

# Two Thousand Miles in a YT

## Preamble

I take the view that if you own an interesting car then you need to use it. Of course for some the car of their choice is one that they prefer to only take out when the sun shines and perhaps to a local show. A long journey may be a 30 mile round trip and the annual mileage may be around 500.

That of course is their decision we (Jo and I) think differently and take great enjoyment in the challenge of a long run – a trip within the UK or into Europe – and having been doing just that over the last seventeen years. From 2000 we used a TA to visit France, Belgium, Holland, Austria, Germany and Spain as well as journeys to Ireland, Wales, Scotland and several areas in England.

These ventures were not all Club or Register Events but sole journeys with the TA carrying camping equipment, clothing and spares. We learnt a lot about ourselves, what we could and could not when we had the inevitable stoppage and the joy and help we received from residents as we passed through towns and villages. In France and Germany an old British sports car is viewed and cheered with a passion not always found in the UK.

I will pen an article in the future, if the Editor permits, of one particular trip to Spain in the TA in 2008 when over three weeks we covered 1700 miles.

## Why Spain and Portugal?

During our travels I have always been the driver and Jo the navigator, a role in which she excels. However, she has always been frustrated as she was unable to drive after having to surrender her licence in 1984 for medical reasons. She became the worst back seat driver, which is something that she wont mind me saying though of course will add that her comments are fully justified!



It was therefore with utter surprise and delight nearly four years ago that her consultant, having found a successful means of overcoming her problem, told her that he would be more than willing to support an application to DVLA to enable her to drive again. In January 2015 she was able to take to the road after a 31 year hiatus.



Jo used to use our YA as daily transport to the school where she taught over four years. So this new freedom gave her the opportunity to drive a Y once more, though this time a YT. I should add that she was bitterly disappointed when I sold the TA in 2011 and bought an MGA. She really loved that little T Type (though those weren't quite her words when I acquired the car in 1998!).

Although she concedes that the MGA's lines are superb we both felt that it was very impractical (and neither of us would have accepted the idea of a boot rack as this utterly destroys the appearance!). So I bought a TC – which has a rack, which can be easily removed, just like the TA! I'll have to get the TC spot on before Jo tries it.. although sadly she doesn't like the colour!

Last year Jo drove the YT to all the events we attended and to the MG European Event of the Year (EEOTY) in Le Touquet. When Portugal was announced for the European Event in 2017 our interest heightened. Other than a week in the Algarve ten years ago we had never truly experienced the country.. so here was a chance.

It was though a long trip for just



a three day event. However, our good friend and Y Type owner Victor Rodrigues and his wife Evelyne, whom we first met on a Y Register Brittany Excursion (well a week!) in 2002, were organising a Swiss MG V8 gathering in Estoril, to the west of Lisbon, the week before the EEOTY in Porto. We wrote to Victor and asked if he had any cancellations and whether we could join them in the YT. He did and we were on board with 31 other cars, a mix of MGB V8's, RV8's, a modern TF, and MGA Coupe.



We were delighted to be able to have the chance to catch up with Melvyn Dunster and Mary Musselwhite who live a stones throw from Le Mans, whom we first met 10 years ago in a European Event in Germany and on the last day in Le Touquet. So at least we would know a couple of the participants.

This was several months ahead after being accepted for the Porto leg we looked to booking a ferry. I guess if we had had perhaps another couple of weeks we could have travelled through France, via Cherbourg and south to Bilbao. However, we agreed upon the Portsmouth

– Bilbao link (called a 'cruise') as the Santander crossing was either too early or too late in the week. We reckoned that the 550 mile journey from the port to Lisbon would probably take 3 days to allow for us to look round and act as tourists! (Yes I know that in a modern this could be done in just over eight hours.. but a 2017 BMW is rather different from a 1950 MG YT!).



### Planning the Journey

In the information over loaded world that we live in journey planning is relatively straightforward. We sorted out our stops on the internet. Needing to be at Estoril on the Saturday afternoon, following our crossing we docked at 15.00 hours we agreed on a stop between 50 and 70 miles from Bilbao where we could reach with time to spare before an evening meal. We needed secure overnight parking as a pre-requisite and a few interesting stops had to be ruled out. Nonetheless, we allowed for journeys of 200 miles for the Thursday and Friday leaving a final stretch of 125 miles on the Saturday.

Planning such a journey assumes

that (a) the car will be able to cover 40 miles an hour (b) driving stints of no more than 5 hours (c) suitable stops for coffee and lunch/ fuel etc. Although we have driven the YT across the UK, France and Scotland since 2009 the temperatures have been perhaps no more than 25/27C. Spain and Portugal are hot climates and of course this part of Europe had been experiencing up to 40/42C so how would the YT cope with this?



