

Gordon (1954–1958)

The Gordon, made by Vernons Industries Ltd.

based at Bidston, was a British three-wheeled motorcar produced from 1954 until 1958.

Erling Poppe is, of course, a familiar name to Sunbeam enthusiasts, being the man behind the S7 and S8. What is less widely known is that, in 1954, he turned his hand to something rather



different: a tiny British three-wheeler called the Gordon. Poppe's later design work on the Gordon followed his post-war period at Sunbeam, linking this curious little machine to our own marque in an unexpected way. The Gordon was built by Vernons Industries of Bidston, a subsidiary of the Vernons football pools business, and was aimed squarely at the budget end of the market. It used a 197cc Villiers single-cylinder two-stroke engine mounted externally to the right of the driver, driving one rear wheel by chain.

Contemporary accounts and later histories agree that its great selling point was price: it was promoted as the cheapest car on the British market, at around £270 to £300 depending on source and specification. Like many post-war light vehicles, the Gordon was a product of its age: ingenious, economical and slightly eccentric. It had a single front wheel, minimal mechanical complication, and access through just one side door. One period enthusiast account notes that, despite its unusual layout, some contemporary road testers were more complimentary about its comfort and performance than later legend might suggest. The makers even used a Land's End to John o' Groats run as a publicity exercise, claiming fuel figures of around 60 to 70 mpg. Even so, the Gordon never enjoyed a happy reputation. Later sources describe concerns over build quality, one-wheel drive, and awkward weight distribution, especially in poor conditions, and production remained very small before the venture ended in the late 1950s. Estimates vary, but fewer than 1,000 to around 1,500 appear to have been built, which helps explain why the Gordon is now such a rarity.

It is a reminder that post-war vehicle design was full of experimentation. So while the Gordon may never stir the soul in quite the way an S7 or S8 does, it remains an intriguing footnote in the wider Sunbeam story. And perhaps that is part of its charm: an oddball cousin from the family tree, best regarded with affection, mild amazement, and just a hint of the traditional British question, "What on earth were they thinking?"