



Synchro!



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The Newsletter of South Staffs and North Birmingham MG Owners Club

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Newsletter 2008; an introduction from the new editor.

I somehow managed to be battered into submission by Steve Gwilt to have a go at the job during a weak moment. My knowledge of the 'Publisher' computer package is just about non-existent, but I will try to master it a bit at a time. This first issue for 2008 contains an article that I had already written for the next issue, describing summertime wanderings in France, which I hope you will find interesting. In order for the newsletter to have a continuing useful content, I would ask everyone and anyone to let me have any contributions, anything at all that may be of interest (how about your U.S. holiday, Dave, Jeff, Sue and Joy, for example?). Please send any contributions to ajheeley@btinternet.com, or just hand your efforts to me at a club night. I am starting from zero, so I will need material as soon as possible. May I wish everyone a very Happy New Year, and I hope that 2008 will be a much improved year over 2007; it would be good to have a bit of decent weather for the main months, rather than the 2007 floods.

THROUGH THE CHAIR by Steve Gwilt

It doesn't seem possible, but Christmas has come and gone, and we are already into another new year. So may I begin by wishing all of you, on behalf of Elaine and myself, a Happy and Prosperous New year.

As the new year dawns my first year as chairman draws to a close, and I have to admit that in many ways my first year has not been the greatest of years for this club. The unfortunate departure of the club secretary, and the dreadful weather that plagued most of the summer has dampened a few spirits, and spoiled several events in recent months. It has to be said that 'topless' motoring loses

some of its romance in bitter cold driving rain, and the cockpit of an MGB is very claustrophobic with the hood raised, and the heater barely puffing a little cold air onto the wet steamed-up windows!

To be fair, the year hasn't been all doom and gloom. We moved to our new venue at the Globe, which has provided a much better atmosphere at club nights. MG's in the Trees was an outstanding success, and I can look back and smile at other fun days out; an example being a glorious sunny day in August at Trentham Gardens, where we were awarded the runners-up trophy for the best stand, much to the delight of our closest neighbours, who, unusually, were unplaced. The Christmas party was great fun and seemed to be enjoyed by all who attended. We have also welcomed several new members to bolster our numbers. This, of course, is very important to the future of the club, because any club is only as strong as its membership, and with new blood comes new ideas to avoid stagnation.

On that note, we should look forward to the next twelve months. Some of the old favourites such as Stoneleigh, Trentham and MG's in the Trees are already fixed in the events calendar. However I think it is important to add new events to the list to maintain interest and to cater for the needs of all members. So anyone who has ideas for any event, grand or small, please put them forward, because your input is valued and needed.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported me during the more difficult times of the past year, and of course a big thank you to all who have helped, organised, assisted, and worked to make this club what it is.

And so to the summer wanderings in France.....

LAON / ANGOULÊME 2007

The two towns in question are both in France; Laon, in the North, and Angoulême, in the South-West. There are common features between the two towns; both are medieval walled cities situated at the top of high ground, but the main point of MG interest is that both host motoring events during the year. I was fortunate enough to attend both events this year, and enjoyed both of them immensely. Although there are several points of similarity between the two events, there are also great differences. For both events the towns are just about 100% taken over by motoring enthusiasts for the weekend.

CIRCUIT HISTORIQUE, LAON

This event takes place during the spring bank holiday weekend at the end of May. Laon is situated about 150 miles from Calais, not far from Reims, and the whole journey is possible by motorway, so it is within very easy reach for a long weekend (the worst part of the expedition is the journey on this side of the channel!). The town is known locally as La Montagne Couronnée, the Crowned Mountain. This is because most of the surrounding area is fairly flat, and Laon stands out very prominently from a considerable distance. It has a very large medieval cathedral, and I found during the visit that for obvious reasons it is twinned with Winchester.

My co-pilot for the event was my brother-in-law Peter, who was 'given' the weekend as a 60th. Birthday present from Pat and myself and the family.

We met up with Graham and Cynth Cherry at Laon, giving a small representation for the South Staffs club at the event. They were excellent company; plenty of food and lots of



The mayor of Loan welcomes his visitors

South Staffs MGOC at the event.

