Two new 6-volt batteries firmly strapped in place

Check your batteries

For many years now Peter Berry had been meaning to convert the twin 6v batteries behind the seats to a single 12v item. Several V8 Workshop Notes - 250, 329 and 357 (the latter being a twin 12v conversion) - cover the subject very well. He even bought a 12v conversion kit in a handy plastic tub from the V8 Register around 25 years ago to do the job. But . . . it's one of those things that just never quite seems to happen. Having to remove the rear seat, rear carpet section and tin cover, in an awkward, bent-double position means they don't always get the regular attention they deserve. This is the story of how Peter's 'well maintained, trickle charged' batteries let him down and how (quite miraculously) they didn't spoil the holiday he had just commenced when it occurred.

Peter recalls "back in 2020 a friend and I planned a Champagne region tour with our wives. I would take the V8 and my friend was in his TVR Chimaera. Then Covid came along and skewed everything. The planned trip was in September, when restrictions were easing - but we all felt that an overseas trip was perhaps a little unwise at this time. We therefore quickly repurposed our plans to become a trip to the Yorkshire Dales, staying in a very nice hotel in Harrogate.

No. 201 outside RAF Wittering

Car preparations completed and packing finalised, the departure date soon arrived. We set off from NW Kent and were soon on the other side of London, heading north towards our lunch stop just outside Peterborough. During our very nice pub lunch, I remembered a photo opportunity for the cars, around 10 miles further north up the A1. RAF Wittering, displays a lovely Hawker Siddeley (Jump-Jet) Harrier outside the entrance; this would be our photo shoot location. We pulled into the car park, introduced ourselves to the RAF sentries, who were more than happy with our photo plans and lined the cars up in front of the Harrier. This is where the problems began.

After a few shots (not from the sentries) I jumped back into the V8 and turned the key. Click… Nothing more, just 'click'. I quickly pulled out the back seat, carpet, tin cover, etc and checked the battery terminal connections. Everything was fine and tight. My friend suggested that we try bump-starting the car, so a comical sight ensued with my friend and our two wives pushing the V8 around the carpark. Luckily the engine fired quickly (well, I'd just completed 100 miles of trouble-free motoring) and so we jumped in the two cars, waved to the RAF guards, (we were waiting for little red dots to appear on our foreheads!) who were laughing and slightly bemused by our antics and sped off up the A1. My mind was racing about possible causes until I noticed my small voltmeter (with phone incorporated charger - worth their weight in gold) was reading 15.6 volts! This was definitely not right so I pulled off the A1 into the Granthan services and found a friendly AA Patrol parked up in the far corner of the carpark. As I pulled up, left the engine running, greeted the Patrol and started explaining the problem, the engine simply cut out. As an AA member, I phoned through for assistance, completed all the formalities, etc. and the nice lady hooked me up straight away to the Patrol standing beside me.

I still had the lid off the batteries so the Patrol connected up his voltmeter to each 6-volt battery, one at a time. One read 3 volts and the other was little better at 4 volts. So, in series, I had 7 volts on a 12-volt system. My batteries had chosen this moment (100 mile from home) to throw in the towel – and yet, the car had successfully started at least 4 times that morning. The nature of modern-day batteries appears to be fine one moment and dead the next, rather than gently draining as they used to, years ago. Next, the AA Patrol connected up his 12-volt jump pack and I turned the key. The car started perfectly, with my voltmeter settling down at 13.6 volts. This pretty much proved that there was nothing wrong with the alternator or the starter motor. So… what to do? The AA man said, "You're good to go now sir." I pointed out that there was the small matter of me having his jump-pack hard- wired to my car and that he would probably want it back. "No problem, sir. I'll follow you, where are you going?" "Harrogate…" was my reply, which was around a further 100 miles up the road. The AA man grinned, took off his hi-viz jacket, put on his sunglasses and said "Shall we be on our way then sir?"

So that was it, the AA man followed me all the way to our hotel carpark, which turned out to be a lovely drive, (followed by a Ford Transit) where we removed the jump-pack and the engine promptly died. The next day I found a Euro Car Parts centre just 2 miles away and they actually had two 6-volt batteries in stock. We jumped in the TVR (ever reliable!) collected the batteries, fitted them and my worries were over. The hotel even offered to dispose of the two dead batteries, free of charge with their commercial waste. I think I should have bought a lottery ticket that day! The Yorkshire Dales were fantastic, with some incredible scenery and wonderful driving roads. On our return

home, I checked the age of the old batteries. Nine years…! I had guessed around five years but time runs away and I was slightly embarrassed to find out their true age. They didn't really owe me anything.

So, four years later, and bringing us fully up to date in the summer of 2024, perhaps the time has come to brush the dust off that 12-volt conversion kit and get the back seat out. The moral of this story is a simple one; although out of sight is generally out of mind, check your batteries regularly!