# Collector finds unexpected pride in the UK’s rare surviving Yugo 45



There are many reasons why people buy classic cars. Nostalgia often drives collectors to search for vehicles once cherished by family members or dreamed of during their youth but deemed unaffordable at the time. Others view acquiring such cars as an investment, especially as certain models dramatically increase in value due to dwindling numbers and growing interest among collectors. For many, the appeal lies in the experience of driving vintage cars that often offer more engaging performances and simpler mechanics compared to today’s technologically advanced automobiles.

In the case of Allan Smyes, however, his choice to purchase a Yugo 45—the car commonly labelled as the 'worst car in history'—represents a more unconventional justification. This small, rather unremarkable vehicle, produced in the 1980s by the now-defunct Yugoslavian manufacturer Zastava, has long been the subject of numerous automotive jokes and a negative reputation in popular culture. Yet, despite the infamy, Allan, 50, from York, claims that owning this car has brought him unexpected joy and pride.

Allan's Yugo, a 1988 model, differs notably from the expansive choices available today. Initially priced around £3,000 when it launched in the UK, it significantly undercut rivals like the Austin Mini Metro and Ford Fiesta, making it accessible for many. During its peak, Zastava reportedly sold about 3,000 units annually in Britain, although very few examples remain today, partly due to rust and decay over the years. Allan believes that he possesses one of only two surviving units in the UK, bringing a unique charm to his collection of vehicles.

The Yugo's reputation is entrenched in automotive history, particularly in the United States, where it was marketed from 1985 to 1992. Notorious for its poor build quality, lacklustre performance, and safety issues, it quickly gained the moniker of 'worst car in history.' Author Jason Vuic, in his book *The Yugo: The Rise and Fall of the Worst Car in History*, elaborates on how the car became a punchline in American comedic culture. Critics highlighted numerous design flaws, including unreliable electrical systems and subpar safety standards, contributing to the vehicle's rapid decline in popularity.

Interestingly, the cultural dynamics surrounding older Eastern European cars, like the Yugo, are currently shifting. A wave of nostalgia has prompted renewed interest in such models, particularly in the United States, where enthusiasts are now seeking out vintage vehicles that represent a bygone era. Vehicles like the Lada Riva and Trabants are undergoing restoration and sales surges, reflecting a broader fascination with the past. This trend resonates with Allan, who views his Yugo with affection, appreciating it not merely for what it is but for how it represents a unique piece of automotive history.

Allan's Yugo has attracted considerable attention, often surpassing the allure of much more expensive vehicles. He recounts moments at petrol stations where onlookers, drawn to its quirky design, ask about his car, sharing stories of their old Yugos or those of relatives. Despite its humble beginnings and flawed construction—Allan describes his car's interior as a 'sea of caramel' resembling a Caramac bar—his affection for the Yugo grows with each encounter.

Indeed, the upcoming revival of the Yugo brand adds another layer to this narrative. German entrepreneur Dr. Aleksandar Bjelić has plans to relaunch the Yugo name with new models, starting with a modern interpretation, the Siaj. This hatchback, priced under €20,000, aims to marry the nostalgic appeal of the original with contemporary demands. Allan welcomes this development, suggesting that this return could help reshape perceptions of the brand. He draws parallels to other manufacturers—like Renault, which successfully revived the iconic 5—wondering if Yugo can similarly catch the public's imagination.

Despite its troubled past, Allan argues that the Yugo deserves re-evaluation. He believes that perceptions have changed, and those who initially mocked the car might now appreciate it for what it was—a budget option serving basic transportation needs. The car's simplicity, he points out, allows for easy maintenance, making it a perfect choice for those who enjoy hands-on car care. Allan has only racked up around 700 miles on the vehicle, opting for the joy of preserving it rather than daily driving.

Allan's Yugo was once owned by a woman named Christine, who cherished it for decades before passing it on to a museum. Their ongoing correspondence adds a personal touch to the car's story, with Christine referring to it affectionately as 'Ruby.' This connection encapsulates the essence of classic car ownership, blending nostalgia, community, and a unique narrative that extends beyond just a mode of transportation.

