



Everything comes to he who waits – then goes again

One of my earliest DAF related memories goes back as far as 1971, when, at the grand old age of 8, I was taking a great interest in motor cars. Vauxhalls, mainly, because that's what my dad always had in those days – Vauxhall Victors. I was also a little bit interested in Minis because that's what my mum had, but I was also interested in Vauxhall Vivas, because that's what my grandpa had. I'm sure that many people can relate to that sort of story, substituting the makes and models accordingly.

So it was an interesting moment when early in 1971, grandpa and grandma came to visit us and duly turned up in their white HA Viva. I took even more interest when during conversation, the subject of cars came up and grandpa announced that he was thinking of trading in the Viva and getting a new DAF. He then produced some brochures – ones that we are all very familiar with now; the individual ones for DAF 33, 44 and the 55.

No doubt that at that point, the grown-ups would have been talking about the various woes of the world and perhaps chatting about cars. I wandered off with the brochures to look at the pictures and announced rather grandly that I wasn't very keen on the 33 (yes, honestly – can you believe that now?!) and that the 44 looked "quite nice" and the 55 coupé was "brill".



Tea and visit over, I probably forgot about the DAFs, until maybe a couple of months later, when this time, mum, dad and I went (in the Victor) the 35 miles or so to visit grandpa and grandma. Once settled in and after tea, grandpa announced that he had something to show me

and led me to his garage. And what should be there, but a brand new white DAF 55! And what was more, it was such a lovely sunny evening that he was going to take me for a ride in it.

Core! I think he tried to explain to me about the Variomatic but what really struck me was that lovely new car smell and the fact that it had cloth upholstery. It is easy to forget now how unusual it was in those days to have such luxury. And for a little chap in short trousers, cloth was far easier on the legs than vinyl!

History will tell us that that must have been some sort of serendipity moment because, of course, some 8 years later when I was to get my first real car of my own, that would most unexpectedly be a then 9-year old mimosa yellow 55 that "might keep me going for a few months," which turned into 18 years and got me to where I am now in the world of DAFs.

But life and the years went on which leads me to my next DAF memory; 1975. This time, we were visiting my cousins and grandpa and grandma were also there – with their DAF 55 of course. I was still very much in to Vauxhalls and had a basic understanding of DAFs. But I was also rather full of myself because the Volvo 66 had just been launched and I distinctly remember having a conversation about how cool (or whatever words we used then) it was that DAF had become Volvo and that they had really made it now in the world of motoring by even having big impact absorbing bumpers.



The adverts at the time made great play of the fact that the new Volvo 66 was just like a big normal Volvo, but cheaper to run. I remember being particularly impressed by the colours and Volvo’s description. I.e. very matter of fact red, yellow, blue, green; none of these fancy names that makers came up with to describe their particular shade of red, yellow, blue and green. Volvo yellow was my favourite, because it was bright but also was the same colour as experimental safety cars that would often be shown on TV and in motoring magazine in those days.



As a digression, 1976 was memorable to me as well, for that saw the introduction of the Volvo 343 which again, to my youthful eyes, looked splendid in Volvo yellow.

Fast forward, of course, to 1980, and the day had come for me to have my own car and, as fate would have it, it was the most unexpected choice, certainly given my penchant for Vauxhalls (I thought I might be able to stretch to a HB Viva as a first car) and to a lesser extent Minis (and if I am perfectly honest, Mk1 Ford Escorts had a certain appeal). But these were not to be – I got my DAF 55! And history tells us all about what that got me into over the years.



And since then, for all sorts of reasons, Variomatic wonders have been part of my life. These included the Volvo versions of course. I well remember a moment in the mid-1980s when on a day that I had been out and about in my 55, I had spotted a yellow Volvo 66 parked at the road side. I stopped and placed a club leaflet under its wiper, and its rather prim lady owner appeared. I muttered something along the lines of, “Did you know about the DAF Owners Club?” and she replied, rather like Mrs Bucket would, “Why would I need to know about that, I’ve got a Volvo”. The moment was lost.

