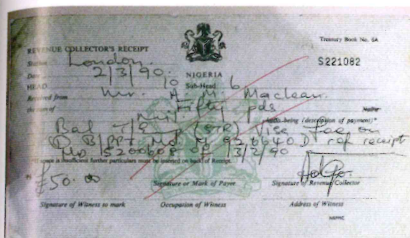


SCAMP GOES INTERNATIONAL

Four decades of building Scamps has taken Andrew MacLean to some far-flung places. Join him on his adventures... some glorious, some ghastly.

Words: Jeroen Booij Pictures: Andrew MacLean and Jeroen Booij





The trip took place in March 1990.



Andrew MacLean hadn't met a chief before.

Back in the July 2020 issue (168), we caught up with Scamp boss Andrew MacLean in his West Sussex workshop. He had some great reminiscences to share, but there were more to come. We knew Andrew had been interweaved with some adventurous endeavours of building kit cars overseas, too. Did he want to share these with us? He did – and boy, do they make great entertaining stories!

You may recall that Andrew had taken over Scamp production from Robert Mandry in 1987, but the duo hadn't been the only persons selling Scamps. Ron Smith, from Run-a-Moke, had run a Scamp agency in Battersea, London, and it was Smith who received an enquiry from one Chief Akinrele in the late 1980s. Chief Akinrele was the chairman of a Nigerian company called Gacol Nigeria Limited, which mainly made air conditioning systems and fridges. The chief was looking for a manufacturing opportunity for a car like the Moke, and it needed at least 50 percent local manufacturing content. Farm-fresh motor manufacturer Andrew was brought into the picture and given the opportunity to turn the Scamp Motor Company international.

Andrew: "It was mid-March 1990, I had my visa sorted, a certificate for inoculations, left my dog Charlie with a friend and left for Lagos. I travelled light, hoping for laundry service at the all-expenses-included Lagos Hilton five-star hotel. How wrong



Despite a limited production run, the Scamp Motor Company did manage to turn a profit from the Nigerian deal.

could I be? It was a dump worthy of no star merit, with what looked like a brothel in the foyer and no phone to call home. On route to Lagos, the Nigeria Airways Boeing had landed unexpectedly in Kano, Northern Nigeria. No idea why, but it clipped a lamppost on taxiing to turn round and was impounded for three hours while temperatures soared to 40 degrees with no air conditioning.

"On eventual arrival in Lagos, I was met by a gathered gentry of chiefs. Chief Akinrele and about five others, all in various displays of traditional suits and dresses and hats! I felt humbled and very honoured, but uncomfortably covered in sweat stained clothes. They'd bought my newish Scamp Mk2 demonstrator, a complete Scamp Mk3 LWB kit with all the extras, loads of spare parts and a Mini donor vehicle. We didn't negotiate a franchise deal. The thought they were going to rip me off never occurred; I was young and had never met a Nigerian chief before. I would trust them at their word, and taken in by how much they had bought from me already, for the asking price. I must be the only car manufacturer in the world to have made money out of Nigeria?"

Although Scamp manufacture barely got off the ground in Nigeria, Andrew at least had a good time there. "My trip coincided with the Royal Tour of West Africa," he says. "Prince Charles and Lady Diana were in Nigeria that very week, on board the Royal Yacht Britannia. So my tour of Lagos included a visit to the port and a quick view



Scamp Mk3 LWB being assembled at the Nigerian factory.



Labour was not in short supply when it came to assembling cars.



Scamp undergoing testing in Nigeria...



...but production never really got under way.



Gacol Nigeria Limited primarily made fridges and aircon units.



ABOVE: Chassis fabrication under way in Jamaica.

RIGHT: Andrew raises a smile, but his trip to Jamaica was far from a holiday.

BELOW: A finished Scamp up and running.



Andrew's accommodation – 'the doghouse.'



Scamp delivery, Jamaican style.

of the yacht, with flags flying. We did a bit more sightseeing and I was given some treasures to take home – ethnic carvings in ebony wood. The trip also coincided with a coup and an army takeover of the national radio. The general was later executed along with nine other officers and 27 men! I was there just for a week and was told to only eat out of tins and bottles. Sound advice. I had a prawn curry on my last night. I became so ill when I eventually arrived home to the shocking cold. It took over a week of dysentery and lots of fluids to recover. I was very lucky!"

