

Words: Cliff Chambers Pics: Stuart Grant



BATTLE

WITHOUT THE BULGE

Pint-sized Germans weren't auto giant-killers

Goliath, as you would know from school Bible class, was a big bloke who did quite well until his features were rearranged by a little feller with a slingshot. Much the same fate befell the front-wheel drive models that shared his name.

The Goliath was one of several minor German brands – others included Lloyd-Hartnett, Messerschmitt and Goggomobil – to overcome post-WWII prejudice in export markets that were hungry for well-built and affordable small cars.

However, by the early 1960s when

BMC's Mini arrived, those same buyers were equally keen to turn their backs on Germanic quirkiness.

The brand was founded by Carl Borgward, who operated a metal fabrication business before expanding into full-scale vehicle manufacturing. In 1926 Borgward adopted (presumably with some irony) the Goliath name for a series of three and four-wheeled delivery vehicles, many of which were used by the German post office to clear road-side posting boxes.

With just 22kW from their 200cc

engines, these models epitomised – and possibly inspired – the concept of 'snail mail'.

In 1933, and with Germany in economic and political 'scheissenhaus', Borgward still managed to produce a short-lived passenger model that went by the name of Goliath Pionier.

During World War II, the Goliath works was heavily involved with military vehicle production and a target for Allied bombers. Among its more innovative products was the Leichter Ladungsträger (light-charger carrier); an unmanned

tracked vehicle controlled via a length of telephone cable that could be surreptitiously manoeuvred past Allied defences to destroy buildings and vehicles – not to mention itself – with a 60kg load of high explosive.

Having spent three years in a US-run prison for his part in Hitler's war-effort, Borgward emerged in 1948 with a clear plan for the company's revival. Understanding that bureaucracies of any persuasion are easily bewildered, Borgward established three separate brand names – Goliath, Lloyd and Borgward – to produce a diverse range of models with an emphasis on export.

Despite all of its facilities being based in the city of Bremen and some duplication (even triplication) of activity, this ploy allowed Borgward to access three times the allocation of reconstruction funding and raw materials that would otherwise have come his way.

The revamped Goliath emerged in 1950 and within the year a range of models was available. Most interesting was the Sport Coupe with a Porsche-like body. By 1951 the twin-cylinder, two-stroke engine had been modified to accept Bosch fuel injection and power increased from 24 to 29kW.

The GP700 sedan that hit Australian showrooms late in 1954 delivered styling derived from the company's larger Borgward sedans and far more modern than the 1940s lines being offered to Volkswagen, Holden or Morris Minor buyers.

The Goliath cabin was almost palatial, offering a split bench front seat and plenty of space for three in the rear. Equipment included dual-speed wipers, a remote bootlid release and reclining seats. Top speed from the fuel-injected version was 114km/h, with fuel consumption better than 8L/100km. To that, however, you

needed to add five litres of two-stroke oil every 1500 kilometres.

The USA was already a popular destination for Goliath models, including the Combi station wagon and a cabriolet with fully retracting roof panel. Importer Goliath Distributors Inc. highlighted the "skilled hands and scientific minds" responsible for the design and the benefits of the cars' front-wheel drive. More than 12,000 were reportedly sold to US buyers.

In 1956, the 900E version with 5kW of extra power was released but modifications to the transverse-leaf front suspension caused major headaches for owners. Philip Soderstrom who owns our featured 900E Goliath explains:

"The front end doesn't have a true subframe, just a tube and rubber mounts attaching it to the body, so lots of them suffered from cracking to the firewall. When they changed the suspension design, they moved the mounting for the transverse springs to the centre, so if you hit a gutter when parking or a bump while you were braking, the wheelbase on that side of the car would be lengthened or shortened."

Introduction of a 1.1-litre, horizontally-opposed four-cylinder engine should have reaped major benefits for Goliath.



Goliath interior is stylish with lovely two-spoke steering wheel and handy split-fold front bench seat (above). This front-drive GP900E has been modernised for improved safety and performance.



The mess and smell associated with two-stroke propulsion had undoubtedly deterred some buyers, however the 1100 eliminated this element of market resistance.

While Borgward could not afford a major design revamp to embellish its new engine, a makeover including rear fins and a new grille was possible without shredding the company's increasingly shaky budget. Contributing substantially to Goliath's problems had been the cost of developing the Jeep-Jagdwagen, of which only 100 were made.

By 1959, Goliath's range included a 1.1-litre version of the Express van that had initially appeared in 1953 and a new coupe with 'Tiger' badge work. With 41kW and a 135km/h top speed, the Tiger could have provided real competition for Volkswagen's Karmann-Ghia but few were built.

Despite borrowing money from his remaining friends in the Bremen State government, Carl Borgward was unable to salvage the business. Goliath production effectively ceased in 1959 and cars sold from then until 1963 carried 'Hansa' branding.

Among the potential buyers for Borgward's brands was BMC – cashed-up and avaricious on the back of the Mini's success – but the tooling went to Mexico and the factories to Hanomag. Carl Borgward barely outlived his failed company; dying from a heart attack in July 1963. ■



I OWN ONE!

After 30 years of drag racing involvement and restoring a series of interesting small cars, Philip Soderstrom was "looking for another challenge".

Three years ago he found it in the shape of a Goliath GP900E sedan which had been in storage since 1965 when the engine had seized.

"I was put onto the car by Ray Harrison who founded the Borgward Club," Soderstrom said. "The engine needed a rebuild and I replaced the fuel injection with a 42mm Mikuni carburettor, but that was just the start of a process to make the car usable and reliable."

Aware of the Goliath's chassis and steering problems, Philip basically redesigned the car forward of the firewall; eliminating many of the issues that antagonised owners when the cars were new.

"It now handles and stops pretty well and it's got around twice the power the engine had when new," he elaborated. "I also changed it to 12 volt electrics, which involved adapting the water pump to run an alternator in place of the original generator."



Owner Phil's interest in small, low-horsepower cars is unusual, given his drag racing background. Fuel tank is mounted under the bonnet! (left). Styling reminiscent of company founder Carl Borgward's other eponymous make (above and top).