

# Backfire

North West Casual Classics  
Newsletter March 2024



**The North West's Leading Classic Vehicle Club,  
Established 1996**

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**Next Meeting : Tuesday 9th April 2024**

## DISCLAIMER

Views or opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of the club, its officers or committee members. No responsibility can be accepted for inaccurate or misleading information within this newsletter, but every effort will be made to check accuracy before publication



**On the cover: Alan and Eileen's splendid Rover P4, a car of real quality from a time when "Made in England" still meant something.**

## CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER



Hi All!

For the twenty five years that I have owned my Volvo it has never failed to get me home. That accolade has now gone as it 'failed to proceed' recently and I had to go home without it. I had just dropped off a friend of mine when the tick over started going awry, revving up all on its own and running very rough, a bit like I had pulled the choke out. I instinctively switched the engine off and guess what, it wouldn't start again. In the morning on my return, it started and I drove home but something was definitely wrong.

To be fair the Volvo hasn't been running at its best for some while but I couldn't put my finger on it, sometimes it was not ticking over smoothly but other times it was OK. I had been giving it the 'Kodak' treatment, to see what developed. Well now something has. My friend Glyn came around and offered some suggestions, one of which was a faulty Air Mass sensor. We cleaned it out with electrical cleaner and an airline but no joy. Nigel Grant my friend with the Garage Workshop called a couple of days later, his call was the Temperature Sensor so he's ordered that. He

says he will fit it on Thursday (7th March) so watch this space!

I also sent the Austin to Chris Dickinson for a little welding job. Nothing serious just a little bit of sheet metal behind the driver's running board. He'd asked me to remove the board and bracketry to give him easy access, which Glyn and I soon completed in quick sticks. Quite surprising really given the location, where the fastenings are open to all the weather and spray. However, someone in the Austin's past had had the foresight to fit stainless steel nuts and bolts! This of course made the job a dream. The welding went ahead and was done without any unforeseen problems and drama, except for a braking issue. On the way to Chris's I had noticed that the foot brake was 'snatching' if pressed gently but I had put that down to the inactivity of the car, but on my way home the problem was getting noticeably worse. I have since cleaned the running board metalwork and brackets and painted and stone chipped them to protect them. When the Austin is on the ramps to refit them the

Brakes will be inspected as the same time. I'm just hoping it's nothing more serious than needing replacement brake shoes.

Two out of three cars down, and my usual classic motoring modus operandi seemed under real threat.

The Stag has now stepped up to the plate as my daily driver, and even that disgraced itself, needing a jump start at Morrison's after doing the weekly big shop. Ah, the joys of classic motoring!

***Cheers, Nigel.***



**Top: Trouble at t'mill with the classic fleet at chez France, and below, Stag seconded from show queen to (temporary) daily driver...**



## EDITORIAL

I have just been digesting the import of the Chancellor's Spring Budget (or as they now termed "Fiscal Events") with a particular eye on measures affecting the motorist, and the future of our hobby.

First, we learned that a planned fuel duty rise of 13% has been postponed for 12 months, because (cue gasps of surprise) it would have been "inflationary". What pray, has it been for all the years the "fuel duty escalator" has been in place? And by the way, have the Indians or Chinese introduced similar taxes? No? I didn't think so...

In case he hasn't noticed, we now live in a world very different from that which most of us grew up in. Shops and schools we could walk to, no giant out-of-town retail parks, and no jobs being moved up motorways in pursuit of ever-bigger profits. Now, we are a car-dependent society, and few, if any of us had any say in the matter. Motoring has become a necessity, not a luxury, yet the response of government has been the imposition of duty levels that rise every year, whether or not there is any justification for it, and they cloak this in green virtue signalling. They have even been embarrassed into bringing in windfall taxes, because the oil

Companies' profits are at obscene levels. In a decent society, should not the price of life's basic necessities, be controlled in the public interest, or do we just let greed run unchecked?

Meanwhile, the farce of the "spontaneous combustion vehicle" continues. Jaguar Land Rover and Stellantis, (the owner of Vauxhall, Fiat and Peugeot) have called on the Chancellor to reduce VAT on public charging points from 20% to 5% while the rest of us keep paying nearly seven quid a gallon. How is that fair? In addition, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders has called for VAT on electric vehicles to be cut from 20% to 10%, which they say will take £4k of the price of an electric car.