Fully recovered, and with Scamp production in full swing in the UK again, Andrew's next adventure started in 1994 when he was contacted by a man with plans to start a retirement project in Jamaica. He recalls: "Rex Fofanah was a part-time football coach in the UK and was of Jamaican parentage. We agreed a deal and he made arrangements for me to go over to the island for six weeks to start up production there. Rex had bought from me

a complete set of jigs and a complete Scamp Mk3 kit with donor, plus at least two sets of aluminium body panels and quite a stock of pre-cut steel tubing. I'd shipped out twenty scrap Minis in one container, which were really cheap to buy back then.

"Again, I was the only white person on the flight and I had £160 taken from me for excess baggage at Gatwick. Jamaican customs took my wallet and kept the rest of my cash for import duties on a suitcase full of spare parts, so I had no money left at all. That was not a good start but it got worse. Rex, the boss, picked me up from the airport in his pick-up truck and I was very hungry since no meal had been served on board the flight. He drove cross-country and, when we saw a crossroads with a barrier, he quickly reversed and went looking for another road. We drove cross-country all the way and it took us six hours to get to his place on the very other end of the island. By that time, I was really starving. But it was daylight, a cup of tea and straight to work."

But that was just the start. "I realised in





"I WAS TOO ILL TO BE EATEN BY THE TICKS OR MOZZIES AND DIDN'T SUFFER A SINGLE BITE"

the first two weeks that I wanted to get out. But there was no telephone and he unplugged the one in his house at night to put in the boot of his car – locked. I had to make the best of it with the two guys working there. I spent the nights in what we called the doghouse, which was infested by mosquitoes and ticks, despite me hosing it down on a regular basis. The boss's house was magnificent by comparison, though I did join them for breakfast and evening meals in the main house, until we really fell out and I had to eat alone in the doghouse!

"One day, I arose early and went for a walk. I didn't know it was an important day. Unbeknown to me, the government [equivalent of the] DVLA were visiting and inspecting the Scamp for registration, and I needed to be there. They left without me, so I enjoyed the morning to myself looking round the neighbourhood, receiving a right telling off when they found me sunbathing on the tick infested lawn.

"We'd finished the first Scamp in five weeks, though. I still had no money. I did have my guitar and used to sit in the garden until late lamenting with the howling dogs. I was very much alone, since the other guys wouldn't join me in the garden due to it being infested with ticks. I think I was too ill to be eaten by the ticks or mozzies and didn't suffer a single bite. Or was it that I hadn't washed for four weeks? We had no running water either at work or home. Rain water was collected in an oil drum, we had no soap and the oil drum of water was used by everyone to wash with. It was sickeningly unpleasant, so I often didn't wash! Rain was an amazing pleasure and it was warm running off the hot tin roof. We had a huge

tub of barrier cream that had to be used [as a cheap soap substitute]. The boss had his own soap. And a towel! I am not making any of this up!

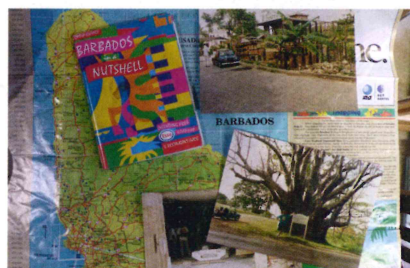
"After three weeks of hard, hot work, I was treated to a three-day all-expenses-paid trip to Negril beach resort. I hadn't drunk nor eaten properly for weeks! The boss stayed with me for most of the first day and joined me in the food hall. I ate with both hands and was getting totally sozzled on dark rums, until the barman asked where my partner was. The boss was long gone by now. I had a room in a hotel about a mile further down the beach. The ever-so-friendly barman promptly called for the bouncers who casually picked me up and threw me out. The next morning I went back only to find I couldn't get in and needed a pass. Back at my hotel, I started to read my book, all alone, on that beautiful warm glorious sandy beach, sick looking, pale, skinny – I'd lost over half a stone. I cried, contemplating no food for the next two days. Dad, bless him, had stuck a tenner in my book as a page marker. It saved my life!"

