



'We've got a great collection of vehicles and think people would like to see them'

The Armouredgeddon team involved in the restoration pose with the M3 Lee shortly before it was moved from the workshop to the museum

A job well done

The Armourgeddon Military Museum team carried out a nine-month restoration on a World War Two-era M3 Lee Medium Tank

Just 12 months after first going on public display at the 2018 Victory Show, Armourgeddon Military Museum's M3 Medium Tank looked vastly different when it returned to the show in September last year.

Having undergone a nine-month 'makeover', the World War Two-era 'Lee' drew admiring glances from visitors who recalled seeing it while still a rusting hulk.

Armourgeddon's Nick Simons, who was involved in the restoration process, said they had displayed the tank in its unrestored state soon after it arrived in the UK from Australia. "We did it so people could see what it looked like before the work started," he said. "The idea was then to bring it back 12 months later when restored, which we did. We got a lot of good feedback, with many people saying they didn't think we would do it, so we were all very proud of what we achieved."

Classic Military Vehicle was on hand late last year to watch as the newly-restored M3 was driven to the Armourgeddon Military Museum in Leicestershire. The half-mile dirt track from workshop to museum was possibly the longest journey the M3 had tackled under its own power in at least 25 years or more.

Armourgeddon owner Stuart Garner had the privilege of being at the controls. "I've driven a lot of different armoured vehicles and heavy tanks and that felt really confined and enclosed," he said once the Lee was safely parked in the museum between a Sherman tank and Sexton self-propelled artillery vehicle.

"Considering it was only me and Nick inside, I can only imagine what it must have been like with seven lads and all the ammunition and gear and how



Armourgeddon owner Stuart Garner gives a thumbs-up following a successful move

horrendous it must have been. Visibility was poor, but it drove very smoothly, there was plenty of power and it steered absolutely beautifully.”

Armourgeddon took ownership of the tank nearly two years ago after the Australian owner died. The vehicle was put up for sale and a friend notified Stuart that it was on the market. Working through a middleman, a deal was eventually struck, and the tank shipped to the UK.

“The chap I bought it through in Australia sent me photos of it driving about 25

‘Called ‘the tank that surprised Rommel’, the M3 gave the Allies the firepower they needed’

years ago. It looked pretty much the same as when we first got it,” said Stuart. “The previous owner had it for about 25 years and during that time managed to find most of the parts, which made the job a lot easier for us.

“I’d say it was at least 90% there when we got it. One of the biggest challenges was fitting the turret that came with it but hadn’t been machined (to fit). It was cast from an original because trying to find an original, well they are like hen’s teeth.”

Called ‘the tank that surprised Rommel’, the M3 gave the Allies the firepower they needed to combat German panzer brigades early in World War Two. Although it was only meant as a temporary solution

The crew of an M3 tank at Souk el Arba, Tunisia, November 23, 1942.
WIKIMEDIA



British M3 Grant (left) and Lee (right) at El Alamein (Egypt), in the Sahara Desert, 1942, showing differences between the British turret and the original design. NO 1 ARMY FILM & PHOTOGRAPHIC UNIT



SPECIFICATIONS

Nationality US

Type Medium Tank

Production Run August 1941 – December 1942

No built 6,258

Engine Continental R975 EC2 radial nine-cyl

Fuel Petrol

Fuel capacity 795 litres

Power 340bhp

Max speed (road) 38.6km/h

Max speed (cross-country) 24km/h

Range 193km

Armament 75mm M2 gun; 37mm M6 gun in M24 combination mount in turret with co-axial .30 machine gun; two .30-cal Browning machine guns in hull

Armour 51mm (turret mantlet and turret sides) 51mm (hull front); 38mm (hull sides)

Transmission synchromesh transmissions with five forward and one reverse gear

Crew Seven (Lee) six (Grant)

Dimensions (overall)

Weight 30.7 tons

Length 5.6m

Width 2.7m

Height 3.10m

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until better tanks could be brought on to the battlefield, it offered good armoured protection and decent firepower. Two variants were produced and in Britain tanks using the US pattern turrets were called the 'Lee', after the famous Confederate General Robert E Lee, while the other, using the British pattern turret, was called the 'Grant' after Ulysses S Grant, a Union General.

The M3 came about as the result of the need for a tank with a 75mm gun that could be produced quickly. The US Army had just 400 tanks in 1939, most of which were M2 light tanks. However, that changed following the success of the German Army's Panzer III and Panzer IV in France.

US Army chiefs quickly realised they were lagging and ordered a new medium tank armed with a 75mm gun. Although this was the M4 Sherman, an interim fix was still needed and the M3 was the solution. It met the US Army's needs for a tank armed with a 75mm gun and the UK's demand at the time for more than 3,500 medium tanks.

The first M3s became operational in 1941 after design and production work started in 1940. While they had impressive firepower and good armour, the M3 did have its drawbacks in its design and shape. These included a high silhouette, poor off-road performance, riveted



ABOVE: Being reversed into the museum
BELOW: The M3 drew plenty of admiring looks at last year's Victory Show



On the move.
The half-mile dirt track from workshop to museum was possibly the longest journey under its own power in more than 25 years



Safely parked between a Sherman and Sexton, the M3 looks right at home



The engine is dated '1942'

'Visibility was poor, but it drove very smoothly, there was plenty of power and it steered absolutely beautifully'



Restoration work was carried out in the Armourgeddon workshop and took around nine months



The turret with its 37mm and machine gun



The driver's hatch located in the middle of the tank



A view of the interior looking towards the driver's hatch



After months in the workshop where it was restored, the M3 heads for the nearby Armourgeddon Military Museum

construction and an old fashioned sponson mounting of the main gun which prevented the tank from taking a hull-down position.

The distinctive design was the result of US plants not having the necessary experience at the time to make a gun turret capable of holding a 75mm weapon.

The medium-velocity 75mm gun was in an offset sponson, which was mounted in the hull, while a high-velocity 37mm gun sat on top of the tall hull along with a machine gun. The traverse of the 75mm gun was limited due to this design, but, on the plus side, using a hull-mounted gun allowed the M3 to be produced more quickly than a tank featuring a turreted gun and Britain was in urgent need of tanks.

A total of 2,855 M3s were handed to the British Army from the 6,258 variants the US produced. They first saw action in North Africa in 1942. Both M3 Lees and Grants were involved in action in May of that year and despite their flaws, accounted well themselves. They caught

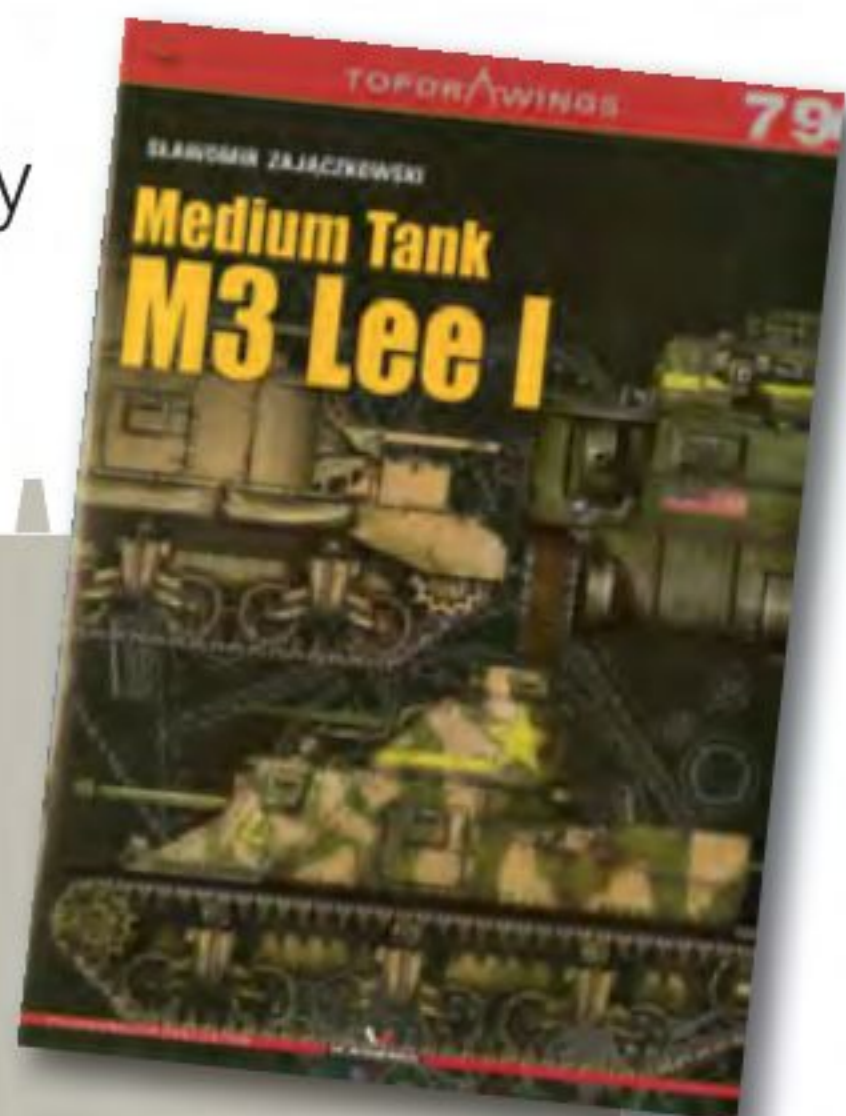
the Germans by surprise with their 75mm guns.

