

Water, Water (Nearly) Everywhere!

by Marian Hart



Civic reception in Vaduz

Liechtenstein and Switzerland are now happy memories – a bright oasis surrounded by a curtain of French rain. Forty-two Austin 7's with each year had been waved off from Folkestone by well-wishers. A quiet crossing and we were all keenly assembled on the car deck to 'roll off' – but wait – how can you roll anywhere when the great door at the end of the ship is stuck? An appreciative audience watched amazed as an officer in white shirt and plenty of gold braid climbed up the side of the door and whacked the lock with a hammer, eventually the door yielded amid cheers and the hammer flew through the air in pieces. We were now free to join the queue of cars being tediously processed by the French customs who were 'going slow'! Three days were spent crossing France – a shaking down period during which it rained frogs

and dogs – a period in which we discovered that the wiper was exhausted after half-an-hour, that the faint engine noises detected in the UK were louder in France, that we couldn't get the car high enough off the ground to change a wheel because oil had leaked out of our jack, that the hotel room we had booked from England had been given to somebody else and that there wasn't an empty bed in the town, that the hotel in the next town locked us in at night so that we couldn't make an early start on the day when we had more miles than usual to cover, that the rain was wetter than at home and kilometres were strangely longer than miles!

The dampness did not affect the welcome given us by the French people. They waved and clapped and flashed their lights and photographed us at every opportunity – at Montaldier we went

in procession through the town with the local dignitaries ending up at the townhall for a champagne reception; at Sautieu the local car club met us with their vintage cars and drove with us to Autun for a civic reception where we were generously presented with a cup for the club; at Evian-les-bains they drew back the curtain of rain and allowed us to dry out. We spent two nights at Evian where it was sunny and dry and the sky was blue and we felt our holiday had really begun. Good company in good restaurants, a visit to the hydrotherapeutic centre to see liverish patients cocooned in bright orange robes stuffing across marble floors from one hydro experience to another, a trip on a handsome paddle steamer across Lac Lemman to the Swiss shore, time spent checking over the car and we were ready for Switzerland.

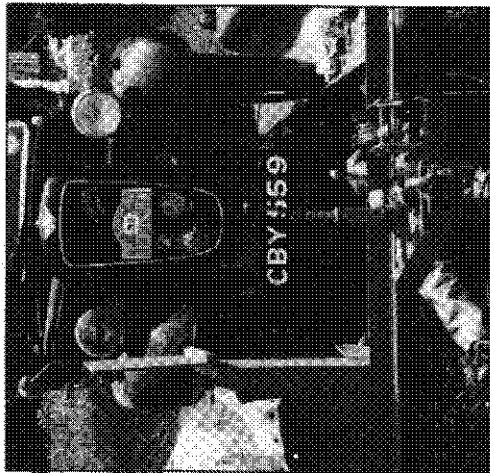
Up into the mountains with the snowy peaks getting closer and the sight of the first flakes of snow by the side of the road – more and more snow until we were driving through a passage recently carved out by a snow plough. The curves and twists of the mountain road prevented us spotting the A7 ambush well supplied with snowballs – when honour had been satisfied we continued upwards among fir trees clad with snow like a giant overdone Christmas card.

A night spent in Brienz on the Brienzensee where the houses looked as though cuckoos were about to pop out of the upper storey – and we were off early to tackle the Klausen Pass, the only pass open on our road to Liechtenstein.

Up and up we climbed with snow laying thicker and thicker until only the chalet roofs could be seen. At the top a welcome café and a car park peppered with Austins. An avalanche had blocked the road just after Reg Nice in his Ulster had driven through. On foot we inspected the fall of snow glistening like icing on a birthday cake and as we looked up at the towering peaks above us more snow could be seen and heard cascading down the mountain. A snow-blower was summoned and whilst we waited at the café the road was cleared for our descent into the valley between great walls of snow where every bend was a photographer's delight.

At last Liechtenstein and the town of Vaduz was reached for a three night's stay and where the sun shone warmly on us as we explored the local bars and cafés; wound our way up the steep mountain road to the royal palace perched on a cliff above the town; climbed even further to a chair lift which swept us up the mountain above the gentians and fir trees to a stony mountainous wonderland. The sun was still shining when we returned to Vaduz for a reception in the main street where, with our cars parked in line astern, girls in national costume offered us local dishes and wine.

A visit next day to Austria to a ski resort for a picnic lunch and our visit to Liechtenstein was over – the time had passed too quickly and we were once again heading back across Switzerland by a more northerly and flatter route. We broke our journey for a meeting with a local car club



Running Repairs for Colin Barber's Open Road Tourer. (Photo: Brian Smith)

who brought three Swiss registered A7's for us to see and some of the members accompanied us to our next destination of Solothurn, an interesting old city which there was no time to explore. We made an early start for our return to France and with the clouds low we crept up the Weissenstein, the steepest climb of the trip. Crews were jumping out to lessen the load – some A7's were driven up backwards, some weren't driven up at all. There must have been a magnificent view from the top but we couldn't see through the clouds. A lunchtime arrival at the Schumpf Motor Museum at Mulhouse where the sight of so many perfect cars under one roof was hardly credible – as far as one could see there were avenues of cars placed symmetrically and outlined by elegant street lamps – countless Bugattis, Rolls, Alfa Romeos, Renaults, etc, etc – all except for Austin 7's, the only one they had was burned, but that is another story.

We were now back under the French rain and at Altkirch the 'Clive Veness Campsite Cooking Con-test' took place in the pouring chats and umbrellas. The entrants however, rose to the occasion and in one instance so did the dish.

Our next stop was Neufchâteau at the garage warmly and also put his workshop at the disposal of a Pearl with a broken crank. Lifts, tools, workbenches and overalls were all offered to the workforce who were also supplied with most welcome liquid refreshment to help things along.

French rain was getting even wetter and the journey to Senlis is best forgotten – on towards Adres we ran out of rain and met for our farewell dinner by a lake. We recounted tales of our pleasure and woe and as we said goodbye to our new and old friends we wondered whether we would shrink or just go rusty!