

UNDER THE BONNET WITH TIN-TIN. (OR A CAUTIONARY TALE OF A JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN)

The clearing up at the Classic Car Show was complete and "Bitz" was the last car to leave. I had the battery disconnected for the show (regulations) and having reconnected, we started up and set out into the darkness. High wind and pouring rain, strewth!, no headlamps, oh well on with the foglights.....nothing!! Well we did at least have sidelights, so tuck well in behind Freda with the estate car and back to 'base', which luckily was only some five miles to go.

I couldn't find the fault, so we drove back to Suffolk the next day in daylight, tucked "Bitz" up in her own motorhouse and turned on some gentle heat to dry her out. This was the end of season and with plenty of other things to do, I have to admit I left the job until some time later. Dave Parkin had told me that he had been through a similar problem and that his auto electrician had eventually found corrosion in the rear of the fuse box. I wondered if we might be similarly affected.

I started by dropping that little hatch under the dash-board, taking out all the fuses and checking each one.....all were sound. I put them back and tried the lights again without success. With a circuit tester I tried each fuse holder again, first with every switch I could turn on and finally with the ignition turned on as well. Fuses 4,5, 6, 7 were not receiving any power....hum I thought!, we have to go a little deeper into this one. At this point I removed the whole underdash trim and had a good look at the whole unit. Three relays, a direction indicator flasher unit, and below them the fuse box. With the fuses removed again, two screws could be seen lurking coyly in the depths of the fuse box. I decided to have a feel behind the screws...I could feel lots of wires but nothing certain about nuts on the back of those two screws.

Now at this point one needs a B.A., preferably (Hons) from a good school of contortion. It would also be advisable to see your friendly surgeon and have both hands modified to six fingers, two of them lengthened to about 8" and reduced to 1/2" diameter and strengthened so that they can grip like a molegrip. But to return to those screws holding the fuse box. I took the plunge, loosened one and of course was lost.....they are not self tappers, they do have nuts on the rear. I daren't risk a spanner amongst all those wires.....there was nothing for it but to remove the whole plate, relays, fuse box.....the lot! The lower two screws are tapped into the scuttle cross tube and lying sideways across the seats, half in and half out of the car I got them out without too much trouble.

The upper screws were next and I started on the passenger side. A nut and bolt through the plate to a small bracket and the nut is one of those Nylock jobs.....give me those old fashioned spring lock washers any day. Once loosened you can undo 'em without a spanner, but these nylon ring things insist on a spanner almost to the last turn. By now I was working more than half out of the car.

That damned nut insisted on a ring spanner....there's no room for a socket and try a I would I just couldn't get into anything near approaching a comfortable position. I vented a little steam and 'er indoors came into the motorhouse to see what was going on!!!! Eventually the damned nut gave up and I went and put the kettle on.

In due course, I returned to the final nut on the driver's side. I would swear it was grinning at me. I told it that it was about to lose the battle and hand over the steering column, I managed to trap the nut with a ring spanner. The screw grinned and the steering column moved up gently to trap my wrist. Now all I had to do was ease myself onto my side and with my left hand get the screwdriver up the other side of the column and undo the nut. Ha Ha Ha.! The screwdriver took one look at the job and moved itself just out of reach down the passenger footwell. The steering column sniggered and moved up another fraction holding my wrist even more firmly. I told the spanner to stay where it was and gently let go, with hands off it stayed in place. Now I had to struggle free of the steering column. Slowly I wriggled free and then went after that ***** screwdriver. Having got the brute in my left hand, I edged my right hand gently over the steering column again, and it gripped my wrist as before. At this point the spanner fell off the nut.

In complete silence (and if you believe that....well!!), I managed to get the spanner back on the nut and started to approach the bolt with the screwdriver. After some considerable time, I realised it can't be done, you simply can't hold the spanner and use the screwdriver on this job at the same time.....not if you are my shape anyway. With the help of 'er indoors, whose wrist slipped over the steering column with no trouble and I'll swear it dropped down to help her, we removed the final nut and bolt. Carefully easing the wiring loom forward, I laid the whole unit down on top of the radio console and then unscrewed the fuse box. The scene that greeted my eyes was like that which greeted those who first enter an ancient Egyptian tomb...dry and dusty and all in perfect order.

No doubt some of you are way ahead of me at this point...in fact for me the great truth was yet to dawn. I crouched looking at those three relays and then (and not before time) I went off to look at the wiring diagram. Returning, I removed all three relays and one at a time tested them. You guessed it! Two were duds. I drove straight along to our local motor spares man and bought three new 30amp relays, when fitted all the systems worked perfectly. My excuse is that in all the years of motoring, I cannot remember having a relay fail before, let alone two!. I still had to put her back together, but from the lessons learned dismantling I did manage it in time.

The lesson for you dear reader is, if you have any headlamp or foglamp problems.....it just might be a relay and if you really do want to remove the fuse and relay plate, it can be done and got back, but it isn't easy.