If an idea is good, and capturing the public imagination, why does it need massive subsidies from the taxpayer? Or legislation to force people to switch? I don't recall Henry Ford or Herbert Austin demanding government subsidies of their products to establish them in the marketplace. This smacks rather of desperation in selling an idea that people are realising is a dud. And if the government is daft enough to fall for it, and sales did rise sharply, who gets to trouser the increased profits? I think I can guess...

**Steve C.**

Diary dates for 2024	
21/04/2024	"Drive it Day" road run to Heskin Hall
11-12/05/2024	Blakemere Military Show (Pre-1950s only), Sandiway, CW8 2EB
12/05/2024	Cheshire View, Christleton near Chester (TBC)
18-19/05/2024	Anderton Boat Lift Show (Under discussion)
27/05/2024	Rainhill Village Gala
1-2/06/2024	Tatton Park (Early show)
08/06/2024	Hale Carnival, NWCC Annual Show, L24 4AX
23/06/2024	Lymm Transport Festival
07/07/2024	Lydiate Show
13-14/07/2024	Cheshire Steam Fair, Daresbury (Pre-1973 only) WA4 4AG
20-21/07/2024	Middlewich Show
03/08/2024	Newton Town Show (Amphibious vehicles only)
17-18/08/2024	Tatton Park (Late show)
7-8/09/2024	Avro 40's Weekend at Woodford (Pre-1950s only)
8/9/2024	NWCC Show, Burtonwood (Date TBC)
28-29/09/2024	Victoria Park Widnes (Provisional)
06/10/2024	Wirral Bus and Tram Show, Woodside Ferry

Events listed in blue above are NWCC's own events. Those in black are where the club makes block entries. Those in green require individual entries to the organisers. Always check our web site or Facebook page before setting out for a show.

## KEY POINTS FROM FEBRUARY MEETING

There were 50 members present and 3 Guests from our charity partner. The Raffle raised £105 Nigel reported that the committee has decided to retain the web domain [nwcasualclassics.com](http://nwcasualclassics.com) to prevent anyone else gaining access to it. This will be paid for.

Nigel updated members on the refurbishment of the A-boards we use at shows, and outlined the Cheshire Lanes Run in March.

David Thompson from Warrington Disability Partnership, our charity partner for 2024, gave a short presentation on the work of the charity and the scope of its many activities. David was clear that their work is user-led, with many roles in the charity undertaken by disabled people. He outlined his own experiences since becoming disabled in 1989, and the misconceptions disabled people often face. The charity has recently acquired an Invacar, once a common sight, which it hopes to display at our events.

Kenny advised members of the sad news that Dave Wright has passed away. Members will be informed of the funeral arrangements when known, which is likely to take place in Bolton.

## SHOW INFORMATION

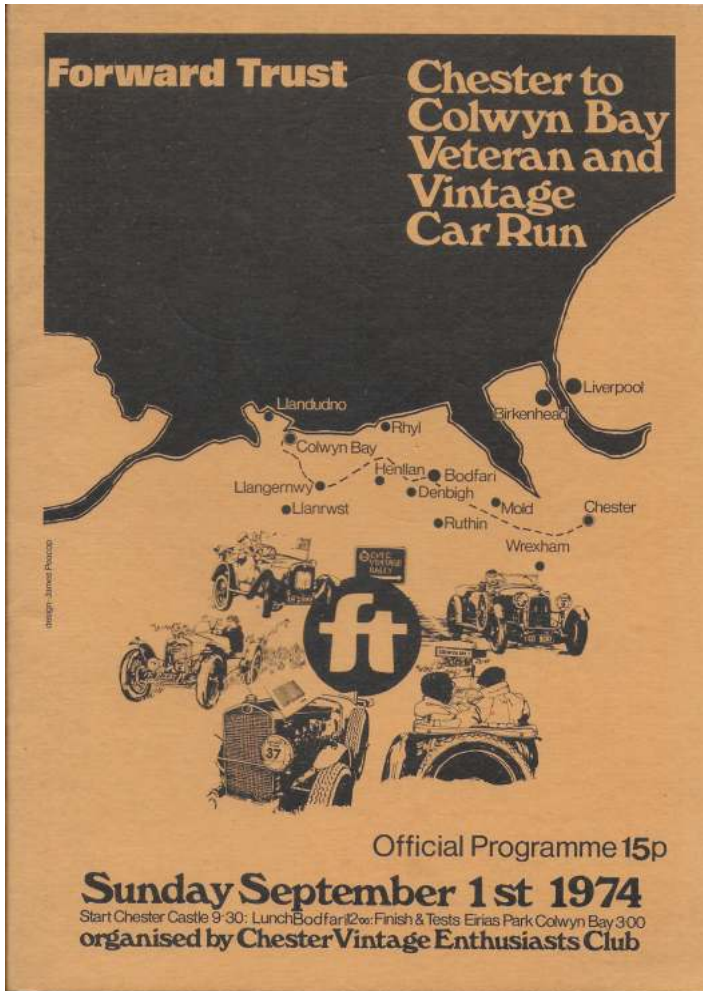
Kenny advised members that the show calendar is gathering pace, with the sheets now out for many events, and this before we are invited to share any with our neighbouring clubs, Phoenix and St Helens CCC.

