

# MY CLASSIC & I ABOUT PEOPLE WHO USE THEIR CLASSICS



ROBERT OWEN

Left: The Swallow Doretti today, and (below) as it looked between 1962-75 with squared-off rear end and Triumph Mayflower roof



## JAMES WILLIAMS

**A retired draughtsman from Cheshire, 67-year-old James Williams wanted to build a plastic special in the mid-fifties, but ended up making the last Swallow Doretti from all-new parts in his mother's backyard in Manchester**

Originally, what I wanted to do was fit a plastic special body to my MG PA. There was one at the time called the Mistral that looked like a Ferrari, which I liked, so I put a deposit down. But then I looked at the 3ft 6in front track of the PA and decided against it: the plastic body would overlap the wheels by a mile.

So I decided to start again and get a new chassis. I saw an ad by Swallow in *Motor Sport* in 1956 announcing all parts for sale, including the chassis. I went down to the Walsall factory from Manchester and walked straight into the Swallow spares department – the company had closed down by this time – and managed to buy the very last chassis.

And not just the chassis: the liquidator wanted to sell me parts to build a complete car. As I already had this plastic body on order, the price was dropped to £88, for the chassis and body panels minus doors, inside floor and quite a few bits and pieces.

The following Wednesday the whole thing was delivered to my home in Flixton, Manchester, in packing cases. There were some bits missing – the door pillar on one side for instance – but, being a draughts-

man, as long as I had *one* I could make a copy from it.

A new TR engine was too expensive but I found a 1.5-litre six-cylinder OHC Wolseley engine, like the Hornet unit only bigger, for sale in *Motor Sport*. It had been raced by a man called Eddie Sybal in a Bugatti with a Laystall crankshaft and a supercharger. He wouldn't sell it with the supercharger but it *did* come with a Jag' Moss gearbox, the worst I've ever used.

I then advertised for a TR3 engine and bought one from a boy in South Wales who had replaced it with a Jaguar engine in his TR for racing. It's still in the car today.

Swallow didn't want me to call my car a Swallow Doretti because I had built it, not them. Maybe they thought I might make a mess of it. So I called it a Scorpion, purely because I was born in November, under the sign of Scorpio. It's registered as a Scorpion too, but I got fed up of explaining what it really is at shows, so I decided to make a Swallow badge myself out of copper.

When my children were growing up in the early sixties I decided I had to sell the Doretti and get something

bigger but nobody wanted it. So, I got my pencil out and drew a new body for the car from the rear wheels back, with a hardtop, using the roof off a Triumph Mayflower, which gave tremendous headroom and a big rear window. I then built a body at the back to suit those bits, with an A40 bumper and Vauxhall lights. The car remained like that from 1962 to 1975. In between it was pinched by a couple of drug addicts who drove it to Torquay. It made the local papers, but I got it back after a week. When I came to put it back to its original state, in 1975, I found I had saved the bootlid and back panel but thrown the side panels away. I even went looking for the panels on Urmston tip, but couldn't find them. Luckily I got hold of a complete bodyshell for £75 which turned out to be the car that won a Welsh rally.

Once the Swallow was our only car but now it's used only in the summer. I still have plans for it – the next modification is a Panhard rod to improve the handling – so I'm gilding the lily. But I shall never sell it. 