

“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



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



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



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

# lighter and a pair of microswitches for the electric windows”



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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 that had been retrofitted with post-1977 bumpers. The circular door mirror and lack of a front spoiler gave the game away.

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

**Above: LRH19336 was originally Walnut with gold fine lines but the car, then christened The Chocolate Slab, was recently repainted in Summer Beige**

**Below: the letter in Spirit & Speed that sparked Edward Waterson's interest**

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





## “The Rolls-Royce was in a sorry state... I paid £3,000 for it”

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 (metallic Walnut, as was my favourite Corgi car as a lad in the 1960s) with a Tan Everflex roof, trim VM 846. We just managed to squeeze it into a shipping container and brought it out on the Royal Mail Ship. There was hardly an inch to spare but we made good use of what little space there was by filling it with sanitary fittings for the newly renovated bathrooms at Farm Lodge.”

“The car acquired its new St Helena number plates (302) and the locals christened it The Chocolate Slab. Last year, with the help of a friend, we managed to restore it to its former glory and it is now painted Summer Beige.”

LRH 19336 isn’t just used to ferry guests to Stephen and Maureen’s place. Weddings are a massive thing on St Helena and the favourite mode of transport is a Rolls-Royce. There’s not much choice, so Stephen becomes the chauffeur for what is usually a very long day. When we met up, he’d recently spent an equally long day underneath the car, sorting out a problem with a leaking hose. Improvisation is a way of life out there, so a hose was borrowed from a nearby Land Rover and the bride got to the church on time.

If you’re thinking of going to St Helena, don’t wait until everybody else discovers it. It is a quite extraordinary island, full of wonderful eccentrics like Stephen and his Rolls. I’m sure he’ll be delighted to collect you from the new airport in the car - it’s like home from home for an RREC member.

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

According to [sainthelena.island.info/classiccars](http://sainthelena.island.info/classiccars), one of the stranger features of driving on St Helena is the proliferation of classic cars still in day-to-day use.

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.

### FIRST CAR ON THE ISLAND

Back in 1919, motorised transport was prohibited on St Helena but in 1924 islanders began debating whether cars should be allowed. The opposition maintained that St Helena had got by very well with horses and donkeys and that the steep and narrow roads were unsuitable for motor vehicles. Governor Charles Henry Harper was publicly neutral but reported to the Colonial Office that time was rarely of the essence in any undertaking on St Helena and thereby gave a hint regarding his private opinion.

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 distinction of being the first ‘car’ on St Helena belongs to a cyclecar imported by Captain Mainwaring. This vehicle, however, did not prove successful and during its trials crashed into the wall of the graveyard - with Governor Harper as passenger.

In 1929, St Helena’s most enterprising inhabitant, Mr Humphrey Solomon, imported an Austin 7. Registered as number 1, and sold to and operated by a Mr Withecombe, the car was generally referred to as ‘the Number 1’ but is believed to no longer exist.



Number 1, in 1935; it is thought to have been burned out during the 1970s



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



This 1966 Humber Super Snipe came to the island in 1974 with 17,493 miles on the clock and was used by Governor Thomas Oates, replacing an Austin 12, until 1982. It was then passed down to the Chief Justice, before being retired in 1991



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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