The motoring event commences with a gala dinner on the Friday evening (which I was not able to attend). The tour arrangements had been made via the MG Owners Club, and our excellent hotel, the Mercure was situated a few miles out of the town, so after the journey it was a case of a very nice dinner followed by an early night.

The Saturday event was a 'rally'. This is inverted commas because it was really more of a gentle wander round the surrounding countryside, and completely non-competitive. To give an idea of the scale of the event, there were about 550 cars entered, of which I would think that about 50% were British.

In order to minimise the amount of standing around and queuing, this mammoth field of



entries was split in two, and the two sets of participants set off on the same roughly circu-

lar route in opposite directions.

The two groups converged on the grounds of a nineteenth century fort for the lunch stop, and then again set off in opposite directions, meeting up finally at the local (horse) racing circuit. It was all very nicely organised, and the list of entries included just about every type of car imaginable, plus a few unimaginable. Everything from extremely well-used specimens to immaculate Ferraris. MG's and Triumphs were particularly well represented, both British and French. There were crowds of local people manning every vantage point and cheering the cars on their way.

The whole thing was very convivial, and ended with a glass of Champagne.

Sunday saw the 'Main Event'. As the town is situated at the top of the hill, there are roads leading to it from either side, which have a series of tight-to-hairpin bends. The idea is that all of the entrants do two complete circuits of a course, which includes the cobbled streets of the ancient town centre plus the above-described approach roads.

The cars were assembled, again in two large groups, and then everyone went up to the

Town Hall. A glass of Champagne was again provided, and the organiser of the event welcomed everyone, followed by a short welcoming speech from the Mayor. It was stressed that drivers should behave themselves properly, as any accident would jeopardise the future of the whole event.

The 'parade' was then started, and the first group set off and did their two circuits, followed by the second group. Hundreds of the local inhabitants turned out to watch the cars go by, with much cheering, flag-waving and general enthusiasm.

The only slightly unfortunate incident was one of the French entrants driving a Renault Alpine, who had evidently decided to carry out an impact test on the rear end of his car



Just a small section of the cars in the town hall square

against a tree (not serious).

The weather throughout had been slowly going downhill, from bright sunshine, eventually to rain, which arrived just as the last people completed their runs. The event concluded with, once more, a visit to the town hall, short speeches, and, of course, a glass of Champagne.

One of the, to me, very noticeable things about the whole of the proceedings, considering the number of vehicles involved, and the fact that the whole city was virtually shut off to normal traffic, was that there was a complete lack of any visible Police presence.

There was another 'rally' organised for the Monday, but I was unable to participate in this, due to time constraints. The event was very well-organised, and the general wel-

come from the French was superb.

ANGOULÊME.

The journey from the channel ports is about 320 miles, so this is a journey 'to get your teeth into', with the choice of either the wonderful French autoroutes, or the equally splendid main roads, both refreshingly free from our traffic saturation.

As previously mentioned, this town is also situated at the top of high ground. It is much further away than Laon, , so ideally a visit would occupy more than long weekend. For this event, Pat and I travelled in convoy with Ian and Shirley Pearman, and Roy and Dianne Clarke; wonderful company. We enjoyed the journey, mostly in brilliant sunshine, the racing, and a lot of laughs on the way.

It hosts their motoring event in September, and once again, the whole place is taken over by throngs of petrol-heads, together with their various vehicles, which once again were a fantastic assortment.

The big difference is that the town centre is closed off for actual races round a circuit. The preparations for this involved setting up the course with Armco barriers, and what is normally a parking area set up for the pits for the races.



Forming up ready for the 'circuit historique'

The proceedings again kicked off on the Friday evening, but this time it was to for Concours D'Elegance, held under floodlights, for a selected twenty or so selected cars, which were paraded under floodlights.

The French commentator somehow managed to turn this into rather a bore (for me), with over-long rambling about each competitor. However, it was interesting, and won by an immaculate Bugatti, which had been driven to the event from Bury. The French commentator slightly amused me by mis-hearing Bury as Paris (Paree), not much difference!

