



Remembering Peter Morgan on the 100th anniversary of his birth

This year marks not only the 110th anniversary of the Morgan Motor Company; November is also 100 years since the birth of Peter Morgan. Peter, son of the company founder HFS, was born on 3rd November 1919, at Chestnut Villa, the house alongside the original Morgan factory in Worcester Road, Malvern Link. He was the fifth and youngest of HFS and Ruth Morgan's children, the only boy. As a child he was a budding engineer and a keen motoring enthusiast, although his first love was steam trains. In 1935 the family moved from Malvern to Cannon Hill, just outside Maidenhead in Berkshire, where Peter learned to drive in the first four wheeler Morgan prototype.

His first competition event also marked another milestone for the Morgan marque. The Exeter Trial held on Boxing Day 1935 saw the first showing of the 4/4. This was the public launch of the four wheeler Morgan, driven by HFS Morgan and navigated by 16-year-old Peter. By 1938 he was an award-

winning trials driver in his own right, and followed this up on race tracks at Brooklands and Donington Park.

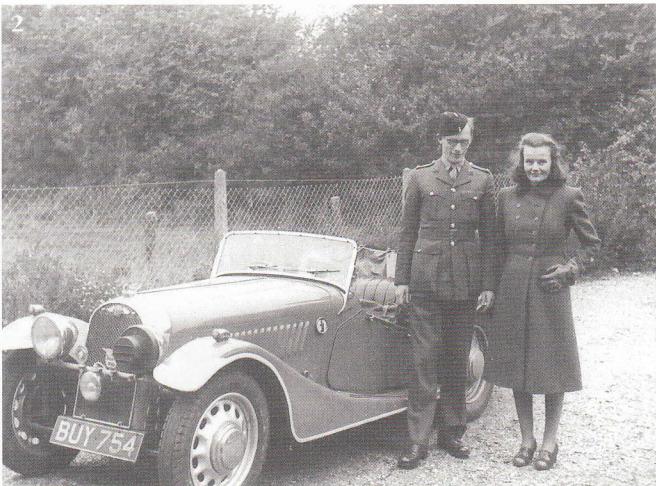
Peter trained as an engineer, but his education was interrupted by World War II. In 1940 he married Jane, and in the same year joined the Royal Army Service Corps – having been rejected by the Royal Navy on account of his eyesight. His job was to maintain fleets of army trucks, and Peter rose to the rank of Captain, serving in Sierra Leone and later running the Army workshops in Nairobi. Peter and Jane's Daughters Sonia and Jillian were born in 1941 and 1942. Son Charles was born in 1951.

By 1947 he was back in the UK and joined the family firm. His first major project was



the development of the Plus 4, using the 2088cc Standard Vanguard engine, enlarging and upgrading the 4/4 'Series 1' chassis to cope. The Plus 4 was launched in 1950 and, incorporating various evolutions including the "cowled" grille front end styling and disc brakes, would be the company's flagship model until 1968.

The Plus 4 proved to be hugely successful in terms of sales, particularly in the USA and other vital overseas markets, and also



in motorsport. In the early 1950s the focus was on rallying, with Morgan taking the team award on the 1951 RAC Rally, and Peter Morgan's own car narrowly beaten into second place overall by Ian Appleyard and his now-legendary Jaguar XK120.

In 1951 the Morgan 4/4 Club was formed, and was a constant presence in club racing, rallying, and trials. Peter Morgan was often a member of the Club's teams, including the winning 1959 Birkett 6 hour relay crew. Later renamed the Morgan Sports Car Club, a Morgan Club team also won the 1999 Birkett, amazingly with one of the same Plus 4s!

In the late 50s and early 60s, Chris Lawrence developed the TR engines to ever more potent outputs, powering his team's Plus 4s to numerous wins around the UK. Having dominated the Freddie Dixon Trophy series in 1959, Lawrence looked to the continent, competing at Monza, Spa and the Nurburgring with great success. The marque's finest hour was at Le Mans in 1962, Lawrence comfortably winning the 2 litre production class. His tuning expertise was employed in the Plus 4 Super Sports model, which became extremely popular for club racing the in UK and also in California, where Morgans were to be found at any SCCA race meeting, dicing with MGAs and TRs. Peter Morgan supported Chris Lawrence's efforts at first unofficially, but later more openly including entering TOK 258 at Le Mans as a works car.

Peter Morgan was by this time running the company singlehandedly, following the death of

his father in 1959. He had to buy out his sisters in order to continue the business, and he operated as a sole trader for most of the 1960s. This was a very precarious time for the business, relying heavily on the US market. Morgan's popularity had declined during the 1950s, as the cars came to be seen as out of date. He was well-known and very much liked by his customers and staff. Peter was very hands-on, conducting high-speed testing on a Super Sports racer

on the M50 motorway (pre 70mph speed limit!) or even answering the phone when working late.

Peter's attempt to move with the times was the Plus 4 Plus, with an all-enveloping fibreglass body. It was not a sales success with just 26 built over five years, but it did generate publicity for the marque. By the end of the decade, a combination of the racing successes, celebrity owners such as Brigitte Bardot and Mick Jagger, and the launch of the Plus 8 combined to build the following that Morgan has to this day.

The end of the four-cylinder TR engine series spelt the demise of the Plus 4 in 1968, but Peter was ready with its replacement: the mighty Plus 8. Thanks to the all-aluminium Rover V8 engine, the Plus 8 was barely any heavier than the light-weight Plus 4, but its huge torque made it the fastest-accelerating car in the world at the time, outgunning even the E-type to 60mph. Although Peter had brought in Maurice Owen to do the engineering work on the new car, it was Peter's idea and his achievement in persuading Rover to allow Morgan to use the new engine long before anyone else, which made the Plus 8 possible.

Following the breakdown of his marriage to Jane in the late 1970s, Peter married Heather in 1982.

The Morgan Motor Company's fame, and that of Peter and Charles Morgan, was cemented in the public consciousness by Sir John Harvey Jones' Troubleshooter TV series of 1990. The programme on Morgan was by far the most news-worthy, as Peter and son Charles flatly rejected Harvey Jones' advice. Having been out of the public eye for most of the 1980s, the programme drew attention to Morgan and resulted in thousands of new orders, raising the notorious waiting list even further. Unlike the other companies featured, who followed his instructions and went bust in the ensuing recession, Morgan survived without ever turning a loss and has grown ever since.

Peter remained Chairman of the Company until his 80th birthday in 1999, when he finally handed over the reins to Charles, who had worked at the company since 1985. As well as running the Morgan Motor Co, Peter Morgan was also honorary president of the Morgan Sports Car Club. He died in October 2003, aged 83, and in recognition of his amazing service to the marque it seemed only right to name the MSCC's top race in his honour – a tradition that continues to this day.

Following Charles Morgan's departure from MMC in 2013, the most regularly seen member of the Morgan family today is Craig Hamilton-Smith. Craig is the grandson of Peter Morgan, and the latest generation of the family to compete in motorsport, as he drives a Plus 4 Club Sport in the Morgan Challenge.

Photo captions:

1. Peter Morgan racing at Donington Park in 1939, in a 4/4 TT Replica
2. Peter in uniform, with wife Jane, during WW2
3. Peter Morgan in an early cowled rad Plus 4, at the 1959 Birkett Relay, won by the Morgan 4/4 Club
4. Posing with a Plus 8 in the 1970s
5. In his office at the Factory, which has since been recreated in the Visitor Centre museum
6. Peter's last Mog, a 1998 4.6 litre Plus 8. The AB16 registration has been seen on Morgan family cars since before WW1 (photo taken at Thrill on the Hill 2018)

