Well this book is supposed to be all about my Berkeley's but this one sort of slipped in very quietly as it does not have an engine , has only two wheels and is by far , a whole lot older than any of the others,

The 1952 Berkeley Caravette.

This was part of a line of caravans and mobile homes made by Berkeley Caravans years before they met with Mr L Bond.

Berkeley and Laurie Bond started working on cars in 1956. They were sold on the idea to use the skills of the workforce to build cars during the slack winter months for Caravan builders

The Caravette the smallest in a large range , was a multi purpose item in so much as the Caravan part could be lifted from the chassis and a cargo box type trailer body could be dropped on, A additional porch awning was available as was a huge tent like cover for the kitchen end.

Not sure if that ever caught on – but a good few of these tiny Caravans were sold.
To be dragged around by any 500cc motor cycle combinations or a small light car if you believed the advertisements.

As with the cars later on, they are nowadays very thin on the ground but got spread out a long way.

I have even found one as far away as Sweden

This one was found after meeting some one in the middle of a classic car parade ring at a show during the line up.
I was in the T60 and the chap next in line in a converted Morgan like three wheeler with a single cylinder Arial engine.

The conversation went like this, is that a Berkeley, Yes, did they make caravans, Yes. My mates got a Berkeley caravan he wants to sell, a very small one.

Needless to say phone numbers were swapped and I got in touch and it soon had a new home.

This Caravette as it was called, had spent some of its early years, being dragged all around Europe, behind a Brough Superior motor cycle combination or so I was told, only to be parked in the back garden of a large house some long time ago. A collector of Brough Superiors and Indian motor cycles by the way.

Amazing to think how it survived as the construction is very light ¾ inch square timber frame with 3/8 thick fibre board, painted on the inside and clad with Alloy sheet on the outside. Tear Drop shaped.

The years of use / the years of storage , even though under cover , had still let the damp in ,the result was the ply wood floor the was rotten , screws pulling out everywhere and was generally collapsing in on its self.

To protect it, a small shed had been built around it, and this is how it sat for years, until the shed fell apart around it. At some more recent point in time a restoration of sorts had been attempted,
The rotted floor was covered with a huge sheet of 1/8 thick alloy
The rotted door frames repaired with modern silicon like substance I think used to stick hand basins to concrete walls.

Well it was used with a vengeance every where, but it did hold it together.

The best bit of it was, it was still all original, even the kitchen drawers.

Several others I have seen have been I think over restored , sat on incorrect chassis and wheels, or have been rebuilt with additional bulkheads, or just customised in a way Berkeley Caravans would never have considered.
Nothing wrong in that, but I like original.

This one had its paint removed and the alloy polished, to make it look like an American Airflow I guess; luckily they left a tiny bit of colour and the LOGO of the dealer in Colnbrook who sold it when new.
A close match to that, I found is Smoke Grey as used o 1950's Morris Minor, to my eye more a grey green colour, but a correct period colour never the less.

On completion of the purchase I towed it 100 miles or so home,
It stayed stuck together,
But had to tie the doors down to stop them falling off,
Shortly after I got Pete Tilling who had come up from Cornwall to be at the Malvern Micro Car show, to tow it, from Worcester to the show.
It still stayed stuck together.

Good glue that stuff what ever it was.

Its first rally in years, looking in a bad way, but still got loads of attention.

It was here I met with Steve Pepper , who at one time had run a Micro Caravan Club , now no longer in existence , but he was able to give me so much help , with old drawings , photos, and magazine reports of the Caravette in far off places,

The centre piece of his Micro Caravan Club Logo was a Caravette; He still had the badge proudly displayed on his now more modern, micro Motor Caravan.

Working in my tiny shed has its problems, and when this got pushed it filled the space completely, so keeping it on wheels was important as I needed to push it in and out as it was worked on.

The Door almost fell off. When I took the outer alloy skin away all the wood was rotten. So a small project to make a new door frame was started.

The curved rear door that opens and is held up with stays to access the " kitchen " was also in a bad way , and clad on the inside with more ally sheet in an attempt to stiffen it up , the gap between filled again with that silicon stuff .

Once that was off it was interesting to note they made the curve shape , not by steam bending solid wood , but a made up laminate of several ¼ inch strips of ply wood and hard board , glued and screwed together .Then mortise and tenon joins were made for the solid cross members.
Time to get me chisel sharpened.

