

The 2017 MG Meeting in the Dolomites



The View from the Watles Hotel

I have been a MG fan since, while living in England, I purchased in 1971 a red MGBGT for 1200 GBP. I drove it throughout England and even towed a caravan, with 2 children in the back seat, through the Swiss Alps. I shipped it back to Australia but regretfully sold it after driving it for another three years. It did not perform well in the Sydney summer heat. On impulse, about three years ago, having always regretted selling my old one, I purchased a similar model I saw on Carsales.com from MG Club member John Hughes.

I joined the MG Car Club and was attracted to the MG Meeting in the Dolomites that was advertised in the journal by its organizer, Dr Christian Bianco. I had been to the Dolomites several times and it is one of my favourite areas with its spectacular mountain scenery and wonderful mountain passes with their 'hairpinning' roads, just the shot to enjoy driving your MG. I decided to have the car upgraded with an overdrive gearbox and one thing lead to another so that I did not get the vehicle back, fully restored, for two and a half years. I had only time to drive it for a week before I had to ship it to Genoa so as to get it to Europe in time to attend the Summer MG Dolomite meeting.

This was always going to be a risk and sure enough after a few days driving to the Italian town of Mantua the new starter motor failed. Moss in London was completely out of stock and no help but fortunately Bruce Smith at Sportsparts was able to arrange with his supplier in England to ship out a spare and it

arrived the next day. Full marks and thanks to Bruce. The problem appeared to be that the ignition lock was sticking and causing the starter to keep firing. To avoid further problems the clever Italian mechanics fitted a press button starter which has worked well to date.

Fortunately Mantua was an interesting town in which to spend a few days and we still had time to get to the meeting. We arrived at the splendid Watles Hotel, set high over the beautiful Val Venosta, in the evening to be greeted by the organizer, Christian Bianco, and some of the other guests amongst whom were two Australian couples, David and Laurel Godwin and Ross and Shez Letten. These two couples have had the most amazing travels and have circumnavigated the world in their MGs. There were eight cars in all in the group with participants from England, Germany, Austria and Italy, so we were a diverse group but bonded by our enthusiasm for MGs. Australia was well represented with three cars.

Christian had done a superb job with the organization, The hotel was superb with luxurious rooms, all with panoramic views over the valley.

The staff were excellent and the dining room offered a great range of meals and drinks. The meeting commenced with drinks in the basement where the owner George had on display his extensive

James Ritchie

collection of restored cars; Volkswagens, Mercedes, Alfa Romeos, a Triumph Spitfire and a number of early post war bubble cars, Isottas and BMWs amongst others. A great start for the vintage car enthusiast.

The next day we set out on a long 280 km drive. The day was bright and sunny and Christian had gone to a lot of trouble preparing the route and supplying us all with a manual detailing the program and the directions for each day's drive. He had pre-booked the coffee stops and luncheon venues. We firstly drove the magnificent Stevio Pass, up forty eight tight hairpin bends in wonderful mountain scenery to the Tibet Restaurant for our first coffee break. The Tibet restaurant offered a huge panorama of the mountains and the tightly twisting road. The drive up was quite tough with tight corners, steep grades, many cyclists labouring up the mountain in the 30 degree heat and many motor cyclists trying to break the record to the top. The motor bikes were constantly passing the MGs and cutting in uncomfortably closely in front of you. Unfortunately all the mountain passes are a magnet for, particularly, German motor cyclists. However this did not destroy the enjoyment of the drive.

The Stelvio Pass



After coffee we drove on to the Passo Gavia where we stopped for an excellent lunch at the Ristoro "Al Pietro Rossa" an attractive building set in a picturesque valley.

After our excellent lunch we drove back via the Passo Tonale and Passo Palade through beautiful scenery, past mountain lakes, fields filled with wild flowers and through pretty small towns



On top of the Stelvio Pass.

to the hotel. The road surface was rough which was uncomfortable with the MG's firm suspension but the drive worth the effort. It was a long drive and quite a tough one through the many passes and we were all tired at the end of a long day. We enjoyed an excellent dinner before all retiring for a well earned and sound sleep.

The following day was less tiring. We drove through three countries, Italy, Switzerland and the tax free enclave of Livigno. The road was less winding but the scenery still superb. We drove over the Pass Dal Fuorn before we stopped for coffee at the Hotel Cadonai,



Coffee break at the Hotel Cadonai

set in a picturesque position overlooking the mountains

We made our own arrangements for lunch when we reached the town of Livigno. Fortunately our wives were not in the mood for shopping as Livigno is a tax free zone with a wide variety of tax free shops. We had an excellent lunch with Gary and Pam from the UK and Michael and Gerda from Vienna before driving back along the lake

and through the long Munt La Schera tunnel and over the Foscagno Pass back to the hotel. The length of the trip was only 65 km so quite leisurely compared to the previous day but we again drove through spectacular



mountain scenery and were able to enjoy a long leisurely lunch so it was all very pleasant.

The last day was very relaxed. Most of the participants departed and the group was down to three cars. We drove only 47 km but were fortunate to happen upon the Corpus Christi celebration in

the town of Burgeis just below the hotel. The celebration was a big event where the local people turned out in force, dressed in traditional costume and accompanied by a band and a group dressed in uniforms and shouldering Mauser rifles. They carried colourful banners and some of the girls carried cornucopias. The religious ceremony was accompanied by harmonious singing unaccompanied by any music and was concluded by volleys of shots from the rifles. It was all very colourful and we felt lucky to have witnessed it.