There is a new event, at Cheshire View, Christleton by Chester on May 12th. Expressions of interest to Kenny please. This may provide an alternative for members excluded from Blakemere due to the vehicle age restrictions.

Lymm Show have accepted a club entry from us, but numbers may be capped at 25. Kenny will advise when the number of places are confirmed. Burtonwood will be going ahead, but the date is still to be confirmed.

Widnes show at Victoria Park is still to be confirmed, if it ever takes place at all.

The way we were: Club driving days back in 1974, with the Chester Vintage Enthusiasts Club.



Courtesy of Colin and Margaret Evans, this was the programme for the CVEC Vintage Car Run in 1974, (yours for all of 15p!) Sponsored by Forward Trust Bank, the run had 41 vintage vehicles, ranging from 1911 to 1933 undertaking a road trip to Colwyn Bay, stopping for lunch at the

Dinorben Arms at Bodfari. Vehicles ranged from Rolls-Royces to baby Austins. The club was founded in 1959 and still exists, but today it admits all classics, not just pre-1940 cars as it did then. A very different era in our hobby, when things were a little less egalitarian than today!

## The Docker Daimlers Part 2: The final flourish of the “Docker Shockers”, the reckoning, and Lady Docker in context.

For 1953, Daimler’s Motor Show centrepiece was more subdued. It had either a Daimler 3 litre chassis, or a modified Lanchester 14 chassis modified for the 3 litre Daimler engine (no-one is quite sure).

Smaller than the previous Docker offerings at 16 feet long and weighing “only” 1.8 tons, it won no awards at the show, with Daimler’s Conquest Roadster (itself no beauty), winning the coachwork award.



On this Hooper created a 2 door, 2 seater, fixed-head coupe which was originally painted green, this clashed with the black leather seats. Two days prior to the show, Lady Docker had it repainted silver, and named it “Silver Flash” echoing BSA’s “Golden Flash” motorcycle. Although the sweeping Hooper stem-to-stern line is evident, the confused frontal treatment, with a smaller radiator grille flanked by two ugly air intakes, is jarring. At the rear, the “bustle back” boot interrupts the flow of the body’s sweeping belt line.

Inside “Silver Flash” the usual Docker extravagances continued unabated. Fitted red crocodile leather suitcases behind the seats, a vanity drawer under the dash with silver fittings, a glass roof panel with integral blind, and red crocodile leather on the dash and elsewhere completed the assemblage. “Silver Flash” was sold to a US owner in 1966, and appeared in an auction catalogue in the 80’s, painted tan over cream.

For 1954 the Docker Daimlers returned to form with “Stardust”. Echoing the style of the Gold Car

“Stardust” was built on a DK400 prototype chassis, slightly shortened and with a narrower track. Daimler’s 4.6 litre long stroke “six” provided the locomotion, with their usual fluid flywheel/pre-selector gearbox. With twin SU car-

and a low compression ratio the unit delivered a lazy 167 BHP. The coachwork featured 7,000 hand-painted silver stars below the belt line, with glazed lights and hinged rear spats on sprung struts for easier wheel changing.



