



Above:  
MMOC youth  
group in 2016

# THE YOUNG ONES

Many classic car clubs are seeing their membership levels falling, with few youngsters joining their ranks. What can be done to halt the decline?

Words: Richard Dredge

The classic car scene is fabulous for its variety, camaraderie, and the opportunities that it offers to create long-lasting friendships as well as terrific experiences. For many classic car owners, it's not until they join an owners' club that they get to experience everything that their vehicle and the classic car scene have to offer. The problem for many clubs is that younger enthusiasts aren't interested in paying a fee to join a member organisation. They would rather sign up to an online group which costs them nothing, either to share information, enjoy some online chat, or to meet up informally.

The Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs (FBHVC) surveyed 238 clubs in 2021, and discovered that over the next five years, 43% of them expect the average age of their members to increase, with 32% assuming that their membership numbers will decrease. What's even more worrying is that this is against a backdrop of a big increase in enthusiast owners according to the DVLA, which says that the number of historic cars has increased, and the estimated number of enthusiast owners has gone up from 500,000 to 700,000. That's a 40% increase in just five years!

According to the FBHVC, the typical cost of a year's membership of a classic car club in 2016 was £20, and by 2020 this had risen to £25, or the equivalent of half a dozen pints of beer. The problem for many clubs is that it seems a lot of youngsters would rather have the booze...

The FBHVC report asks: 'Are clubs just not seen as relevant to today's historic vehicle driver? Clubs were mostly started by like-minded individuals with a shared interest in vehicles, whether generally or specifically by make or model. Clubs offered the opportunity for enthusiasts to compare notes on their vehicles, seek help with problems and often obtain assistance with repairs. Clubs provided magazines and social meetings or events, for the interest and benefit of members. Our survey shows that clubs are continuing to do all these things. But is that the problem? Clubs are doing what they have always done yet most are not thriving and growing. We have to conclude that if clubs keep doing what they have always done the results will always be the same'.

More encouragingly, the report adds: 'Our research does show that 11% of clubs either have a youth group or make special arrangements for younger members. Set against that, 89% do not. It is the larger clubs that cater best for younger members (24% do so), which perhaps contributes to the potential for a polarisation effect – the large get larger, while medium-size clubs get smaller and the smaller clubs eventually disappear'.

Keen to address these rather bleak predictions, many clubs are going all out to attract a new generation of classic car owners. One of them is the Rover P4 Drivers' Guild ([roverp4dg.org.uk](http://roverp4dg.org.uk)), the chairman of which is Eamonn Burnell. He comments: "This has been something that our club has been focusing on for the past two years. We recognise it as a big problem for us potentially, because it's clear that for many people, buying a classic car is something that comes later in life, with higher levels of disposable income. Groups like ours need to change that, by making the cars more accessible, as well as making the club as welcoming and useful as we can.

"One of the key things that we've done is to recruit a young owners' officer called Robson Field, who is in his mid-20s. He has already set up a Facebook page that promotes us much better than the Facebook group that we've had in place for years. He also manages our Instagram account and feeds his ideas into the committee. The Guild also recognised that a modern and

attractive website is very important for the younger generation, which is why a completely new site has been implemented, which is also far easier to use."

The Rover P4 Drivers' Guild isn't short of ideas, as Eamonn explains: "Reducing the cost of ownership is key, which is why we are going to work with insurers to cut the cost of cover for young drivers. We'd like to look at such opportunities as the use of a black box to cut insurance premiums or anything else that we can jointly devise with the insurance companies we are close to. Technical support is another key reason for club membership, so we make sure that this is available to all members, whatever their age."

"Perhaps the key problem that a lot of clubs are up against is one of perceptions. The P4 is seen as quite a staid classic, and maybe only really suited to older drivers, but it's a great car for regular – or even everyday – use. We're looking at having a P4 at our annual rally, where youngsters could get behind the wheel to sample it. What I think all classic car clubs would benefit from though, is some sort of expo at a venue such as the British Motor Museum. We could all turn up with cars for youngsters to try out, and they can find out more about what we have to offer as well as what our cars are like to own and live with."

