



1899 12hp Daimler

Daimler is one of the oldest names in the British motor industry. The 12hp car that forms part of the collection at the National Motor Museum is a significant vehicle in the history of British motoring and has a long association with the Montagu family and Beaulieu.

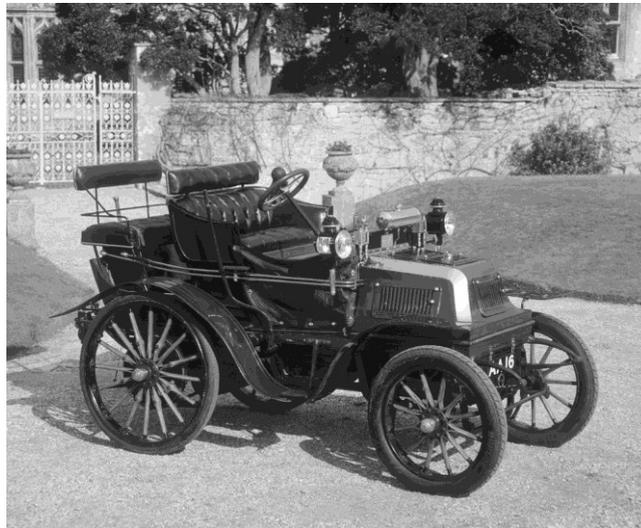


Figure 1: The 1899 Daimler as restored and displayed in the National Motor Museum.

The origins of the Daimler Motor Company date back to 1888 when Frederick Richard Simms first met German engineer and motoring pioneer Gottlieb Daimler at the Bremen Exhibition in Germany. Simms was sufficiently impressed with the design of Daimler's petrol engines that he started manufacturing them under licence in Britain in 1891, largely for various marine applications. F.R. Simms & Company changed its name to Daimler Motor Syndicate Ltd. in 1893. Two years later the company was acquired by Harry Lawson and became part of his British Motor Syndicate based at the Motor Mills in Coventry. It became the Daimler Motor Company in 1896.

The only similarity British Daimlers had with the German Daimler vehicles was the name. The earliest Coventry-built motor cars had a front mounted 1596cc 2 cylinder 4hp engine with 4 speed gearbox and chain drive. The first example left the factory early in 1897 fitted with a French Panhard engine, Daimler's own designs not yet being ready. Within a year 89 chassis had been built, with bodies fitted by Mulliner of Northampton.

A prototype 4 cylinder machine of late 1897, utilising two 2 cylinder engines coupled together, was followed by a purpose-built 12hp 3050cc 4 cylinder engined motor car in 1899. One of the first customers was John Scott Montagu MP (later 2nd Baron Montagu of Beaulieu), acquiring his vehicle in May of that year. He regularly drove it from the New Forest to London and that summer it became the first petrol-engined vehicle to enter the yard of the Houses of Parliament. The Motor Car Journal said the car was 'the most up to date carriage built in this country.'

In August Montagu was invited to lunch at Highcliffe Castle where the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) was a guest. That afternoon he took the Prince for a drive on local roads, one of the first motor car journeys undertaken by royalty and the start of a long association between the British Royal Family and Daimler cars. John Montagu later said of the trip: 'I distinctly remember that His Majesty displayed immense interest in the details of the car ... and with his wonderful alertness of mind he had evidently grasped what a remarkable effect upon the locomotion of the world the coming of the motor car would have.'

At the end of August John Scott Montagu took the Daimler to France as an entrant in the Paris–Ostend road race. Together with C.S. Rolls, driving a Panhard, they were the first British competitors to enter a European motor race. Montagu finished in third place in the Touring Class. The medal presented for this feat was the first motor racing award ever made to a British driver.

The 12hp Daimler was also notable as being the first car to ever carry a mascot; in the form of a small St Christopher figure, this was sculpted by Charles Sykes, later the creator of the famous Rolls-Royce Spirit of Ecstasy mascot.

John Montagu entered the 12hp car in the Thousand Miles Trial of 1900. This event, organised by the Automobile Club of Great Britain & Ireland, was intended to be both a test of cars and drivers and to publicise the motor car to a sceptical British public. The trial started from Hyde Park Corner, London on 23 April and followed a route taking in many of the principal towns and cities in England and Scotland, including Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Sheffield and Nottingham before finishing back in London on 12 May. Montagu's Daimler succeeded in completing this arduous test, gaining its owner a bronze medal.

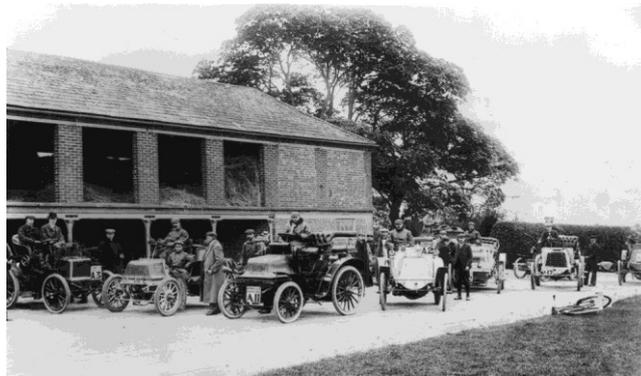


Figure 2: John Scott Montagu driving the 1899 12hp Daimler (entry number A11) during the Thousand Miles Trial in 1900.

In 1901 John Montagu took delivery of a new 22hp Daimler, the 12hp car being relegated to the role of an estate hack and by 1902 being rebuilt with a wagonette body. It eventually fell out of use completely and in 1918 was rediscovered, having been stored in a barn behind the Montagu Arms Hotel in Beaulieu village. In the mid 1920s the Daimler was presented to the Science Museum in London. In 1952 the vehicle, now without a body, was loaned back to Edward, 3rd Baron Montagu of Beaulieu (John Scott Montagu's son) for display in his collection of historic cars at Beaulieu, the nucleus of today's National Motor Museum.

In the late 1960s the Museum's workshop restored the Daimler to working order with a new body in the original style. In July 1969, Edward, Lord Montagu drove the car into the yard of the Houses of Parliament, seventy years after his father; an event that was also commemorated for the centenary in 1999. In recent years it has been a frequent entrant in the annual London to Brighton run. In 2000 the Daimler took part in events to mark the centenary of the Thousand Mile Trial.

Manufacturer: Daimler Motor Company, Coventry.

Engine: 4 cylinder, water cooled.

Capacity: 3,050cc.

Output: 12hp.

Max. Speed: 30mph/48.28kph.

Further Reading:

Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, 1959. *The motoring Montagus*. London: Cassell.

Tritton, Paul, 1985. *John Montagu of Beaulieu, motoring pioneer and prophet*. London: Golden Eagle/George Hart.

Lord Montagu of Beaulieu & Burgess Wise, David, 1995. *Daimler century*. Yeovil: Patrick Stephens Limited.

Last updated: 24 September 2015.