

# It's the life of Riley for Alistair



**RESTORATION COMPLETE:** Classic car enthusiast Alistair Reid with his 1953 Riley RMF. Photographs by Kenny Elrick



A stickler for tradition, Alistair Reid likes nothing more than to see old classic motors restored to their original glory. He told **Philippa Gerrard** about his most recent project

**J**ust about every car manufacturer in history has developed a saloon at one point or another.

However, forget the Audis and Fords you see by the hundreds on roads today, and rewind back to 1953, when the saloon ruled as a distinguished gentleman's motor car.

Low-slung, rakish and elegant, Rileys have always been the epitome of saloon sophistication.

For Alistair Reid, from Aberdeen, it was not only the sheer style offered by Riley which was appealing, but also the engineering pedigree which matched it.

"I've had this 1953 Riley RMF for three years now, it's a 2.5 litre version," said the 79-year-old.

"At the time I'd been looking for a classic motor for a wee while."

"I wanted a car I really liked, you see, not just any old thing which happened to be for sale."

"I'm an engineer by trade and the thing I love most about cars is the engine and how it works."

"I've always admired Rileys and this RMF in particular is an interesting motor."

"The engine was designed before the war and really hasn't changed

much since, which makes it pretty special."

Yet with the car parked in his driveway fresh from the online auction, things weren't quite as they first seemed.

"When I bought the car I thought it was in excellent condition," said Alistair.

"Then I got it home and it turned out it wasn't quite as perfect as I'd remembered."

"I noticed pretty much immediately that the windscreen needed replaced, then I realised the engine needed done, the interior needed overhauled – and finally the car needed completely repainted."



But despite the Riley needing substantial refurbishment, in Alistair's eyes it was merely light restoration compared to work he had undertaken in the past.

In 1996, redundancy left him with a lot of spare time, and desperate for something to do, Alistair indulged his passion for cars for the first time, purchasing a Bristol 401 saloon – or most of it anyway.

"It was an absolute basket case," he laughed.

"It took me the best part of five years to restore it. It was so difficult to source parts for it that I eventually ended up making most of them myself."

"In the end the garage I rented got sold off, and with nowhere to keep it I was forced to sell the Bristol on."

"As the years passed I missed having a project to work on and hence why I got the Riley three years ago."

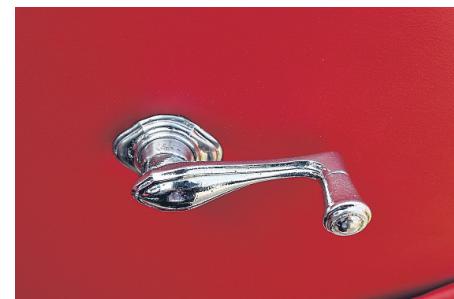
Despite the gaps in Alistair's classic car ownership, the thrill of getting out on the road has always been a passion of his.

"I've always had an interest in cars," he said.

"My brother is the same and he has a 1926 Singer motor car at the moment."

"I suppose you could say it's in the blood, as my father was a car salesman."

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"He used to come home from work and instead of teaching us about the history of famous battles and such he taught us the history of cars."

"Over the years we were thoroughly tutored on cars and their weaknesses."

"However, when I was working I had no time for cars really."

"As an engineer it was my job to look at engines all day; now it's my hobby it's become fun."

"Friends still come and ask if I can make this or make that and I do – it's something I enjoy doing."

"Something Alistair knew he couldn't take on alone however was replacing the interior of the old Riley."

"The carefully stitched leather was badly worn and coming away at the seams, but finding someone to take on the job turned out to be a mission in itself."

"There was a place in Edinburgh which could do it but they had a waiting list of two years," said Alistair.

"My next option was a place down in Hampshire, but they don't take the whole car, so I'd have to

they usually do sofas or jobs refurbishing pubs, so working on my old Riley was quite a change."

"Getting the interior right was a big worry but they did an absolutely tremendous job."

"And really quickly too – usually car upholsterers say 'I'll put you on the waiting list' but this got done in three weeks."

"I've actually become rather good friends with the gentleman who runs the business and he's even helped me source other bits and pieces for the car since then."

"Restoring classic cars is a really wonderful thing to do."

"I'm a member of the Garioch Vehicle Restoration Society and have made many friends through it."

"An interest in old cars and keeping them on the road is truly all you need."

### I'm a member of the Garioch Vehicle Restoration Society and have made friends through it



The stylish Riley 2.5 litre needed substantial refurbishment inside and out when Alistair bought it three years ago