



Founded 2009

## The Crankhandle

July 2023

Issue 81

NEWSLETTER OF THE HEREFORD AUSTIN SEVEN CLUB



Why does Jules need a windsock when driving her open top? See p18

**SHED NIGHT:** Tues Aug 15<sup>th</sup> at Riddings Farm HR8 1JP: 7pm:

Come along to discuss what to do in the event of a breakdown.

**AUSTIN 7s for sale** p19

**October HA7C holiday Shropshire:** p2

Come and join us for the **HEREFORD AUSTIN 7 CLUB AUTUMN BREAK** at

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10 Rooms have been provisionally reserved for October Mon 2nd, Tue 3rd & Wed 4th. Leaving on the morning of Thursday 5th. Members wishing to join should contact The Castle Hotel direct, quoting 'Hereford Austin 7 Club Booking'. Once you have booked, please let me know by email: [stuarthoward43@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:stuarthoward43@yahoo.co.uk).

[www.thecastlehotelbishopscastle.co.uk](http://www.thecastlehotelbishopscastle.co.uk) : this site give you info but shows no availability on the dates above, therefore it would be best to phone.

### Chairman's View

It has been lovely for all of us that we have had such good Austin Seven weather over the past couple of months, with warm sunshine on our trips out. The days out have been most enjoyable; even when there was a heavy shower at the most recent one at Highnam Court, Gloucestershire. This event was well represented by the HA7C, with five member cars, and the club sail-flag, with lots of interest in our cars. The only thing missing was the wind blowing through my hair; no hair these days, but the warm wind was lovely!

I have at last decided to cut my losses on the replacement of the rear springs on the Opal, which I thought that I had covered three years ago. I should have replaced with new, but I opted for replacement of the longest leaf only, on the basis that the remaining leaves were re-tempered and all would be like new. Not so. Three years on, the car still did not sit correctly above the rear wheels. I purchased the correct sports springs, and fitting was not hampered by seized and rusted components, as I had greased everything on assembly three years ago. I am very happy to report that the body now sits correctly, and the road holding is transformed: a particularly important feature when driving on Herefordshire roads.

On clearing up after the spring replacement, I decided to remind myself of where I put the spares and tools that I carry in the car. To help with packing away, I used the **spares list that the club has on the website**. <https://www.ha7c.co.uk/Technical/75%20A7%20SPARES%20LIST.pdf> I am not too proud to admit that after 55 years of A7 ownership, I still found this a useful reminder, and would urge you to make use of it to ensure that you are carrying the minimum of essential spares. I printed a copy, and then annotated to what part of the car the various bits could be found. Hopefully, this will reduce the number of minutes that I will have to suffer the rain dripping down my neck on the side of an open deserted road on my way down from Hay Bluff! Although I jest, I am all for making life easy when my memory fails me.

The list of essential spares was fresh in my mind from our 'Drive-it-Day' run, when one of our number had a distributor problem, and another member immediately produced a replacement, ready wired, and within ten minutes, we were all on our way again.

The moral that I would like to pass on is simply 'be prepared'.

Happy Sevenning, Michael.

## Secretary's Corner

For many years now, we have held our monthly meetings at the Richmond Place Club in Hereford, which is centrally located, amazingly inexpensive to hire, provides plenty of space, serves cheap drinks and has lovely friendly staff. Nevertheless, some of us find it just slightly depressing and wondered if we could find somewhere else to meet with more character – perhaps a pub that offers meals? Well, this has now been thoroughly researched and discussed by the Committee who by a majority verdict - decided we should stay put. Arguing that meetings need to be in Hereford, nowhere else in the City seems suitable, and we cannot afford any of the pubs or golf clubs nearby.

It was also argued that if we leave the Richmond club, we might lose members – but of course it could be argued that we might be losing people by staying. Clearly, this is a fine example of the concept that *'you can't please all the people all the time'*. However, if you have strong thoughts on this matter – please make them known to a Committee member.

Looking forward to the Welland steam fair (I'm going on Friday), usually a source of numerous essential items, and a busy weekend on 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> August with the club visit to Early Engineering and the Chairman's run.

