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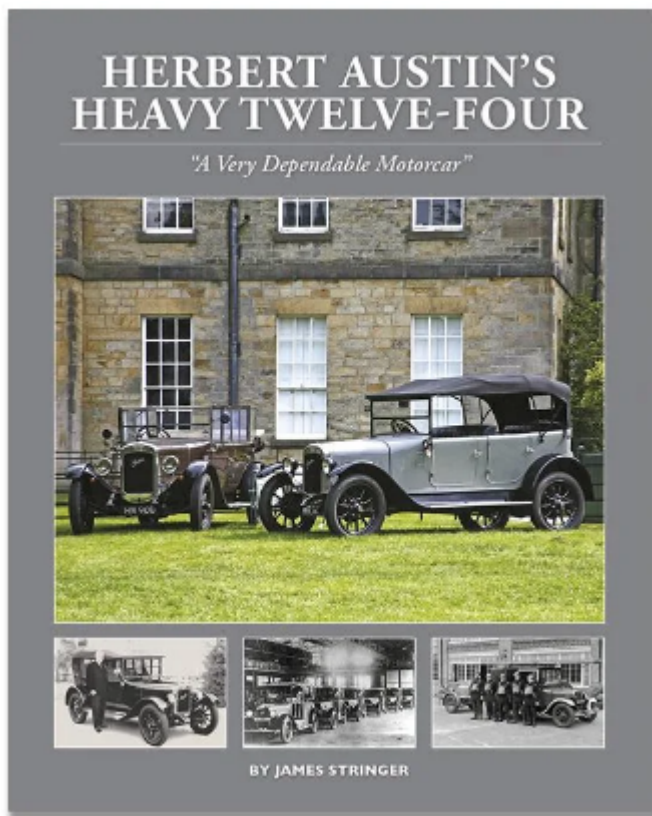
For Your Bookshelf – Herbert Austin's Heavy Twelve-Four – 'A very dependable motorcar'

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Reviewed by Kim Henson

Author: Jim Stringer

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128 pages (hardback), with colour and black and white photographs (over 300 illustrations)

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At the outset I should declare an interest here... As some Wheels-Alive readers may already know, I am an enthusiast of older vehicles and own several classic Austins. That said, I have never owned a Vintage Austin, although I have long been aware of the high regard in which they are held in automotive circles.

During the 1920s the Austin company might easily have gone the way of so many British motor manufacturers and faded from the scene through financial difficulties; indeed that very nearly was the story for Austin, and a receiver was appointed in 1921.

However, the firm produced two masterful models in the early 1920s, including, of course, the ubiquitous and highly successful Seven, introduced in 1922 and which put so many families on wheels during the following 17 years. The other highly significant model to arrive was the Twelve-Four, developed and produced from 1921. In many respects a scaled down version of the contemporary Austin Twenty, the Twelve-Four smaller and less costly. The model was acclaimed for its solid engineering, practicality and reliability, and became a mainstay of the firm's line-up into the 1930s, helping the firm to survive and prosper.

I was aware of the above situation, and had come 'close' to Austin Heavy Twelve-Four models in two ways. First, since a fellow member of a local classic car club has owned a Clifton Heavy Twelve-Four for many decades, and I have always been impressed by the car, also because I used to read to my children (now grown up and with Austins of their own!) the delightful 'Gumdrop' stories (written by Val Biro and based on his own Heavy Twelve-Four).



I was therefore fascinated to discover that Jim Stringer, well known for his Austin ownership and his books, had written a book specifically about the 'Heavy Twelve-Four'.

Jim is a well-respected writer and his knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, Austins of the Vintage and early 1930s era, has been harnessed to great effect in this book.

The background to the introduction of the Twelve-Four (and associated models) is fully described, and its technical make-up analysed in detail.

Within its pages are chapters relating to how the cars were built, contemporary road test reports and, in a revelation to me, a comprehensive description of the various standard and special body styles used on the Austin Twelve chassis. I must confess that I hadn't been aware of the multiplicity and diversity of all the different bodies used, and the variety of firms involved in making them. How fascinating I found it to take on board this information new to me.

The illustrations and photographs in this book are excellent, covering contemporary and up to date photographs of the cars, brochure images from long ago, and adverts from up to a century ago.

I also found interesting the chapter on the Twelve as used in taxi operations (many were still used through the Second World War - including on fire brigade duties, etc. - and into the 1950s).

One of my favourite sections within this volume is the one entitled 'Survivors and Losers', in which Jim Stringer describes and illustrates some of the Heavy Twelve-Fours that have survived (many having been rescued from dire circumstances), as well as some that didn't make it.

The appendix at the end of this book also makes very interesting reading, covering (for example) in-depth the various production changes through the years (including dates and Chassis Numbers), production figures for each type and information on how to translate the



car's identification plates.

VERDICT

Brilliant, in my view.

This terrific book, produced with high quality covers and paper, is readable, comprehensive, fascinating and packed with facts and information based on the author's enthusiasm for and full knowledge of these tough and likeable Austins.

I rate it 10 out of 10, and this would make an ideal Christmas present for anyone interested in Vintage vehicles and automotive history, whether or not they are also fans of Austins (in which case it's even better). Of course if you are not buying for someone else, you could just treat yourself to a copy...

Currently the publishers Herridge and Sons Ltd. are selling copies signed by the author for £32.50 (instead of the normal price of £40).