

THE FUEL-INJECTED P6B

Paul Gretton mentions the injected P6B models planned for the US market in his piece on the US-model 3500S in the October 1996 *P6 News*. I have been trying to trace the story behind these cars for years, and have only very recently hit upon proof that they actually did exist – and in quantity, too!

When I was preparing *Rover P6, 1963-1977* for Motor Racing Publications, I had a few strands of evidence, but that was all. One photograph I had found in the Heritage archives (now at Gaydon) showed an injected V8 engine in a crash-test car; this picture was dated October 1970. A second showed a group of badges which included one for a 3500EI; that was dated November 1970. In addition, a list of commission numbers prepared at Rover included a series for models described as 3500EI manual-transmission cars. These ran from 461... for home-market models to 465... for left-hand drive CKD export types.

None of this of course proved that any such cars were ever built. The engine in the crash-test car could have been an experimental prototype installed in a standard P6B; the badges could have been no more than styling mock-ups; and the list of numbers simply showed that such cars had been planned for production at one stage.

Then I came across another small piece of evidence. Richard Twist, who worked on the V8 engine with Dave Wall at Solihull, happened to mention to me that he thought about 50 P6Bs had been built with fuel injection. This sounded interesting, but those 50 cars could have been 50 ordinary P6Bs into which fuel-injected engines had been put for test purposes. This was a tantalising new lead, but still not proof that any 3500EI models had been built.

Some hard evidence finally came to light in the spring of 1996. The Heritage archives took possession of a number of Rover documents which

had turned up in a dusty cupboard somewhere in the old British Leyland empire, and I was given the chance to go through them. I there, I discovered records of no fewer than five 3500SI models which had actually been built and road-registered, and the commission numbers allocated to them suggest that there were at least 41 cars – quite possibly the 50 of which Richard Twist had spoken. These cars were built in autumn 1970, at the same time as the photographs I knew of had been taken, but they had commission numbers beginning with 999... rather than in the 461... to 465... block.

Only 999-00035M and 999-00041M are described as 3500EI models in the records; the others are described as 3500PI models.

The fact that number 36 went to J. Lucas (Joseph Lucas) suggests that the fuel-injection system may have been of Lucas manufacture. The written-off car, number 35, might have been the crash-test car in the Heritage pictures; and car number 38 probably went to Woodhead's in connection with damper testing. Car number 39 was clearly fitted with a standard carburettor engine before being sold off through Ellis Garages (the Rover dealer in Oswestry).

There must have been other cars, and it is quite possible that others were sold off through Rover dealers after being fitted with standard carburettor engines. So do any of them still survive? Please do check the commission number (VIN) of your car if you have a late 1970 or early 1971 V8. If it begins with 999, your Club Historian needs to hear from you!

This is what the records show:

<u>Car No.</u>	<u>Engine No.</u>	<u>Reg No.</u>	<u>Regn. Date</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
999-00035M	999-00038C	PXC 975J	3/11/70	Written off
999-00036M	999-00036C	PXC 552J	16/10/70	To J. Lucas on 24/10/74
999-00038M	999-00037C	PXC 553J	16/10/70	To W.H. Mair Woodhead Manufacturing on 12/11/71
999-00039M	425-10056B	RXC 242J	12/11/70	To Ellis Garages on 13/7/72
999-00041M	999-00041C	PXC 976J	3/11/70	None