

## 1958 SAURER

Carrying out a road test following the completion of a vehicle restoration is not really anything out of the ordinary. A few miles of running around the local roads will either indicate that all is well or reveal problems that will need attention. For Roger and Margaret Mortimore the “shakedown cruise” for their 1958 Saurer was slightly more ambitious and involved a trip of several hundred miles around several European countries.

With one of Margaret’s freshly baked Victoria Sponges on offer I was only too pleased to call in at their home near Mereworth in Kent to hear the story of the latest trip and the details of the restoration of the lorry. As Roger explained “We hadn’t really planned on such a test run but we were, as they say, overtaken by events or perhaps more accurately overtaken by one event the 2012 Deutschlandfahrt held last August. However we need to go back a few years to when I first bought the Saurer”

The lorry is a 1958 Saurer SV 2 C which had previously been in the collection of vehicles owned by Dr Peter Borstel. He had rescued the lorry from a farm in Germany in 1994 and had subsequently carried out a full restoration and the Saurer was rallied extensively all over Europe. Very little is known about the history of the lorry other than it had been owned by a Swiss Co-operative Society and had been painted in a rather vivid orange livery. Roger knew Peter very well and in 1996 he drove the Saurer on one of the rallies and grew quite attached to the vehicle which handled and ran very well.

“When Peter decided to reduce the size of his collection he gave me first refusal on the Saurer and in 2008 I agreed to buy the vehicle and it was brought back to my workshop or the “Toybox” as it is more often called. The Saurer was in excellent condition and apart from touching up the paintwork in a few places I didn’t really have to do any other work. For the first couple of years Margaret and I took it to local rallies and the box body on the back provided some space for basic or perhaps “Spartan” living accommodation. On previous European rallies we had taken either our Scammell Highwayman, the Crusader or the Bedford TK but in 2012 we decided to take the Saurer back to Switzerland where it was built.”

“That trip proved to be quite eventful as by the time we had reached Luxembourg on the outward journey we had a problem with the brakes. One of the hydraulic wheel cylinders exploded and we lost the piston but we managed to nurse the Saurer to a garage we knew across the border in Germany. Here some temporary repairs were made while Margaret went off into the town to search for some hydraulic fluid and split pins. However the missing piston could not be replaced and we had to complete the rest of the journey to our destination at the Saurer Museum in Arbon with braking on only three of the wheels.”

“During our time in Switzerland experienced mechanics with detailed knowledge of these 1950s Saurers completely rebuilt the braking system. You could say that the first stage of the restoration of the vehicle was started 600 miles from home in Switzerland although there was a bit of a delay before stage two began. After thoroughly enjoying ourselves on this trip the Saurer returned home to the “Toybox” and over the next few months had outings at various local events.”

“In October 2011 I decided that a start would be made on what I had planned would be a two year restoration project and which would a complete mechanical overhaul and the rebuilding of the living accommodation in the box body. With space made in the “Toybox” for the Saurer work began on dismantling the front end and the headlights, bumper, radiator and the front wings were removed. These parts would all need extensive repair work and on closer inspection we discovered that the front bumper was really beyond saving. While from the front it looked alright there was some severe rusting from the back and it had obviously received a hefty clout at one time and it seemed remarkable that it hadn’t fallen to pieces already. As this could not be repaired my son Steven made up a new one using the original as a template.”

“By Christmas the front end had been dismantled and the radiator surround sent off to a company in London to be re-chromed. The beginning of 2012 saw all the engine components removed to leave just the cylinder block with the main fuel pump left in place. The block was cleaned and taken back to bare metal using wire brushes, a dirty, tiring and labour intensive job just right for Margaret !. Once cleaned the engine block was primed and painted and that is all that it needed. The engine was in superb condition with all the pistons, cylinders and valves in perfect condition. The starter motor and dynamo were removed and refurbished before being re-fitted and we were making pretty good progress”

“Then in February 2011 with the front of the Saurer in a few hundred pieces came news of the 2012 Deutschlandfahrt being organised by ETM Services in Stuttgart and TEAM Fehrenkotter a leading German transport company. This was to be held in August and the itinerary would include two overnight stops at the Saurer Museum in Arbon. We felt we just had to be part of this occasion and our two year project which was jogging along quite nicely now had a new deadline and the work had to be finished during the next six months”

“Many of the parts which had been removed had been repaired and repainted but had not been re-fitted while there were other areas such as the cab and chassis which hadn’t really been touched. Something had to go and sadly it was the renovation of the living accommodation as there was no way that planned new interior could be finished in time so poor Margaret had to “slum” it again.”

“The front axle was dropped out and stored in the yard and this would receive attention further down the line. The interior of the cab was gutted all the seats, dash and controls were removed and the old floor covering taken up. This revealed the

next nasty when we discovered that the cab was not actually still attached to the chassis and apparently had not been for some time. The fixings and the rear cross member had completely rusted and broken. These were all cut away and a new rear cross member was made up and fitted along with the steel section floor supports and a new floor was cut to shape from sheet steel and welded into place. A false floor was also fitted to allow the addition of sound proofing material to reduce the noise levels in the cab. This sound proofing was also added to the lower third of the rear of the cab body. The seats were sent to Regal Furnishings in Ilkeston in Derbyshire to be re-upholstered and trimmed in lichen green leather. This replaced the rather basic vinyl although from speaking with other Saurer owners it would seem that during the 1950s most of these lorries would have had upholstery in either tan or black leather but we prefer the green.”