**News from the workshop** – Work on the chassis and pressure-fed engine for a Trials 'Ulster' A7 in a lovely Rod Yates alloy body for a friend is now complete. It has been handed-over for someone else to finish-off the wiring, instruments, upholstery, seats & wings etc.

This is the only pressure-fed A7 engine I have ever built and I was delighted when it fired-up first-time and seemed to run beautifully. Now collecting parts to build another Special.  
Happy motoring ..... Bob G



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**Eddie's Mystery object:** Answer on P 18



### Eddie's Tale

Eddie gave an informative and amusing talk at the Richmond Club on Tues 27 June, about his time as a Hospital Maintenance Craftsman. He saw the post advertised in 1980, and was attracted by the fact that it involved shiftwork. At his interview he was asked whether he could deal with the high pressure steam in the boilers, at 80psi, to which he was able to reply that in the mines he had had to maintain boilers that generated steam pressure of 450 psi, which in turn feed electrical-generating turbines. His work initially was with the boilers. Every morning he had to test the water in the boilers for additives to remove the oxygen, and thus lessen corrosion. One winter's night the temperature dropped to  $-20^{\circ}$ , and the feed-pump to the boiler froze. Eddie had to take a live feed of steam from the boiler to defrost it. The boilers were fed with residue oil, which was very thick, and had to be warmed before use, and one night the pipe burst, starting a small fire. Eddie was reluctant to sound the fire alarm, because the whole hospital would have then had to be evacuated, so he used the extinguishers, and put it out. In the morning he was expecting to be congratulated, but the reverse happened, and he was given a dressing down for not calling the fire brigade.

He had to cover 4 hospitals, The General, The Victoria Eye, The County, and St Mary's **Psychiatric Hospital**, at Burghill. The latter caused him some concerns as some patients were known to be violent. In fact the doors had no knobs on, so that the patients could not injure themselves, and no radiators were used, to avoid burns. Instead, the rooms were heated by air vents. When working in the boiler house at St Mary's at night, Eddie was apprehensive of what the patients might do, and used to lock himself into the boiler room. One night the door was being rattled constantly by a patient, causing Eddie some concern. When Eddie's colleague arrived to take over the shift in the morning, he explained that this patient only wanted someone to read a letter to him, and in fact it was always the same letter. St Mary's had some sad cases, for instance some women had been incarcerated there because they were unmarried mothers, and also the grounds contained a graveyard which included some babies. The Grounds of the County hospital also included a graveyard, but for Medieval Crusaders, which could be deduced because both their legs were broken. The higher section of wall at the back of the bus station was where criminals were hung. There were also some happy memories of St Marys, where there had been a lovely dance hall, concert hall and theatre.

The **Casualty** was at the General Hospital, staffed at night by one doctor and one nurse and one porter. Eddie compared this to a recent visit to the Emergency Dept of the County Hospital, where the waiting room was absolutely full, with staff everywhere.

The night doctor at the old Casualty often used to be a locum from Bristol, and didn't like to ring the Consultant for advice. One night they had a motorcyclist come in who had been in a road accident, and the doctor asked the nurse and engineer what they thought he should do. Eddie settled the discussion by asking whether or not the patient had lost consciousness, and when it was found that he had, then Eddie said the consultant must be called. Another time, on New Year's Eve, they had to wash out the stomach of a young woman who had taken an overdose. Once it was finished the patient got up, and discharged herself, but the Sister said the patient wouldn't live long, as the patient had taken distalgesic, and sadly this proved to be the case.

**Other jobs:** There were a variety of jobs that needed to be done occasionally. One of these was to climb down a 20' ladder into the Victorian sewer under the General Hospital, which was lined with white ceramic tiles which had to be cleaned. He told the managers it was not safe without breathing apparatus, but he still had to do occasionally for several years.

He also had to maintain the **Jensen Pulse clock**, where a master triggered each minute to the other 'slave' clocks which were hard wired to it.

The **telephone switchboard** sometimes needed repair after a telephonist had spilt coffee into the mechanism. It had been built in 1938, and the telephonist had to put a jackplug into a socket (with dolls eyes to show if it was in use), and the jackplug was attached to a weight via a pulley and cable, to pull it back into position when it was out of use. When coffee was spilt into it, Eddie had to strip it down to clean the cables so it could work again.

