

Our Trip to the 70th Anniversary of the Circuit Des Remparts, Angouleme

Peter & Julia Tipping

Fri 18th – Sun 20th September 2009

I hope its OK with our SHVPS members reporting on and using a modern MG on this trip, but it was to go and see vintage racing machines, so thought it might be of interest. Basically it all started over a pint at an MG club night. A fellow MGA owner friend, Mike would go in his MGA with another member, Richard. I decided the MGF would be best for Julie and myself as we were intending to catch up with some old friends now living in central France which would entail a good few extra miles and the “A” really is a bit under-gearred and lacking in storage space for this sort of trip.

In case you are unaware, Angouleme has, with some gaps, held motor races round the same ‘track’ within the city since 1939. This year there were to be eight races for various classes round its 1.28km track which basically consists of three hairpins and three right angle bends, the longest straight being along and outside the southern rampart.

Well the months ticked by and Mike was getting his “A” up together service-wise with the panic of an intermittent misfire which after replacing everything else, as you do, was eventually found to be, make note, bunged-up SU float needle valves !

Come the day, we embarked midday on the Thursday which meant just 40 miles to our hotel at Lisieux that evening. Maximising on autoroute use, we had a great hood-up 280 mile run the next day when there was a little rain going via Alencon, Le Mans, Châtellerault and Poitiers to our hotel at Angouleme, where we were to meet up with Mike and Richard.

Having arrived and checked-in in good time and being unsure of the parking, we decided to park outside the city walls down by the river and walk to ‘centre ville’ which is a gruelling uphill slog, because although the city itself is fairly level, complete with its ramparts, it’s about 200ft higher than the countryside around it.





Barry Foster and his C-type in the pits

Well it was a nice warm evening and there was due to be the famous Concours d'Elegance in 'Champ de Mars' Square. Getting our bearings we found most of the barriers had been erected for the practice and racing on the Sunday. We found the pits area, got a programme and the required armbands for the Sunday's pits and grandstand entry - weekend sorted!

In the well-manicured gardens outside the "Hotel de Ville", Bugattis (2009 being their centenary year), Mercedes and Alfa Romeos; I think all from the Schlumpf Museum at Mulhouse, were being pushed under individual gazebos. A short stroll from there we came across a market square where classic cars were being allowed to park.

In the meantime Mike had phoned to say they had arrived at the hotel, so we knew they were around, but it was in this square that we literally bumped into them! A beer was called for! They had bravely driven up and luckily managed to park on the edge of the square in true continental style.

The thing that really impressed us that evening, were the two attractive girls who arrived in the square in a drop dead gorgeous British Racing Green French registered MGA Twin Cam. But this is France - one of



The Alfas outside the Hotel de Ville

them even had a mink coat draped over the boot ! We later found they were entered in the 'concours', which we attended. Dress it appears may be more important than the cars here. To be fair there were some very nice motors, mostly French, but a lot of English classics like Bentley, Jaguar, MG, Triumph, Frazer Nash, etc. had made the trip too. Eventually a meal was taken outside and with the light eventually dying and we made our way back to the hotel.

The Saturday basically revolved round the 'Rallye International de Charante' This rally is purely for classic cars which leave pretty early and return after 5pm. So we left them to that on what was a pretty damp day and took in the town and



You just don't see this number of Bugattis very often – at pits exit onto track

enjoyed the French basically showing off their cars around town. It was great, how they allow it I don't know, but typically there were actual open wheeled racing Bugattis, Vee-twin three wheeler Morgans and their French equivalent Darmonts and others banging around - all were to be seen racing on the Sunday!. Modern Ferraris were screaming

around town too, they did sound the business down those narrow streets - real petrol head stuff - shame we can't get away with it here. Not a policeman in site!

So come race day, it was to be a very damp and early start to ensure we got the right seats in the right grandstand. We actually parked up in the market square at 7:30 in the dark! As practice for the eight races was to be from 8:30-12:00 it wasn't too long to wait and during that time they worked up a nice dry racing line. The racing itself started after lunch at 2:00, which is when the French arrive 'en masse', standing anywhere with the usual zero consideration for others, so our seated grandstand view deteriorated completely. The racing was furious stuff though and a few casualties were seen to be trailered back to the pits. Ouch...

As entertainment during the lunch break, around 15 open 1930's Bentleys full of passengers were roaring round the track thoroughly enjoying themselves. This is the place to really hear these things bellowing on full song between mediaeval walls - what a noise! You just well-up don't you...

There were also quite a few C, K, P and T-type MG's in the pits and racing, which were of special interest to me. Very impressive



Our MG's parked up early on Sunday morning

was Barry Foster's beautifully prepared little BRG 825cc blown C-type Monthlery which at one point was running in 4th against cars up to 3½ litres until he slowed up with a front wing all askew! We last saw him competing at Le Mans Classic, a fabulous little motor. You can start to understand how these little MG's must have impressed 80 years ago.



A racing Bugatti roaring around the streets

Then the rain started about half way through the afternoon and a mass of umbrellas just do not work. By the last race we'd had enough and started to make our way back to where our cars were parked but then a tropical kind of squall hit town and we just made the Town Hall entrance as it really let go! Eventually it eased and we made our way to the cars. When the decision was made to return to the hotel, Mike and Richard reckoned that the rain wasn't bad enough to warrant the hood, so went for it with just an umbrella hand-held to the screen. People were actually taking pictures of the mad Englishmen! Monday morning the weather had improved and things were drying out. Mike and co-driver headed off hood down to a hotel somewhere west of Le Mans, to return on Tuesday's ferry.



Montmazot on Thurs am at our friends in the middle of France

Up to this point the MGF's hood had been up, but once it had dried off it was down for the rest of our trip! Our itinerary, however, took us east for some 170 miles to meet up and stay with our friends for 3 nights with two glorious days of sunshine thrown in.

Having said our goodbyes Thursday morning, it was topless motoring once again and via Bourges, for a bit of

sightseeing and lunch, we headed for a Chateau on the Loire near Blois. A gorgeous drive...

It turned out the lady running the B&B chateau was a descendant of the original family who had built it in 1758 - quite a millstone I guess. I suppose you could sum it up as sumptuous but now rather tired - possibly with original cobwebs too!

Next morning was another great day for the final 190 miles to Le Havre, but we hadn't had our Moules et Frites yet! To this end it was to be a whistle-stop lunch in Honfleur, all doused in sunshine and back to the car within the hour!

Tom-Tom was given its final task and we made our way straight to the ferry with perfect timing and still the sun shone! The sea was a 'millpond' and the 'UK' bit was completed hood down too, under the stars this time. What a machine, didn't miss a beat for the 925 miles and apparently Mike's "A" behaved herself impeccably too.