The M3 was able to engage the Germans outside the range of their 5cm Pak 38 anti-tank gun, while it was also superior to the Fiat tanks used at the time by Italian forces. Once large numbers of Shermans became available, the M3 was widely withdrawn from combat,

Further Reading

Medium Tank M3 Lee
by Slawomir Zajackowski

The M3 served in the British, Australian and Soviet armies during World War Two with 6,258 being produced in all variants. The book is a must for modellers as it contains some excellent illustrations of the different versions of the tank, some of which have been painted showing the different markings and camouflage used during the war. Views of early to late model M3s include from the side, top, front and rear. Publisher: Kagero. ISBN: 9788366148482. Price: £17 Pages: 20



On the move with the rear engine doors open



although it continued to be used against the Japanese in Southeast Asia until 1945.

"The Lee, at the time it went into the desert, was as good as anything out there until the German's up-gunned their tanks," said Stuart. "It acquitted itself well. Unfortunately, we don't know too much about the history of ours. We managed to get the original British T number off it and its original US number, but we've not been able to find mention of it in the Australian records, so we're not sure what to make of that. It should be there if it was used by the Australian Army.

"The chap we bought it through seems to think it was used by the British against the Japanese, but we've not found any damage to it – no bullet marks or anything else – which is unusual, because if it was used against the Japanese there would be some damage."

Although Armourgeddon took possession of the tank in 2018, restoration work only began in earnest in January last year when Stuart began stripping it. Tim Veasey, a member of the team, then got involved in February.

"Tracy (Stuart's wife) did all the paperwork to get it into the country. It can be a challenge sometimes, but this went quite well," said Stuart. "The lads were just finishing off the Sexton when I got started on it and then Tim got involved and worked on it until the Victory Show. He did most of the work, although we were all involved at some stage."

Amazingly, it still has what the team believe is its original wartime engine, dated 1942. "In the end, it wasn't a bad restoration and went quite smoothly," said Nick. "There's so little to these vehicles inside and it came with most of the parts so we didn't have to hunt around the country and world for bits and pieces because that's where things can really slow down."

Alex Garner, Stuart's son, documented the restoration process providing regular updates on social media. "We had a lot of people following the restoration on Facebook," he said. "It helped to create

An M3 during training exercises in 1942, Fort Knox, Kentucky. ALFRED T. PALMER / WIKIMEDIA



ABOVE LEFT: Nick Simons conducts a final inspection before the move

ABOVE RIGHT: Another picture showing the unrestored M3 soon after it arrived in the UK from Australia

BOTTOM: The engine smokes and splutters before roaring to life

interest and when people realised how well things were progressing, they wanted to come and see it at the Victory Show."

While the M3 is for now safely tucked away in the Armourgeddon Military Museum, it may not remain there. "I'd consider selling it, but would be looking at offers of £350,000 plus," said Stuart. "I don't like selling anything, and if we've only got one, as a rule, I won't sell, but because we have a Sherman Jumbo coming in, and that's a big and expensive restoration

for us, I'd consider it."

For now, anyone wanting to view the M3 will have to visit the museum which opens again in April for the 2020 season. "If we don't sell it, we have been asked to take it to Tankfest, Harborough at War, which we support, possibly the Victory Show and maybe Wickstead at War," said Stuart. "We've also toyed with the idea of holding our own show and will also look at that as an option. We've got a great collection of vehicles and think people would like to see them." ◀