The future for the Yugo brand may be uncertain, yet Allan’s passion for his car embodies the spirit of classic car enthusiasts everywhere: a celebration of individuality, history, and the stories that vehicles can tell, transcending their oft-held reputations as automotive failures.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/cars/article-14739625/I-worst-car-history-love.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/6d3279e1-4219-4b02-ac42-75ccc80863d2)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/cars/article-14739625/I-worst-car-history-love.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yugo), [[4]](https://www.carkeys.co.uk/news/the-story-of-the-yugo-the-worst-car-in-the-world)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_automobiles_known_for_negative_reception), [[6]](https://www.startribune.com/no-go-yugo-a-history-of-the-worst-car-in-the-history-of-the-world/86426187)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/6d3279e1-4219-4b02-ac42-75ccc80863d2), [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yugo)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/cars/article-14739625/I-worst-car-history-love.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/6d3279e1-4219-4b02-ac42-75ccc80863d2)
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* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/cars/article-14739625/I-worst-car-history-love.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.carkeys.co.uk/news/the-story-of-the-yugo-the-worst-car-in-the-world)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/cars/article-14739625/I-worst-car-history-love.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yugo)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/cars/article-14739625/I-worst-car-history-love.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.carkeys.co.uk/news/the-story-of-the-yugo-the-worst-car-in-the-world)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/cars/article-14739625/I-worst-car-history-love.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/6d3279e1-4219-4b02-ac42-75ccc80863d2> - Actor Tom Hanks developed a fascination for the Polski Fiat 126p during a visit to Budapest, frequently sharing his fondness on social media. This led the residents of Bielsko-Biała, Poland, to gift him a restored version of the car in 2017. Americans have since shown an increased interest in communist-era cars, driven by nostalgia and a desire for unique vintage vehicles. Garages in Eastern Europe are responding to this demand by restoring and selling these classic models, including the Lada Riva, Trabants, and Zastavas. Collectors appreciate these cars for their historic charm, distinctive aesthetics, and cultural significance. Enthusiasts like Serbian tattoo artist Jovana Ninković and Upstate New York’s Philip Pameri exemplify the passion for these charming yet robust machines from a bygone era. The revival reflects a broader trend of Cold War nostalgia and fascination with objects that were once inaccessible to Westerners.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yugo> - The Yugo was a compact car produced by the Serbian manufacturer Zastava from 1980 to 2008. It gained notoriety in the United States during the 1980s for its low price and poor build quality, leading to its reputation as the 'worst car in history.' Despite its shortcomings, the Yugo developed a cult following, and in 2002, entrepreneur Malcolm Bricklin attempted to revive the brand in the U.S. market. However, the revival was short-lived, and the Yugo remains a symbol of automotive infamy.
4. <https://www.carkeys.co.uk/news/the-story-of-the-yugo-the-worst-car-in-the-world> - The Yugo, produced by the Serbian manufacturer Zastava, was marketed in the United States from 1985 to 1992. Despite its low price, the Yugo was criticized for its poor performance, build quality, and safety issues, leading to its reputation as the 'worst car in history.' The car's design flaws included unreliable electrical systems, water leaks, and a tendency for the engine's timing belt to fail, potentially causing engine damage. The Yugo's brief success in the U.S. market was overshadowed by its numerous defects and negative reception.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_automobiles_known_for_negative_reception> - The Yugo, produced by the Serbian manufacturer Zastava, is often cited as one of the worst cars in history due to its poor performance, build quality, and safety issues. It was frequently ridiculed in the media and became a symbol of automotive failure. Despite its low price, the Yugo's numerous defects and negative reception led to its rapid decline in popularity and eventual discontinuation.
6. <https://www.startribune.com/no-go-yugo-a-history-of-the-worst-car-in-the-history-of-the-world/86426187> - The Yugo, produced by the Serbian manufacturer Zastava, was marketed in the United States from 1985 to 1992. Despite its low price, the Yugo was criticized for its poor performance, build quality, and safety issues, leading to its reputation as the 'worst car in history.' The car's design flaws included unreliable electrical systems, water leaks, and a tendency for the engine's timing belt to fail, potentially causing engine damage. The Yugo's brief success in the U.S. market was overshadowed by its numerous defects and negative reception.
7. <https://www.hagerty.com/media/market-trends/is-this-9000-yugo-the-best-worst-car/> - The Yugo, produced by the Serbian manufacturer Zastava, was marketed in the United States from 1985 to 1992. Despite its low price, the Yugo was criticized for its poor performance, build quality, and safety issues, leading to its reputation as the 'worst car in history.' The car's design flaws included unreliable electrical systems, water leaks, and a tendency for the engine's timing belt to fail, potentially causing engine damage. The Yugo's brief success in the U.S. market was overshadowed by its numerous defects and negative reception.