Inside, the occupants sat on hand-woven silver brocatelle fabric, beneath a glass roof panel, and the cabinet work was in aluminium. Once again several unfortunate crocodiles gave up their skins to cover the cabinet work and four fitted suitcases in the large boot. Inside the cabinets were the usual cocktail set in cut crystal and a Wedgwood tea service. A single jump seat could accommodate a third passenger, in this typically sumptuous Docker interior.

“Stardust” was a return to form for the series, and was a more harmonious and resolved design than the “Silver Flash”. It was rescued from a Welsh hill farm and restored

close to its original form and was sold at the Goodwood Revival in 2014 for \$136,000

For 1955, stylist Rivers and Lady Docker went truly over the top, with the infamous “Golden Zebra”. Today this vehicle would have prompted public outrage from environmentalists, but such concerns did not matter in the fifties, when the entitled rich were still going to Africa on safari to exterminate the wildlife for “sport”.

Based again on the DK400 chassis, Golden Zebra was an ivory white fixed-head coupe, featuring hooded headlamps and quite pronounced rear fins. All the glass was electrically operated, including the





usual Docker glass roof panel with integral blind. The doors bore monograms of Norah's initials. The defining feature of "Golden Zebra" however, was that every piece of trim, inside and out, was gold-plated, even the 3 windscreen wipers!

A gold-plated zebra mascot adorned the radiator, and a typically sweeping Hooper wing line went all the way to the spats covering the rear wheels.

But it was inside the "Golden Zebra" that Lady Docker's "taste" really ran amok, with cream hide and fourteen zebra skins on the seats and trim panels, and gold-mounted ivory on the dash and every accessory. The boot held fitted rawhide suitcases with Bramah locks.

Two cabinets in the rear held cocktail and picnic sets, while the passenger door held an ivory-handled umbrella and a manicure set, while a drawer beneath the dash held more cosmetic and grooming items to complete the whole vulgar edifice

Having cost over £12,000 to build and done just 25,000 miles, "Golden Flash" was sold by Henley's of Chester for £1,400. It was eventually acquired by John Wentworth in America, who shipped it home in 1988. After many years in pieces, and an appearance in "The Car's The Star", the restoration was completed for his widow, and it was sold in 2006 to the Louwman Museum in The Hague where it remains.

Lady Docker wore a mink and gold outfit to unveil “Golden Flash” at the Motor Show costing £5,000 (equating to around £200,000 at today’s values), and submitted the bill to the BSA board as expenses. It was the final straw, and an emergency shareholders’ meeting was called which ousted Sir Bernard from the BSA board, and Lady Docker, despite her public protests, from the Daimler board. The era of what the press had dubbed the “Docker Shockers” was finally over.

As the Docker fortunes declined, they took refuge on Jersey, whose inhabitants Norah described as “the most frightful, boring people that have ever been born”. When Sir Bernard died in 1978, Norah moved to Majorca, but still visited Britain, where she was found dead in the Great Western Hotel in Paddington in 1983, an all but forgotten figure.

How should history judge the Dockers? On the positive side, they brought some glamour to a drab era, and a lot of publicity to Daimler, just as Norah had intended. Her extravagance and calculated outrageousness fed miles of press coverage, and gave people something to talk about. The cars themselves may have been extravagant, but they did provide a showcase for superb British craftsmanship and engineering, albeit at eye-watering cost.

Conversely, it offended many

people’s sensibilities to see a nouveau-riche couple squandering vast sums when the nation was struggling with rationing and austerity. Also, Norah’s occasional public drunken tantrums and poor treatment of staff did not endear her to many, and she appears to have had a very thick skin. Norah had risen from nothing, and lost her father to suicide, and a child at nine months, so her social climbing using her wits and charm was remarkable, but it also had an element of ruthlessness. She has been aptly described as the “Marie Antoinette of motoring”. In the end, it is appropriate that the cars themselves are remembered and admired, while we forget their patron’s excesses.

As to that Royal warrant, Daimler lost it due to repeated transmission issues with the King’s car in 1950. The process was gradual, and as Daimlers were sold out of royal service they were replaced by Rolls Royces. If Lady Docker really had so offended the establishment of 1950’s Britain by her behaviour as to lose Daimler their Royal patronage, it is probable that Daimlers would have all left the Royal Mews rapidly, to swiftly distance the monarchy from the brand. In fact, they remained in service for years.

