

# A L V I S

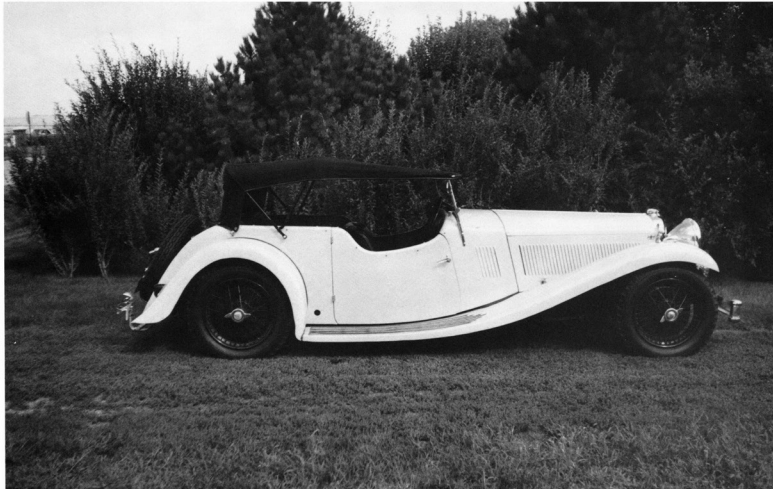
Shortly after the First World War, Thomas George John made two decisions: first, he preferred becoming an automobile manufacturer rather than remaining merely an automobile engineer and, second, naming his new car after himself was not a good idea. Though the word did not carry the same slang definition as in America, driving a John in England still didn't have exactly the right ring. Chosen instead was the name of an obscure metal foundry in South London; then T. G. John came up with a radiator emblem which brought objection and threatened litigation from one of Britain's top airplane manufacturers, a situation he maneuvered around by the expedient of turning the Alvis triangular badge upside down. Such pragmatism became the hallmark of the marque. The cars, all of them coachbuilt, were noteworthy for their high quality, their rugged longevity and their fine performance. Models proliferated as T. G. John Ltd. metamorphosed into Alvis Car & Engineering Co. Ltd. (in 1927) and ultimately Alvis Ltd. (a decade later).

Most sporting of the Alvis range in

the early thirties was the Speed 20, which in 1934 was provided two major changes: independent front suspension and an all-synchromesh transmission. Quite possibly, the changes may have been partly prompted by Alvis owners since the company often asked their advice. Customers were regarded as friends. The Coventry factory organized rallies and races, even dinner dances, for its clientele. Alvis was, in a way, its own intimate club. Alvis owners were fiercely loyal to and wildly enthusiastic about their cars then. Alvis collectors are equally so today.

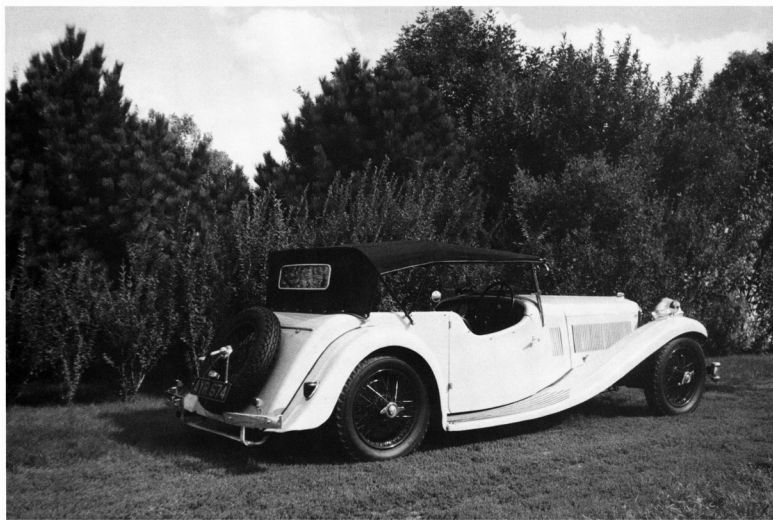
"It is a sports car and a Classic," declares Walter Fuelberth of his Speed 20. "It looks sporty, sounds sporty, drives sporty—and is Classic in style (Vanden Plas coachwork) and features (one-shot lubrication, P-100 headlamps, etc.)—and singularly so with a transmission synchronized in all four forward speeds. U.S. practice was usually a three-speed synchronized in second and third only; we didn't have a synchronized 'four on the floor' until the 1957 Corvette. This car is fun to drive and interesting for an American driver because of the right-hand steering, of course, but also because the throttle is located between the clutch and brake pedals. I've owned this Alvis since 1974. Wherever we go, it attracts much attention."