“By now the engine components had been re-fitted and the cab gutted but the next step was a little more tricky. There was no room to work on the chassis in the “Toybox” especially as the body was still in place. The body was jacked up and the forklift was used to drag the lorry out through the doors and into the yard. The front end, which had no wheels, was supported by the fork lift while the chassis was power washed several times and then the laborious job of removing the rust and old paint began. Again wire brushes, pads and a needle gun were used with Margaret spending days on end lying underneath the chassis scraping away at the old paint. She really does get all the best jobs but I do help and have the scars to prove it after an unfortunate run in with an angle grinder. It would seem that the chassis had been shotblasted around twenty years previously as while we were working on the frames we came across great lumps of shot still stuck in the corners and it took days to get these lumps off with a needle gun”

“The spare wheel carrier was also removed and work was needed on this. The lorry had originally been fitted with 900 x 20 tyres and the carrier was obviously built to carry this size of spare. However we were fitting 1000 x 20 all around and so the carrier had to be enlarged as well as straightened and repaired before it could go back in place. Just another job which took valuable time but one which could not be overlooked.”

“The bonnet panels were sent away for shotblasting as were the front wings but while the bonnet panels came through the process unscathed the wings looked like spiders webs and time that we could ill afford had to be spent making welded repairs to both wings. The cab apart from the problems with the floor proved to be in reasonable condition with the fibre glass roof and rear panel found to be sound. Some work was required on the metal scuttle and the doors which had been taken off needed some repair work mainly along the bottom edge and around the hinges. I had taken out the windscreen glass myself and this had cleaned up nicely and would be re-fitted in due course. However the window rubbers were all perished and new ones were fitted.”

“For Margaret it was “short straw time” once again and she set to work laboriously cleaning all the wheels. The rear wheels were in pretty good condition as they had been worked on in Switzerland two years previously when we had the brakes rebuilt. With the wheels and chassis cleaned and primed the chassis was spray painted red using two pack. Time was now pressing and the decision was made to get the cab repainted professionally and one of the guys from Eagle Autos in Swanley came to the “Toybox” to carry out the painting. For two years Margaret and I had given much thought to the livery. The original Co-op orange was a non starter from the outset, much too vivid, especially after one or two “sherbets” while the idea of a light green, cream, blue and black were also kicked around at length. Finally after two years of careful consideration we opted for “Blau Grun” a colour which is carried by several European vehicles including Saurers. The fact that “Blau Grun” or Blue Green was basically the same colour as it had already been painted is neither here nor there.”

“Further work included repairs to the horn which had completely seized and had to be dismantled cleaned and rebuilt, the panels of the engine were removed and repainted and the exhaust brake was also found to be seized and had to be taken to pieces, repaired and rebuilt. All this was eating into the time and our departure date was coming ever closer and there was a real danger that the 2012 Deutschlandfahrt would be taking place without us.

## PART TWO

“Work on the cab was going pretty well the painting was finished, the dash re-fitted and the interior painted in a light grey. The floor underlay had been fitted and the re-upholstered seats had just been finished and were ready to do in. Bearing in mind that this is a 1950s vehicle the seats are quite sophisticated and it is not just a matter of bolting them to the floor. They are fully sprung, seemingly every which way and it was a devil of a job to get the driver’s seat positioned correctly. Over several days of tearing my hair out I had the seat in and out four times before I was satisfied that it was fitted correctly. I called upon the services of Terry Brown at Invicta Upholstery in Maidstone to fit the new headlinings and carpets for the cab and he really has completed an excellent piece of work and I would recommend the firm to anyone”

“It was now June, about eight weeks before the “off” and the front axle was still in the garden with the wheels off. However on the plus side the new windscreen rubbers had been fitted and I brought in some professional help to re-fit the windscreen. Whilst I had been happy enough to take it out myself I did not want to risk breaking it as the new rubbers made it quite a tight fit. However people that know what they are doing seem to make these tasks look very easy and the glass went back in with no

problem at all. Then I just had to reconnect the leads and fitting for the windscreen heater. How many 1958 lorries from British manufacturers had heated windscreens?"

"The front axle was retrieved from the weeds and power washed and another week was spent rubbing in down by hand and taking it back to bare metal before it was primed and painted. Once it was back in place the wheels which had also been painted could be re-fitted and for the first time in several months the Saurer was now back on all its wheels. The radiator which was one of the first things to have been removed had needed a few repairs but was found to be in pretty sound condition and was put back in place and the pipework re-connected. The grid in front of the radiator took nearly a week of work to repair straighten and square up before that was repainted and fixed back in place. The chrome surround had been returned some weeks previously and had been stored in the living room indoors to avoid it getting dirty or damaged but this could also now go back in place."