Both rear and side door alloy skins were in reasonable shape, just the rear had some modern light attached, but I could see how I could get Berkeley stop tail and indicators to fit. Much more in keeping with the period and to be a bit safer on today's roads.

Back in the day they never made any provision for side lights or indicators.

I did find during the restoration that a small 2 wire plug was fitted on the chassis at the front with a two core its cable passing through holes drilled through all the "rafters " until it came out in the kitchen end.
This was the 6v power supply from motor bike / car that would be connected to a bulb to light up the kitchen or inside.

An early discovery connected the Caravans directly to the Cars. The window frames were made by the same company at the Planet Works in Birmingham, although nothing like the car windows in shape or style, they each carry the same blue Planet Works badge.

The kitchen furniture, the draws and oven recess all had loose joints and covered in a heavy layer of emulsion paint.
With them out, another small project started of stripping back to bare wood, taking to bits and re glueing the joints got under way. All was in good order so not a difficult task.

The floor could now be got at, the sheet of alloy took out, and good stuff that, still using it, leaving the original lino cover plywood.
It hardly needed any tools to remove, so rotten I could pull it to bits with my hands.

Was to be replaced with a new sheet of exterior ply with the underside painted in thick black bitumen sealer sort of paint.

The chassis, wheels brakes all fine The Suspension is quite unique with its half parabolic leaf spring and wish bones linkage, but all good.
Now to take the top outer skin off the Caravatte, all the screws along the top gully rail turned, but did not come out, mole grips later, they just pulled out like nails, and all the years of damp had rusted the screw threads.
Soon had the rails off the top outer skin is just one piece , so difficult to handle , that said once it was off and out side and some of the side skin panels removed and took out side the problem was clear to see,
All the vertical sticks coming off the chassis were rotten up to about half way.
It was only the fibre board inside, that were keeping it from collapsing completely.
It had been helped up to then by the alloy skin sides.
So one by one the rotten stick were removed and replaced with new ones. First along the door side and at both ends,
The opposite side was still sound.

A bigger problem was the laminated tear drop shape curved edge.
Draw bar end it was completely rotten for 12 inches off the chassis and then progressively got better until as it went up higher until the top,
The kitchen end was worse completely rotten almost up to the rear door hinge

The opposite side was still sound- I guess that side must have been more under cover.

The only way to repair was to cut out all the rot and by staggering the joints into the good bits re laminated it with new hard board and ply strips, mind you I did use waterproof glue as well

I was again surprised to find the use of very poor materials ¼ ply wood strip and ¼ hard board strips , but can understand why, the shape is made easily , the strips so floppy they only need draping over the up rights to make a curve. And stiffened by adding more screwing to gether as you go.

But then again material was good enough as it was never supposed to get wet under the alloy cladding.

Would have survived better if brass screws not steel were used and if were glued, on this build, no glue only screws, loads of them.

The inside is just a fibre board, painted, in the areas that were badly affected by the rot I cut sections out and fitted in new bits, The Fibre board came from Dave Rich.
I think it might have been a school notice board in a previous life, was correct thickness, Imperial sizes get more difficult to find now its all in mm.

The long hinge on the rear door screws into some heavy timber and .this also had some rot , but with the rot cut out and new wood inserted glued and screwed it all came good.

Painting was always going to be required; it's not and never was going to be shiny.

That job much to problematic for me to attempt in the space I have, so it went off to a classic car restorer who used to paint coaches and busses so although no where near that size was geared up to paint a Caravette with out any problem

Interesting the logo

I have never seen and Berkeley Logo painted on anything.
Until I found on E bay a Caravette for sale, in poor condition, but its history was know, had been in the same family since new. Only to be purchased and shortly put on E bay again, its restoration was going to be too much for that buyer.
The photos clearly show Berkeley Caravette logo in a hand script , this I thought had to be factory, Need a copy , The chap selling was very helpful taking time to photo and measure the front ,
All that detail got passed to Ray Bell among other things Ray is good with art packages and he replicated the image on to computer for me , later to be made into a transfer by my local graphics company.
A while later a spotted another logo in a much older picture of a Caravette , so proof enough was factory or perhaps dealers work.