**Emergencies:** When working at night, he was issued with a pager, so that he could help with any mechanical problem on the wards, and then later on, also in the theatres, where he dealt with the sterilizers for the surgical instruments.

The 1938 block in the County Hospital had a bed lift, and one night, in the small hours, he had an urgent call as the bed lift had broken down in between floors, with a haemorrhaging patient on board. He had to run to the winding gear on the roof, and then called down to the nurse to ask how serious was the situation, to which he was told it was grave. He got the porter to hold the autobrake in the off position, whilst he hand-cranked the lift down, telling the nurse to inform him when it was level with the floor. He then had to run down to the ground floor and manually open the doors, and the patient was rushed to theatre, and was operated upon successfully.

Another time, he was summoned to the ward as a delirious patient was shouting for a doctor to attend. The nurses asked Eddie to put on a white coat, and put a stethoscope and a MIMS (a handbook of drug dosages) in his pockets, and sit with the patient. He took the patient's hand, and asked her what was the matter, only to be told P---'off , you are not a doctor , you are the man who cleans the drains.

**Ghost story.** Eddie and a porter had been helping the nurses turn Maisy, a 26 stone patient, every 2 hours, so as to avoid bedsores. Maisy apologized for putting everyone to so much trouble. One night Eddie was going to the ward to help, when he met Maisy in the corridor wearing a nightdress. Eddie said: where are you going, to which Maisy replied that she felt wonderful, as she was going home. Eddie rushed to the ward, to inform the Sister that the patient was absconding, only to be led to Maisy's bed, where she had just died.

**Misunderstanding:** Eddie was in the changing room with a visiting doctor, who had come to learn how to do the new Charnley hip replacement, and was asked what his specialty was, to which Eddie replied, that he was a brain surgeon. Later on, Eddie was cleaning out a gully, when the same doctor came across him, and was rather surprised, to which Eddie said that what he had actually said was that he was a Drain Surgeon.

**Helping out on Christmas day, 1992,** the Sister on Hawkins ward requested help with distributing the Christmas bottle drinks (alcoholic) to all the wards. Eddie and the porter then used a flat trolley to visit all the wards, handing out Christmas drinks. Of course each ward insisted on them having a complimentary drink, so by the time they had completed the task, they were the worse for wear, and certainly not capable of driving home, and had to ring their wives to pick them up, who were not best amused.

In conclusion, Eddie noted that the old hospitals had 680 beds, including the hutted wards that had been shipped over from Canada in knocked down form to deal with the anticipated D Day casualties, (fortunately they were not needed for this purpose). When the new hospital opened in 2002, this reduced dramatically to about 460.

