

Foto Flashback – It’s a Small World

Roger Hargreaves, Truro, Cornwall

The decade in question was the Seventies. I had just got married, no children yet, and was still active in motorsport with the Chester Motor Club. I had always been a navigator on road rallies and when our friend and fellow club member Noel Watson suggested entering a few events around north Wales who could resist?

My Imp (VDJ 291) was pretty standard. There was some rust between the floor and the sills compensated for by some fibreglass and angle brackets. However, after consulting Noel he wrote, “VDJ 291 was the first Imp ‘bitsa’ that I built from two or three very tired vehicles as a bet that I could produce a useable rally car for less than £100. For the record, the sills were actually very securely attached to the rusty floor with lots of pop rivets! The 875 engine used the best parts available from a big box of assorted items.”

Mostly, our results have sadly become lost in the house moves that followed but memory recalls they were not shabby. Noel again came to the rescue and recalls, “on the ‘Y Ddraig Goch’ (The Red Dragon) we finished a creditable 6th overall and 1st Semi in quite exalted company, despite having replaced the less than reliable 998 engine with one of my spare 875s!”



Roger Hargreaves’ first Imp, VDJ 291, in action.
Noel Watson driving, Roger navigating
Photos supplied by Roger Hargreaves





Noel and Roger again
Photo supplied by Roger Hargreaves

However, in our exchange of news at Christmas Noel added this paragraph to his narrative: “A couple of months back I went to the annual Malpas Vintage Machinery event and spotted a smart Imp in rally trim. I tracked down the owner, one Ed Linton, and struck up a conversation around

local rallying and Imps when he mentioned your name. Turns out he rallied during ‘our’ era.”

Well, I’m sorry to say, Ed, (if you’re reading this) that you have faded from my memory over the last 50 years or so but I did find your name and phone number in an old personal phone book. So imagine my surprise when your name cropped up again in the March 2023 edition of *Impressions* on page 21. That prompted me to put finger to keyboard for this short article.

One other Imp of note from that period was that of Rob Fisher. I only did two or three events with him but that car was devastating. From memory it had disc brakes all round, front radiator with pipes through the cabin (you certainly didn’t feel the cold in there!), a pump and oil cooler for the gearbox, etc. It did have a little habit of throwing long flames out of the exhaust on the overrun until the wise head of Frank Pierson suggested that there was a small hole somewhere in the



Ed Linton’s lovely rally Imp spotted at Malpas Vintage Machinery Show
Photo: Noel Watson

exhaust that let in air and so burnt off unspent fuel. Here’s a photo (right) of Rob and I on the 1975 Palferman Rally – I pencilled the result on the back: 11th overall and 1st Semi.

An event on Anglesey was the nail in the coffin for Rob. Out of a tight right hander he dropped the clutch and the output spider from the gearbox sheared. His reaction was to sit back, go to sleep and let his navigator, me, find some way of getting us back to service and the inevitable tow home. (That could be a story for another day.) Rob gave up rallying and took up trials instead.

Rallying wasn’t the only activity that we did before children – production car trials were popular in north Wales. Below is a photo of our hand-painted Imp – this time with my wife in the hot seat.

The aforementioned Noel Watson is still involved with motorsport in and around Cheshire/north Wales while I’m in deepest Cornwall where stage rallying ended some years ago due to the distance from the rest of the country and cost. But if you fancy some closed public road sprinting come along to Watergate Bay in September: www.watergatebaymotorsport.co.uk.

While I haven’t got an Imp anymore I do have a Ginetta G15.



PCT-ing in north Wales
Photo supplied by Roger Hargreaves