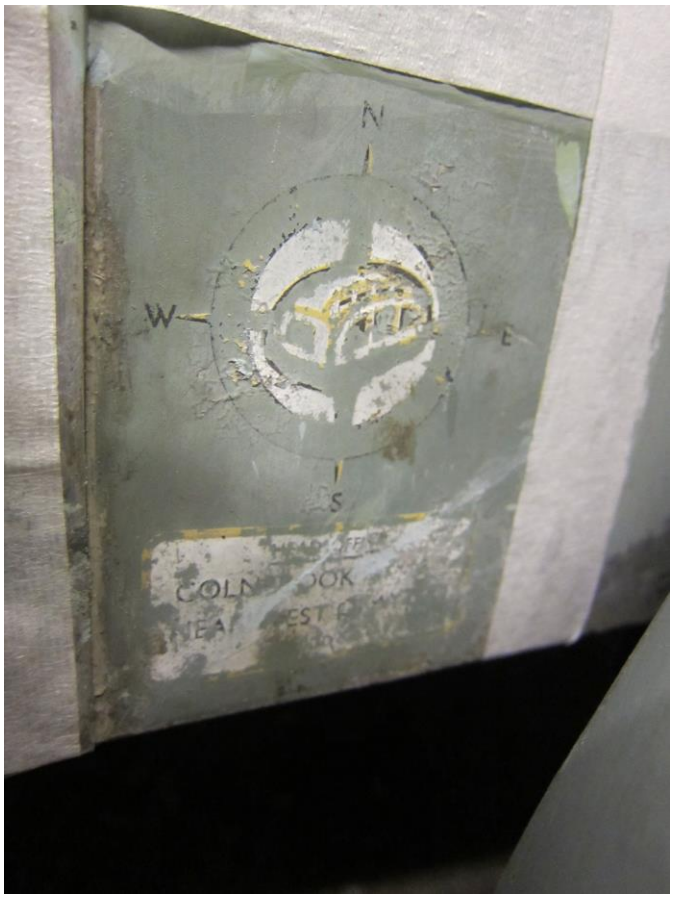
Original Logo script, Berkeley Caravett.



After I got it reproduced as a transfer



The logo of the dealer's in Colnbrook West London
And its original colour



Advert telling just why you just had to have one at £99.15.0.

I would rather have the Vincent at £305 but then add another £63 .10.0 purchase tax. Oh what to do.



The ply floor is coming out. Side and top already skinned



The laminations rot being repaired
Note The internal wiring



The curved rear door almost finished.



Not a lot of room in here
But new rear door almost finished



Part of the problems with damp and time.

Rotten left hand corner.



The laminations failed, hard board first then the ply wood
To repair you can only cut out the bad sections and remake with new wood



Just to illustrate build quality, see the side door panel.

Berkeley's general construction design was light even before Laurie Bond came along and wanted to make it even lighter still for the cars.

The sticks are approx ¾ x ¾ inches. And not a lot of them.

Sure they never gave it a thought that this could possible survive for nearly 65 years.



But one survived and got to Sweden.

I met the owner at the Hatton World Micro Car Rally.
He was all over my Caravette like a RASH,

But it's good to help others in restoration.

From the looks of it, survived by hiding under a bridge or is that under some ones house.

It’s called Pinocchio



Caravette restored and painted.

Street legal, well it got lights now, they never had them when new.
The seven pin plug wiring follows the original two core lighting cable route.
A must into day's traffic.
MXW 485 is made of foam board and stuck on, back in the day white numbers on black backgrounds were still being hand painted on. So much the same.
I was loathed to drill more holes in that original door panel, and to put a number plate lower down or sticking out the side will just not work.
MXW 485, Is my 1952 Sunbeam S8 Combination motor cycle and side car that gallantly drags this along. A bike I have had since 1968.



Tea and Coffee can be served now, Biscuits are in the drawer.



2015 Micro Car Rally and NO, the T60 cannot pull it.

Just after the grand children had visited, no eggs or bacon left now.
Note Three of them can fit in the back of the T60.



And also three grandchildren and a son can easily fit into the Caravette



The first rally, Micro car rally Malvern.
With some of my other Berkeley's



Jackie testing the side car with its soft top off.



The BEC 50th do at Quainton.

The Caravett and Sunbeam S8 with Watsonian Palma sidecar.
Set up for the long weekend of feasting and merriment.