"The repaired front wings had been painted black and once these were back on the front end was at last beginning to look more "lorrylike". The bonnet panels still needed to go back on and because of the louvred side panels I again elected to have them sprayed by a professional to ensure a really first class finish. The bonnet had taken a lot of work to refurbish as there are connecting hinges which had not moved for years but I sprayed the whole lot with WD 40 which I left for a few days to seep into the important little places. Then more WD 40 was sprayed on and I tapped the hinges with a hammer and slowly freed the first one after several days of spraying and tapping. The other one refused to budge and in the end I had to resort to a couple of blows with a larger hammer and fortunately this seemed to do the trick without damaging the panel."

"The bonnet is fitted with small leather protective patches but when the fasteners were removed the leather corners were destroyed in the process. During my searches and travels I had managed to find two or three sets of similar leather corners which I thought might be adapted to fit. I found some in Austria which were almost the same but slightly smaller and eventually I had a stock of six different types. Eventually on another search of the "Interweb" I managed to find the right size and once ordered they arrived in a few days and were fitted straight away. I still have all the others in stock as they fill up one of the storage drawers in the "Toybox" very nicely and I never throw anything away."

"Our intended departure date was now only two weeks away and the body was still up on blocks inside the "Toybox". Before it could be lowered into place on the chassis there was still the trifling matter of re-fitting the entire braking system so a few long days and some longer nights were spent feverishly working to get everything back in place. We thought it was job done until we notice a slight oil leak from the rear diff pinion. Try as we might we could not remove the front flange from the gearbox even with the help of a makeshift lever in the form of a 4ft long section

of scaffold pole. I telephoned my friend Ian Langley to see if he could come over with an hydraulic puller but when I explained the problem he said that the scaffold pole was giving more pulling force than the hydraulic puller would. He suggested that I pour a couple of kettles of hot water over the flange and give the pole a tap. I applied the hot water gave the pole a clout and the puller and the pole and the flange flew across and landed under the sump. Good job I didn't have any of my delicate bits and pieces in the way"

"With the flange off the faulty seal was removed and then had to try and find a replacement. Amazingly we managed to make contact with a firm which thought they might have something in stock as they had supplied seals for some "old 1950s" lorries many years ago. It turned out they had five in stock and one was quickly sent out to me. Once the seal arrived I am glad to say the whole lot went back in with a lot less effort than it took to get out."

"The chassis was manoeuvred into position and the body lowered back into place and a set of new bolts secured it to the chassis. Our plans of refitting the interior with kitchen, bathroom and sleeping areas had of course been deferred it would provide for basic requirements during the trip, assuming of course we made the start line and that was still in some doubt."

"The last time that the engine had been running was when the Saurer was reversed into the "Toybox" the previous October and now with the engine and controls back together it was time to fire it up. Not a glimmer, foot hard pressed down on the accelerator and not a sign that the lorry was going to start. Battery was new, plenty of diesel and spent four hours bleeding the system several times and making more attempts to get the thing going. I really did get the hump and just stomped off indoors for a tea. I returned to the Saurer a few hours later and pressed the start button and the lorry burst into life but as soon as I pressed down on the accelerator it died. There was obviously something wrong with the throttle linkage."

According to Margaret and I quote "The numbskull had put the linkage on backwards" a problem which once discovered was soon put to rights. In his defence Roger maintained that "The only driver's handbook I have for the Saurer is in German and so you have to go by the pictures and diagrams but I generally get there in the end. It was now the 14<sup>th</sup> August a week before departure but at least the lorry did start which was two or three steps in the right direction."

"The finishing touches included fitting the mudflaps, finishing the steps and putting up at Margaret's insistence a curtain rail and curtains over the rear window in the cab. There were the emblems and badges to go back in place and the wiring and lights to be given a final check to make sure everything was working. There is an original VTOL "Lady " mascot which should go on but this is rather delicate and these originals are something of a collector's so ours will stay indoors and in time a duplicate will be fitted to the lorry."

“Departure day and we were supposed to leave at 2.00pm in time to catch the ferry at Dover. The morning had been spent checking over the lorry and we were running a bit late but were finally ready to go at 2.45pm. Climbed in pressed the button and the starter jammed. A clout with a big hammer did nothing, so an 8ft length of 4x2 was retrieved from the “Toybox” and used as a lever to rock the Saurer with it in gear until it started. Just in case of further problems the length of timber was nailed in place on the rear of the body and slightly flustered we started on our way. As it turned out we had a trouble free “shakedown cruise” and the only difficulty with starting the engine came at Calais on the return journey some three weeks later.”

“Although we had put ourselves under some pressure to get the job done the only corners which had been cut were with the living accommodation, all the engineering and mechanical work had been completed to the best of our ability. After all we did not want to suffer the embarrassment of being on a rally with dozens of other Saurers and being the only to experience breakdowns or have to be recovered. Although I would not normally recommend a fifteen hundred mile “shakedown cruise” to anyone for Margaret and myself it worked out fine and we had a whale of a time on the run.”