

### 2007 EVENT REPORT

James May entered the 2007 Norwich Union MSA Classic in his Bentley which was then given away as the prize in a competition. He wrote up his exploits in the [Daily Telegraph 20th October 2007](#).

**James May: It's not easy going nowhere ... But I managed not to crash the Bentley last weekend, so it's still yours to win (competition now closed).**

Last week, I went to a place in the British Isles I'd never even heard of. Wigtown. It's somewhere west of Dumfries and around the corner from that bit where the sea juts in, so it's technically in Scotland and therefore abroad. Unless you actually lived in Wigtown, it would be difficult to conceive of a reason for going there. Ever.

I, however, was there to give a talk at the Wigtown Literary Festival on the subject of my latest book, James May's 20th Century, which is still available at a number of high-street supermarkets and Telegraph Books at an attractively reduced price, yet still not selling half as well as Richard Hammond's autobiography.

Anyway, Wigtown rather surprised me. Firstly, I assumed it would be pronounced "Whitton", as with some other towns with spellings designed to catch out the plebs (Vale of Belvoir) or American tourists (Towcester). But no; it really is named after a hairpiece.

Secondly, it's rather like Royston Vasey with a positive spin. It is a local town well served with local amenities run by local people for local people. I gave my talk in the local distillery, was fed by the proprietor of the local bookshop, had a pint in the local pub and was put up for the night by the local farmer, who gave me a bottle of the local whisky afore he went.

The following morning, I was driven back to the railway station by the local doctor. And this was when I was truly bowled over by the place; or, to be more precise, by the quality of the local roads. Wigtown is not a big town by any standards – I've been in post-office queues with a larger population – but the roads were sweeping, expansive, almost completely empty and altogether superb. And I ended up thinking that if I lived in a place like this, I'd get up early on a crisp autumnal morning and go for a drive just for the hell of it.

But of course I wouldn't, because I've never been able to do this. Given an interesting new car to try out but, like Chuck Berry, no particular place to go, I'll just drive up the nearby dual carriageway for half an hour and then turn around and come back. I've done this with cars as exciting as the Ferrari F430 and the Maserati Quattroporte, simply because, without a purpose in life, I didn't know what to do with them.

This is a bit of a problem if, like me, you're interested in old cars. I have a Fiat Panda for being in other places on time, so the old car is just a hobby, something I drive for fun. But how, exactly, does one drive around for fun, even in Wigtown? I've taken Woman out for a drive in the old car before now and got no further than the local jet wash, because that's where my imagination ran out. Of course there have been times when we've decided to go somewhere for the weekend, and you might imagine that this would be an ideal opportunity for "taking the old girl out for a run". But because we actually want to get somewhere, we go in the Panda. Regular readers might remember that I recently bought an old Porsche 911. It arrives this weekend and I have no idea what I'm going to do with it. I mean; I've already got a car.

This must be why classic-car rallies are so popular. To be honest, I've always avoided such things, imagining that they'd be full of people with otherwise empty lives looking for someone with whom to share concerns about spares availability or ignition advance. Now I realise that without classic-car rallies most old cars would never be used, because there's no reason to use them at all in the pursuit of normal life.

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#### The MSA Classic

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## THE MSA CLASSIC



So I went on one, the Norwich Union MSA Classic, last Sunday. Driving the Bentley T2, I covered several hundred miles on roads I didn't know existed, simply to arrive at Silverstone, wear the tyres out a bit on behalf of the next owner, and come home again. Left to my own devices, I could never have conceived of a route quite so tortuous between my home and the self-styled home of British motorsport, but thanks to the supreme efforts of the organisers I was able to spend half a day pursuing a vigorously driven Daf Variomatic through uncharted areas of Gnarlingshire. At the end of the trip I was given a medal – not for putting in a good time, but simply for enjoying a drive around the countryside and eventually arriving at the finishing line.

Brilliant. I could never have done it by myself.

- James May co-presents Top Gear on BBC2.



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