## Webmaster Report

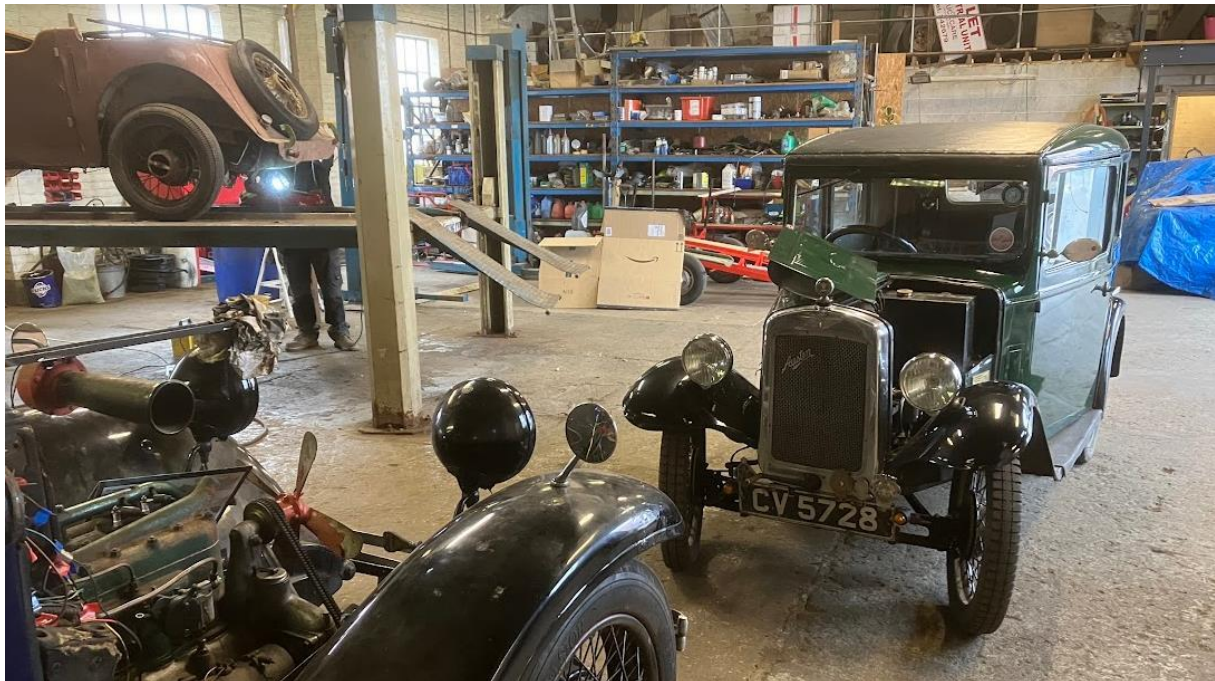
Roly reports that he has been regularly updating the Events page as and when Pat and Jan send them to him.

Any input from the membership for the website will be gladly received.

Roly is preparing for the club outing to Bishops Castle in October. In consideration to his partner for the trip, he thought he should check the exhaust, as it smells of exhaust in the cabin, and the engine pops on the overrun. He stuck his head underneath to find that someone's stolen the catalytic converter!



The car is now at Gerwyns workshop for a new “cat” to be fitted! Plus some front suspension checks.





# Light Car and Edwardian Weekend, Llandrindod Wells, 24-26<sup>th</sup> March 2023 Annie Peake

With just a few days to remove Hereford trialling mud from my Austin 7, (it took several attempts), we were off with our new trailer, found thanks to Eddie Loader, to the Light Car weekend at Llandrindod. Old and small, true vintage cars take part.

Saturday is the tour, Sunday the hill trial. Despite being a massive hotel, the Metropole at Llandrindod (*below*) is heavily oversubscribed, such is the popularity of this weekend. If



you fail to re-book your room as you leave, your place is lost for the following year. The Light Car is an excuse for a big social event, and a chance to hand out awards and make speeches at a massive dinner for what looked like 250 people.

The hotel car park is given over almost entirely to vintage cars, so it is an intriguing motorshow in its own right. There is a striking Austin 7 that turns up every year, which clearly

caught fire in the late 1930s and has stood outside ever since (*below*).

New organisers this year: Tania Brown and Adam Jones. They set out an interesting 120 mile round trip up the Elan Valley, through Rhayader, and across to the Welsh coast at Aberaeron. We followed Malcolm and Jenny Lyon in their matching grey Chummy, (well, matching apart from the fact that theirs is Concours condition). 153 vehicles entered for the Saturday tour, and while every attempt was made to avoid a crocodile of old corks, it always happens. Pity the poor moderns pulling over for 15 elderly cars in a



row. The route carefully avoids larger roads where possible, with testing sections of narrow and steep gradients.

I can't claim the drive was calm and without stress. I'm not used to distance driving, certainly not with my husband beside me wincing at every gearchange. The Lyons drive at a professional lick, and I needed to keep up. The rain didn't help. The hood was up all the way to the coast, but we smiled at the full reservoirs with water pouring over the sluices. Last year up the Elan Valley we watched people picnicking and playing cricket in the dry bottom.



The scenery *en route* was breathtaking, and despite my temperature gauge failing, the Chummy went beautifully. Aberaeron, our destination, was enchanting, especially the mass of colourfully painted houses. To a visitor it seemed a lovely

place to live, and clearly a tourist destination, with good places to eat around the harbour.

It was a cold drive over, but there was no question of wimping out on to the shorter route, as that isn't Malcolm's style. However, we were very glad of a hot bath when we got back to the Metropole. The evening's dinner and awards were jolly, although the clocks went forward which curtailed some people's excesses.

Given that my Austin doesn't meet the Light Car regulations for trialling, we marshalled the following day. A good call, it could have been divorce otherwise.

Billeted to the hill called Penlanole, Anthony was delighted. Not only was it almost flat, it was the home of Sue Pulford, a favourite 'special friend' from his Cambridge days, all those years ago. It meant that he didn't concentrate much on marshalling and marking score sheets. This was partly because virtually nobody got to the end of our section because of the mud, despite the course being almost horizontal, but mainly because he was deep in conversation with Sue. (Well, she is very pretty!) At least he focussed

sufficiently to watch Malcolm and Jenny take Penlanole like true professionals. Malcolm never once accelerated or spun the wheels, and their Chummy gently passed Marker 25 with no fuss at all. After them, us marshals got rather bored. Most cars lost control or ground into the mud at the first tree, and that was that.

The Lyons continued their understated assault on the rest of the sections, and unsurprisingly won the event by miles. It was a popular win too, judging by the cheering they received at the pub afterwards. The HA7 club is proud of you! **Well done Jenny and Malcolm.**

It was a successful weekend, with a good tour to Aberaeron, and I expect everyone is looking forward to the event in 2024.

## Graham Baldock and his 1932 Austin Seven RN Saloon 'Judith'

*"Would you like an old car for your birthday?"*

Negative thoughts flashed through my mind...Nissan Bluebird?...Datsun Cherry..? Or conversely could it be a stylish SS Jaguar with its ultra large headlights? – wow that would be worth having "No it's an Austin Seven" my wife Janet said. Well, the offer of a classic car sounded rather better than not affording a new three-piece suite, so 'wow, lead me to it' I said.

Ever since 1986 when my wife offered to buy me an 'old car', life has never been the same. Thinking she meant an old banger I was surprised when she produced a photograph sent to her by her Hereford friend Miss Marjorie Daw (of see-saw fame?) of a rather splendid 1932 Austin Seven which had seen it on a driveway in Pilley Road. Needless to say I was in love, and wanted it very badly! But it was rather expensive for a present, so we agreed to go halves. The same day we telephoned a certain Mr Eddie Loader (a mere youth at the time) who duly announced "You'd better be quick as it's being advertised in Exchange & Mart this coming Saturday" (remember Exchange & Mart – the advertising magazine to go for, before eBay?)

We had never acted so fast, and the next day saw us both travelling to Hereford from our home in Colchester to have a closer look at the car. It's undeniable that anyone who sees an Austin Seven for the first time has to be enthralled – and I was duly smitten seeing it sitting there in all its finery, restored so beautifully in her blue and black livery.

Did we buy it? Of course we did. And we wanted to drive it back home to Colchester, but Eddie wisely advised us not to, as the 6 volt battery may not last the journey. It

would have meant travelling nearly 200 miles mostly in the dark! There was also the fact the gearbox was non-synchromesh, and had only three gears – again not advisable for a novice. So the car was duly transported to my home for an additional £25.

Our introductory first outing in her was a bit of a disaster as there was less than a pint of petrol in the gravity tank. Fuel? a fact in my excitement I had overlooked. So the next hour was spent with Janet and I pushing her the mile or so back to our house, luckily on the flat, with me steering. Later we had a friendly conversation about who would steer, and who would push - another marriage saved.



*On the Yorkshire Experience', a photo I entered into a competition which won us a holiday to Canada*

I wasn't concerned about joining a club as I was quite happy driving in circles around my neighbourhood, until one day, after boasting several times how I

would like to drive from Lands End to John O'Groats, a neighbour called my bluff and offered to accompany me on the marathon. Gulp!

I had no option but to go along with the idea, so it was time to join a club. I went to a meeting of the Essex Austin Seven Club who gave me good advice about what spares to take, etc, and how to prep the car.

