

2008 Norwich Union MSA Classic

Brod Purdy: Navigator, 1966 Porsche 912 SWB Coupé, No. 265

"From Cheltenham we started..."

On 12 October 2008 over 900 starters in cars dating from 1904 to 1987 set off from eight different start venues: Silverstone; Bath; Norwich; Chester; Dorking; Cardiff; Nottingham and Cheltenham all with the express aim of enjoying a great day's classic motoring over some of England's quiet motoring roads. The 2008 Norwich Union MSA Classic had started.

At the end of the 2007 Norwich Union MSA Classic, Carolyn and I made the immediate commitment to take part in the 2008 Classic, so when details arrived in the post, the cheque was sent. But at that time we had no car; the Porsche had stopped on our way to Plymouth to take part in the 2008 Cape to Cape Tour with fuel feed problems and it was still in the garage. With the event looming, it was obvious that the engine would still not start and e-mails were sent to Porsche specialists who diagnosed the problem...and sent a new petrol pump. That was fitted on the Wednesday night, the car was MOT'd on Thursday and we drove down to Gloucestershire on Friday. All was going well.

Sunday dawned beautifully over the Cotswolds, although there was a slight mist over the Slimbridge Wildfowl Trust. Nothing to worry about on our drive to Cheltenham, but that all changed when we arrived within the environs of Cheltenham and attempted to find the North Place car park...even with the aid of my brother in law's map of Cheltenham. Just how many one-way streets does Cheltenham have? We did manage to find the car park and after a 'U' turn entered and joined the signing on queue. Documentation over, we parked as directed and waited for the signal to drive into Cheltenham where the mayor, resplendent with Chain of Office, waited to flag us all away.

The first section was fairly familiar, but soon headed for unfamiliar territory on the way to our first venue, the Prescott Hillclimb. We were starting off where we had finished in 2007 with superb, quiet roads through some extremely picturesque Cotswolds villages with unfamiliar names: Temple Guiting; Guiting Power, Naunton; Greeton and then Prescott Hill where we directed up the hill climb course... which seemed shorter than when I first visited in 1975! Carolyn drove steadily and afterwards parked in the car park for a short 'comfort break' and to allow me to take some photographs for the web site 'Gallery'.

Then it was off to Coughton Court just south of Redditch. We drove at a very pleasant and comfortable speed taking in the wonderful scenery and enjoying the superb weather along the route, through Gloucestershire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. Some gorgeous villages where some residents came out and waved...some who would remember our cars in period with grandchildren who were just as enthusiastic. Across the River Avon near Pershore then a change of direction through Pinvin and Inkberrow, B road followed unclassified and crossed A roads and Motorways. Some were supposedly narrow but there was plenty of room if careful. Then the wonderful Coughton Court where we parked in a grassy field specially designated for us whilst the public used their own designated car

park. We managed a short break for coffee and a chat (and more photographs) and took the opportunity to discard pullovers and fleeces for the rest of the journey.

From Coughton Court, the route headed North-East before the final direction change to South East and towards the Heritage Motor Centre at Gaydon. The route meandered along great B roads to cross the Stratford upon Avon Canal and the M40 twice, past Wellesbourne airfield, where one of the few remaining Vulcan bombers is still stored, and on to Gaydon for lunch and a short browse through the museum. We've been here so many times since a TR Register event in 1999 that we feel the museum is no longer as visit-worthy now as it was then. So after a lunch of sandwiches made from home-baked bread and followed by homegrown apples, we headed for Silverstone.

Having planned to get back to our temporary home for dinner, I discovered that the Gaydon to Silverstone leg was the longest of the four legs...so Carolyn took the hint and pushed the 912, without ever exceeding the speed limit. Once over the M40 we accessed the B roads, crossed the Grand Union Canal twice and followed the route through Priors Marston, Madford, Blakeney, Greene Norton and Towcester, where we had an interminable wait to join the dual carriageway before peeling off for Whittlewood Forest and round Stowe School grounds before heading up towards Silverstone. Here we started to come across other routes joining us and followed a green MGTF on the Nottingham route the driver of which had, not three days earlier, carried out the MOT on my 912. We drove through the pneumatic arches, collected our medallions and 'goody bag' to the dulcet tones of Graham Robson describing the car as a Porsche 911...it is a 912, Mr Robson. As I had driven the circuit in 2007, this time it was Carolyn's turn. Whilst I do not believe Carolyn would cause the professionals in the Porsche Cup any sleepless nights, for a novice on a circuit, I thought she did remarkably well.

And then it was all over...until next year when we'll do it all over again.

Comments and thoughts?

A more comprehensive map of how to access the North Place car park would have been very useful; we discovered a number of 'No Entry' signs along our preferred route and had to guess the correct road. And we weren't the only ones!

The start venue was terrific...and many thanks must go to the Mayor of Cheltenham who flagged off nearly 100 cars from outside his Municipal Buildings and seemed to find an encouraging '*bon mot*' for all entrants.

The Road Book as last year was (almost) faultless, but minor niggles aside, we got round with no wrong slots...but we did miss the narrow entrance to Coughton Court as the sign was on the navigator's side of the car and I had my head down. But we weren't the only ones.

And finally, because everyone always remembers the last piece they read, a very loud thank you to all the organisers, route finders, road book compilers and marshals along the way. We could not have done it without you...and we definitely hope to see you all again next year...and then we'll know how to get to North Place Car Park in Cheltenham. And we've already booked our accommodation!

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