On Saturday the main event was again a rally, but as with Laon, this was, I think, rather a leisurely affair. The number of vehicles involved was about 200, and the cost was, I gather quite high to participate, with a formal gourmet lunch laid on, so most people opted for simply watching the cars depart, and in due course, re-appear. The mix of vehicles was very varied, from Ferrari to Morris Minor Traveller. In the evening the cars assembled in the centre, and a pleasant hour could be spent wandering around them.

On Saturday, most of the preparations had been made for the following day's racing, so the chance was taken to get the MG's out of the garage parking, and do a few laps of the circuit (instigated by Roy). Care was required for this, as prior to the actual closing of the roads there was always the possibility of meeting another car (or bus) somewhere on the circuit. However, it was invaluable, as gave a good idea of what it must have been like to race there. The streets are generally quite narrow, and there were some right-angle corners, plus hairpin bends on the hilly parts of the circuit.

Practice for the races took place on Sunday morning; the races themselves on Sunday afternoon. The seven races involved a mixture of cars, from mixed sports cars from specific periods to an all-Jaguar race, but the highlights were a couple of races specifically for Grand Prix Bugattis. Looking at the Bugattis in the pit area, the most striking feature was that despite the fact that they were individually almost priceless, they were just about the most beaten-up, and generally used cars imaginable. Somehow, Ian managed to get

Stirling Moss's autograph; a good effort, as the honoured guest was in a very private area, closed to the public!

The sights and sounds from the races were superb.

Following the races, it was really great to see various of the competitors, such as a four and a half litre Bentley, happily pottering around the town, still carrying their race numbers.

The return journey included a very pleasant few days in Brittany. Again, highly recommended for an MG visit, and not too far. The coastline is superb.

Both events were excellent, and highly recommended. I admire the fact that the French are able to organise this type of event. I read recently that in the UK, a parade by the local Scouts and Cubs for St. George's day had to be called off because they were not able to



A 1925 type 35 Bugatti belonging to a M. Arnaud Grignic, awaiting its race. Well-worn, but what a sight!, what a sound!

close a short city street for a couple of hours on Sunday morning due to the necessary bureaucracy (someone said that it needs an act of parliament to close a road for a few hours!). This being so, the chance of closing a city centre for a motoring event in this country would appear to be nil. How sad. As with everything these days in the UK we have to bow down to regulations, insurance, H&S and the rest. The Flowers Sunshine and Fairies Party together with the Flat Earth Society and the Carbon Flat Footprint Police would make certain that it would be

impossible to run such an event in the U.K.
The French seem to just get on and do it!
Vive La France!

A final footnote. The combined mileage covered by the three MGB's for the two events was, very roughly, 4500, and no-one had the slightest problem, not so much as a blown bulb. Can't be bad!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wed. Jan 9th. Club Meeting; The Globe, Hednesford

Wed. Jan 23rd. Club Night. The Globe, Hednesford. **Quiz Night.** Based on the Highway Code theory test, and we will be having a visit from the Black Country MG Owners Club for this event, which will start at 8.30 p.m. prompt. Refreshments provided. Hopefully not too desperately serious. Should be fun; Good Luck!

Sunday Feb 3rd. Club AGM. Hatherton Parish Room, starting at 3 p.m. Your chance to have your say in the running of the club. Any new suggestion for future activities will be welcomed. All members please try to attend.

Wed 13th. Feb Club Meeting, The Globe, Hednesford

Sunday 24th. Feb Stoneleigh International MG Show. This is the ideal opportunity to buy any parts needed for the winter re-vamp. Buy anything from a spare bulb to another car. The club will have a stand at the show, so if you would like to lend a hand with manning the stand (and doing some advance promotion for "MG's in the Trees"), please have a word with Steve Gwilt.

FINALLY, ODDS AND SODS

For sale: Five 14 inch painted wire wheels, suitable for MGB. Not bad condition. £40 the lot. Phone 07718 352734

Wanted: Colin Hawkins needs a 6 volt battery. Has anyone got one surplus to requirements?

Short of New year Resolutions?

What about: Get that MG out and USE IT in 2008!!