

The Wheel of Fortune?

Who invented the wheel? Does anyone know? It certainly wasn't me! Whoever it was has a lot to answer for!

I can't for one minute believe that whoever it was who invented the first stone round object, and discovered that a second added with a few pieces of wood made a cart, would then have said to his next door neighbour, Bog the Ugly, that if he wanted two as well he would do him a nice pair of 7 spokes with low profile stone edges!

Surely all he wanted to do was to make a pair of wheels to help carry something from "a" to "b" with less effort – yet that simple act of invention has spurred a whole way of life, together with a complete industry of manufacturers of add on goodies that will make your "four wheeled cart" look even better.

A basic stone wheel at each corner seemed a good idea at the time, until some other idiot decided that a set of alloys was better!

OK – now for the wheel jokes – just to get them out of the way – and I warn you – we have to *tread* carefully! Was it such a *wheely* good idea?! Perhaps the inventor *spoke* to someone else about it first! Or *bearing* in mind the subject, was the inventor just a bit of a *nut* who wanted to get to the *hub* of the problem!

That's it – I promise no more wheel jokes. I'm as *tired* of them as you! (OK, so, I lied!) But when you do look at the industry for wheels as a car "accessory" rather than a basic component, it is quite amazing. Go to any car superstore, showroom or exhibition and you will see the odd stand or array of gear knobs, car seat covers and nodding dice, but you will also see an absolute plethora of wheels in all styles (I almost put in all shapes and sizes – but one thing that is certain, is that they will all be the same shape!)

What happened to the good old bog standard wheels with a chrome wheel hub and the car manufacturer in the centre plus a painted surround that matched or contrasted with the car? Well, I'll tell you! They have all been replaced with the fancy alloy multi spoke, variable profile wheels that become damaged whenever you park within six inches (sorry 15mm) of a grass verge, and are designed to be absolutely impossible to clean!

And there now seems to be a propensity of cars with different size wheels on the front and back (including my Griff). It makes rotating the wheels an absolute nightmare – move them all round by one position and you end up with a car that will turn a corner when going straight on! And some cars will not even allow you to swap any wheels over. They are computer balanced with read outs that will advise you of any deflation of a tyre and swapping them over sends the computer chip into orbit!

What happened to the old fashioned way of telling whether your tyre was flat – go round a corner reasonably fast and if you ended up facing the way you came from you potentially had a flat! Or simply listen out for the tell tale "clunk-clunk-clunk-clunk" as the metal rim redesigned the pattern of the tarmac!

Computerised wheel systems are now getting a bit too clever to make them sensible. Recently, I was travelling with one of my salesmen along a motorway in his Renault Laguna, and his on board PC advised him that all his four wheels had been removed! Shades of Back to the Future's De Lorean – although we weren't quite doing the 80-something miles an hour needed to return to the future (or past!).

However, I found it a bit worrying to think that we were hurtling along at 70 plus miles per hour and all four wheels had fallen off! However he told me not to worry about it as it often told him he was down to 3 wheels!

Talking of which, who was the bright spark who came up with the idea of Del Boy's 3 wheeler? If God had intended cars to have 3 wheels He would have provided 3 tracks in the snow. Can you imagine a 3 wheeler in a formula one race or a motor rally?

I was once overtaken by a Robin Reliant on the M6 – I was doing about 70-75 and he must have been up to 85. It was an old model and every panel was a different colour! There were 3 big blokes in it and it was bouncing along like a space hopper! It must have felt like a fairground ride!

Actually I have seen a 3 wheeler in a motor event – a Welsh Rally a few years ago! I was standing by a 180^o bend, facing the brow of a hill. RS Escorts, Rally Metro's and Subaru's appeared one after the other over the brow of the hill, sped towards the bend, often snaking from left to right as they did so, screamed round the bend, and then disappeared into the woods with a huge roar and a cloud of dust.

Finally, all was quiet, and then after a few minutes another car appeared over the horizon – it was a bog standard Lada! A huge laugh went up from the crowd as it seemed to struggle to reach the bend, and then, as if to be as defiant as possible, the driver gave it a bit of welly. Instead of the desired effect, the car lurched forward and its nearside rear wheel fell off, overtaking the Lada and clearing the front row of the crowd!

As the Lada driver disappeared into the woods, oblivious to his new styled vehicle, a well-meaning member of the public was seen running after the car holding the wheel up in the air, shouting "Hey mate - you dropped this!"

But what of TVR and Tiv wheels? Well, it appears the sky's the limit! I'm struggling to keep up with all the variations available. You can change your wheels just to change the appearance, or change them to alter the geometry or just update them.

You can even change them to bigger sized wheels and if you don't change the speedo calibration, presumably you can have the car going faster than the speedo registers – just so you can try and convince Plod that you *thought* you were doing the correct speed!

There appears to be any number of spoke variations from 3 or 4 right up to 10 and 11 spoke – but shouldn't Spider wheels always have 8 spokes (legs)? If I bought a set of spiders and they only had 7 spokes I would feel like I'd been cheated!

Then, if you are ever thinking of rebuilding a TVR to it's *original* condition you can ask half a dozen people for a definitive answer on what the *original* wheels were for that model and you'll get half a dozen different answers! And what's really worrying is that they'll probably all be right!!

When I first read the Griffith chapter in the Collector's Guide to TVR, I noticed there were 3 pictures that showed the wheels – at the unveiling at the 1990 Motor Show, (6 spokes), the “concept car” (Oz multi spoked) and the 1994 Griffith 500 (7 spokes) the latter with the comment that it was “complete with modern pattern road wheels” – does that mean that the others were out of date virtually before they had got a decent layer of brake dust on them?

At last year's “Griff Growl” at Griff Near Coventry (where else would you hold such an event?!) I lost count of the different styles, types and even sizes. But you can guarantee that any TVR with any “out of the ordinary” wheels will always attract a lot of attention – which is exactly what happened. The real anoraks were even taking pictures of the special wheels! (And no I didn't – dash board layouts are much more interesting!!)

Going back to the idea of different sized wheels, I have come up with a couple of very innovative ideas for TVR options. How about 20” wheels on the front and 16” on the rear – especially for Griffs and Chimaera's to lift the front end so as to give a better view out of the back with the hood down! (Griff and Chimaera owners will know what I'm talking about!) Or what about 20” wheels all round to reduce the grounding problem! Come to that you could put 24” wheels on a TVR and bounce over all the speed humps! Perhaps not!

Meanwhile, I haven't even started on tyres. If you're really bored, try changing the wheels around so that the “Rotate” signs are pointing in opposite directions, and then try and describe the (revised) handling of the car with no four-letter words!

As for me – well wheels are just wheels aren't they? Nothing to get all excited about. The fact that I'm off to clean my highly polished, refurbished, split rim, multi spoked Oz racing wheels with lightweight titanium bolts, that I just paid seven hundred and fifty used oncers for, is totally irrelevant! Oh – and while I'm there I think I'll treat myself to a wagon wheel!

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