

Riley 1898-1969

Although the first Riley was a neat four-wheeled voiturette with a single-cylinder engine, production vehicles were initially motor tricycles; tricars were made until 1907. Four-wheelers followed, powered by 1034cc vee-twin engines. This capacity was increased to 2 litres from 1908. Although these were still in production by the outbreak of World War One, a 2.9-litre four was now also available.

Post-war Rileys initially used a sv 1 1/2-litre engine, the Redwing sports version of 1923 being a particularly handsome variant. However, the really sensational model of the 1920s was Percy Riley's Nine of 1927, particularly the fabric-bodied, high-waisted Monaco saloon, complete with boot (an unusual feature for the date). The engine was outstanding, an 1100cc four-cylinder with twin camshafts set high in the block, actuating inclined valves by pushrods in a hemispherical head. This proved a highly tunable layout, without the complexity of overhead camshafts, and remained a feature of Riley engine design up until 1957. In 1928 a touring version of the Nine appeared, and also the low and lively Brooklands model, inspired by J. G. Parry Thomas.

A six-cylinder variant of the Nine theme was inevitable: this, the 1.6-litre Fourteen, came in 1929. The 1930s saw many variants on the four- and six-cylinder engines, the distinctive fastback Kestrel and more conventional Falcon appearing in 1933. Not surprisingly, the Riley engine layout lent itself admirably to competition activities: one instance was successive wins in the BRDC 500 Mile race at Brooklands in 1934-35-36. Sporting models were the 9hp Imp, the six-cylinder MPH and, later, the 1 1/2-litre 12/4 four-cylinder engine appeared in 1934 and was produced alongside the faithful Nine. Two years later a 2 1/2-litre long-stroke four was marketed.

Financial storm clouds were gathering, however, and William Morris took over the company in 1938. The new broom saw that only the 1 1/2- and 2 1/2-litre cars remained in production, these engines also powering the post-war cars. The 2 1/2-litre Pathfinder of 1954 retained the classic Riley engine, though this ceased in 1957. Remaining models were merely badge-engineered BMC variants, mainly on the Mini and 1100 theme.

Source: <http://www.cartype.com>