To make it worthwhile, we decided to treat the trip as a fund-raiser for our local hospital, and so the following month was spent asking friends and business colleagues for their backing. There was no backing down now. Nervous as hell, the following June found my neighbour and I spending a week, driving all the way from the tip of Cornwall up to John o'Groats, with my son Alex and his girlfriend Moira accompanying us in a modern, and a trailer (just in case)... we felt it best to trailer the car to Lands End. That week in June turned out to be one of the wettest weeks on record, so much so the vacuum wiper worked overtime while my companion held a paper cup to the windscreen to catch the leaks falling on my trousers. Much to my relief, we covered the nearly 900 miles in four days, avoiding motorways, but suffering just one 'breakdown', when the windscreen wiper decided it had had enough. A diversion to a friendly Austin Seven parts stockist in Yorkshire supplied us with the bits necessary to make a repair free of charge, but he warned us 'not to tell his mother' who was obviously the 'boss! Sadly Mr Dalby's business is no longer 'in business' perhaps he should have told his mother?

Beforehand, as stated, we had decided the trip just had to be worthwhile so we asked for sponsorship and were lucky enough to raise the princely sum of £1,500 for our local hospital.



*On Eurotour through France and Paris in August 1997. Our route to the Eiffel Tower had taken us over a slip road to a tunnel which led the very next day to Princess Diana losing her life in the same tunnel. The oil slick that a convoy of Austins left along the entrance had nothing to do it with it we were assured...*

Once I had earned my stripes travelling a long distance, thereafter there was no stopping us, so in 1997 we signed up for 'Le Tour' organised by the North Herts

branch of the 750MC from Calais to the south of France via Cognac, Bordeaux, Vichy and Epernay, (except for Vichy all were alcohol towns) then returning northwards through Paris. So exciting for us and our little Austin!

In Vichy I had a near disaster when the gear stick started to flop around, we were thankfully close to the hotel, but I knew something was amiss. Hoping it was something fairly easy to correct I removed the starter motor as it was blocking the top of the gearbox, and undid the four bolts holding the gearstick in place. Amazingly, and I still can't believe my luck, when I removed the gear cover, there was a small spring, an aluminium cup and a holding ring perched on top of the gears. If I had driven a foot more the aforementioned would have disappeared into the gearbox with all that would have entailed. Phew!

The drive north to the outskirts of Paris was almost a formality. The following day found us travelling in convoy into the heart of Paris. From Compiègne in the north east, our small bevy of Austins threaded our way through the back streets of Paris (a nightmare if ever there was one, as there were seemingly endless circuses where the road radiated outwards). Never too sure which one to take, by guesswork we thankfully and finally ended up circling the Arc de Triumph (three times) leading to much hooting, I might add, before heading down the Champs Elysees and back to the hotel, this time via the motorway that burrows under Charles de Gaulle airport.

## Why a motorway?

We had been told to avoid the Peripherique, the main road that encircles Paris, as it gets rather busy, but we weren't happy about tackling those minor roads again, and by this time in the late afternoon we were on our own. Looking over a bridge the motorway looked free of traffic so gung ho, – away we went, down the slip road and onto the slow moving highway. However, our two-lane adventure slowly turned into a six lane nightmare! To get to our destination we had to cut across not 1, not 2 or 3 but 5 lanes! So not being in our right minds, and with us both sweating considerably, Janet stuck her hand out of the window, (no trafficators on a '32 model) and with a wing and a prayer we moved across the 5 lanes putting the accelerator down as hard as it would go. Luckily the French are possibly more sympathetic and courteous to mad Englishmen and classic cars than here in England, and we thankfully emerged on the other side unscathed. Soon we were under the airport main runway - and came out the other side still sweating but spotting a handy layby, pulled in and said a little prayer of thankfulness that we had survived. Luckily I had a change of trousers at the hotel...

The next day we travelled along the B roads heading for home. It was then, when in a hotel in Calais, that we heard the unbelievably sad news of the death of Princess Diana in a road accident, in a tunnel, one which we had crossed over just two days before. Somebody hoped it wasn't due partly to the oil slick a convoy of Austins had left behind?



Over the following years (every 5 years) other rallies into Europe were arranged, the Black Forest, East Germany and Berlin, and Switzerland. It was on this last trip that I managed to break a half-shaft just 60 miles shy of Calais.