"What was also interesting was that I'd just had a four-page spread in *Mini Magazine* in the UK at the time. Under the pretence of the Jamaican Scamp's launch we were invited to 'Dover Race Track' – the only circuit on the island. A guy at the track recognised me from the article – 'You're Andrew MacLean', he said, which was a bit of a surprise. And he asked me to have his copy of the magazine signed. I felt like royalty!

"The boss spent the rest of the afternoon in the VIP lounge and viewing tower. I was not invited to join him and his young



ABOVE: When Scamp owned the Jimini project, some cars were produced in Barbados. Locally it was called the CariMoKe.



BELOW: Mini based beach car in the Caribbean sunshine.



ABOVE: A container full all the nuts and bolts for 100 Minis turned up unexpectedly at Scamp's facility in West Sussex.

ladyfriend, but I had some money at last, and treated my co-workers to a beer. At that moment, the boss found us. He'd brought me a beer as a token, but when he saw I'd bought one for the others and myself he just tutted, turned and walked off with it. I had just one more week to go, counting the days. He treated me to a final last night at a small hotel. I had to buy my food, but suddenly the boss turned up in the morning realising I was on the wrong side of the island and my flight home was later today! He wanted to get rid of me so badly, he took me to the airport to catch an internal flight to Kingston. But at least I got home alive. I won't be going back.

"I returned home, very bedraggled and ill, from a nightmare six weeks working without getting paid and not much food. But somehow I'd managed to finish the very first car to be manufactured out there from the jigs and materials I'd supplied."

But don't think Andrew had enough of his overseas adventures yet. A year later another opportunity presented itself. He had just taken over the Jimini project in 1995, which included an immaculate metallic blue Jimini Highlander demonstrator, an early production car and several freshly produced GRP body tubs.

Andrew: "That's when Graham and Andrea Reeves-Law paid the Scamp factory a visit with a view to buying a Scamp Mk3 manufacturing franchise as they were retiring

to Barbados and planned to take on a project over there. They liked the slightly more curvaceous Jimini and, again, we agreed a deal. They moved out to Barbados and I sold them three kits, which they took with them. They also bought my demonstrator plus a complete set of new moulds. BL Unipart could supply the powertrains as they supposedly had 3000 sets of Mini running gear ready and crated to go. We went to see them in the warehouse in the UK but weren't allowed to go through all of the crates!

"The first shipment of crates arrived at the Scamp factory. There were ten 998cc pre-A-Plus engines and gearboxes in one crate – imagine the weight! They'd been destined for Venezuela, South America, for the ill-fated fibreglass Mini-Cord and had been cobbled together, with so many parts missing. In the end I went to the BL people and asked them if they could lower the price for me. I got a contract price at Barbados and didn't make any money from the whole thing. Very frustrating."

"One day, a one-off single crate arrived at [the Scamp factory] Rowfant, totally unexpected. It contained all the nuts and bolts for 100 Minis and must have weighed at least 10 tonnes – we had two forklifts and the guys from the local scrapyard to help me. But, as soon as we moved the crate, the bottom fell out and all the parts scattered across the drive, it was a huge mess. I

decided to take the shovel and just clear it up. Most ended as scrap.

"Other problems ensued when Barbados did not want to pay the VAT. I agreed to claim it back with my quarterly returns. I made no profit from exporting tens of thousands of pounds worth of stock. But the VAT inspector did not like paying me back and took me to court – twice! I proved, eventually, it was just a dumb deal, no-profit contract.

"But then, over in Barbados, a bomb fell. The moisture content of the moulds fought its way out in the heat of Barbados in summer and they started blistering badly. And so I went over to help the Reeves-Laws out. They paid for it and I spent two weeks there and had a fabulous time with them. They'd named the car the CariMoke and about 30 were manufactured under the banner of Evolution Cars in Barbados. New moulds were taken off a UK supplied bodysheet and altered to accept Suzuki Maruti running gear. I suppose it could have been more successful, but unfortunately things didn't quite go as they planned.

"As a summary of promoting Scamps on the international stage, I'd have to say that Barbados was lovely, Nigeria was nice, Jamaica certainly wasn't. I wrote a diary, which now makes fun reading, reliving the great times, the mishaps and the hardships. Hey, life is what you make of it. Who needs money anyway?"