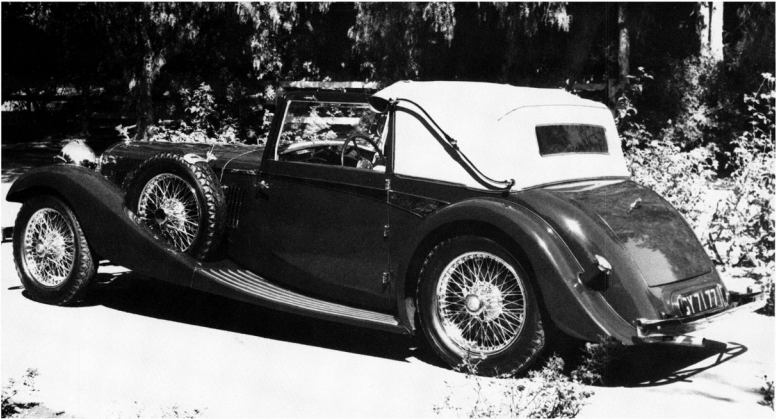




*1934 Alvis Speed 20 Tourer, Vanden Plas*

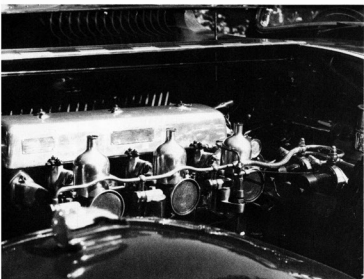
*Owner: Walter Fuelberth of Mesa, Arizona*





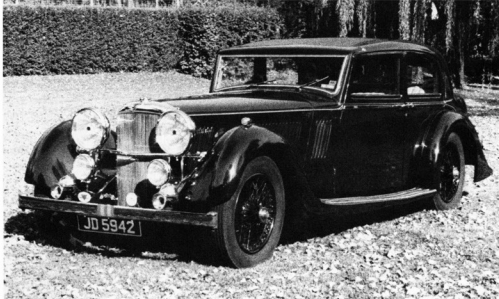
1935 Alvis Speed 20 Drophead Coupe, Charlesworth

Owners: Kay & Milton A. Miner of Los Angeles, California

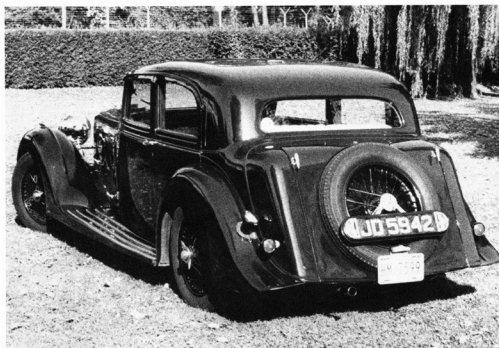


The Speed 20 in the Miner garage has been there for a quarter of a century. "The styling first caught my fancy," comments Milton, "then when I found it to be an excellent driving car, I had to have a Speed 20. Alvis enjoyed the use of the GM synchromesh transmission under license. Left-hand shifting is no trick at all. Nor is tire changing, with built-in mechanical jacks front and rear and the jack crank mounted on the firewall. The body of this car was one of four specially built by Charlesworth, and the car was originally owned by one of the four directors of Charlesworth Ltd."





