



# The Crankhandle

July 2022

Issue 75

## NEWSLETTER OF THE HEREFORD AUSTIN SEVEN CLUB

### Editorial

I apologise for the late publication of this issue, however I felt that it was important to delay the issue so as to give a report of The Austin Seven Centenary celebration at Moreton in Marsh Fire Service College. I have written the report in haste so there may be plenty of mistakes in it!

I would like to remind the membership that at the next AGM in February, I intend to stand down as editor and the club will need someone to volunteer and carry out the role. I will have been running this newsletter for five years come the AGM and I feel that the newsletter will benefit from fresh blood and new ideas. Naturally I will support whoever takes on the role and help to ease them into the role.

I intend to continue as a committee member (if I am still wanted) as the website editor and emails services administrator. I also distribute the Grey Mag when it is issued. So I shall still have plenty of work to do for the club.

### Chairman's Natter

Welcome back to the five Hereford Club Sevens that ventured to the Black Forest as part of this year's Eurotour in June. I was pleased to hear they all managed the trip without any mechanical difficulties and look forward to hearing all about their adventures.

The once in a lifetime - A7AC Moreton-in-Marsh Centenary celebration was really enjoyable, with more Austin Sevens gathered in one place than ever before. The whole

event was a great success and from the Chair, the Committee and the Membership of Hereford Austin 7 Club I would like to say A VERY BIG THANK YOU to the ORGANISING COMMITTEE for making this mammoth event a great success.

I would to thank the sixteen members of the club who attended the gathering through the week. From my own personnel experience it was most enjoyable. The accommodation was very good and the food was excellent with friendly and obliging staff. Best of all was the Bar excellent choice of beers at £4 a pint what more could you ask. In the evening there was entertainment every night in the Marquee which was excellent. I think a very good time was had by all.

Hopefully, we now seem to have left most Covid restrictions behind and can look forward to more freedom for the remaining events this summer.

Brian,

### Secretary's Corner

In early June, around thirty Austin Sevens and their adventurous occupants enjoyed eighteen nights away, tootling around the Black Forest area of Europe and five of the thirty cars were from the Hereford club. I understand the HA7C cars all behaved themselves for something approaching 2,000 miles – an admirable achievement - and my congratulations to all concerned.

The five-day A7CA Centenary event at Moreton-in-Marsh concluded last week and over thirty Hereford club members attended for at least some of the days. It seems a good time was had by all and the weather stayed mainly fine. Over a thousand Austin Sevens were expected on the Saturday and although (at the time of writing) I'm not aware this has been confirmed - I can say it was almost certainly the largest gathering of Sevens anyone has ever seen at any time in history. There were A7s of every conceivable type & model on-show – including road going saloons, open tourers, racing cars galore and a host of different Specials. Many of us enjoyed the exhibitions & trade stands – and also, spent hours carefully scouring the A7 autojumble for essentials.

I thoroughly enjoyed seeing Austin Sevens buzzing in all directions around Moreton-in-Marsh and the surrounding area, mostly progressing at steady speeds – but I did spot one-or-two cruising at around 60 mph. Very impressive! Interestingly, I was amused to hear that one of our members was cautioned for exceeding the 10-mph speed limit on the Fire Service college roads. He was unashamedly proud of having been captured speeding in an A7.

Although the strict tone of the build-up to the Centenary event seemed to some of us a little off-putting – I'm delighted to say that the event itself was wonderfully easy-going and friendly. This made for a thoroughly enjoyable experience and on-behalf of the Hereford Club - my unreserved praise to the A7CA for organising such a brilliant event.

Happily, a good number of HA7C members attended the June Club Night meeting at the Richmond Club - it seems we are all slowly growing accustomed to living with the Covid virus.

Happy motoring ..... Bob G

## Chairman

## Events Co-ordinator

I'm writing this amidst preparations for the centenary bash but due to the newsletter compilation process I know that you will be reading my scrawl after our volunteers have finished clearing the Fire Service College site. However our long suffering editor has made some cunning adjustments and provision for reports from Moreton-in-Marsh to be incorporated elsewhere in this newsletter.

Notwithstanding the passing of the centenary, the season of shows and events is not yet over and there are lots more between now and October on our club calendar. Check it out and continue the Austin 7 celebrations by using and showing your car.

## Membership

Membership remains same as last month,

57 paid up members

3 Honorary members

6 Guest members

Total on list 66

19 paid up members for Grey Mag

Membership remains £10 per year which includes family members at no additional cost. Grey Mag £13 per year, including postage.

Brian and myself have been approached by two people interested in becoming members. They have been informed of our club night Tuesday 26th, should they attend, they will be welcomed as we do for every new member!

Can I please remind all members of the importance of updating personal details for club records, if you wish to receive club news, this includes all forthcoming events put out by Events Coordinator David Southcott.

Plus should the Committee need to share official news, up to date contact details are essential .

There is also a very smart new club windscreen sticker which is available for £2.

Thank you.

Julie James

Membership Secretary

### Technical



This photo shows what happens when petrol dribbles down the bodywork if the tank is accidentally overfilled on my Ruby. The damage is obviously caused by the Ethanol content in the petrol I am using, I can remember a time, not so long ago when it was common to clean oily bodywork with petrol! Eddie Loader





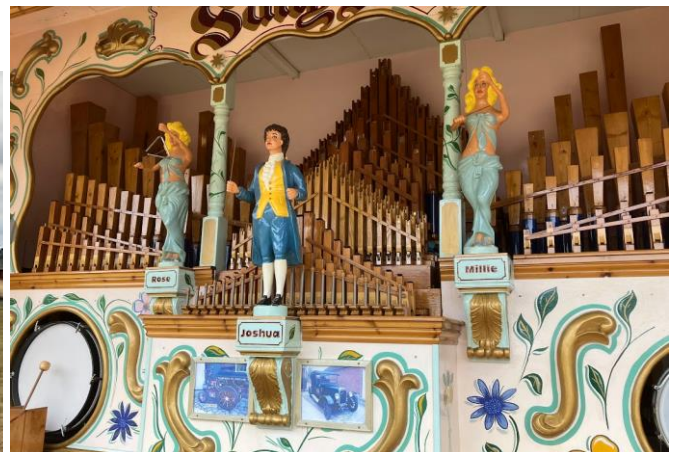
## Members' activities

### The Austin Seven Centenary Celebrations at Moreton in Marsh Fire Service College.

It was a fantastic event and will never be repeated in our lifetime.

What we received for our entry fee of £25 was incredible.

The use of the Fire Service Site. A huge double marquee, four live bands, Hook Norton bar, Street food stalls, a day at Prescott, five tour routes to follow, a bespoke Ordnance Survey map of the area, childrens entertainment, a fairground organ, a unique pop up museum. An extensive program listing all entrants, an exhibition guide, a new book about Stanley Edge, an enamel commemorative lapel badge, an enamel car rally plaque badge. That last item alone was worth the £25!! No doubt I have forgotten to list some significant bits an pieces but the above gives a very good idea as to the extent of the offering. There was also an exhibition by David Mawby of his very original unrestored Austin Sevens.



The work over the last three years by the committee came to a very successful conclusion. Over the week many, many people offered their services as volunteers for various tasks making for a super-efficient running of the event. Good humour exuded everywhere.





"Austin Sevens sir! Thousands of 'em!"



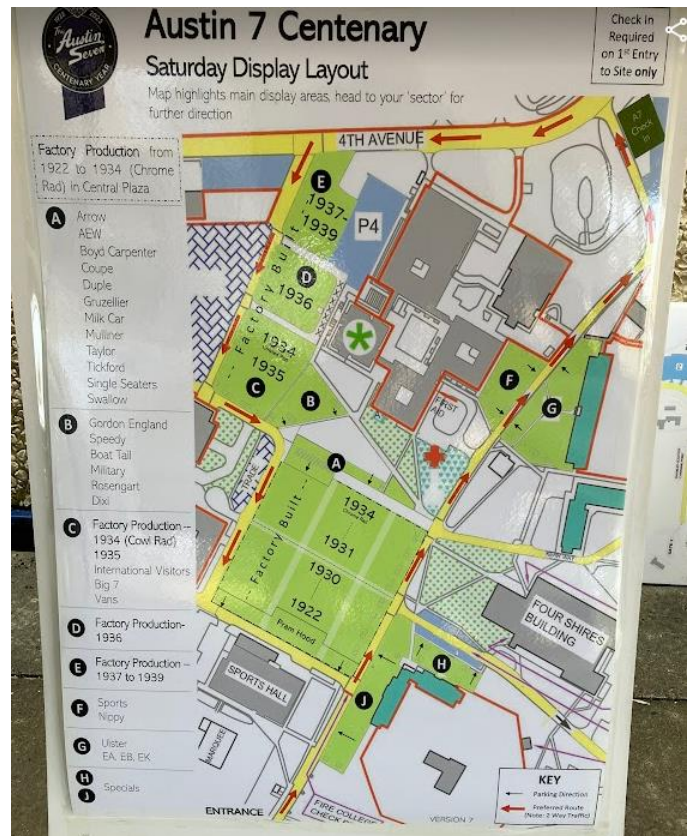
Bob Garrett and Ron Sadler



Club sail and Brian Bedford's and my car



Mike Ward



Eddie and Ann Loader, Brian Bedford, Ron Sadler





The Marquee and dancing

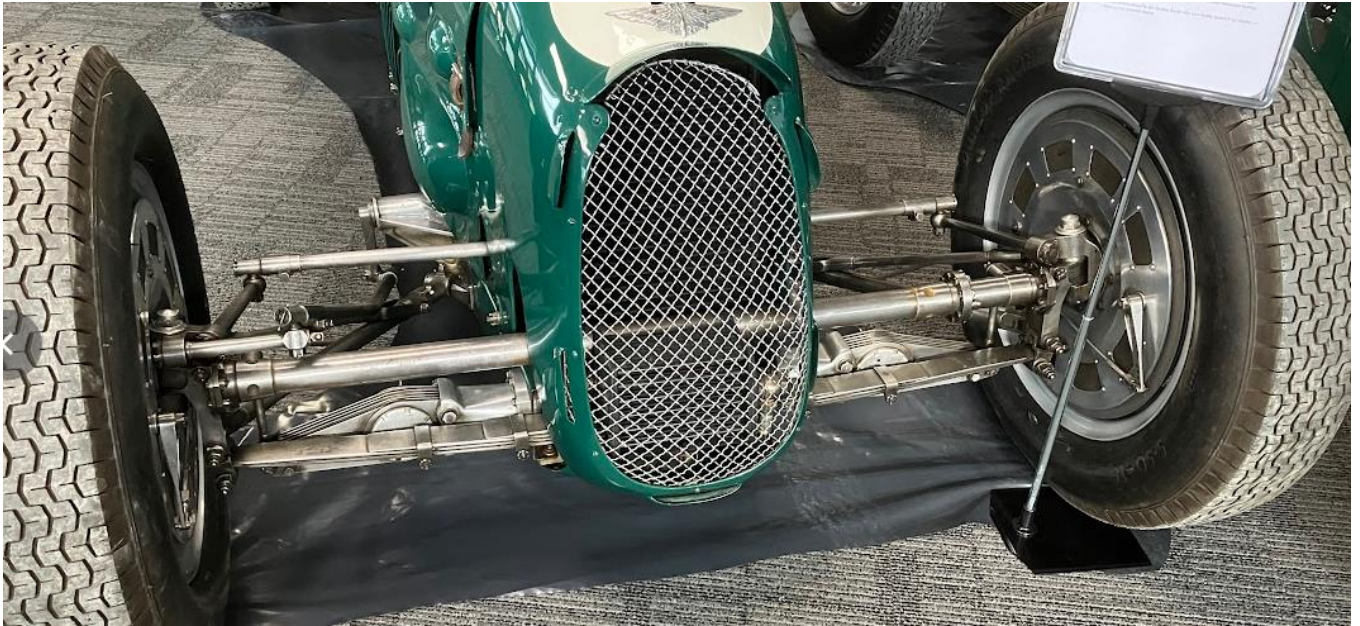


Tim and Christine Francis





Works Single seater Austin Sevens



Front axle detail, wonderful!



The David Mawby Collection



Here are some of my experiences

Tuesday morning I was up early to take advantage of the new early time for the gates to open at FSC due to the extreme heat expected that day. I set off just after 07:10 and arrived at 08:15. The run was uneventful apart from me successfully overtaking a slow lorry while ascending Fish Hill. Despite the temperature I was pleased to note that the car never overheated. The radiator recore and blocked water gallery clean out has clearly been effective.

Check in and registration was very efficient and in no time I was off looking for my accommodation block. This was of course an initiative test! The room key and site plan said Wellington, but the block was actually called Bridges 2! After some touring around the correct building was identified so it was all good in the end.

This is a large site and one soon got used to walking the distances between HQ/bars/restaurant and other areas of interest. My phone tells me that I walked 25 miles during the event and don't my knees know it now! During the day, Brian Bedford, Eddie and Anne Loader arrived. Eddie announced that Ron had broken down with probable fuel issues in Ledbury and had to be recovered home. Ron turned up in the evening with his modern car.

The heat was beyond description that day and all through the night the room was very uncomfortably hot. Thank heavens I brought an electric fan with me.

Wednesday most people went to Prescott, there was a parade of Sevens up the hill and full power demonstrations by the single seaters. I gather this the first time that all these race cars had been gathered together. I was on volunteering duties so did not attend.

The evening entertainment was provided by an Oompah Band, much jumping about and thigh slapping and lederhosen. The huge marquee was full of great jollity.

Thursday was the Centenary Picnic Day, it was a sight to see hundreds and hundreds of people, many in period dress (including me) having a lovely genteel afternoon. Previously I had sold a blazer which no longer fitted me, to an A7 owner. I was pleased to come across him wearing it. I was very impressed with how he and the blazer looked.

That evening I was talking to a chap in the Marquee who lived in Wensley in Wensleydale. I asked "Did you drive your Seven here?", "No, it's a single seater!" he replied. Oops. Unfortunately I have no idea who he is.

Ron's gin club continues apace. Regrettably his submission of gin was sorely lacking and bland. I rectified this by bringing along my bottle of Plymouth strong gin.

I visited the pop up museum several times during the week. There were very interesting displays and films. The first time, I would have stayed longer but the heat was

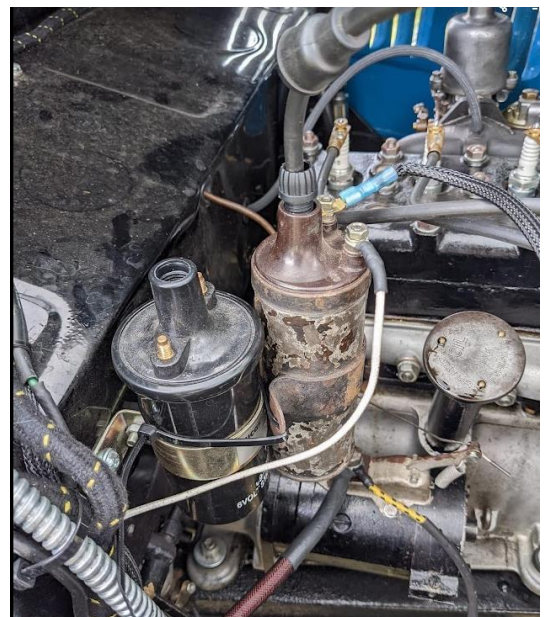
overwhelming and this was after the really hot day. Later visits were far more comfortable.

I came across the fabric saloon I owned 8 years ago. Now owned by Simon Laxton. I had forgotten what an original car it was. I was wonderful to see it again. I very much regret that I swapped it for a Trojan.

Eddie and Brian visited the Wellington museum just outside of Moreton. While there, they came across a Seven owner, Geoff Foster, whose car was failing to proceed. They quickly diagnosed the coil was faulty and quickly strapped a spare working one alongside the faulty one. Amazingly, Brian had a choice of spare coils. Push in ht leads and threaded in type. Further to this Eddie fixed a non-starting Big Seven which had a very weak spark. This was due to the coil being wired up with polarity reversed. He also rescued a Chummy which had a worn cantilever mechanism in the carburettor float mechanism.



Brian and Eddie fixing the broken coil.



Tim and Christine Francis from Germany gave me a call as he had not managed to meet any club members during his short visit here. Met up with him and his wife and showed him my two seater car.

Friday, for me, was relatively quiet. I mooched around the trade stalls. Purchased a pair of chrome windscreen bolts from Willie McKenzie. Looked for a Ruby style horn bezel, was advised to ask Tony Betts on Saturday. Went to the ceilidh in the evening, which was very active but not by me as I'm too stiff in the knees these days to caper about.

Saturday was the day for as many cars as possible to gather at this time of writing I have not discovered if we reached the target of 1000 Sevens, but it seems very possible. Stop press! I am informed by Ruairidh Dunford that 1038 cars attended on the Saturday. I also heard that over 700 cars came to Prescott.









There was also a fly-by of the BBMF Spitfire, it arrived later than scheduled, and quite suddenly. Gosh it was low! You could count the rivets on the wings. It flew round again and dived on to us, waggled it's wings and was away. The Eureka Parade Jazz Band walked around playing and gave a lovely show. In the evening in the marquee we had another The Vintage Syncopators Traditional New Orleans Jazz band and the dance floor had willing jivers strutting their stuff.



Sunday I packed up and left site by 08:30 and was home by 09:30. The car behaved well during the week apart from an annoying noise of tin tacks in a baked bean tin being rattled. No noise on overrun or light power, it's just when one is using what power there is to travel up hills or accelerate. I cannot make my mind up yet as to whether it is the gearbox or the back axle. I am loathe to fix something which isn't broken so I will live with the noise until it becomes more evident what is wrong.

Roly Alcock



**Some members of HA7C visited the South Wales Austin Seven Club at their Bryngarw Rally. Photos by Eddie Loader.**



**Ray Moses**



**Stuart Phillips**



**Eddie Loader has the long distance award 84 miles.**



**Ron Sadler**

**We had a club event in Montgomery**, staying at the Dragon Hotel for three nights. On the Tuesday we visited the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway. Everybody commented on how much they enjoyed the day there. The ticket office was a carriage and one of our members successfully managed to drop his credit card down the gap between the platform and the carriage. The card was duly recovered by one of the volunteers who had to crawl under the length of the carriage to retrieve it. There was also a model car museum at the station (reputedly the largest collection in the UK) which some of us visited.

On the Wednesday we split up and pursued our own activities. I went with Gerwyn and Pauline to Powys Castle and afterwards had a light lunch at Mid Wales Airport, Welshpool.



The weather during our visit was very hot and not at all comfortable for me and indeed some of the cars. Flooding carbs and errant fuel pumps. My car, which had an unidentified noise for some months clarified what was wrong by announcing the flywheel was loose.

In Montgomery, which is a charming town redolent of the 1950s, there is an old fashioned ironmonger called Bunner. I gathered that the family who run it have been there for six generations. Even more remarkable is that they still sell fuel via a boom over the pavement.









### **A7 Centenary Eurotour 2022.**

Gosh, where has the last five years gone to? Such a lot has happened during that time to all of us. In May 2017 we embarked on our first Eurotour, just nine months after the



restoration of the 'Buggy' which I have owned since September, 1968. I had never even dreamt of going outside of the UK with it, let alone to the Austrian Tyrell. It was such a fun adventure that we knew that we wanted to be part of the 2022 Eurotour to the Black Forest in Germany and Alsace region in France. The preparations started in 2019. The Covid pandemic followed, would there be a 2022

Eurotour? As time went on, more entrants dropped by the wayside so from fifty five expressions of interest, twenty eight cars finally left the UK.

At 8.30 am on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> May, Gill and Michael Harcourt arrived at our house for the first stage of the journey, which was to Redhill in Surrey. Initially, my heart sank as I peered over our front wall to see: a tool roll laid out in the road, a carburettor, and the bonnet up. However, my fears were unfounded as the spare carburettor was soon on Michael's car and we were off on our adventures.

The weather was dry and the route through Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Berkshire good for Austin Sevens. A picnic in glorious sunshine on the Marlborough Downs ensured that we were in the recreational mood. A little further on, heavier traffic was encountered around Basingstoke, the Hogs Back and Surrey and almost to our destination for the day brought us to a grinding halt in the middle of Dorking with static traffic and blue flashing lights. Unfortunately, not a police escort for us but a naked man. My navigator spared me the detail but save to say, Gill and June had to be restrained by their drivers. Eventually, our Seven's came to rest having completed 162 miles.

Monday started dry but we were aware that the forecast was not good. We started with the long hill up and out of Redhill on the A25 and by the time of our scheduled coffee stop at Leigh near Tunbridge Wells, we were experiencing really 'wet' rain, so the hood went up. The pub for coffee was however closed so, we pressed on to Pembury. From there on, the weather got wetter and by the time we were joining the short four mile stretch on the M20 at Folkstone, it was a deluge. It was a comforting sight to see other Austin Seven's in the car park at the Holiday Inn at Dover and it was not long before we met up with Carmen and Kip Waistell, Jane Turner and David Fowler and Jean and Michael (Mick) Ward. So, we now had four Hereford A7C members and Jean and Mick from Cambridge. Sadly, Janet and Graham Baldock (HA7C) were unable to come due



mainly to their recent house move. Eighty nine miles covered today but it was enough in view of the inclement weather.

Tuesday dawned dry and an impressive sunrise, which was so blinding that it caused June and I to go around the Round-a-bout twice, because we were blinded and could not see the A2 down into Dover! Even at 6.30am the docks were humming with activity and we were soon joined by other Austin Seven's booked on the Irish ferries boat to Calais. Jean and Mick and ourselves, had chosen previously to change our booking from P&O, in view of the controversial sacking of the P&O workforce. By the time that we were leaving Calais docks, it had started to shower but when we were clear of the Calais area it was becoming drier. In the distance ahead we could see Carmen, Michael and David and also John Naulls Chummy from Scotland. Behind us were Sue and Bob Ansingh from Leicestershire so, it was no wonder that there were many French people waving to us as we passed through the various villages.

We had a most enjoyable journey during our first day and soon seemed to be at the village of Souchez, where we were to stop and visit one of the immaculate World War One British cemeteries, La Cabaret Rouge . June's Uncle was buried here and was sadly killed just before the end of WW1 at the age of nineteen. Jean and Mick accompanied us and we then moved on to the well-known Canadian cemetery at Vimy Ridge, a most impressive

memorial. Gill, Michael, Jane and David were just leaving when we arrived. After an hour, we continued to our destination, the Mercure Hotel in Arras. We encountered very heavy traffic in Arras as it was 'rush-hour'. At this point, Jean and Mick's 'Box' saloon decided to have a rest! Nothing was



moving so we did not hold anyone up. Two Frenchmen helped push the 'Box' to the centre reservation whereupon the problem was identified as an overheated coil. While we were allowing it to cool, June exclaimed that the Mercure Hotel was right in front of us. The 'Box' started and the forgiving traffic around us allowed us to cross six lanes to enter the underground car park. Total distance today, ninety eight miles.

Wednesday brought lovely sunshine and comfortable temperatures. The drive from Arras was to take us into Picardie but first stopping in Laon to accept a kind invitation from the Mayor at the Town Hall to attend a civic reception. The 'Old Town' and magnificent Cathedral, is on a hill and can be seen for many miles before getting to the outskirts. Sue

& Bob in their Four Seat Tourer and Jean & Mick passed through a set of traffic lights in the town but we were caught by the red light. Inevitably, we lost them so we just aimed for the Cathedral high above us. The whole of the town square had been reserved for Eurotour Austin Seven's and it made a wonderful spectacle on our arrival. We were heartily welcomed by the Mayor and his staff and shown into a magnificent function room where sparkling wine and canope's were taken. The Mayor gave a welcome speech in French and it was helpfully repeated in English by Kip (Waistell).

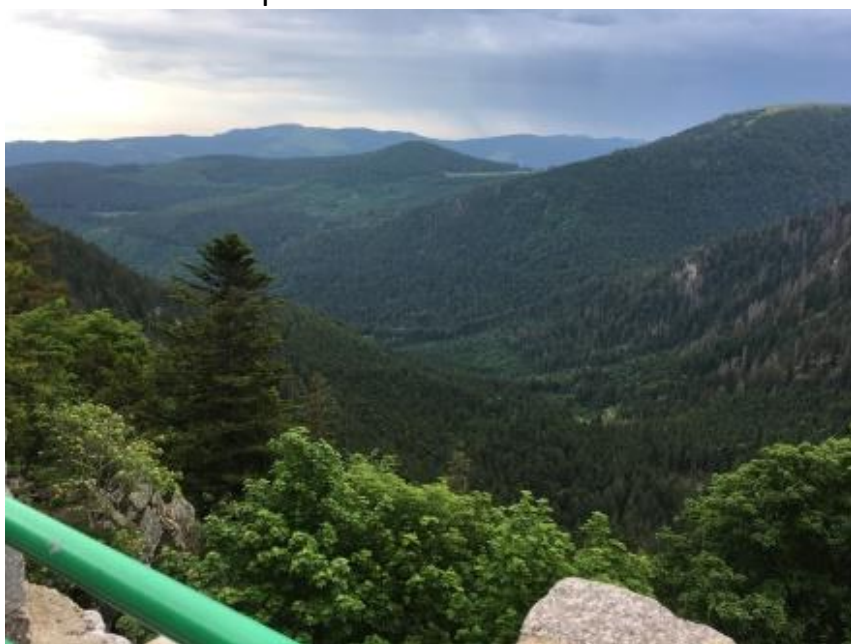
After the reception and also visiting the Cathedral, we negotiated rush-hour traffic yet again and drove the fifteen miles to our hotel situated on a lake at Chamouille, beautiful setting and a lovely sunset. Miles today, ninety six.

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup>. May was the last of our one night stops and today we headed for Metz.

The sunshine was glorious and the route, perfect for Austin Seven's. All went well until about twenty miles before Metz, when we came upon a 'route barre'. A new road had been built and opened after the A7 route had been

researched. It was also very humorous as well as being frustrating as there seemed to be Austin Seven's going in all directions. No sooner than we set off again it became apparent that we had collected a further four A7's to our little group of four. Eight A7's finally turned into the car park of the hotel and inevitably, lots of chat over a pre-dinner drink.

Total today, 163 miles.



Friday's route took us over the River Rhine from France into Germany onto our first challenging hills which would take us down the other side to the Black Forest. A scintillating drive negotiating countless hairpin bends up some challenging gradients. June and I were leading as we left the last



filling station before the climb. Sue and Bob were behind. We climbed and climbed, all the way to the top, both cars in third gear the whole way. Finally, at the top, we pulled in and opened the bonnets. Seven minutes later, Jean & Mick and Jane & David appeared, all of us pleased with how our little cars had performed. From leaving the summit, it was all downhill into Freudenstadt. Finding the hotel on the outskirts was a simple task and here we would be staying four nights. Today's mileage, 157.

Wall to wall sunshine started Saturday market day in Freudenstadt. June and I walked across beautiful wild-flower meadows down into the town and sitting having a coffee later made us realise that the planning and journey to the Black Forest, was all worthwhile. The architecture of the buildings demonstrated that this town was perfect for us with its history and present day function as a ski resort in winter and during our stay, a summer retreat.

After a hearty breakfast on Sunday, we joined forces with Sue & Bob Ansingh (Leicestershire) and Ann & Stan Price from Cumbria, to travel 'over the tops' to the Spa town of Baden Baden, some forty miles away. This was a wet start but by the time we reached the top of the 'High Road', it had stopped raining. Unfortunately, the distant views were misty but the sun shone on our extremely picturesque route and we dropped down into Baden Baden in Glorious sunshine. A very interesting Spa town with lovely architecture but time went far too quickly. We decided to take the 'Low Road' for our return journey but were all surprised that firstly, it was almost as high as the 'High Road' but mostly, that the hills and hair-pins were steeper and sharper. The villages were lovely and the views were clear, allowing us to see as far as Strasbourg. On our return to Freudenstadt we found a delightful little restaurant for a typical local evening meal. Total miles today, 78.

Monday dawned another glorious day. June and I took ourselves off to the railway station and boarded a train to alight four stops later on the other side of town. From here we climbed the hill out of town to an ancient look-out where-upon, we trod the 283 steps to get magnificent 380 degree views over the surrounding countryside. I have to confess that just before we got to the look-out, we stumbled upon a little wooden shack with a little man in it with a fridge full of ice cold beers! What an oasis. The two hour walk back to the hotel was most enjoyable and prepared us for a well earned swim in the hotel pool. No miles today; in the A7 that is!

Tuesday was departure day from Freudenstadt and our route would take us from Germany back into France. *To be continued in the next edition of the Crankhandle.*

**Michael Ward.**



Although we are beyond the 50 mile suggested distance from Lubenham, we have been asked to post this vacancy position for A7CA archivist. So as to widen the net to find an interest. I have a job description if anyone is interested that explains more about the role.

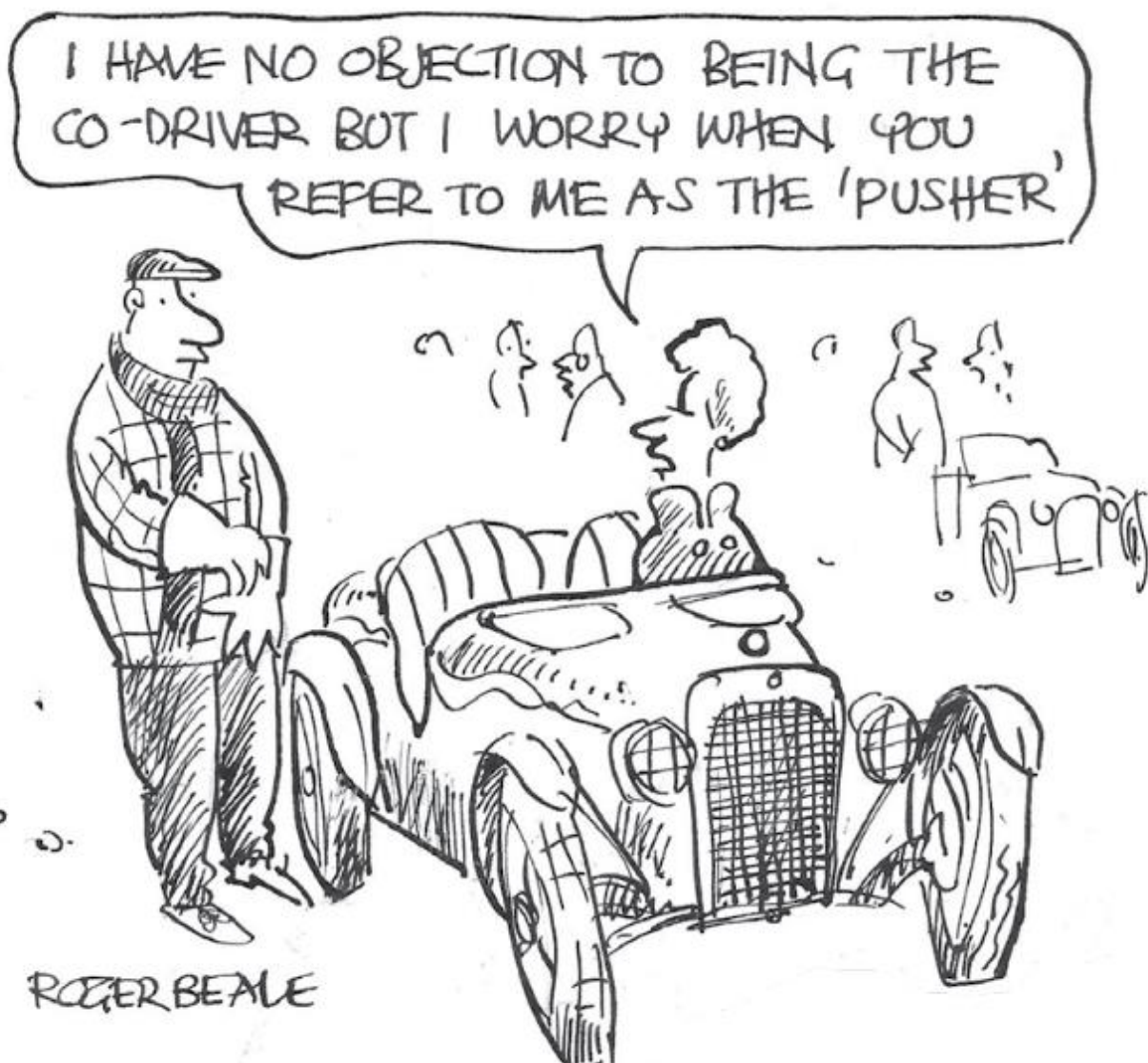
A7CA - Archivist Role Opportunity

The Austin Seven Clubs' Association are looking for a willing volunteer who would like to take up the exciting opportunity of becoming the next Archivist for the Austin Seven Clubs' Association.

The current Archivist, Hugh Barnes, has stayed on slightly beyond his tenure to see the Centenary Year out and will be stepping down at the AGM in April 2023.

This is a great opportunity for someone to take over the Archivist role and be at the centre of the Austin Seven movement for a period of three years, which can be extended to six years if so wished.

If you are interested in this most interesting and valuable role please contact Hugh Barnes by email on [archivist@a7ca.org](mailto:archivist@a7ca.org) or by telephone on 01223 573273 to discuss further.





## Market Place – For Sale

### A message from Dave Price

I'm thinking of selling my Austin, perfect for someone looking for a nice one.

Not concourse but very tidy inside and out.

I'm thinking offers over 10k

**Dave Price** 07859384728





## **1927 AD Chummy for sale £15,000 ovno**

Good running order, and runs reliably. Nice original car. Hood and side screens recovered. Car is for sale as I have other Austin Sevens and wish to start a new project.  
Phill Lane. lanefamily5@btinternet.com 07971 957337



## **Austin 7 Ruby Mk 2 1937** **FOR SALE**

Nice smart car, surplus to requirements with original Reg No. Lots of recent work to ensure reliable motoring. Drives well on nearly new correctly sized 4.00x17 tyres

Details from treasurer@ha7c.co.uk  
£6850





## Available Club Regalia

**New Style Windscreen Stickers   £ 2.00**

**Sew on   Embroidered badge   £5.00 (Previously £10)**



**Badges available at most monthly meetings. There are limited stocks.**

### **Tail Lights**

A doctor visits an elderly patient in her nursing home and asks how is she getting on with her new hearing aids. To which she replies very well thank you doctor, I haven't told my family yet, they have visited five times in the last couple of months and I have heard all they've said and changed my will after four of the visits.

### **HA7C Committee contact details .....**

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HA7C website

<https://www.ha7c.co.uk>

Herefordshire Austin Sevens Forum

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/357904524672062>

### **Some other useful resources on the Internet**

Austin Seven Friends

<http://www.austinsevenfriends.co.uk/>

Austin Seven Clubs Association

<https://www.facebook.com/thea7ca/>

The Federation of British Historical Vehicle Clubs

<http://www.fbhvc.co.uk/>

Austin Seven Group on FB

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/8069487412>

Cornwall Austin Seven Club

<http://www.austin7.org/>

Bristol Austin Seven Club

<http://www.ba7c.org/>

Dorset Austin Seven Club

<http://www.da7c.co.uk/>

South Wales Austin Seven Club

<http://southwalesaustinsevenclub.com/>

Red Cross Directory of Parts, Products and Services <http://oldcarservices.co.uk/>

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HA7C Newsletter July 2022

# THE TALE OF BRIAN THE SNAIL

Part 4 of May-June 2007

## Chapter Four

### Into Asian Russia and the Siberian Forests



**Siberian Road- main road to Moscow!**

Tuesday 29 May

At customs point at 8am, and only half a dozen cars there. Let through at 9am only to have to return to a building where we had to complete a declaration form. Chap took forever and a day translating what I had written into their own script and typing it onto a form with just one finger. Wanted to know why we were not exiting at Tsaaganuur in the west of Mongolia as originally anticipated, but no real problem in that respect. Met three young French who had driven from Lille, and who had not had to pay for a single night's accommodation so far, having either stayed with people or camped. They were intending to go on to Tibet and Nepal, but having declared that they wanted to import their old



Citroen into Mongolia and sell it there, (continuing their journey on foot, hitching and by train), a demand for 4,000 dollars had been made by way of import duty. The Mongolians penalise any car which is old, and theirs was ten years old. With the help of the French Embassy on the phone, they had managed to lower the figure to 2,000 dollars, and were still trying to lower it further.

Through Mongol customs by 10.30, and drove to Russian border post, with eight cars in front of us. At 11.30, the first car was still waiting to go through. Lots of form filling seemed to be going on, and baggage being closely inspected. By 12.45, there were only three cars ahead of us. Slowly but surely, we were making our way to the front. 1.30 at passport control at last, where we learned that it was now 2.30 as Russia was one hour ahead of Mongolia. 3.00 we were in the Customs shed, and had been told that our Ingonord insurance, bought as a top up from a Finnish company as basic Russian insurance was too low, was quite sufficient and that we did not have to buy basic insurance on top. I had expected to pay Ten Pounds perhaps, so no big saving - but every little helps. At 3.30 we were still in customs. I had put "Mongolian bow" down on our declaration form under description "weapon", which was a bit silly, but then I find it difficult not to follow the letter of the law. We were told to do the form again, and just to write down "souvenir" and that was that. We were on our way at 3.45 Russian time, so had "only" taken 7  $\frac{3}{4}$  hours! At about 9.30pm we reached Ulan Ude.

After we left Russian customs, the noise from the clutch, which had been just chirrupy, became absolutely awful, sounding like a bag of nails being thrown around in a tin container. The noise was there in neutral as well as when the car was in gear. We stopped at the roadside, and were soon asked if we were OK by a passing motorist. I explained the problem, and we were led to a scruffy little garage, the proprietor of which smelt badly of alcohol. He looked around the car, I drove him up the road a hundred yards, and he pronounced a loose exhaust pipe, which was rubbish. We left, crawling at 10mph, intending to limp to Ulan Ude best we could. However, after about ten minutes, the noise suddenly stopped, and not only that, there was no chirrup either. Brian went well the rest of the day (bar a bit of vibration at one stage which we put down to the road surface) with not a sound from the clutch.....but next day the chirrup was back. Even with hindsight, the awful noise was inexplicable....it cannot have been the prop shaft as the noise was even there in neutral, so perhaps a stone had ventured into the clutch area, then dropped out? Anyway, the drive to Ulan Ude was through virgin steppe, bursting with millions of wild iris, the vast majority light blue, but a very few yellow as well. Gorgeous countryside with no hedges or fences, just rolling green hills, rivers, pine and birch trees.

As we slowed to enter Ulan Ude, some locals adopted us, and led us to one hotel recommended by Lonely Planet, but it was full. They led us to another, which had a room available, but no hot water as there was "a problem". A bit like the night before! Our room was on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, and actually we could use a shower room on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor if we wished. Brian had a garage, though we had to be out of it by 7am for some reason.

I felt that Brian was going to make or break me. What WAS that awful noise? Could not worry too much as we were committed to the trip, and either we would make it or we would not.

Using animal noises, we ordered chicken for the meal, and get pork. Must practice more. Cannot quite understand how a chicken noise can sound like a pig? However, waitress did seem a trifle thick to say the least, so perhaps she has never heard what animals sound like.

Ulan Ude, and the region around it, was out of bounds to foreigners till the late 1980's, with sensitive border installations, a secretive aircraft factory, and a private airport that still does not appear on any maps.

Drove 142 miles, so total now 1,352.

Wednesday 30 May

What a day. Woke up at 6.45 and left by 7.30 to cover the alleged 7 kilometres to the monastery of Ivolginsk Datsan, the centre of Buddhism in Siberia, where we hoped to go to a morning service. It was more like 25 kilometres, so naturally we were constantly asking the way, which was back on the road on which we had come into Ulan Ude. Eventually reached the monastery at 8.45, just in time for the 9 o'clock service. We stayed for an hour, and to be honest, the droning of the monks was a bit monotonous, but it was interesting to see what went on besides. For example, the chief monk sitting on his "throne" and getting onto his mobile phone midway through the service, and an old lady coming in and sliding up and down on a wooden contraption. She had to grasp a block in each hand, then slide forward - the blocks following two grooves worn in the floor - till she was prostrate, then slide back to a kneeling position, and this was repeated three times. Good for the tummy muscles. During the service the monks were given cups of tea and what looked like Turkish delight or marshmallows. Many of the "god" figures in the temple were surrounded by sweets, and icing sugar shaped into canopies.

Retraced our steps to Ulan Ude, then took the road to Irkutsk. On our journey we had lots of police stops, but very, very rarely were we ever asked for papers. This particular stop was the only one where we had to produce passports- thank goodness, for Carmen realised she had left them at the hotel of last night, where she had had to deposit them for registration. At worst, we would have discovered this at Irkutsk, and have had to retrace more than two hundred miles, but as it was, we had "just" one hundred miles to go back to Ulan Ude. Nevertheless it was extremely annoying, as one hundred there and a hundred back represented seven hours driving wasted, and I was tired as it was. Coming on top of Carmen's loss of Two Hundred Pounds in the Black Market at Ulaan Baatar, I had no patience to spare, and Carmen rather felt the lash of my tongue, I have to admit. We left Ulan Ude for the third time at 6.30pm, and really tired, but had to make at least a start towards Irkutsk, so we did about 60 miles then stopped for petrol. No sign of any hotel so asked two lads on a motor bike if they knew of anywhere, and they led us to a nearby village in which there was a sweet little guest house, where were the only



guests. Gave them some cigs as a “thank you”. Had a shower and in bed writing my notes by 9.45. Hosts were Mr and Mrs Sergei Gorbachev- but no relation!

Russian petrol filling is different. You have to guess how much you need, and then that is what is delivered, once you have paid. We did not need to worry, however, if we overestimated, as we were always given a refund. No gauge on Brian, of course. Had to watch the petrol levers too, as they either delivered a trickle, or a torrent. This pump did neither, for as soon as I took the filler pipe out of the pump, it started delivering petrol before I could do anything. It went all over our baggage, over the seats and into the foot wells.

Many drivers today tried to get us to stop for a chat and photos, but we could not oblige as we would have been permanently stationary. The drivers would come alongside and try to wave us down, or stop ahead of us, get out of their cars, and try. We must have had our photo taken hundreds of times in Russia, usually on mobile phone cameras held out of side windows by passing motorists. All very friendly, but one or two a bit the worse for drink. We did actually end up on a Russian lorry drivers’ blogsite, with quite a few photos of us and Brian

We had been told by Y that the Irkutsk to Moscow road was frequented by lots of Japanese cars being driven from Vladivostok to various parts of Russia. Well, we came across plenty of them usually in groups of five, covered in mud and dust...and these were going to be sold as new cars! The road beyond Ulan Ude to Vlad does not really exist other than as a track, and I cannot imagine anyone really wanting to buy such a car after such rough treatment. I understood the cars were cheaper than “usual” because they were right hand drive.

Lots more wild flowers today, and alpine scenery for first 30 miles or so, whilst following a winding river. Just before we were stopped by the police, we had a glimpse of Lake Baikal, and it was a bit of a disappointment. Huge, of course, being about 400 miles long and about 35 miles wide in parts. It has enormous depth – being up to a mile deep, so it’s the world’s deepest lake. The guide book says that 25 million years ago it was three times deeper. Difficult to take in that it contains one-fifth of all the world’s fresh water- more than the five great lakes of North America combined.

Chirrup there from time to time, and now I also definitely do have a vibration in the prop shaft. I did not know it then, but the two were connected! One loose bolt on a joint in the prop shaft, which I had tried unsuccessfully to tighten, but could not, as thread worn.

280 miles today, total now 1,632.

Thursday 31 May.

We did two hundred miles along what was a pretty awful road, and not much to see of Baikal as we always had the railway embankment between us and the lake, or forest.

However, when we rounded the end of the lake, there was quite a view, but then we had a terrible fifteen miles uphill slog along dirt road with dreadful potholes.

Stayed at Hotel Rus in Irkutsk, which was fine, but a bit dear at £41. In fact the Lonely Planet book was miles out in its pricing of Russian hotels and meals, and though it was a three year old edition, the differences were a bit extreme- sometimes out by a factor of three!

Had a brief look round centre of town and looked at the two main churches, which were boring. Not like churches as we know them. There is no seating, so during services you need stamina- though it seems you come and go as you please rather than, as we do, having to stay in your seat for the whole service. The service area, if I may term it that, is often a room with a low curved roof, and not at all “holy” in atmosphere, indeed with little atmosphere at all. Irkutsk was/is known as the Paris of Siberia, but whilst one can tell from the buildings that is certainly was once very elegant, it now looks scruffy, and down at heel, and unfortunately many old stone buildings are surrounded by modern tat. The main cathedral was demolished in the days of Stalin, of course. Quite a few nice old timber buildings, but looking sad, and most probably will not survive another twenty years unless there is a change of attitude.

The city was founded in 1651 as a Cossack garrison town, and became eastern Siberia’s trading hub. Three quarters of the city burnt down in 1879, but a gold rush immediately after the fire restored the fortunes of the city. After the Revolution, it became a centre of anti-Bolshevism, and only succumbed to the Reds after the head of the White Army, Admiral Kolchak, was captured and executed in 1920

Lots of photos taken by passing import cars.

Ate at “London Pub” and it was quite good.

We have done 1,832 miles

Friday 1 June

I was worried about the noise from the prop shaft, so stopped at a tyre/exhaust garage that let me use one of their pits to check under the car. I put in two new bolts at the relevant joint, changed the engine oil and gave the car a greasing. In fact most days Brian got the grease gun. We had done about two hundred miles, some of it over pretty awful road, when we stopped for petrol. On the other side of the road was a wedding party, the bride in her flowing dress, and they were having drinks. Peculiar place to do so! A fellow came over and invited us to come and have a drink. The bride wanted to have her photo taken in the car, and ignored my advice about getting oil over her dress. Carmen was handed some champagne, and I was given some vodka. I said I was a bit worried about Russian police, and told not to worry by our “host”, Valodja, as he was the local police chief, and the groom was one of his junior officers. Got out the pipes for a little



piping, and we were invited to the wedding feast, where I “performed” again....but first, Brian was decked out with blue ribbon and a balloon on the radiator.



**Russian Wedding**



**With Chief of Police at Wedding**

We went to Valodja's house to wash and change, then to local "salle des fetes" for an excellent meal, dancing and so on, (me included- received some invitations I could not refuse from one of the girls sitting opposite me. Usually I detest dancing), till very much under the weather we were taken home and I cuddled up to the family dog and fell asleep immediately. I think there was a firework display at some stage!

We were now in the Siberian Taiga, or forest, and would be for a few thousand miles. The taiga is the world's largest forest, and covers an area equivalent to the size of India- five million square kilometers, containing 25% of the world's timber reserves. It is an area which is bitterly cold in winter.

Mileage total 2,032

Saturday 2 June

Left house 7.30 whilst our hosts still asleep. Carmen had tummy upset, went to the loo, tried to pull the plug and it would not work. Tried to put water down loo from tap, but the loo was blocked. Left an apologetic note and a "thank you". Russian plumbing simply fails to work more times than not, yet- as in Asia- bad plumbing does not mean smelly, and/or dirty people.

Brian refused to start, and on looking into engine, I found a broken distributor lead, which had to be replaced, then we were on our way. However, Brian was not willing at all, and we just had no power, especially at top revs in any gear. Eventually we pulled

over to the side of the road and I began to wonder what on earth to do. A group of Russians, driving Jap import cars, pulled in and also a lorry driver. They changed the points and the condenser. We started the car, and somehow it slipped into gear and began to run over one of the Russians before I managed to cut off the engine with the isolation switch, as for some reason the ignition switch did not work! We all grabbed hold of the car to stop it moving forward, and then it stalled. The fellow underneath was shaken but not stirred. Then I set off up the road, but there was no improvement. "Aha", said one of the Russians, "I know what it is. It is bad fuel. We always get it on this stretch of road- just keep the revs up and it will go away" and surely enough, after another half hour or so, it did.

Road pretty bad in places, and very bad in others with ruts, bumps, huge potholes up to two feet deep. Very worried about doing some chassis damage, but Brian pulled through. In fact, we had broken the rear left spring in the Gobi, but had not realised it. This was only discovered by the chap who bought Brian in November 2007! We should have realised this had happened, as the car did have a leftwards list.

Countryside rather samey and boring. Twice stopped by police, but no problems. Just followed usual procedure of smiles and photos.

Stopped at a small town where car immediately surrounded by rather odd people, quite a few of whom were worse for drink, including one middle aged lady who took a fancy to me whilst Carmen was trying to negotiate a room in a scruffy hotel nearby. When Carmen reappeared, she said the price was £34 to which I said they must be joking, that we would leave immediately and camp somewhere. Carmen not too pleased as (a) lots of mosquitoes and (b) no tent, just a large tarpaulin.

The problem camping on this road was that (a) lots of mossies as I have said, but also (b) the road was built on a causeway, with a big drop down to swampy ground.....so nowhere to park. Anyway, after some miles we did see a rare sight, a little track leading into the forest, and seemingly going nowhere. We pulled off, and went along the track about 100 yards, so that we would be out of sight of the road and enquiring eyes. Local mossies immediately woke up and came to see what was what, as we tried to get meal under way on our camp stove and to rig up some sort of cover for us using the tarpaulin. Heard a cuckoo calling in the distance.

I had been suffering from tummy cramps for some time, so decided to go off into the forest- not too far and certainly not under trees as did not want to get bitten by any ticks and get encephalitis- to do my business.

Had just finished when a motor cycle pulled up, with a fellow and his son on board. They could not speak any English, but wanted to look at the car. We took a Polaroid photo of them, which we gave them, then saw them on their way. They disappeared off into the forest. Thought he must have a shack or something tucked away- we certainly could not see anything. I decided to go back to where I had done my business, with some petrol,



and set the paper etc on fire to clear up. Well, just doing this when the fellow and his son reappeared in a car, I stood back, and put my foot right in what I had done. Cursing, I returned to the car, but then to our surprise the fellow asked us to come and stay with his family for the night. Well, we could not imagine what sort of accommodation we were going to get, but he was so friendly, unlike the mossies, so we eagerly said "yes". We asked him to give us ten minutes to clear up, they disappeared and reappeared ten minutes later, and guided us through the trees to a Siberian log village, and there was their house- a gorgeous timber cottage, with painted shutters, and a welcoming grandma who took us in as if we were long lost family.

We were told it was sauna night, and that we could use their facilities. The cottage, which was about 100 years old, had a small yard at the back, and then another quite large wooden building in which was a kitchen, dining room and bedroom, with the sauna leading off it. This was entirely wood built, of course, with a large stove burning away in one corner. Very, very hot, and would have been more so had Carmen and I used the water to throw on the stove, but we were not quite sure what to do, so just used basins of water to soap ourselves down and rinse. Felt marvellous afterwards, and then into the house for a lovely meal with Sasha and Tatiana, husband and wife, Alla, Sasha's mother, and S/T's son, Jenya. We had already had some soup at our camp, but fell to with enthusiasm. We could speak no Russian, they no English, but with the aid of a dictionary we got on fine. Sasha was a truck driver for a forestry enterprise, so far as we could tell. The meal consisted of a sort of rosti, with bacon, courgette, and egg, and liberal quantities of vodka and a local drink called kvas. Lonely Planet says it is made from fermented rye flour, but Alla said that it was not, and that it was made from silver birch sap. Very good anyway. She also makes her own vodka, from 30 litres of water with 8KG of sugar, and 1 KG of yeast, ending up with about 8-10 litres of the hard stuff

Mileage today 225, so total now 2,257.

Sunday 3 June.

Did not wake till 9, though it may have been 8 as we were frequently going through time zones in Russia, and our watches were sometimes an hour out. Slept like a log in a log house. Got up, packed car, and had a lovely breakfast of chicken noodle soup and tea.

Took some photos outside, then set off, and once again Brian not at his best. Several stretches of bad road, with no tarmac, ruts, hillocks, grooves, holes and whatever. Sometimes when we had tarmac, it was corrugated, which was almost worse than having no tarmac at all. But after Kanst, the road improved and we made better progress till mechanical problems led to a halt under a garage canopy. Checked petrol supply- OK. Took out distributor and tried to reset to TDC on Number One cylinder, but then Brian would not even start. Usual crowd gathered, all well intentioned, but made it difficult to think. In the end I gave up, and called over a mechanic, and as soon as we looked at the distributor together, it was clear that the points were not opening and closing at all. Prior to stopping, I had wondered if it was bad petrol again and had refilled with 96 octane,

but it had made no difference, with Brian popping and spluttering and no top gear at all, as insufficient power- no wonder!

Brian then went very well, and bar two usual type police stops, we made Krasnojarsk without any delays, and spent £60 on a really nice hotel room, as a bit of a treat.

Lots of photos taken from passing cars all day, many wanting us to stop for a natter, but of course we could not, and toot- tooting and waving from drivers and pedestrians.

Countryside not quite so wooded now, but still plenty of birch and pine.

Lots of roadside graves reflecting (a) the state of the roads and (b) the state of the drivers and (c) the state of the cars, which take a real pounding. Quite ornate some of them, with plastic flowers, a photo of the victim(s) a little table and benches. Just the place for a picnic with a difference?

235 miles today, so total now 2,492

Monday 4<sup>th</sup> June

Horrid weather all day, probably because I washed Brian last night, and God abhors a clean car. First 100 miles OK, but then bumpy, potholey, and dangerous- poor visibility as rain had flooded many holes, making them difficult to spot. Stopped for lunch at a scruffy but charming little roadside café at Aueensk (AYNHCK), with a sashlick stand outside. Had excellent lunch and met up with an ex kick-boxing champion, who insisted on escorting us for some way after we left. He then overtook us in his 4 x 4, disappeared, and then about 15 minutes later, there he was waving us down at a cross roads with a bunch of lilacs for Carmen!

Carmen told me that at the wedding the girl I danced with twice kept asking if she was OK for the loo- eventually Carmen said she would like to go, so out of the hall they went, and Carmen noticed that the girl picked up two little bits of paper en route. Outside, they made for the loos which were in total darkness, and of course there would have been the usual mess, and small hole to aim for. So the girl said "oh, let's just go where we are" so they did just that, six feet apart under the stars!

Brian went well today, with no problems.

Stopped outside Marinsk at a hotel which looked most peculiar from the outside, but marvellous inside. Manageress could not be more attentive, including twice knocking at the door of the room when I was getting undressed, to give us advice about this and that, and during the meal she constantly hovered about, but in the nicest possible way. The restaurant attached to the hotel had only been open four days, and was so plush it was quite surreal. The meal was only £16 for which we had a lovely salad, soup, smoked salmon, pork, two beers and a vodka. A few very nice timber houses in the street



9pm getting off to sleep when there was a knock on the door, and it is our attentive manageress again. She has found a garage for Brian over the road. So I dress, and install Brian in a dry cover for the night, which he appreciated. Sometimes, though, attention can be too much!

Brian went well today and we managed 220 miles, total 2,712.

Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> June.

Up at 6am, and collected Brian from his overnight resting place. Saw lots of log houses, all of which were rather tatty and uncared for, some empty and obviously on last legs. A shame, as they really could be quite something.

Tomsk was founded in about 1604, so again relatively “new”. The wooden architecture was “saved” largely due to the city fathers refusing to allow the Trans Siberian express to pass through, fearing noise, dirt and disruption. Instead they found economic isolation, and the once busy city dwindled in importance. To some extent it owes its revival in fortunes to a number of major academic establishments coming here, so plenty of young about. Saw a few nice wooden houses there, but most needed lots of TLC. Too much rubbish about, tatty gardens, and plain neglect.

Stayed at a reasonable but quite expensive hotel. It takes ages to change money - travellers cheques you can forget! Had deer for the evening meal- from the farm of the owner of Chelsea football club- is that Abram Abramovich?

125 miles today, total now 2,837. To be continued.