“Stephen needed two plates for the inside door handles, a cigar...

Spares for the
**MOST REMOTE ROLLS-ROYCE IN THE WORLD**

When Edward Waterson read about the LWB Silver Shadow on St Helena, little did he realise he would soon be packing his bags with spares from a breaker’s yard in York and heading 4,800 miles south to the timewarp Atlantic island.

**Destination reached:** grateful owner Stephen Biggs with his Silver Shadow, almost 1,700 miles south of the equator and 1,200 miles from the nearest major landmass.

The journey began with a trip to visit Carl and Andy at Westminster Auto Spares, Edward Waterson’s local breaker’s yard, just outside York. Edward arrived with a shopping list of Silver Shadow spares destined for St Helena.

Door handle plates, electric window components and a replacement cigar lighter for the front seats were among the parts needed for the St Helena LWB Silver Shadow.
JILL AND I hadn’t intended to make the 9,600-mile round trip to keep Stephen Biggs’ Rolls-Royce on the road. It just worked out that way.

Perusing the letters page of Spirit & Speed last September, we noticed a reference to LRH19336 and a minor controversy as to whether the tiny isolated South Atlantic island of St Helena was indeed home to a Wraith II. It wasn’t, pointed out Marinus Rijkers on the same page. The car was actually a 1974 Silver Shadow II. It wasn’t, Marinus Rijkers pointed out. The car was actually a Silver Shadow II. It wasn’t, Marinus Rijkers pointed out.

This particular car lives at Farm Lodge Country House Hotel, a listed seventeenth century planter’s house that’s lavished with the same care and attention as the car. Stephen Biggs and Maureen Jonas like beautiful cars and beautiful houses and if I’m honest, it was a desire to visit the house that first prompted me to get in touch with them. I’ve always had an interest in historic houses and they don’t come much more historic than Farm Lodge.

Stephen didn’t actually know that his car had been mentioned in the magazine, with the story of how he used it to collect guests from the late lamented Royal Mail Ship St Helena – so my email saying that I was familiar with his Rolls Royce left him somewhat bemused. We arranged to get together during our stay on the island (earlier this year) and just as an afterthought I asked if he needed any spares. He was back like a shot. What he really needed were two small chrome plates for the internal door handles and a pair of microswitches for the electric windows. He could also do with a replacement for the cigar lighter that he’d been relieved of by a light-fingered gentleman some years ago.

That seemed a modest enough request and the good news was that just a few miles from our home in York lies the village of Sherburn-in-Elmet, the HQ of Westminster Auto Spares, one of the country’s largest breakers of post-1965 Rolls-Royces and Bentleys. Dozens of them stand two deep in a macabre automobile graveyard. I’d had recent dealings with the firm’s ever-obliging Carl, who had helped me source parts for my 1956 Silver Cloud, so introductions were no problem.

“Hello Carl, Edward here. I need some spares for the most remote Rolls-Royce in the world.”

“Well, we’ve just delivered an engine for a Rolls-Royce in Mongolia,” he replied.

Carl was able to provide everything Stephen needed but even he didn’t realise there were two sizes of lighter. I told him that in the case of St Helena it was small cigarettes in the back and large cigars in the front. What we needed was a...
replacement for the stolen cigar lighter. He had one. Just £50 secured all the parts, which were later carefully wrapped in my boxer shorts and delivered (without the undergarments) to their new owner. We met Stephen on the verandah of the Consulate Hotel in Jamestown under the watchful eye of a full size effigy of Napoleon Bonaparte, St Helena’s most famous resident. He could wait no longer. Ripping the parcel open, Stephen was like a kid with a Christmas present.

As a thank you, later in the week he collected us from the city of Jamestown (population 600) in his Silver Shadow. It looked very much in place, parked on what is said to be the world’s best preserved Georgian High Street, straight out of Jane Austen. He drove us past St Paul’s Cathedral (a small country church) to Farm Lodge for dinner. On the way we called in to see growers of the world’s finest coffee, selling for £90 a pack in Harrods. On our left a Tricolour flew on the French sovereign territory surrounding Napoleon’s empty grave. This place is fascinating, beautiful and seriously bonkers.

GETTING A ROLLS-ROYCE TO ST HELENA

So how come this LWB Silver Shadow ended up on St Helena? Stephen and Maureen had been crew on the RMS St Helena and bought Farm Lodge as a near wreck. Once they’d completed the restoration and opened their hotel, the world’s finest car seemed a natural addition.

“The Rolls-Royce was in a sorry state when I bought it from a chap in Paignton, Devon in 2006,” says Stephen. “I paid £3,000 for it. The paint was 9510261 and the locals christened it The Chocolate Slab.”

“Number 1, in 1935; it is thought to have been burned out during the 1970s – with Governor Harper as passenger. The dispute raged on until 1927 when, in the face of considerable local opposition, the 1919 Ordinance was repealed and a new Motor-Car Ordinance was passed, making it lawful to import motor vehicles to the island. In order to be ready for the anticipated rush of cars, some 60 miles of road were prepared in 1928.

The current Governor’s Jaguar – with no requirement to display a number plate, just a crown at the base of the radiator grille

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The reason is because it costs a lot to import a car. In addition to around £2,000 shipping cost from Europe, islanders have to pay up to 45% import duty. Hence, the residents are inclined to buy older, cheaper cars. As a result, once they’ve bought a car, they tend to look after it and keep it running. St Helena’s mechanics do a great job of keeping these vehicles running on the poor road surfaces. At least one garage hand-machines parts, so if a crankshaft fails and a replacement is not available, all is not lost.

ST HELENA HAS AN 86-MILE ROAD NETWORK. MOST OF THE ROADS ARE SINGLE LANE. UPHILL TRAFFIC HAS RIGHT OF WAY AND A 30 MPH LIMIT APPLIES TO THE ENTIRE ISLAND

Just two examples of the type of classics still in daily use on the roads of St Helena

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