

More Model Secretary Musings

Colours for old cars are a contentious subject. Some people think that they should be returned or kept in their original hue, whilst others paint them as they see fit, either in original Alvis colours or modern ones. Clearly owners can do what they like to reflect their taste, with varying degrees of success. In any case the colour is something ephemeral, as paint deteriorates with age and will require replacement sooner or later. Fashions and tastes change over time and it's amusing to see some new cars appearing in the pastel shades popular in the 1950s and 60s. Extrovert owners will sometimes choose 'look at me' finishes whilst others like to display quiet good taste. The colour can affect the value - I once inspected a Porsche in a metallic dark pink which had been bought very cheaply simply because the hue was not, shall we say, to everyone's taste.

I thought it would be interesting to look at my 12/70 database and see what colours were applied when the cars were new in the period 1937 - 1940. The original colours of 735 12/70s are known, with a few blanks and cars exported as 'chassis only' deliveries. I think there were 12 standard factory colours offered and the list below shows these along with their code numbers and the number of cars delivered.

Black	342 cars	50.6%
Dark Blue 43P	49	7.2
Maroon 40P	48	7.1
Dark Crimson Lake 39P	43	6.4
Light Grey 42P	41	6.1
Highland Green 38P	40	5.9
Desert Sand 47P	31	4.6
Dark Grey 41P	26	3.8
Light Green 45P	24	3.6
Dove Grey 37P	14	2.1
Dynasty Blue 48P	13	1.9
Dark Green 46P	5	0.7
Total	676	

The overwhelming popularity of black, accounting for more than half of the standard single colours, is really no surprise and I recall from my childhood that this preference continued well into the 1950s. It is however the least forgiving finish: every ripple and slight imperfection in a panel stands out and it must be kept scrupulously clean.

34 cars had two colour (different, contrasting colours) or two tone (different shades of the same colour) paintwork when new. The standard Mulliners saloon and drophead coupé bodies lend themselves to two colour or two tone paintwork as they have moulding lines in place on the vertical panels to act as guides for the separation. Despite this only 5 cars had such treatment with the remaining 29 having the darker colour applied to the wings and wheels only. When

contrasting colours are used, modern wisdom is that the darker colour should be on top and the lower vertical panels lighter as this has a lowering effect. If the combination is reversed, then the car looks higher and shorter.

Black and Cream	1
Black and Blue	1
Black and Red	1
Bright Red and Black	1
Dark Blue and Black	9
Dark Crimson Lake and Black	2
Dark Grey and Light Grey	13
Dove Grey and Black	1
Dynasty Blue and Desert Sand	1
Highland Green and Black	1
Maroon and Black	3
Total	34

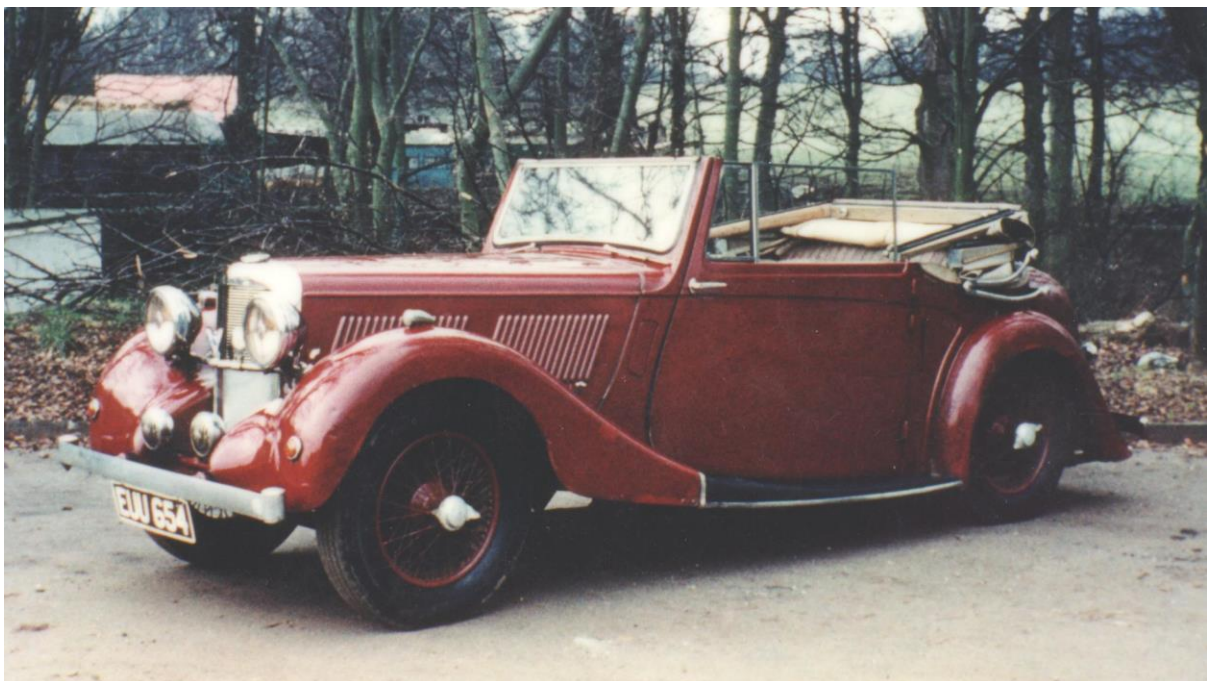
It has been remarked that when choosing colours the manufacturers generally know best, but nevertheless 25 12/70s had paintwork in non-standard colours. These are shown on the Car Record Sheets but are not always consistently recorded so, for instance 'grey' might refer to a standard colour recorded without its code. Anyway, we find single instances of Brunswick Green, Chamois, Copper-Bronze, Cream, Crushed Strawberry, Fawn, Graphite, Special Grey and Special Silver, two each of Ivory and Special Bronze plus three just shown as 'Grey'. Fancy names for colours are nothing new but they were not nearly as prevalent in the '30s as today.

