

SHIRE 245 ALBUM

# Staff Cars

DAVID FLETCHER



## Staff Cars

With relatively few exceptions, the average military staff car is nothing more than an ordinary motor car in war paint. Examples of just about every well known make of car have seen military service of some kind since the dawn of motoring. This book focuses primarily on the two World Wars but it begins with the first years of the twentieth century, takes a careful look at the years between the wars and briefly surveys the post-war scene. Developments in Great Britain form the main theme, but comparisons are made with events in other countries. Some of the more unusual types that loosely qualify as staff cars are included and many of the photographs have not been published before.

David Fletcher is the librarian at the Tank Museum at Bovington Camp in Dorset, which he first visited, out of idle curiosity, in the early 1960s. His main interest lies in the early years of military mechanisation and armoured warfare in Britain. He has been responsible for a series of books published for the Tank Museum by HMSO and is a regular contributor to the military vehicle journal *Wheels and Tracks*.

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STAFF CARS

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A preserved Volvo Sugga four-wheel-drive staff car attending a Tank Museum rally in 1988. Known officially as the P2104/TP21, these cars served the Swedish Army from 1953 as command staff and radio vehicles. They were powered by a straight six-cylinder side-valve engine driving through a four-speed two-ratio gearbox to the rear axle or both axles as required.

## THE POST-WAR YEARS

With so many cars on the strength it was clear that no substantial new purchases would be possible for some time. However, the occupying forces in Germany obtained German-made cars in some numbers for local use, including many Volkswagens as well as Mercedes, BMWs and Opels. Most unusual of all was a batch of Humber Snipe chassis which were rebuilt from light trucks with saloon bodies by the German coach-builders Karmann.

After the war the British Army at last realised that the true military vehicle is totally different from its civilian counterpart. Yet experience had also shown that compromise was inevitable since the huge fleets needed by an army at war could not, economically, be maintained in peacetime; and they were of little use to civilian users. There was, however,

some sense in developing a nucleus of such specialised vehicles for a smaller peacetime army and this the War Office proposed to do. In 1945, in conjunction with the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, they drew up a programme for a fleet of vehicles ranging from a field car to a 60 ton tank transporter, all of substantial construction and powered by various sizes of Rolls-Royce engine as effectively waterproofed as an engine could be. The list included a staff car which would have four-wheel drive and a 90 horsepower six-cylinder engine. By 1947 this had been watered down to the point that commercial types were acceptable for certain roles in the interests of economy, and this included staff cars. The field car, on the other hand, did appear in the form of the Austin Champ, although it was later deposed by the

Land-Rover.

Staff cars continued to be purchased off the shelf, not only in Britain but around the world. The only notable exceptions were the Soviet Union, who built some off-road saloons, the Swedes, who introduced the famous Volvo Sugga, and the French, who somehow applied four-wheel drive to the already highly mobile Citroen 2CV for service in North Africa. In Britain in the 1950s the range extended from the little Hillman Husky utility through a selection of medium-

sized saloons by, among others, Austin, Morris and Vauxhall, to the superior models represented by the Humber Super Snipe and Pullman. At the same time the RAF developed a liking for the Standard Vanguard and Ensign. The situation remained the same into the 1980s with each country using its own national products where applicable. In Britain these include the popular Metro, Ford Granada and a few stately Daimlers.

## FURTHER READING

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- Robertson, Bruce. *Wheels of the RAF*. Patrick Stephens, 1983.
- Scott-Moncrieff, David. *Veteran and Edwardian Motor-Cars*. B. T. Batsford, 1955.
- Vanderveen, Bart. *Historic Military Vehicles Directory. After the Battle*, 1989.
- Wyatt, Horace. *Motor Transports in War*. Hodder and Stoughton, 1914.

*Wheels and Tracks* is a quarterly journal devoted to the history of military vehicles and their preservation.

## PLACES TO VISIT

### GREAT BRITAIN

- Museum of Army Transport*, Flemingate, Beverley, North Humberside HU17 0NG. Telephone: 0482 860445.
- The National Motor Museum*, John Montagu Building, Beaulieu, Brockenhurst, Hampshire SO4 7ZN. Telephone: 0590 612345.

### CANADA

- Canadian War Museum*, National Museum of Man, 330 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario.

### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

- US Army Transportation Museum*, US Army Transportation Center, Fort Eustis, Virginia 23604.
- Patton Museum of Cavalry and Armor*, Keyes Park, Fort Knox, Kentucky 40121.

Many staff cars are preserved by private collectors and may often be seen at military vehicle rallies. Events of this kind take place all over the world and are regularly reported in *Wheels and Tracks*.