

MIX & MATCH



Words by Ryno Verster and Craig Watson
Photos by Ryno Verster & BMC

Wolseley front, Mini back and Australian doors - The South African Wolseley 1000 really is a very unusual animal.

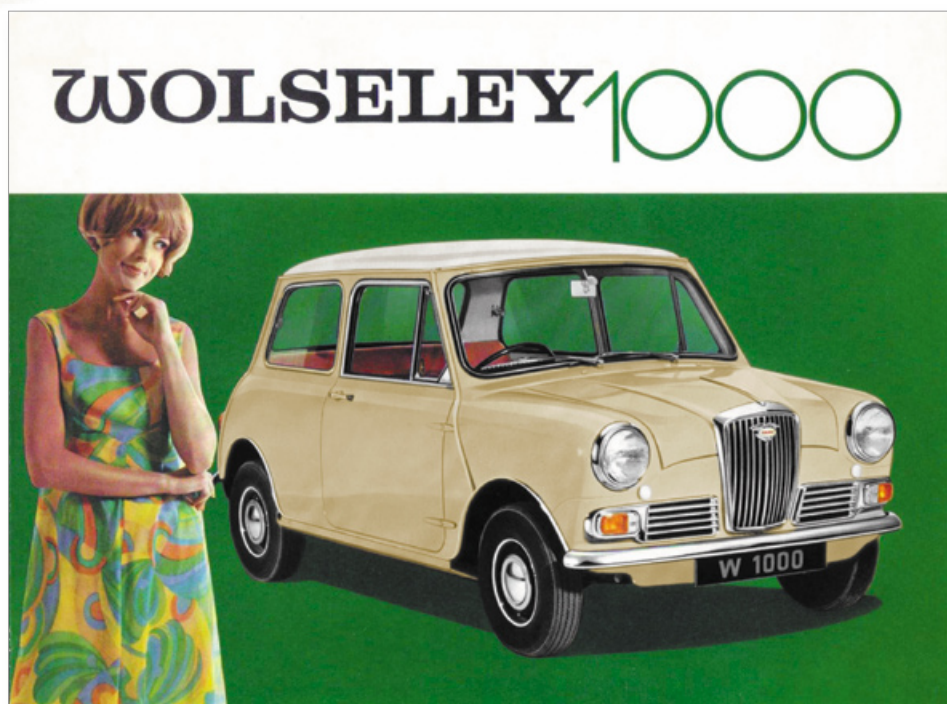
Although exact records do not exist, it seems that the Mini was officially released in South Africa on 27 February 1960, as the Morris Mini-Minor, and Austin 850. This information comes from correspondence in South Africa's Car magazine, August 1960, in which a Mr Ian C. Lewis writes, regarding his first 3,400 miles in his Austin 850. "My car is a Pillarbox Red "baby" delivered on the first day of the BMC invasion, February 27."

But, the first South African Austin 850 was completed on 21 December 1959, and 36 cars (probably all demo models) were sold prior to the official launch. Of those, 24 were Austin and the remaining twelve Morris.

At the time the 850 was listed with a price of £523 (R1046 – that's Rand for the non-South African types). BMC (or more accurately, Austin) had begun building cars in South Africa, at its new factory in Blackheath, near Cape Town, in May 1955.



Original media publicity shot for the launch of the car in 1967.



The first Minis were assembled from CKD (Complete Knock Down) kits imported from the UK. However, from the beginning trim, glass, batteries and tyres were locally made. Local content increased over time to meet government local content rules, which were based on weight.

For the most part, South African models followed similar lines and specifications to the UK models. By 1966, there had been

sedans, estates, vans, pickups, Cooper (997 and 998), Cooper S (1071 and 1275) and Mokes – all available as either Morris or Austin.

In September 1967, the Wolseley 1000 model (not the Wolseley Hornet like the UK version) was launched in South Africa, with a price of R1390. It was unique in that it was the only Wolseley derivative of the Mini with a standard short-tailed body (UK models used the same long boot body as the Riley Elf) but with the distinctive Wolseley regal front end.

The interior featured a De Luxe/Cooper-style three-gauge binnacle, with water temperature and oil pressure gauges flanking the central speedo.

Another special feature was the Australian-designed doors, complete with wind-up windows and quarterlights, which were introduced for the entire Mini range in South Africa in April 1967.

The idea for the Wolseley 1000 came from Ivor Dovey, BMC Works Manager, who suggested this fresh look front end, but combined with the short tail.



The original sales brochure for the Mk I Wolseley 1000.

In 1967, Blackheath still didn't have press tooling to produce the extended rear-end models. These tools only became available to BMC South Africa when the production of body panels for the Riley Elf/Wolseley Hornet ceased in the UK, toward the end of 1968.

The Mk II Mini range, including the Wolseley 1000 Mk II, was introduced in South Africa in December 1968. It featured a Cooper-style remote gearshift (like the Mini K in Australia), padded lower dash rail, and larger rectangular tail lamp clusters - as per the English Mk II. The Mk II retained the hydrolastic suspension, which had been introduced to South Africa in April 1965.

According to the official National Association for Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa (NAAMSA) figures, only 456 Wolseley 1000 units were manufactured and sold in South Africa. The details of sixteen of

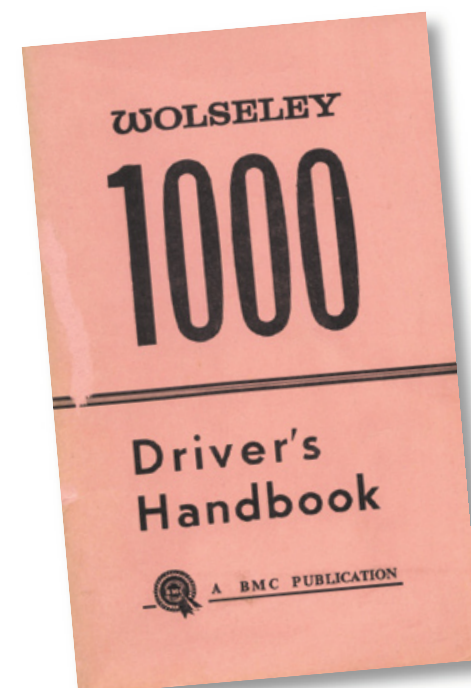
these cars are recorded in a register that Ryno started, and keeps updated whenever another survivor is traced.

Each car was individually numbered with a hand-stamped number on one of its two body plates. These car numbers all started with the prefixes WA2S7 (permanently printed on the body plate) with the individual body number hand-stamped in the body number section. This plate also specifies, "Built in South Africa by B.M.C. (SOUTH AFRICA) (PTY) LTD Blackheath, C.P."

The lowest body number so far recorded in the register is 106 and the highest 545. Since only 456 Wolseleys were manufactured, it is clear that BMC South Africa's production numbering did not start with 1 but rather 101 – apparently not an uncommon practice in numbering cars, as evidenced with Australian Minis usually starting from number 501.



Another publicity shot. From here it looks like any other Mk I Mini.



The second body plate, the chassis plate (as used for car registration/licensing purposes in South Africa), was cut at the top - presumably to remove the words "Manufactured at Longbridge, Birmingham."

These chassis numbers either started with an M- or A- prefix, which respectively indicates that a Morris or Austin body was used with the Wolseley front end. The rest of the prefixes on chassis plates were A-A2S7 for a Mk I Austin body, M-A2S4 for a Mk I Morris body, A-A2SB for a Mk II Austin body, and M-A2S6L for a Mk II Morris body.

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