## The Tilling-Stevens TS3: A revolutionary two-stroke diesel engine designed and built in Britain, which was once on every high street

Commer built trucks from 1905 until 1979. Although now only seen at historic commercial rallies, anyone who grew up in the 50s and 60s will remember them as an everyday sight, hauling loads for many household names. Both Commer and Tilling-Stevens were part of the Rootes group, the latter having been acquired in 1950.

The genesis of the TS3 engine was in 1945 at the Humber plant at Stoke Aldermoor, when a small design team led by Chief Engineer

Eric Coy began work on prototypes for a compact 2-stroke diesel engine, designed to fit easily into the new “forward-control” commercial vehicle designs. Their work was successful, and in 1954 production moved to the Tilling-Stevens plant in Maidstone, which had spare capacity. The TS stands for two-stroke, not Tilling-Stevens. A petrol truck engine derived from the Humber Super Snipe was also developed for those operators who required it

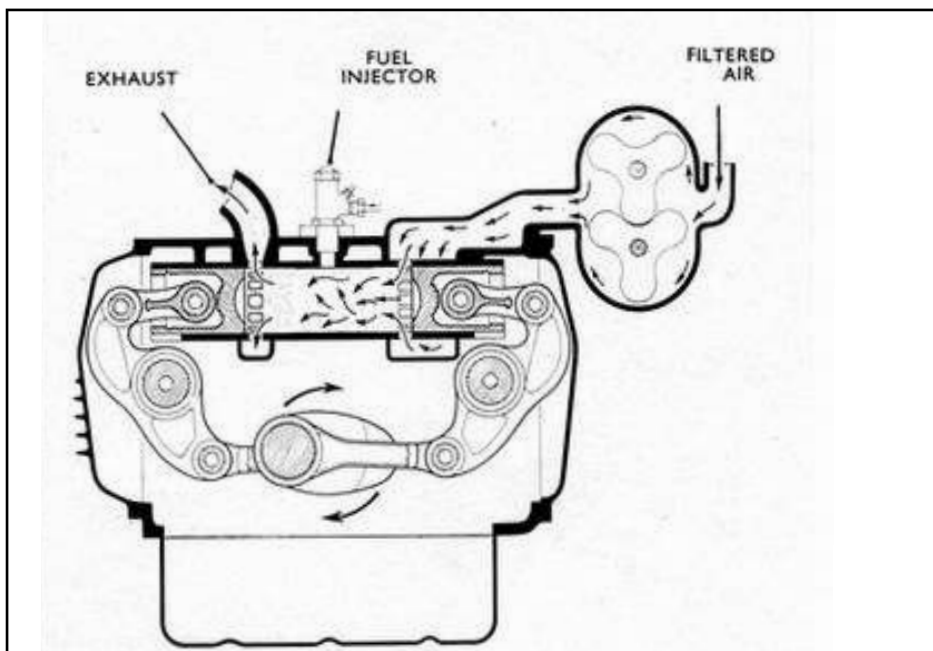


The TS3 engine would be used in the Commer and Karrier range of trucks, and the Commer Avenger range of buses. Thomas Harrington (of Sunbeam Alpine coupe fame) also used the engine in their coaches, and it was also used by Lister Blackstone Marine in boat applications.

The TS3's unique design used 3 cylinders, displacing 3.2 litres arranged horizontally, each with two pistons that moved away from each other on the firing stroke. (Train buffs may care to imagine 1/3 of a Deltic..) The con rods then moved massive rocker castings, which operate a second con rod, transferring the stroke thrust backwards into the engine,

to a central crankshaft, with one journal per rod, rather than the more usual "knife and fork" twinning of rods on big ends seen in vee and boxer engines. Induction was forced, via a Roots supercharger driven from a quill shaft, and as a two stroke, the engine had no valves or camshafts. The unit delivered 105 BHP at 2,400 RPM, and 270 LB/FT of torque at 1200 RPM. These were excellent outputs for its modest size.

The schematic below gives some idea of how a TS3 operates. As the pistons reach the bottom of their stroke the inlet and exhaust ports are uncovered, allowing the gases to escape, as the injector sends in more fuel, which is



mixed with air forced in by the supercharger. This charge also has a scavenging function for the spent gases. Lubrication is conventional by a wet sump, and the size of the rockers is clearly visible.

