extra gear the Solstice’s transmission will give: “With the extra torque and the sixth-gear, it should have no problem keeping up with traffic on the freeway. The guys at Isis tried to tempt me with the Chevy engine they use in the Plus 8, but that’s just insane! I really wanted to keep it a four-cylinder.”

The project at its current stage is as follows: the Solstice is currently in a “rolling chassis” state so that it can be used for reference for designing the new Morgan chassis. The Plus 4 has its panels media-blasted and painted in grey primer and the frame has been removed – so James can take measurements for designing the new chassis: “Once the chassis is up and made I can start bolting things on and getting it together. This stage at the moment is probably the most time consuming part.”



The donor Solstice.

Due to designing the chassis himself, James is building in features that will allow him to add more ideas should the opportunity arise, even planning to make space in the chassis for alternative powerplants. While fairly sure he wants to keep the classic exterior, he has been tempted by another Morgan project where the wheel arches have been removed leaving the wheels exposed – very hot-rod!

“Seeing as I’m designing the chassis, it makes sense to build in as many options as I can. I’ll be putting mounting points for filler panels to enclose the engine if I



decide to go with the fender-less option. At any stage I may want to change the car and I want it to be as simple as possible to do!” said James. With the change to hybrid and electric powered cars, he’d even like to make sure there is room for a battery and the necessary gear, just to keep his options open!

“It’d be great to have this classic looking car, the oldest car on the property, being the most advanced car on the property!” Not afraid of the future of the motorcar, James is enthusiastic about new technology in a way that’s not too dissimilar to the MMC’s outlook. He shares their understanding of

the changing automotive industry and praises Morgan in their ability to handle classic cars, but at the same time be on the cutting edge of technology: “I think the LIFEcar and the Plus E are great research projects that help keep Morgan relevant.”

His project is not a restoration as such – but a reincarnation. He’s aware that not everyone will agree with how he’s approaching his project. Having been to the factory when he was a boy, he understands the importance of tradition: “I don’t want people to think I’m ruining this thing, I’m saving it! It certainly would have ended up on a scrap heap.”

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James at the wheel of his MogRod.

The result of this project will be unique; pure Morgan on the exterior (probably!) but packed with modern technology underneath. Some owners convert their Morgans to race-spec, and others opt for an unusual colour scheme. All in all everyone likes their Mog to be a bit different – and that’s the beauty of it. James’ MogRod will be his own and it’s sure to be spectacular.

One more Morgan back on the road can only be a good thing. Hats off to James for tackling this project. With big ideas and great ambitions, this MogRod is going to be a very interesting project to follow. Check back with us in a few issues time to see how he is progressing.

For regular updates visit James’ blog at www.mogrod.com