



The 1914 Peerless 4 ton Truck.

Peerless, founded in Cleveland, USA, in 1900, set new standards for engineering in the auto industry and had many firsts in design, such as an engine under a bonnet, a drive shaft with floating rear axle, a stamped steel frame, a tilting steering wheel, an accelerator pedal, the use of aluminium to save weight; and the first enclosed body. The first starters and electric lights, and the list goes on and on. However, at the start of WW1, British manufacturers struggled to meet demand for motor lorries for war service and in 1914 the British Government contracted with export agents Gaston, Williams & Wigmore to supply American chassis to be fitted with bodies in England. One of the makes supplied was Peerless of Cleveland, Ohio. Trucks of 3-ton, 4-ton and 5-ton capacity were added to the product line in 1911 and found favour with the US Army.

Between 1915 and 1918 the British Government bought a total of 12,000 Peerless truck chassis, which were imported via Liverpool, then inspected and fitted with their British built body at Gaston, Williams & Wigmore's repair facility at Islington, North London. From Islington the trucks were despatched to the ongoing conflict.



A Peerless in WW1 military service with the Army Service Corps at Bulford on Salisbury Plain in England, showing the style of cab and body. Picture courtesy of Tim Gosling

At the end of the war, the Americans made arrangements for the 60,000 or so trucks that they had in Europe to be sold. Many were sent to the Government repair depot at Slough. In 1920 the Government Surplus Disposal Board sold the Slough site and all the vehicles – including those still in France, Egypt, Turkey, India and Mesopotamia – for over £7 million to a group of investors headed by Sir Percival Perry and Noel Mobbs, who continuing rebuilding and selling reconditioned lorries before converting the site into the Slough Trading Estate.



The Peerless after arrival at Sandstone. Picture by Sandstone Heritage Trust.



The Peerless at work at the 2014 Stars of Sandstone event. Picture by Kim Winter.

Sandstone's example was sold and exported to South Africa. Our research indicates it spent its working life in Grahamstown (renamed Makhanda in 2021) from the 1920s to the 1950s carrying bricks to the many building projects in this This venerable old City has some of South Africa's finest architecture and it would appear that the Peerless truck played a major part in the construction of the magnificent buildings for which Grahamstown is so well known.

Although in mechanical working order, with its 6, 76 litre engine and 4 speed plus reverse gearbox with a dual chain driven rear axle, the body of the Peerless was a rather rough and ready affair when Sandstone acquired it and the truck has now been sent to England for a period military body and cab to be fitted as a testament to its provenance as an active survivor of WW1.