1935 Alvis 3 1/2 Litre Pillarless Saloon, Vanden Plas  
Owner: Colonel Daniel G. Barney of HQ USAREUR

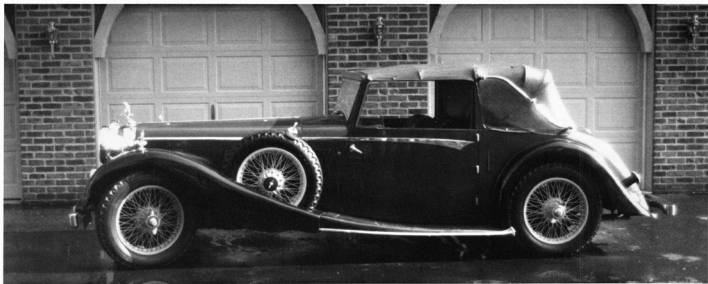


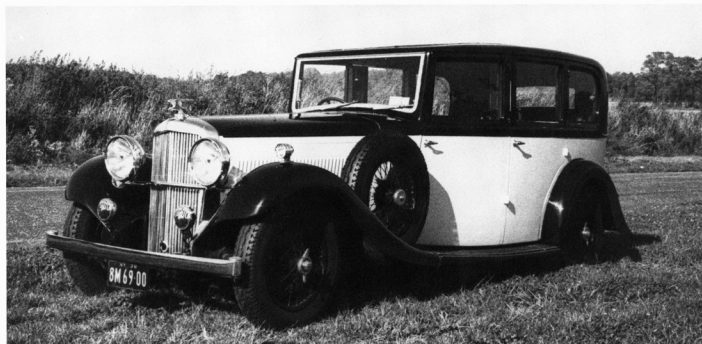
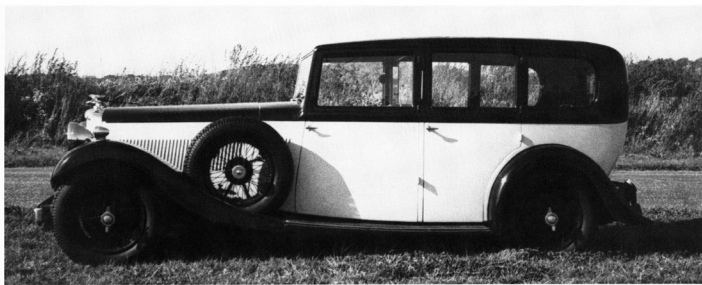
The Speed 20 was a 2511 cc six from 1932-'34, 2762 cc from 1935-'36. The 3 1/2 Litre exemplifies Alvis pragmatism, as explained by Col. Barney: "In the fall of 1935, Alvis had completed development of a new six-cylinder 3.5-liter engine which would later power the Speed 25 model. Anxious to get the engine in a production automobile, the factory modified a Speed 20 chassis to accept the new power train and the 3 1/2 Litre model was born. Sixty-two chassis were produced in 1935 and 1936 until the Speed 25 replaced this short-lived stopgap. My particular car has the first production model or, some say, the last test model of the 3.5 engine. Displayed on the Vanden Plas stand at the 1935 London Motor Show, it was one of only two four-door pillarless saloons made. The coachwork, with the sharply-curved cycle front fenders favored by dealer Charles Follett, is impressive. The car is low, less than five-and-a-half feet high with only seven inches ground clearance, yet is roomy inside and has considerably more headroom than modern cars. The rear passengers gain leg/foot room by having the foot wells drop well below the top of the driveshaft tunnel and under the front bucket seats, which is possible due to the almost nine-inch frame depth at that point. The windshield opens to allow fresh air, and special spring-loaded plungers are in the base of the windshield wiper arms so they can be moved out of the way from the inside when the window is opened. A unique touch is the side window on the driver's side which is raised and lowered by a one-push/pull lever rather than a crank as on the other three doors. Follett had purchased the car as a chassis. The car's succession of owners cannot be fully documented, although there have been quite a few, at one point including a Scottish policeman. This is the only Classic I have ever owned and I bought it in 1986 because I fell in love with its looks. Since then I've found it to be a solidly engineered car which is fun to drive and a real attention-getter on the road. European drivers—even those with 500 Mercedes—yield to you. The Alvis is stopped by cable-operated fourteen-inch drum brakes, no mean task for a two-ton automobile. Despite its weight, it is still lively, responsive and fully capable of the published 90 mph speeds of the thirties. Except for one test run at the Hockenheim Track in Germany, the car has been driven at more sedate speeds in a very gentlemanly manner the past few years."

"A very special car with a lot of unusual features," comment the Erds about their Speed 20. "There's the four-speed all-synchro transmission and independent front suspension, of course, but consider also the triple S.U. carburetors, dual electric fuel pumps, dual ignition (coil and magneto), built-in jacks, cast aluminum firewall, one-shot lubrication, André Telecontrol shocks adjustable front and rear from the dashboard, three-Imperial-gallon oil sump with built-in filter (and float sight oil level gauge). Each valve has nine springs for a total of 108. The four-wheel brakes (14-inch ribbed drums) can be adjusted while driving by a knob on the floor. The body is low slung and, with 87 hp, the top speed is 90 mph."