Another option open to the Rover P4 Drivers' Guild, and which it's considering, is to take part in the Classic Car Loan Project (CCLP), which is the brainchild of retired teacher Bob Wilkinson. Launched in 2016, the scheme gives young drivers access to a range of classic cars, by working with an array of clubs and private individuals who loan out their classics for a year at a time. In issue 8 we'll take a closer look at the scheme and have a longer chat with Bob, but in the meantime you can find out more about the scheme at ([classiccarloanproject.co.uk](http://classiccarloanproject.co.uk)).

One of the groups which has embraced the CCLP more enthusiastically than most is the Morgan Three-Wheeler Club ([mtwc.co.uk](http://mtwc.co.uk)), which has three cars in the scheme. But before Bob Wilkinson came along – indeed as far back as 2012 – the Morgan Three-Wheeler Club was already trying to match cars with young owners, albeit on a very different basis. The club's Steve Lister explains: "We have a programme in place called Mog Match, although in the early days it was an informal arrangement so it didn't have a name.

"Instead of placing cars on a temporary basis we try to home them permanently. Back in 2012 we started to talk informally to long-standing owners of three-wheelers, about the possibility



## Profile: The young ones

of selling their cars at preferential rates, to younger members. We spoke only to people who had long-term projects which were unlikely to ever be finished, or maybe a good car that was no longer being used. Some three-wheelers have needed a complete restoration, while others have needed little more than recommissioning, although some cars were up and running at the point that they were sold on. Naturally we've provided technical support and access to parts to revive or recommission these cars, and to keep them running.

"As with so many clubs, a big problem that we have is the rising values of our cars – they're now out of reach to the average youngster. We aim to sell our cars for no more than £10,000, but £5000 is even better. Naturally we support all of these new owners completely, when it comes to getting their cars on the road and enjoying them. There's a strong competition element to the Morgan Three-Wheeler Club and many of the people who have taken advantage of Mog Match have gone on to take part in our motor sport events, which we heavily discount. We're so keen to get new blood into our motor sport events that we can even lend cars to people, depending on the event and the venue."

The Morgan Three-Wheeler Club is targeting those under 30 with Mog Match; the original intention was to aim for people in their early 20s. The assumption was that the cars would be bought by people already connected with the club, probably through their parents, but because these younger fans already have access to three-wheelers, the cars have been taken on by people new to the Morgan scene.

Steve continues: "We've learned that it's a big step for someone to buy or borrow a three-wheeler, and it's a risk as we don't have any contracts in place, but what's the alternative? Since 2013 we've matched 13 people with cars, seven of them since July 2020, so the scheme is definitely gaining in popularity. So far, all of the cars that we've placed are still with their young owners, who have stayed with the club."

It's taken a lot of clubs a long time to latch on to the demographic time bomb, but quite a few years ago Paul Senior worked it out on behalf of his group; he's been chairman of the Lakeland Historic Car Club (*lhcc.club*) for the past nine years. It's a thriving group with a steady membership of 300. Paul explains: "Most older people join a classic car

club for the social side, but for youngsters it's much more likely to be about technical help, to keep their cars going.

"It would be easy to assume that our new young recruits are related to existing members, but that's rarely the case. We're a very active club, doing about 60 events each year. These range from static displays to road trips and meals, and whatever we do we make sure that we're as approachable as possible; to that end we all wear badges with our first names on and the club's logo. If we're running a display at an event and someone approaches our cars we engage with them. It's amazing how productive this can be; many youngsters are ignored by classic car owners, but we want them to join us, and our interest in them has led to lots of younger members being signed up in recent years.