We then drove up a beautiful valley to a charming hotel, the Glieshof where we had an excellent lunch in a valley surrounded by mountains. As we had plenty of time, on the way back Christian took the opportunity to take us to the picturesque Churburg Castle.

This is the home of the Trapp family and has a wonderful courtyard with the family tree painted in detail on the ceiling of the loggia.

It also had a superb armoury with suits, some worth several million euros, of armour related to the family and. It had many attractive rooms and of course a dungeon. With its elevated position it had extensive views over the Val Venosta so it was a most enjoyable visit.



Churburg Castle

We then drove to Grindelwald in Switzerland set amongst dramatic mountains including the Eiger. Again the weather was magnificent and we had a few days walking and taking the famous Jungfrauoch railway to the top of the mountains.

The walks in the Grindelwald area are superb with stupendous mountain views and, at that time of the year fields full of spectacular wild flowers of every conceivable colour.



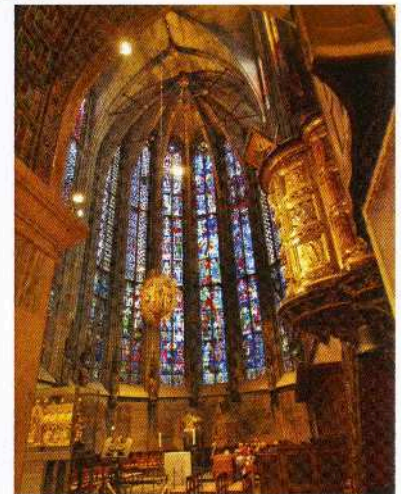
Colmar



Churburg Castle loggia

We then drove up through Alsace Lorraine visiting the many beautiful towns in the area including Colmar, Riquewhir and Strasbourg, all packed with half timbered house, cobbled streets and fountains before making our way to Aachen to view the tomb of Charlemagne in the spectacular cathedral dazzling with mosaics and golden sarcophagi.

We stayed overnight in the historic Roman town of Trier before driving



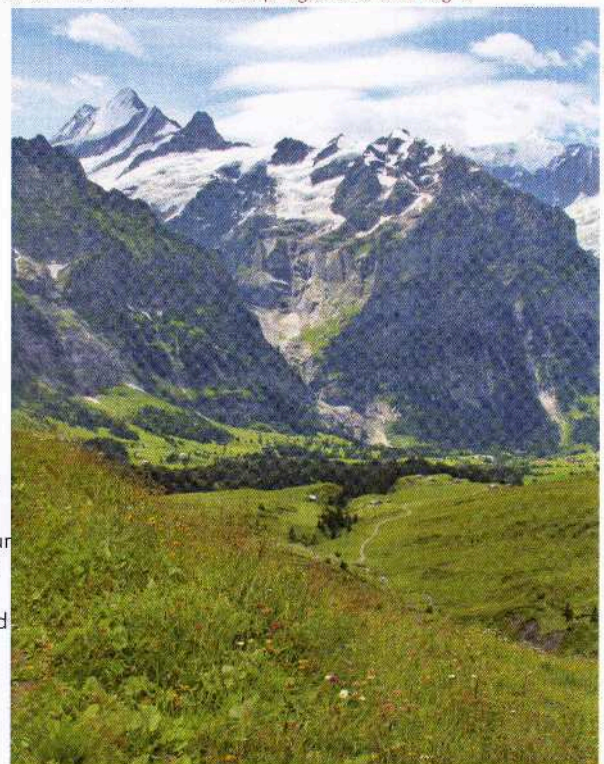
Aachen Cathedral and the golden sarcophagus of Charlemagne

to Ghent. Ghent was throbbing with the annual music festival and the town was full of marquees with bands and bars all pumping out music and filled with people in full party mode. Again a most attractive town with its medieval buildings and canals. We then crossed the Channel from Dunkirk and finished the trip by leaving the car with Edward Vandyk at the Classic Car Safe at Newbury. We hope to pick it up next spring for another tour, probably around the British Isles.

Unfortunately the next day we had to pack up and leave the beautiful Watles Hotel waving goodbye to Christian and his wife Rosalinde and to Gary and Pam McCarroll from the UK. It had been a superb experience giving us the opportunity to drive our cars through beautiful scenery, drive some challenging mountain passes, stay at a beautiful hotel and enjoy the company of fellow MG enthusiasts. We stayed on in the Val Venosta for a few more days to walk and enjoy the scenery.

Unfortunately the new alternator in our car failed and there were no auto-electicians available in the valley to repair it. Christian came to the rescue and found an electrician in Bolzano about an hour and a half away who would help. Again Bruce came to the rescue and had a new alternator shipped out. We hired a car while waiting to have the car repaired and drove through the magnificent eastern part of the Dolomites over the Dolomite Rd to Cortina. Superb weather and a fabulous drive over the Passo de Sella and the Pass de Pordoi with their wonderful views. We returned after a couple of days and were able to pick up our repaired vehicle. A day in Bolzano enabled us to see Otzi the Iceman in the museum. Bolzano is a very pleasant town and well worth a visit with its attractive buildings, museums and churches.

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Walking to Grosse Scheinegg, Grindelwald.