The thing people most remember about the TS3 was its unique sound, which is a loud guttural exhaust bark when the throttle is opened, overlaying a constant high-pitched whine from the blower. It proved to be a reliable engine in service, with the only weakness being the quill shaft drive to the supercharger if the engine was abused.

A TS4 version of the engine was developed, with 4 cylinders, and completed over a million miles of testing, but was dropped following

the Chrysler takeover of Rootes in 1968. The “Knocker” nickname came from export models of the TS3, which used a different blower, and no damper on the drive gears. When worn, this gave a distinctive “Knocker knocker” sound.

One of the most famous applications of the TS3 was in the Ecurie Ecosse race transporter, which was later featured as a Corgi model. Built by Alexander of Falkirk, it could carry 3 racing cars and support and house the paddock crew in some style. It was later restored, and sold by Bonhams in 2013 for £1.8m, and is now in America.

A more unusual application for the TS3 was in a vintage-style roadster constructed by the Lincolnshire scrap dealer John Wright. His



family farm included a WW2 airfield, and over the years his magpie instincts filled every acre and barn with old cars and parts, which apart from providing him with an income supplying the classic car hobby, also gave him an inexhaustible supply of parts for his own creations. His Leyland TS3 roadster was a clever mix of what he had available,

including a modified Commer commercial chassis, solid wheels from a milk float and his favourite engine, a TS3. The car was featured in "Practical Classics", and went with John when he sold up and retired to New Zealand. You can still find YouTube footage of John and his car online, tearing about his land with some gusto.





A TS3 on the floor, showing the three central exhaust ports and injectors and the gear train to the injection pump, large Roots blower on the front(left) and huge "rocker" cover, of which there was one per side

The TS3 was remarkable not just as a powerful and reliable diesel engine, but also as an example of an ingenious and left-field approach by British engineers to a specific problem. That being how to build a

compact power unit for a new generation of commercials with cab-forward designs, intended to liberate more cargo space. It succeeded admirably, and deserves to be better-known and appreciated.

## Our NWCC Charity Partner 2024

Warrington Disability Partnership (WDP) is an internationally acclaimed user led charity. With over 30 years' experience of developing and delivering mobility and independent living services, our aim is to support disabled people and people living with long term health conditions.



<https://www.disabilitypartnership.org.uk>

They really shouldn't have: An occasional look at some cars that should have stayed on the drawing board...



To a peculiarly American branch of automotive culture this month, and not in a good way! Remember the spate of "Blaxploitation" flicks in the 70s such as Shaft, Superfly, and Live and Let Die? They usually featured the neighbourhood pimp cruising "the 'hood" in a truly ghastly creation like this.

Dunham Coachworks in Boonton, N.J. Were behind a lot of them, usually on a Caddy or Lincoln base car, fitted with side mounts, lake pipes, vinyl tops, wire wheels

and white wall tyres. The interiors were a hamster's brothel of fur and velour, with a sound system for pumping out those wah-wah drenched funky sounds. The huge headlights, if you look closely, are just glass covers over the standard lights, and are a nod to "Superfly". They became known as "pimpmobiles" and even spread beyond the black, urban neighbourhoods where they first appeared. As an example of epic bad taste they take some beating..

#### **FIND THE CLUB ON THE WEB AND ON SOCIAL MEDIA AT:**

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**Facebook:**

[www.facebook.com/groups/northwestcasualclassics](https://www.facebook.com/groups/northwestcasualclassics)

**YouTube:** <https://www.youtube.com/user/NWCasualClassics>



Back Page Beauties: The Citroën SM may divide opinion, but when it came out in 1970 it was like a rocket ship from another planet. Designed by Robert Operon, it employed a 90 degree 2.7 litre V6 (essentially a cut-down Maserati V8) high pressure hydraulic everything, variable rate steering and the most powerful brakes road testers had seen. Complex and chic, if not conventionally pretty, it is ineffably French, and rides like a magic carpet. Citroën had bought Maserati in 1968 and raided their parts bins to create a halo model. Wheeler Dealer Mike Brewer has restored his own SM to concours condition, and they now fetch between £40k and £60k for a good one.