"Just 24 of our members are on Facebook, which equates to one in 12, which isn't that many but it's probably a lot higher than for some classic car clubs. Regardless of that, we need to invest more of our time and energy in promoting ourselves on social media, which is why we've recently added a Facebook account and at some point we'll embrace Instagram too."

The Lakeland Historic Car Club doesn't have a separate group for its younger members, but a lot of traditional marque-specific groups are taking this route. Jane Rowley is a director of the Triumph Sports Six Club (*tssc.org.uk*), which has had a section for younger members for a decade. She says: "The cars that we cover are perfect for young owners; the biggest hurdle is getting enough of them together to gain some sort of critical mass. As with most clubs, our members are spread all over the UK – and beyond – which makes doing regular meet-ups very difficult.

"We offer half-price membership for under-25s and half-price entry to our major events. Most of our events are extremely cheap to take part in, as they're invariably camping weekends, so they're perfect for anyone on a budget. But insufficient money is fast becoming the biggest hurdle to classic car ownership in general. For years the Triumphs that we cater for have been among the most affordable, but rising values are pushing them out of reach for many. That also makes insurance companies more reluctant to cover new drivers, although we have negotiated a scheme with Footman James that allows under-21s to drive their cars for just an extra £40 on their premium, if they're accompanied by a parent."





Opposite left: The MMOC Youth Group out on a run

Opposite right: Ollie and Kara with the Triumph Sports Six Club's early Herald

This page top: Will Chignell trying out a TR6 (in a closed environment!)

This page bottom: Jim Edwards (driving) tackles Pardon at Prescott

Profile: The young ones

This page top: The TR Register's Youth Group enjoying a weekend together

This page bottom: Callan Hyde uses his 2000 saloon on an everyday basis

Opposite left: Will Chignell gets his hands dirty

Opposite right: Robson Field, of the Rover P4 Drivers' Guild





Darren Sharp is on the committee of Club Triumph ([clubtriumph.co.uk](http://clubtriumph.co.uk)), and he dropped us a line to say: “We’ve just created a young members section and we’re featuring their cars at the Telford-based MG and Triumph Spares Day in January ([mgandtriumphsparesday.co.uk](http://mgandtriumphsparesday.co.uk)), and we’re also arranging a camping weekend next year. The group has its own Facebook page and a section on the Club Triumph Forum. We recognise that we must put the youngsters front and centre for the sake of the future.”

Club Triumph’s youth group is driven by Callan Hyde, who is restoring a Triumph 2000 estate, while his daily driver is a 2000 saloon. He told us: “The biggest problem for me as a 19-year old is being able to afford to do bigger events because of the cost of fuel, on top of the other ownership costs of my Triumphs. This is why cheaper insurance is such an important club benefit; older drivers might save a minimal amount of money, but for younger ones the savings can be very significant. Ultimately, for me club membership is essential; the costs are very low and there’s a huge amount of knowledge, help and camaraderie that I can tap into.”

“If there are two pieces of advice that I could offer to clubs, it’s to invest in social media because that’s where you’ll reach your younger audience, and be approachable. I know of a few people who haven’t been made to feel welcome within owners’ clubs because of their age or because their car isn’t deemed to be good enough, in terms of its condition or originality. Some clubs will get very few approaches from youngsters, so when they do they have to be welcoming, which sometimes they’re not.”

Another one of Club Triumph’s young members is Bradley Jones, who is 26 and has a 2500S saloon. He comments: “Young people are much more likely to want to modify their cars, as I’ve done with mine, and that rubs some older owners up the wrong way. My car has been lowered and has a blacked-out grille, tinted headlights and a sunstrip and it’s just how I want it, but that doesn’t suit everyone. But it’s my car!

“Older owners tend to put money into their classics and hold onto them for much longer, whereas youngsters don’t tend to feel such an attachment so they’ll chop and change more readily. But within Club Triumph my modified car is accepted, and I’m made

to feel welcome. I can also access all of the help that I need to keep my car running, and as a result I’m much more likely to stick around; I’ve already been in the club for several years.”

The TR Register ([tr-register.co.uk](http://tr-register.co.uk)) was one of the first clubs to set up a section specifically for younger members. Called TR Youth, it’s run by Charlie Crawshaw who told us: “Few youngsters can own a TR nowadays unless it’s a TR7, and even those are getting expensive. As a result TR Youth membership is open to anybody under 30, whatever classic they drive. Crucially, all of our events are open to anybody as we don’t want a ‘them and us’ situation.”

“I’ve been in several clubs over the years, and too many of them are full of older men who gripe about each other and the non-originality of other members’ cars. I’m not interested in politics and moaning, and neither are my fellow TR Youth members. We want to enjoy our cars and our time together; to us TR Youth is as much about socialising as it is about using our cars.”

“There are several key reasons why TR Youth is so successful. Most importantly we have the support of the TR Register at board level, and I sit on that board; having someone young in charge of any youth section is essential. Another reason for our success is the fact that we collaborate with other clubs to involve as many younger classic car owners as possible.”

One of those other clubs with which Charlie collaborates is the Morris Minor Owners’ Club, which has had a young members section for 10 years; one of those who helps to run it is Liam Murphy. He and Charlie worked really hard to put on a festival of motoring for all, but with a specific focus on youngsters. Called TYRE Festival ([tyrefest.org.uk](http://tyrefest.org.uk)), it first ran in 2019 and will do so again in 2022 with the support of an array of clubs, including the MG Car Club, Midget & Sprite Club, plus the Austin A30 & A35 Owners’ Club.

Liam comments: “Any club that sets out to separate young owners has failed from the beginning. Instead they have to integrate those owners into the fabric of the club, and that’s often the biggest challenge. Members have to accept those younger owners and their cars, which sounds obvious but it’s amazing how often this isn’t the case.”



Andrew Critchley (standing), with his Spitfire

“In 2010 the Morris Minor Owners Club saw what was coming and set up the Young Members Register; some of the people who are – or were – in this section are now running regional branches. A lot of clubs have still yet to do anything about their ageing memberships, but the MMOC grasped the nettle and is now reaping the rewards.”

Liam adds: “For a lot of young classic car owners, the idea of paying a subscription to be a member of a club is an alien concept. They’re not interested in magazines, although offering one in electronic form is a good start. For many, discounts aren’t that much of a draw either, although they’re welcome of course. They just want to be welcomed into the club’s ranks, to take part in events and to have access to expertise to keep their cars running.

“Quite a few clubs are sitting on substantial funds, and members should be pushing for this to be invested in schemes that can bring in younger members, whether that’s through improved social media, a better presence at events, or putting a car into the Classic Car Loan Project. Some people argue that this latter one benefits just one person per year, but there’s a huge PR opportunity if the recipient of the car promotes it far and wide.”

Liam emphasises the importance of clubs working together to pool resources and expertise. He also warns against

assuming that youngsters are only any good for running social media accounts and websites, on which note, a word of warning to clubs who might think that a better presence on social media is the answer to everything. It’s a good start, but it’s nothing like enough, as Owen Burgess of the Young Retro Motor Club explains: “There’s so much enthusiasm and expertise available for free that it’s hard to see the benefit of paying to join a club. Of course it depends how niche the car is and as a result how much expertise is out there, but I would join a group only to tap into specialist knowledge, as I have with the IFA Club for my Eastern European cars.”

Owen’s partner Georgina adds: “I joined an online Skoda group because I had some problems with my Favorit and I needed to work out how to put things right. A fellow group member spent three hours guiding me through what was needed and it didn’t cost me anything; the classic car world is full of people who want to help others. Contrast that with an experience I had when I went to a big multi-marque meeting near me, where just about everybody was older and male. I wasn’t made to feel at all welcome which is why I never went back, but in the Young Retro Motor Club the most active supporters are young and we welcome everybody and anybody, which is what the classic car scene should be all about.”