*The break was a very clean snap and it appears the halfshaft had been hanging on by a thread since the car was made . I was told that from time to time Austin engineers would drill into a halfshaft to test the integrity of the metal but then would use the same half-shaft on a car. I was lucky it had lasted for 80 years.*

Luckily, as I'm not that much mechanically minded, another rally member in a Ruby stopped to help. He took a nut off the spare wheel and popped it into the hole where the half-shaft had broken, jamming the differential. He then bolted the wheel back on, and although the suspension was now compromised, and the steering very interesting, as I only had drive to one wheel, I drove over 220 miles back to Colchester and home. Try doing that in a modern!!



*I was awarded a rather splendid trophy by the Essex Austin Seven for the “most Spectacular Breakdown” while on Eurotour*

My final trip into Europe was to Austria in 2017, which I was responsible for, and arranged, but never again – the work involved was massive, with over 40 cars and their occupants, arranging the hotels, route etc. Of all the Austin Sevens which took part, I’m glad to say all but one returned

safely to Blighty. The one car which suffered a breakdown that wasn’t repairable, was repatriated by the RH insurance company.

We, as you can tell, have had so much fun with our little car over the years, becoming chairman of the Essex Club (buggins turn), going on the committee of the A7CA, motoring to Holland, travelling from Lowestoft to Lands End (side to side) and getting a lifetime of thrills every two years on the Yorkshire Experience, struggling to climb 1 in 4 hills while long-suffering Janet gets out and walks up. So much fun climbing to the top and waiting till her little head pops up over the hill.

*To be continued.....*

## **Kip’s Mystery tour 23 May 23**



One always hopes for fine weather for any outing so that the cars enjoy it as much as their owners, and 23 May was as good one could hope for. Nine cars and their owners turned up for an excellent lunch at The Nag’s Head Peterchurch, a pub where one can always be assured of a warm welcome and actually find it open. The mystery destination was unveiled as being Llanvihangel Court at Llanvihangel Crucorney, a wonderful Grade 1 listed medieval mansion set in acres of beautiful gardens. On arrival at the house entrance, yours truly discovered that the house sign had been removed, so in the belief that several cars were yet to arrive and might miss the entrance, I waited at the roadside for several



minutes only to be eventually told that all cars had arrived, some earlier than the “leaders” by a more direct route!

Our host was Mrs Julia Johnson, whose family purchased the property after the last war. She briefly outlined the history of the house to us. It dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when it consisted of a great

hall, open to the roof, with domestic offices at one end, and the private apartments of the family at the other, the owner being one Thomas, son of John ap Gwillim Jenkins of Wernddu, who was Lord of the Manor of Villa Michaelis as it was then known.

In 1627, the house was bought by a local MP, Nicholas Arnold, one of whose interests was the breeding of horses, for which reason the Grade 1 stables are attributed to him. During his lifetime and that of his son, John, additions and alterations were made, including installing the magnificent yew staircase. Later owners included the Bennett family, who removed many previous alterations, to revert the house back to more what it had looked like in Tudor times.

We were treated to a tour of the interior, which is furnished with many interesting period items including the impressive staircase, intricate plasterwork ceilings, oak panelling, huge medieval beams, creaking original floorboards, massive oak doors and the like. Heating the house in winter is apparently a mammoth task. This is not a house with a “green” energy rating. We thank Mrs Johnson not only for her hospitality, but also for showing us around what is not only a historic monument, but also a much-loved family home.





May I invite expressions of interest from Members in:

- (a) a **Medieval Mill Tour**, one Saturday, taking in Cloddock Mill, then a lunch (bring your own sandwiches as the pub serves no food) at the wonderful ale house at Cloddock called the Cornwall Arms, then to Rowlestone Mill, ending up at Rowlestone Court to savour their local ice cream and cakes.
- (b) a **tour of 5 wonderful Herefordshire Churches** and one in Gloucestershire, namely Kempley, Brinsop, Madley, St Margaret's, Kilpeck, and Hoarwithy, to include the oldest wooden church roof in England, the best Romanesque frescoes in Northern Europe, a former pilgrimage crypt, one of the best medieval screens in an English church, some of the best English stone carving, and the only "Italian" church in England. Bring a picnic. Weekday tour.