We had to ensure that car was suitably serviced and upgraded to meet modern conditions and the legal requirements of the various countries. That is Insurance, MOT, V5's etc; Moreover, we had to have our personal insurance and EU Medical Card up to date. Quite how this will all pan out post 2019 I have no idea – but it probably won't be so straightforward.

I had several spares and thanks to Pete I was able to acquire a petrol pump, water pump and head gasket set. I added a half shaft, set of plugs and electrical bits and pieces, a spare dynamo, regulator, tools etc. Plenty of space in a tourer to carry all this stuff!



## Bilbao to Estoril

This leg of the journey was primarily on Autoroutes, which in Spain are largely free but in Portugal are not. The roads were 2-3 lane, excellently constructed, great to drive on and more or less empty.



I don't think that we saw any police (except to attend an accident in Porto) until we reached the border on Day 2. Jo was driving, in fact of 1750 miles driven in Spain and Portugal she drove over 1300 miles – taking over as navigator on occasions when we were arriving close to our B&B and she had despaired at my inability to read the Google Earth map on her phone - 'It's the sun on the screen' I said 'Pathetic' she responded. We then changed positions!

Travelling abroad is always an education – particularly how countries deal with the extremes of weather that affect them. Heat is a significant issue and towns and cities use tree lined streets where the canopies are managed to provide shade. Motorway Service Areas are often in remote spots where there is no natural cover. Covered areas are provided to enable car and occupants to cool down.

Prior to approaching the Portuguese border Jo was concerned as to how we would sort out the necessary payment cards on the highway toll booths. She scanned the internet and I told her that we would be able to sort it out at the border, which indeed we were. A very helpful Portuguese young man outlined the process, took our credit card details and had to note down our registration number manually as the system could not recognise 3 numbers and 3 letters.

He then said that at each toll booth we needed to pass through the open booths denoted by a letter V above them. Very easy!

The benefit of staying overnight whilst en route, rather than blasting straight down to the destination, is primarily that you are able to enjoy and appreciate the culture and environment of a different area and flag up somewhere that you might spend a few days on a future visit. Driving a 67 year old car is of course a challenge in itself and resting and checking the vehicle out is key.



We arrived in Lisbon on Day 6 of our overall journey from home and the

last 50 miles were along relatively busy roads, in contrast to the empty highways we had been along beforehand. Arriving in a city is where a sat nav is essential, I of course hadn't fitted the connection and we were reliant on Google Earth. The signing from the auto routes is minimal and there appears to be a reliance on you knowing where to go – hence the need for modern technology!



## The Swiss MG V8 Event

Clever thinking by Victor and Evelyne meant that the first day of our trip was by coach in a guided tour around Lisbon (or Lisboa as it should be known). This was a real opportunity to spend a full day appreciating what a fine city it is and really worth a visit for a few days. It has echoes of San Francisco with the steep hills, tramways and another Golden Gate Bridge, known as the 25th April bridge across the Rio Tejo. It is though 500 metres shorter and 37 metres lower than its famous counterpart. Opened in 1966 it was designed on exactly the same lines as the original and has the same hue! The day inevitably saw us lunch and enjoy what Victor described as a 'snack'

– an understatement – as it was an extensive buffet!



The daily events were each very different but all involved an 8.30 am start and travelling 75-90 miles on average. This is one of the disadvantages of an event centred in a large city. Each was very different at the end of play the cars rested in a secure car park beneath the hotel. Early mornings were characterised by fettling of the cars by their enthusiastic owners – and I was no exception! It was a case of water and oil checks and a general overview. Normally a ten minute job, although inevitably I would stop for a chat with one of the other owners admiring their cars. Although more often than not it was an awareness raising exercise on Y Types and whilst many were aware of the model very few had either seen or were even aware of the YT. Jo is well versed in the history of the car and is a great salesperson for the Y series in general and the Tourer in particular.

I explained to interested folk that there was a commonality between the Y and their MGB, RV8 and MGA, in that



the Y was the first production MG to be fitted with independent front suspension and rack and pinion steering, and that virtually the same system and parts were used on all later models through to the introduction of the MGF in 1995 – nearly 50 years of unchanged technology. Not many folk knew that!



The YT's performance surprised many and not least the Portuguese members of MG Porto who were present. It was amusing that perhaps seeing a woman driving such an old vehicle took some of them back a bit (and for that matter several of the UK contingent) and Jo's 'spirited' driving was a compliment paid to her and the car.

