

## **MG European Event of the Year 2016**

### **Le Touquet**

#### **Getting to Le Touquet**

The best laid plans and all that certainly hit the start of our trip to the MG European Event of The Year. We had planned on joining the club trip to the Loire for the start of the journey, then continuing North on the Wednesday morning, our Son and his girlfriend were flying over on the Sunday to look after the dogs and hens, everything was going well. The week before Angela was in the UK looking after our 1 year old granddaughter and was due to return on the Thursday before our departure on the Monday, but then the French strikes started. At one point we were unsure if Angela's flight might be cancelled and we were looking how she could get back as the railways might also be on strike, there could also be a problem getting petrol! It was then confirmed that Air traffic would go on a 3 day strike starting on the Friday so Angela would be ok (though on the day, her flight was delayed and we could not get to the club meeting that night) but it would hit our son. After looking at different options and talking to Ryanair (who said they would not take any action until the Sunday morning) his only definite alternative was the flight on Tuesday which was rapidly filling up. So he decided to change their flights (at great expense) to Tuesday instead of Sunday. Very shortly after he had changed the flights it was announced that the Air traffic controllers had reached a settlement with the government and the strike was to be called off, however he was then unable to change their flight back again and we had to cancel the Loire trip. We spoke with our son shortly before they left, and with the prospect of a long drive to Le Touquet in the TB on the Wednesday he said they knew what needed doing so I should take the TB to the Airport and Angela the Galaxy for them and we could set off from there.

Now things were at least we could break our journey, from the airport we would head up towards Paris and find somewhere enroute for the night continuing to Le Touquet on the Wednesday. Having started on our way towards Paris, we then saw signs that the road was closed further on due to flooding!

After various detours we ended up at Le Mans, up until that point the weather had been glorious but as we approached Le Mans the heavens opened up and Angela emptied a shopping bag to cover her hair. We decided to push on rather than stop to put the hood up as it looked ok further ahead. The rain was on and off until just north of Le Mans when it stopped. We continued to the service station at Alençon where we stopped for a coffee and the internet to look for a hotel for the night. The best option looked to be to continue to Bernay where we were able to stay at the hotel L'Lion D'or. We finally arrived there around 20.30 and after checking in we wandered out to quickly find somewhere to eat before they stopped serving. We had a very nice meal then strolled round the old streets and along the river eventually getting back to the hotel and to bed.

#### **Wednesday**

Setting off from Bernay we decided to take a more leisurely drive to Le Touquet and go on the old roads rather than the motorway, but when we got to the roundabout where we would make the choice between the old road and the motorway, the old road was closed! We did manage to take a more circuitous route after Rouen, up towards Dieppe, across to Abbeville and then on to Le Touquet. The day had started dull but by the time we arrived it was nice warm sunny day. We checked in at the event headquarters by the racecourse and picked up our goody bag with the event book, and the run books. We then bumped into Wendy Packer who had met with the club members on the Loire trip, after a short chat we went back to the car and saw my French cousin

Clotilde and her husband Arnoud waving, they have an immaculate 1965 MGB. We hadn't seen them since leaving them in the lake district after the Scottish event in Aviemore 3 years ago. In the evening there were welcome aperitifs at the racecourse headquarters, with all the MG's parked around including a BMC works team transporter. After the aperitifs we went with Clotilde and Arnaude into Le Touquet and found a lively restaurant where we had a meal of very good mussels.

## **Thursday**

There were 4 different runs to choose from (repeated again on the Saturday):-

Rallye 1: Discovering the Bay of Somme

150 km, visiting the city of Montreuil sur Mer. Lunch at Noyelles sur Mer. Discover the Somme Bay and St. Valery by steam train from the Bay of Somme.

Rally 2: Places of memory of the Pas de Calais

150 km From V2 to conquer space with a visit to the Dome and the blockhouse Eperlecques. Discover the Audomaroise region.

Rally 3: Discovering the great diversity of Flanders Mountains

250 km with a visit to Cassel, black and Mount Kemmel. Lunch in Watou in Belgium. :

Rally 4: The road of the two caps

250 km along the coastline to the famous nose caps white and gray nose on the roads of Boulogne. Visit and lunch at the Village Saint Joseph. :

We went on the "Discovering the Bay de Somme" which on Thursday was restricted to "T" types and pre war cars as it was shorter than some of the other runs. We had a very scenic run of around 35 miles to the morning stop by the sea at Crotoy, then a short run on to Noyes for an excellent lunch. In the afternoon there was a trip from Noyes on a steam train to Saint Valery sur Somme and back. The run from Noyes back to Le Touquet was 45 miles and took us through Montreuil-sur-Mer which although 10km from the sea was in the past an important sea port. In the evening dinner was in the Palaise de Congress, a wonderful meal with bottles of good (French) red and white wine on each table, and as soon as a bottle was empty it was replaced!

