

A SMALL PIECE OF HISTORY

A rare small item in the form of a [Riley Imp sales brochure](#) appeared on Ebay recently and after some very spirited bidding it has now arrived in Australia.

The brochure is a double sided foolscap sheet, slightly larger than A4, printed in black and blue with three photos of the first production Imp, KV 8025. The brochure is folded in three so that it has front and rear photos of the car on the front and rear covers respectively, and a three quarter rear photo in the centre when opened out. The car is black and white in the brochure, but appears in colour in John Gathercole's recent book on the Imp and was maroon with black wheels and maroon brake drums. The car is photographed in what appears to be parklands on a winter's day with a very attractive girl behind the wheel in a hat and scarf that would be positively modern on the streets of Melbourne this winter. It is said that girls from the office were used in the publicity shots as they fitted neatly into the rather cramped driving compartment of the Imp.

The car has a few obvious features that did not appear on the later production models. The brochure is dated 1935 although KV 8025 was registered on 7th March 1934. It has a single spare wheel with long protruding petrol filler in the brochure (as did our car when acquired in 1978) but in other Riley Record publicity photos at the time it has twin spare wheels. It has no radiator stone guard, a screw on radiator cap and what appear to be a fabricated large screw on filler cap, and a tiny central tail light. The brochure mentions a Silent Third gear box and no mention of a preselector gearbox. The prototype Imps had the earlier long advance and control levers in the centre of the steering wheel and this can just be seen in the brochure. There appears to be a very small rear view mirror below the passenger's aero screen which would have been of no use with a passenger in the car. There is no interior shot but the dashboard can almost be seen in the rear shot and the top of the matching rev counter and Speedo can be seen but there may be a switch panel to the left of these. There is no mention of weather equipment and all the photos show the main screen flat although the wiper motor can be seen. It is obvious from the brochure that the door gaps were excellent and the paintwork has a brilliant shine with no ripples in the panels at all.

In complete contrast to modern brochures the entire text describes the mechanical specification and performance. These days the major part of motor brochures seems to be on sound systems, air conditioning and fuel economy. It is amusing to see several references to "insulated to all road shocks" which anyone who has ever ridden in an Imp would dispute. There is no specific mention of top speed although the car is described as "extremely silent" over 70mph. It was said to have "high maximum speed, amazing acceleration, and unusual stability" which was somewhat modest as they still go extremely well. What might be challenged was the claim that "seating and upholstery are so arranged that distances of 400 miles and upwards in a day can be covered without fatigue". The brochure concludes with a very impressive list of competition successes achieved by the Nine.

Boldly printed in the brochure was the purchase price of 325 Pounds. That certainly wasn't cheap, and using an Average Earnings Net Worth calculator I found on the internet, would equate to about \$125,000 today; say the price of a Porsche Boxster. The Imp was not a good seller as the same sum of money would buy a Ford V8 or SS Jaguar. I seem to recall hearing the last Imp to come to Australia sat unsold in Cohen's showroom for more than a year.

It is thought that 115 Imps were made of which about 70 were road cars and the balance were the racing version or Ulster Imp. They were made in small batches, often pairs, and were assembled in the racing shop. Consecutive chassis numbers were quite common. KV8025 was the Works demonstrator and was one of the successful team cars in the 1934 Scottish rally, driven on that occasion by T.C. Griffiths and Bill Greenaway, winning the Light Car Class. Registration records show it remained with the Riley Motor Company and was dismantled for unknown reasons before the War.

Ean McDowell.