Despite my many years of DAF and indeed Volvo 340 ownership, I had never driven, let alone owned, a 66 of either the DAF or Volvo variety. It was a need that I hoped would be met one day, especially having experienced the marvellous comfort and handling of Variomatic 340s. I didn’t let it lose me sleep, but always wondered whether maybe there might just be a 66 moment for me.

Well, just over a year ago, that moment arrived. And yes, the 21st Century all things to all people – the Internet was to blame. Or, rather, thank.

Messages started to appear on the website advising that a Volvo 66 was to be offered for sale at a classic car auction in deepest Wiltshire. Pictures showed that although far from perfect, it was a decent looking car, the story read rather typically and, oh, it was yellow! It was being sold by a couple of chaps who had bought it a few months earlier because they had wanted to take part in some sort of race/charity event using “unusual cars”.

For one reason or another, they never got around to entering the event, so the Volvo was pretty much abandoned until they decided to offer it to auction.

Now, much as you and I love our Variomatics and “get” them sadly car auctions tend not to. The auction came, and went, but the poor little Volvo remained unsold and unwanted. Was this a sign? Could this be the time for yours truly to step in?



Prior to the auction, I had entered into email conversation with the owner/seller who was a thoroughly decent fellow who works in automotive engineering and design, so did understand the appeal of the Volvo and its character. But he didn't have the time and space etc to hold on to the car. So in a rash moment, I came straight out with it (I'd be no good at poker) by admitting that I had long wanted to experience a Volvo 66 and perhaps we could come to some sort of deal. And to cut a long story short, we did.

There were one or two warning signs from comments he made that suggested that it would not be a good idea to drive it all the way from Wiltshire to Nottinghamshire, even though it was MoTd and taxed. Comments such as “It might need a tune up” and “I'm not sure whether the transmission is working as it should although it gets about OK” made me search for a way of getting it to its new home.

I was committed now anyway, because I'd even rented a lock-up garage for it – there was no way I was going to kick my much loved 33 out into the open. And anyway, the neighbours would worry about me

even more, as well as the potential effect on house prices should an old not totally smart Volvo appear abandoned on the driveway.

Back to the Internet and a bit of searching found a really good useful website called Anyvan.com which allows you to type in the collection and destination post codes, then their bank of owner/drivers “bid” to you with prices to collect and deliver.

A very helpful one-man-band car transporter contacted me with a good price, so a date was arranged for the Volvo to be brought up to me on the back of a transporter.



Then more common sense kicked in. “Suppose he delivers it to me but it is so bad that I can't drive it anywhere?” A bit of a brainwave saw me going to have a chat with the owner of a garage business who I have used several times over the years about 6 miles from me. His is a garage of the old school – no fancy reception, no coffee machine, weekly newspapers on the table that are six months or more old and, crucially, the boss and all staff have much oil under their finger nails and don't believe in political correctness. And there are always masses of cars being worked on ranging from the everyday up to exotica such as Ferraris and Maseratis. Oh and they are nice people too.

I popped to see him and told him what I had gone and bought. For a moment he gave me a withering look but quickly suggested what I had intended and that was to get the car delivered to them and they would give it a good checking over.

A couple of days later on a sunny but cold December day, a transporter

arrived with my yellow Volvo 66 on the back at the garage. And I was there to welcome it – and hand some cash to the delivery driver.

This was a few days before Christmas so the garage was quite busy with customers having their cars serviced. I explained that there was no great urgency re the Volvo and they parked it in a corner of their workshop. It had the company of an original Lotus Elan that was there for similar reasons, and an early 20th century French racing car that looked just like a racing Bentley – this was owned by David the garage owner. So you can see that they understand and like a variety of cars – even DAFs!



A few weeks later, David reported that the car was in generally good condition and he was especially impressed by the lack of rust and holes anywhere in the sills and floor (as indeed was I). The strange thing was that although not serious, there were rust blisters at unusual places on the upper visible body; the usual bubbling under the chrome window trim on the doors, but there was a hole in the top of the boot lid that went right through and another couple appearing on the roof. It was as if the car had spent a lot of time being dive-bombed by bird deposits in precisely the same spots over the years and that the acid was having an effect on the paint and metal work. There were a few blisters on the sides and doors of the car and recently it seems that something had hit the nearside front wing and bonnet. All cosmetic stuff in other words.