## **Friday**

The options were a Ladies run (had to have a lady driver), or to go to the Abbeville race circuit with an opportunity to take to the track with other cars of a similar era. Angela went with Clotilde on the ladies run while Arnaud and I went to the circuit. I didn't take the TB on the track as having taken the MGC round the full Le Mans circuit for 2 laps (before the race) one year, I did not want to "potter" around a circuit in the TB, though apart from a couple of MGB's and Midgets, the only cars really going for it on the circuit were the pre war cars! I did get plenty of photos and we had a good lunch. We returned to Le Touquet mid afternoon in plenty of time to watch the end of the ladies run, which ended in a parade on one of the main streets of Le Touquet and all the ladies on the run were presented with a very nice Gant polo shirt.

The evening was the Gala Dinner with speeches and presentations, again the meal was fantastic the main course being Fillet steak that melted in the mouth, the desert with mounds of soft tasty strawberries was amazing, all of course washed down with bottles of red and white wine.

## **Saturday**

Back to the 4 choices of runs, the run for "T" Type and pre war cars was "The Places of Memory of the Pas de Calais". After another scenic route we arrived at "The Blockhouse d'Eperlecques" where we were taken in 2 groups (English speaking and French speaking) on a guided tour round the Blockhouse. It was built by the Germans to house a plant for making liquid oxygen, the construction preparation and arming of the V2 rockets, and a launch site. It was a massive structure built of 15ft thick reinforced concrete, many French and Polish prisoners were forced to work on the site until they collapsed and died. It was bombed by the RAF and Americans with little damage until the use of the Tallboy earthquake bombs which eventually caused the Germans to move to La Coupole where in a quarry they build a complex of underground tunnels with a enormous concrete dome over. After leaving the blockhouse we made the short journey to La Coupole which is now a museum and a space museum. At Coupole we were given lunch then we went round the tunnels and watched a short film about rocket history.

When we came out we found there had been a torrential storm and I realised we had not put the tonneau over however when we got to the car it was covered, we were told that when the storm started owners who were outside ran over and put the tonneau covers over or put the hoods up of the cars that were uncovered. After leaving La Coupole we had another scenic trip back to Le Touquet.

In the evening dinner was again in the Palais de l'Europe and was again excellent as was the wine.

## **Sunday**

The final day of the event, all the cars were to be displayed in their different categories around the town. We had the option of joining the pre war MGs in the Market square where there were also a number of MG stalls, or in front of the Palais de l'Europe with the T Types, in the end we decided on the Palais de l'Europe as that was where lunch was to be and we were setting off after lunch. We wandered round the town looking at the different cars, in the middle of the pre war cars in the square (which was packed with people) a dog was fast asleep in the back of a 1934 MG ND Magnette!

Towards lunchtime we made our way back to the Palais de l'Europe and met up with Clotilde and Arnaud and joined other friends English and French for lunch. We had expected a light buffet but it was in fact a full meal again with the choice of red or white wine. During the meal Phillipe Aubry thanked everyone for coming and called for all the catering and serving staff who had dealt with us during the event to go up on the stage for a round of applause. All the meals had been organised by Alex Douchet who is a one star Michelin chef and owns a 1934 MG NA Magnette (his twin brother Philippe owns an MG K3).

After saying our goodbyes to everyone we set off around 15.30 for Rouen and our stop for the night, we did have some difficulty finding our hotel due in part to the one way system in the centre of Rouen but we eventually got there. Although it was June, being Sunday many restaurants were closed, however the hotel owner recommended a brassery that he said would be open. We wandered round the lovely old streets and gradually made our way to the brassery which was full of character and charm and the food was very good.

## **Monday**

We as always woke early and went down to the car around 06.45, the morning receptionist arrived at 07.00 and opened the gates for us to get on our way. We had no difficulty getting out of Rouen and made our way to the motorway, on the A28 we stopped at Domaine d'Harcourt for a coffee

and croissant. As it was a much cooler day, we put the side screens on which did make quite a difference, not only to the temperature but also the noise.

Everything was going well until after passing Tours when just as we were thinking about stopping for another drink, it started to rain heavily! Rather than stop we decided to push on to the next station in the hope of coming out of the rain. Unfortunately it continued to rain on and off all the rest of the way home and our only other stop was at Vivonne for petrol, throughout the event we had no difficulty getting fuel and had filled up on the Saturday night in Le Touquet ready for our departure on the Sunday and the drive home.

We finally got home around 16.45 by which time Angela was more than ready for a cup of tea! The event was a superb very well organised event, we met many old friends such as Brian and Rosie Rainbow who some in the club know, we made new friends including Gerry Brown (the Brown in Brown and Gammon though he left them in the 1990s), who also owns a TB but was unable to get it finished in time for the event.

The event next year is to be 3<sup>rd</sup> -6<sup>th</sup> August in Porto Portugal, entry will open in October and will include a cruise along the river Douro valley from Porto to Regua admiring the vineyards of the region, there will also of course be a visit to a port wine cellar!