#### EEOTY 2017 – Portugal

This was the principal venue for most MG owners making the trip to Portugal. It was also the first time that the country had hosted EEOTY although there was plenty of experience to draw upon. The 260 participants in a 130 cars were based in two major hotels in Porto – which was an advantage. The initial registration and meet up was a five minute drive away. We all gathered for an

introduction, reception and briefing. It was evident from this that there were flaws in the organisation – the most significant being communication. Not particularly the language but more the seeming lack of folk from MG Porto knowing what they were supposed to do!



It would be unfair to castigate MG Porto too much, but it came down to simple things – the preparation of an adequate route book from which you could clearly understand exactly where you were supposed to be going. I saw a UK couple in a lovely TA setting out on Saturday morning on one of the rallies and they never made the destination having got confused by the route book.



It was a shame the trips were all potentially excellent. The food was

outstanding and the final night was packed and folk thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The Awards Evening was a bit of a farce but we all got through it!



The final day was a gathering in a large park on the edge of the city. The parking area had been used in the past for local motor sports events and it was a large, open flat site with very little shade from the hot sun. Most of the cars had gathered and it was the only occasion to see the range of MG's present. There were 14 pre 56 MGs (from a J through to a TF – and Peter Wallace's lovely YT!) although the majority were A's, B's, RV8's and F's.

We left with a very good packed lunch, which lasted us for the next two days, and made our way back to Bilbao.

Other than a 50 mile trip to an overnight stop on the Sunday evening, we covered the 550 miles in two B&B's approximately 200 miles apart, leaving a 100 mile dash to the port to catch our ferry home on late Wednesday afternoon.

Jo had booked a Motel Cancun, close to Leon for the Monday evening and I was delighted to find that the 50 units provided an individual air conditioned garage from which you gained access to your room. Food was

ordered from reception and delivered through a dummy waiter. An excellent set up for petrol heads!



We arrived at Bilbao almost 3 hours before departure. We met up with a couple whom we had had lunch with on a cruise down the Douro River, John and Sheila Bennett. I had explained then that my starter motor had packed up in the week and we were hand cranking the car! He mentioned that at MG France in 2016 he had experienced such a problem in his MGA. He had had to rely on push starting as he had left the starting handle at home. On returning home he discovered that the problem lay in a poor connection. I mentioned that the 'Teccy Support Team' provided by MG Porto confirmed that the starter motor was kaput. This had set John thinking and on the dockside he asked if he might have a look at his starter as it had been playing on his mind since our initial chat. He traced the problem to a poor connection on the battery. I had fixed a battery switch and on moving this we bared back the lead and re fitted it with plenty of wire

exposed and were able to achieve a positive result.... Thanks John!

Our journey home was uneventful and we arrived back at 00.15 hrs having covered 2030 miles. Tired but having enjoyed a great holiday and met some really nice and fun people.

### **What did we learn?**

A great deal but significantly that the car was quite capable of undertaking daily trips of up to 250 miles should we have so wished. That the cooling system coped with heat of up to 40 degrees with the temperature staying at 190F. That our fuel consumption is around 26-28 mpg.

The need to take just key spares – plugs, fuses, gaskets, fan belt, gasket sealant, rainex, coil, petrol pump, ties, rolls of cable wire, assorted nuts and bolts, a range of tools but not everything in the tool box (Checking which sizes of spanner commonly used to adjust, tighten, remove and replace items) and in the case of a Y – a half shaft. It is amazing just how much space you can create in one of our type of cars to locate all these bits.

Besides the obvious – certainly a facility to fit mobile phone charger/sat nav, which I hadn't, hazard warning lights (which we had – very useful when nature calls!), plus of course vehicle documentation. I could not find my V5 Form despite looking throughout the

house and had to phone DVLA on the day of our departure to order a replacement! There are inevitably other things that I have missed.

### **Final thoughts**

If you own a pre 56 MG and have never travelled in Europe then do so now and don't add it onto your bucket list. Insurance cover for the car is well provided, the roads in France are open and just great fun to travel along and the folk you meet are wonderful and love British Sports cars. If you breakdown its part of the adventure, it's relatively cheap to stay in B&B's, or camp (though quite what it will be like after 2019 is very much an unknown).

The whole environment of motoring for fun is fast disappearing and no doubt more draconian measures will be introduced over the next few years.

If your partner enjoys driving but never has the opportunity to drive your pride and joy then let her. The open roads across France are ideal. Don't be selfish – you will find an awful lot about yourself and you may be surprised just how adept your mate is at driving and whether or not they enjoy the experience given the chance. There is only one way – so do it and record your experiences with us by writing to Roger!

### **Jerry Birkbeck**

Originally published in *The Bulletin*, October 2017. *The Bulletin* is the official magazine of the MG Octagon Car Club and is reproduced here by kind permission.