He went on to say that the engine seemed fine apart from a completely worn out carburettor (no wonder it

might have needed a tune-up). Then we came onto the transmission.

David and the guys at the garage really do understand the Variomatic – it turns out that one of them, who is nearing retirement, had some factory experience years ago when he worked at a Volvo dealers. They had discovered that at some point, someone had been doing work on the transmission that was not particularly good and as a result, they had taken a lot of it apart to in effect rebuild it. The drive belts were well used so I decided to buy a new set from the club and the garage duly fitted them.

The garage did all this on and off in between jobs, which was good of them really. As a result I eventually got to sit in and drive the car home in February. My first impression was just how comfy and indeed nippy the Volvo 66 is – and how bright it was to look at. Two miles down the road, I filled up with petrol, and in the few minutes that I was doing that, two complete strangers wandered over to make positive comments etc. I explained that I had pretty much rescued it, and they were even more impressed! (It also helped me to justify to myself how much this little project was costing me)

Then over the next few months I have cleaned and polished it, brushed and vacuumed the excellent interior and also did a little bit in the way of paintwork to smarten it up as much as possible. I even drove it a few hundred miles around and about locally, and people certainly saw me coming – for the right reasons! It is such a bright happy looking car – and totally cool and groovy in a 1970s sort of way.

However, as you will know, I have always planned to be sensible and only really have one old car (DAF) on the go at a time, and I am committed and love my little DAF 33 – which may have started to have felt a bit ignored. My intention was to have some time with the 66 then hopefully find a new understanding owner for it – ideally within the club, of course.

But before I had really gone public with that idea, there was another one of those moments.

“Volvo 66 wanted”

This time, again on our website, a discussion had started about Volvo 66s in general, and Graeme Aiken, who already owns several older and newer Volvos said that he has long wanted a Volvo 66 to add to his collection, and that he very much missed the enjoyment he had experienced having owned Variomatic 340s in the past.

I contacted Graeme and over the next few weeks we discussed on and off about him possibly becoming the “Yellow Peril’s” new owner.

Eventually we agreed a price and the next thing was to arrange hand over. This would take a bit of planning, because Graeme lives about 200 miles away from me down in Eastbourne. He planned to come up with a friend towing a trailer behind a Volvo XC90 to carry the Volvo 66 back home. But for one reason and another, he and his friend couldn’t make the same days, so Graeme asked me to tell him honestly whether I thought the Volvo would make the journey under its own steam. I didn’t really have any reason to doubt that it would, but, of course, as with any old and indeed not so old car, you can never be certain. Graeme explained that like me, he always makes sure he has his breakdown card and mobile phone with him, just in case!

The plan then was for Graeme to come up to Nottingham one Saturday by train, do the deal and paperwork and then drive the Volvo home to Eastbourne. And that is precisely what did happen.

Everything went to plan; the trains were on time, the Volvo started and got to Nottingham station, it was a lovely sunny day and I met Graeme at the station where we had coffee and did the paperwork in the station café area – even though someone nicked my cappuccino.

Of even more interest was the fact that we are now in a new era of electronic car tax transfers. The car was MoTd and taxed of course, but to keep things legal, the new owner has to make sure it is taxed by him. Graeme had brought his laptop and we logged onto the DVLA site from the station, entered the relevant information and within a few seconds, the car was taxed again in Graeme’s name.



Once done, we made the short walk down the road where the Volvo 66 was parked in brilliant sunshine at the road side – it looked super. I had mentioned to Graeme that the car will attract a lot of pointing from people and attention and what should happen as I was explaining the controls to him, than a complete stranger wandered by and photographed the car! This pic then appeared a few hours later on a “long lost cars” website. Infamy!

And with that, Graeme plugged his satnav in, fired up the Volvo and headed home down south.

I was pleased and relieved to get a message from him a few hours later reporting that he and the Volvo had made it with no problem, although it transpired that the alternator had had enough and was no longer charging. Recent contact says that he has managed to get a replacement, he loves the car and plans to do more restoration work on it.

All in all then, a mellow yellow sort of glow. I had my Volvo 66 moments after waiting for 30-odd years and now this little car was onto a new positive chapter in its life.

Richard Butler