Metallic or pearlescent paints were available pre-war but remained relatively rare into the 1950s. I well remember my father's first metallic painted car, a Singer Hunter, in 1955. Seven 12/70s are described as having 'jewelence' paint, five Grey and one each of Green and Honeysuckle. One car was Sun Tan Metallic.

I've left the non-standard two colour cars till last. There were but two, one in Lavender and Grey and another in Orange and Blue. The latter, a Mulliners drophead coupé, was ordered with panels, wheels and the lower half of the body in orange and above the waistline, top of the bonnet and wings in dark blue. All lamps, horns and hood were black. It belonged to a serial Alvis owner in Wales, whose earlier Alvises had also been painted in these colours. In the Alvis Register *Bulletin* no. 278 for Spring 2018, Register historian Greg Wrapson relates the story of these cars, and explains that the late John Warburton restored a Star which had belonged to another member of the family and was also painted orange and blue. He discovered that this had been the livery of the family's horse drawn carriages in earlier days.

The line on the body (hair line in Alvis-speak) was usually gold or matched to the upholstery. It is important to replicate the hair line when painting the body as its effect is to lower and lengthen the appearance rather than simply for decoration.

My 12/70 drophead was originally Desert Sand with a gold hair line, a fawn hood and black wheels. I'm afraid this scheme does not appeal to me. When I first bought the car in 1968 it had been painted a deep red and the replacement hood was fawn. At the time of the first restoration I didn't know what the original colour had been and I painted the car white with the third hood in black. I thought this suited well and it remained thus during my mother's 18 year custodianship and for the early years of my second spell as owner. Then a second restoration became necessary and this time it was done by professionals. By then I had tired of the white but applied considerable thought as to what should supplant it. A return to the original was quickly discounted as I simply don't like it. Dark Crimson Lake with a fawn hood was considered, but eventually I settled on Electric Blue with a black hood, the original colour of my 12/60. This colour seems to have been a standard Alvis finish from at least 1931 until about 1935 so definitely an anachronism on the 12/70. The late Dave Adams, who restored the body, was unsure but the car went to the paint shop anyway. I had supplied a sample from the 12/60, cut from a section of door skin that had been replaced. Painter Malcolm Hall remarked that paint companies recycled colours and that my sample was identical to a late 1960s/1970s Triumph colour called Valencia Blue. As I wanted to be sure, I took another piece of original 12/60 panel and polished it up. I then masked half of it off and painted the other half with an aerosol of Valencia Blue. This was duly cut and polished and the match was absolutely perfect - truly the join was invisible in any light. When the car returned we were all pleased with the effect and twenty years later I am still glad I took the decision.



As bought in 1968. This is a scan of a print made from a slide and has lightened the shade of red slightly. Photo by Gilbert Keech.



In white at International, Brooklands 1998. Photo by Edgar Shields. As I recall, it was Snowberry White, a BMC colour.



By Loch Ness, 2015. Alvis Electric Blue. This colour does not photograph or print correctly. It has a slight hint of green in it and indeed one MOT man recorded it as 'green' on the certificate. Photo by the Author.

There have been a number of enquiries over the years in the various Alvis fora as to what the original car colours were and seeking recent matches or near matches. It would be a worthwhile exercise to collect samples for an archive to enable positive identification and accurate reproduction of original hues.

Meanwhile, the colours and combinations listed above should give some ideas for the owner embarking on a restoration and perhaps, like me, not too keen on the original colour.

Please will somebody reproduce the orange/dark blue combination? It would make it easy to find in Tesco's car park. Sadly the car originally wearing these, chassis 15432, does not appear to have survived, but keep checking those barns!

Robin Gilbert