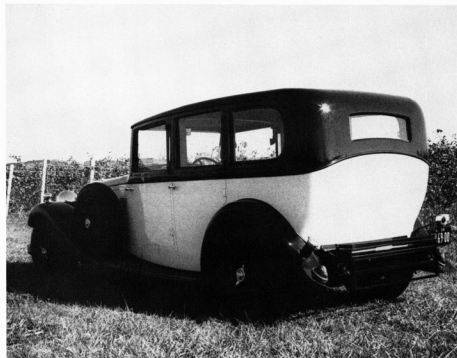


*1936 Alvis Speed 20 Drophead Coupe, Charleworth  
Owners: Larry & Sally Erd of Toledo, Ohio*

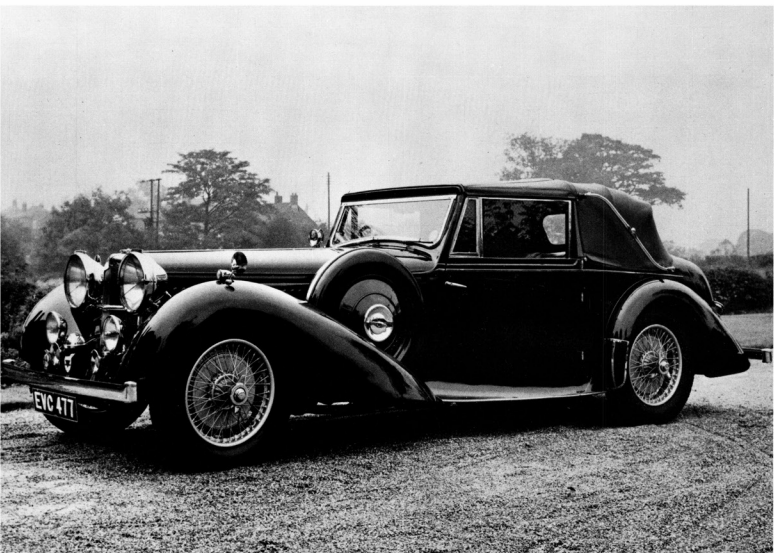




1936 Alvis Crested Eagle Limousine, Mayfair  
Owner: Art Kenniff of Southold, New York



The Crested Eagle was an Alvis designed for the luxury rather than the sporting buyer. Introduced in 1933, and itself introducing i.f.s. to the marque, the new model was seen principally with formal coachwork. By 1936 it carried the Speed 20's 2762 cc engine and was available in two chassis lengths, a Speed 20ish 123 inches and 132 inches. Art Kenniff's Mayfair Limousine is on the longer chassis: "This Crested Eagle is a rare bird. The best information I have is that the price was around \$5,000. Not many were built. In 1979 I became the fourth owner of this car. It is my understanding that of the four Crested Eagles in the U.S., mine is the only limousine. It is a very smooth car on the road and will travel at highway speed all day. The gearbox is a joy and the independent front suspension makes the steering positive and easy."



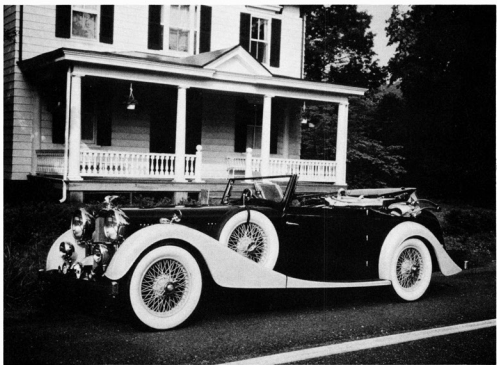
1939 Alvis 4.3 Litre Drophead Coupe, Charlesworth

Owners: Kay & Milton A. Miner of Los Angeles, California

The 4.3 Litre Alvis was the final flowering of the Speed 25, its engine bored out to 4387 cc providing 125 hp. "One of the most modern British cars of the late thirties and a genuine 100 mph car," comments Jean Gorjat. "I bought mine in 1986 in Volo, Illinois and drove it the 850 miles home to Harrisburg in one day. Easy trip."

"Our Alvis, chassis no. 14871, was the last unit produced before Hitler's Luftwaffe destroyed Coventry and the Alvis complex," note the Miners of their 4.3 Litre. "There is no record as to when Charlesworth completed the body as the coachbuilding plant was also in Coventry and was badly damaged. It is believed that the car was finished and in a London showroom at the time of the Blitz. As did all British automakers, Alvis converted completely to war work by 1940."

With peace came austerity in Great Britain. The production policy Alvis inaugurated after the war did not include any of the Classic Era models.



1938 Alvis 4.3 Litre Drophead Coupe, Charlesworth  
Owner: Jean Gorjat of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania