



2006 Euroclassic Lille to Baden Baden

After the Spring sojourn into Scandinavia in 2005 the Euro had returned to its usual September dates for 2006. The run took us through France, Belgium and Luxemburg then on to Germany and Switzerland. Numbers were down on previous years for a number of reasons.

One of the problems on these runs has often been just getting fed., particularly on a Saturday or Sunday night. Most of the hotels seem to work on a skeleton staff, as Sunday is normally quiet. Some of the smaller towns we go to also struggle with a large influx of tourists. So this year's run was characterised by lots of stops for coffee and cake, a number of well organised lunches, and a couple of pre-arranged evening dinners.

Our TR6 now knows its own way from Warwick down to Dover, and the M25 traffic on the Saturday morning was light enough for this run to take only about 2½ hours. Previously we would fill up before boarding the ferry but as we now have the most expensive petrol in Europe we decided that we had paid enough fuel duty to the Chancellor, so re-fuelled as soon as we docked in France, before heading off to the start in Lille. Over the years, this city near the border with Belgium has been run by the Spanish (when they ran the Netherlands), the Dutch, Dukes of Burgundy and was then fought over in both World Wars. Now it is the fourth largest city in France and a major industrial centre. It is bigger, even, than Brussels. Scrutineering and the start were in front of the Hotel de Ville and not far from the Porte de Paris, an arch to rival the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.



The first day of the run proper started from outside the Hotel De Ville and took us through Northern France via a brief refreshment stop at the Annevoie Water Gardens. This year the water at Annevoie was confined to the fountains and ponds instead of coming at us from the heavens, so we enjoyed a long walk round the extensive grounds, to use up the calories from the compulsory coffee and cake.

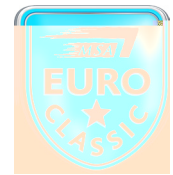
The run then took us through wooded valleys across Southern Belgium and into the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg. Its history parallels that of Lille and Southern Belgium but it has been an independent state since 1867. Its low tax regime makes its fuel the cheapest in Europe so while there are no customs posts, the border is marked by half a dozen petrol stations lined up on both sides of the road between a pair of roundabouts. All our classics duly pulled in to fill up with their favourite brand of fuel. The afternoon stop was at the test track that used to be the home of Goodyear Tyres, but now houses a test circuit that is part of the driving test for all Luxemburgois. This is only feasible as the population is only around 450,000 people, 1/5th of whom live in Luxemburg city.

The driving test includes a unique skid section where hydraulic rams flick the road across under the rear of the car, while you are driving through spraying water on wet tarmac. As we had the hood down on the TR6 we decided to give this a miss. That and the fact that my last attempt here a few years ago, in our E-Type, was a miserable failure. So we restricted ourselves to standing on the bank watching everyone else take a spin.

As Luxemburg shuts on a Sunday night an excellent buffet dinner was laid on in our hotel.

The second day took us into Germany and on to the Trier Hill Climb. This is run on public roads, which were closed for our benefit, and despite me blasting up the hill, using the full width of the tarmac we were caught up by a pair of hooligans in a V12 E-Type. The morning coffee stop included more cake and lunch was a full buffet, before heading off to the Hockenheim circuit, home of the German Grand Prix.

The MSA Euroclassic



Although the circuits aren't the main reason we do this run each year, they are a great addition to a tour through Europe. This is great circuit and suits the TR6 very well. It is fairly quick on the straights and the larger bends but can handle the sharper bends quite well. I did take the first hairpin a little too quickly on the first lap and used up a lot of extra tarmac as well as the rumble strips, but enjoyed the rest of my laps. Having uprated the brakes on the TR6, I now don't have to come off the track when the fluid boils, so just finish when I have had enough. As I pulled to a halt in the paddock the front brakes were smoking and continued to do so for about 5 minutes. Elaine took it for a few slow laps of the paddock to cool them down before taking it back out on the track. After a few more laps in Steve Gash's MGB GT V8 (which seemed unable to get enough fuel through to the carbs) we left for our final stop of the day – Heidelberg.



The name Heidelberg is an adaptation of Heidelbeerenberg, which means Huckleberry Mountain. This is the most beautiful city in Germany – or at least that is what the tourist office says, and they probably aren't wrong. We parked up in the main square in the Altstadt (Old Town) in front of the Rathaus. The Altstadt is long and narrow and dominated by Heidelberg Castle which perches 80 metres above the Neckar river on the steep, wooded hill of the Königstuhl ("King's chair" or throne) mountain. The Germans are very keen on our 'Oldtimers', so our comings and goings attracted a huge amount of interest. To help maintain the quality of the town square we weren't allowed to park our oil leaking classics there overnight and had to drive them back round the tortuous one way system to our hotels.

The city is a vibrant mixture of ancient and modern, being home to one of Europe's oldest universities and full of students, younger than virtually all our cars. As with any student city it is packed full of bars and restaurants so an organised dinner wasn't necessary.

The evening was rounded off by a 20 minute walk back into the Altstadt and across the medieval bridge, where the German troops held off the Allies for a full 22 hours.

Our dinner was delayed slightly as the 1951 Rover 75 Cyclops driven by Andrew Crutchley and Derek Tooley had decided to stick in neutral. They pushed it round the square into their hotel car park and awaited the mechanics. When they caught us up, we finished off the day in true European style. A bunch of Brits, on an Oldtimer Fahrt around Germany, drinking German beer, eating Italian food, served by Italians. And we are less than half way round.

The Tuesday morning took us from Heidelberg through the German countryside to the Bosch Test Circuit. We took our TR6 round the high speed banked test track at speeds of about 80 mph. Entering a banked curve is an odd sensation as the road seems to come up to meet you and all you can see is tarmac. My speed limiter (installed in the passenger seat) restricted the TR6 to 80 mph laps in the centre lane. The serious drivers in their E-Types and Porsches competed to see who would get the highest speed on the display board as they blatted round the top of the banking.

A short run then took us to the Langenburg Motor Museum in the grounds of Langenburg Castle where we were served an excellent lunch in the recently restored Orangery. After lunch, HRH Prince Phillippe of Hohenloe gave us a quick rundown on the history of his family and the castle. It suffered a major fire in the 1960s necessitating a complete re-build. Presumably it wasn't insured, as Prince Philippe's father had to sell 'a couple of castles' to fund the re-build.



It must be tough being down to your last few castles!

A brief stop at the Steiff teddy bear factory and museum broke the afternoon. We resisted the urge to buy lots of cuddly toys, although I was rather taken by a giant bison for 3,560 Euros. Fortunately he was the size of the TR6 so not a practical purchase.

The rest of the afternoon was a leisurely run before finishing in Augsburg. This town was founded in 15 BC by the Emperor Tiberius and has flourished over the two millennia. It is now a thriving industrial city but used to be home to some of the finest goldsmiths in Germany. The town laid on a full civic reception for us in the truly amazing 'Goldener Room' in the town hall, complete with a very informative speech by the mayor which covered enough of the town's history to produce a full TV series.

Wednesday morning took us to the fairy tale castle at Neuschwanstein. We have been to the town before but spent all our time there waiting for lunch to be served. This time we made the steep climb up the mountainside to the castle itself. And it was well worth the climb. The castle is absolutely stunning, perched on top of a small mountain (large hill) and it makes you wonder how they got all the stone up there in the first place.

Most of the rest of the day was dominated by water. We stopped for lunch at a small town on the edge of Lake Constance which had the



feel of a small Victorian seaside town. We were parked up along the lake shore between the cafes and ferries and the cars received a lot of attention while we found somewhere for lunch.

Running short of ready cash we walked into town to find a cash machine and to save time popped into McDonalds opposite, for a quick lunch with Roy Halstead and Graham Love who were hoping their choice of lunch venue would go un-noticed. We then drove down the lake before embarking on a ferry for the 20 minute crossing to the town of Constance itself, shadowed by a small Zeppelin advertising mobile phone services.

The Swiss border is much the same as the Luxemburg one, marked more by cheap petrol stations than customs officers. A cheap re-fuelling stop was followed by a coffee stop at the Rheinfalls, the biggest waterfall in mainland Europe. Sitting on the terrace, overlooking the falls, we were served coffee accompanied by a compulsory piece of apple strudel, which has been a feature of the past few days.

The final leg of the day took us to a wonderful hotel on the edge of the Schluchsee, the largest lake in the Black Forest. Another mayoral address was combined with offerings of local beer, or coffee and Black Forest cake. Schluchsee is an unusual place in the mountains. It is a ski resort in the winter and a walking and trekking resort in the summer. It is a small town of only 2,000 residents but has over 5,000 hotel beds to cater for the tourists. Catering is definitely their strong point as the buffet that was laid out for the evening meal was sufficient to feed a small country.

The last day of the run was a leisurely wind down of only 100 miles on the way to Baden Baden. We managed to resist the urge to buy a clock at the first checkpoint, the 'House of 1,000 Clocks'.





The stop at the glass factory was much more interesting with one of our party volunteering to do some glass blowing, accompanied by some smutty sniggering.

Guess what accompanied the coffee, more compulsory German cake! After a brief buffet lunch the day finished with a short run though the Black Forest into Baden-Baden where we were greeted by the Director of Tourism.

Baden-Baden is an odd place. It feels like a British seaside resort, but much more up market. Being a spa town there were a lot of healthy people about. In between spa

treatments and open air music concerts, they sit in the sun drinking coffee and eating cake. The shops are as up market as the hotels. I saw a really nice jumper for 850 Euros and it is no surprise that the British press reported on the shopping antics of the wives and girlfriends of the England football team. It was difficult to concentrate on the mayoral speech as one of our number (who we will just call Doreen to preserve her anonymity) counted, out loud, the number of times he said Baden Baden (26). The evening finished with a rather slow gala dinner in the Kurhaus as the delivery of the food was delayed. We never did find out where it had to come from – anyway we weren't in a hurry. Fortunately the Kurhaus was only a staggering distance back to a late night session in the hotel bar where Elaine and a couple of the other ladies danced around their handbags to the accompaniment of a solitary piano player.



Baden Baden – so good they named it twice.

For us, the Euroclassic doesn't finish on the last night as we return home at a leisurely pace taking in the sites. The following morning we had a dose of culture by visiting the ruins of the original Roman baths before starting the run back. Friday night we had an unusual stay in a hotel in Saarbrücken on the German/French border. We were lucky enough to get the last table in the restaurant as they were fully booked with a dinner party being entertained by a band of Aztec musicians from Mexico. When we left the following morning, I asked why there was a ten foot round picture of a woman on the outside of the hotel wall. I assumed it would be the founder, or wife of the founder of the hotel chain. But no. The hotel and the adjacent vacant plot were the site of a German concentration camp. The hotel itself was built on the site of the female prison block, and the picture was one of the victims, there as a permanent memorial. The young female receptionist said that this was all a 'very long time ago'.

Having started a number of previous Euroclassics in Brussels but never managed to see the city, we had booked a hotel there for the Saturday night. Worryingly as we approached the city limits, the overhead signs on the motorway said that the city would be closed to traffic on the Sunday. Checking in at the hotel confirmed this. The mayor and city council had decided to have an ecology day. All cars, taxis, buses, trucks etc were banned within the city limits from 09:00 to 18:00 on the Sunday. Great, they could have told us that when we booked the hotel room AND the parking space. Being too late to stay anywhere else we made the most of the evening, walking through the new European parliament buildings into the old city, before eating in one of the myriad restaurants near the Grand Place.

Under instructions from the mayor we rose early on the Sunday, breakfasted and then headed for the ring road before 09:00. We asked the hotel receptionist to tell the mayor that we would spend our time and money in Bruges instead of Brussels. So the day may have been good for the ecology but not the economy. The rest of our trip to Calais, across the Channel and then home was without incident and we are looking forward to next year's Euroclassic which should take us around Spain and Portugal before including the F1 circuit at Estoril.

Should be a great run, fast, scenic and good weather heading south. I think I need to buy an E-Type Roadster before next September.

Tony Merrygold October 2006

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