Kip Waistell [kipcarwaistell@hotmail.com](mailto:kipcarwaistell@hotmail.com)

## Club Night Technical Forum - Tuesday 30th May 2023

Jeremy and Tessa Plummer report that there was a good turn out of members to witness the first question and answer evening to be held in the style of Gardeners' Question Time. A large table was set up to front the audience, and Gerwyn Lloyd, Eddie Loader and Bob Garrett settled down to answer questions. Eddie, as Club Technical Advisor, was in the chair. Our chairman stood up and announced the format, club members had been told to send in questions in advance for the three learned gentlemen, but unfortunately that was where it ended, as no questions were forthcoming.

Tim Bradley took the bull by the horns, and asked some very searching questions much to the interest of all. Tim then asked us all to join him in an adjoining room where he showed us a film about Bertha Benz, wife of Karl Benz, who invented the motor car. She was the first person to stop at a pharmacy for ligroin, now known to us all as petrol, because in the 1880s there were no filling stations. The film can be seen on YouTube

Eddie brought up two examples of problems he had encountered whilst working on Austin Sevens:

- (a) What are the pros and cons of fitting a high compression cylinder head to 'two-bearing' Austin 7s manufactured pre September 1936?
- (b) Some Austin Sevens suffer from steering wobble, what is the cause, and how can it be remedied?

These examples resulted in a lively exchange of ideas, answers and even further questions from the floor. Forum members were actively involved, providing thoughts and suggestions based on their technical knowledge & experience.

In conclusion, despite my misgivings following a lack of initial response from club members, feedback suggests the evening was a success and worth repeating in the future.

David Southcott went to the **Shobdon Vintage biplanes** event on Weds 21 June, at which vintage cars were welcomed: Others present from HA7C were: Steve Kay , Jeremy & Tessa Plummer, Julia James, David & Jenn Rusher, Tim Bradley and Mel Henson



Our front page photo is also from the same event, of course!

**Mystery Object answer:** the pedal head retaining nut for the clutch and brake on early A7's with 3 speed gearbox .

## WANTED

**+0.005 Timing wheel, the small one that fits onto the crankshaft.**

Stuart Phillips [s.phillips001@btinternet.com](mailto:s.phillips001@btinternet.com) 01792 208986.

# For Sale

**Ruby Mk 2** offers over £4,500; Peterchurch, Herefordshire



Fair condition, both internally, & externally. It's black with a brown interior, Everything is pretty much original, rubber mats etc. She was running well until we stopped using her in approximately 2010. Everything worked, and no knocks. Dynamo was charging, lights and semaphore indicators were working. All 4 gears & reverse were fine, so was clutch, and no nasty rattles. Chrome work isn't bad, and it is not a rust bucket. There are some spares, mostly for a two-bearing earlier model, inc crankshaft, con-rods & pistons, and some gears if I recall. Its not restored, better than oily rag, but not concours.

Gilbert Davies: [steameagle@hotmail.com](mailto:steameagle@hotmail.com)  
07968 004 560

**Brian Bedford has for sale the following:**

07974 069430 [s.bedford45@btinternet.com](mailto:s.bedford45@btinternet.com))



**1937 AUSTIN SEVEN  
RUBY SALOON**, Grey over Black,  
Grey Interior and Excellent Condition, on  
the button, £8,500



**1934 AUSTIN SEVEN BOX SALOON**, Beige and Black, Original Green Interior excellent condition and very reliable. Reducing my collection, £10,500 Brian Bedford, as above



**1934 SALES BROCHURE OF ALL AUSTIN CARS MADE AND SOLD IN 1934.** The Brochure is in excellent condition and looks to be unused £100.

Brian Bedford, as above



**CAR TRAILER**, 5ft x 3ft 6in, All Metal Tipping Body, excellent condition, £150. Brian Bedford as above

## Minutes of the Committee Meeting – 5<sup>th</sup> June 2023 at the Pilgrim Hotel

### 1 Those present:

Michael Ward - Chairman	Pat Caine & Jan Haywood – Events coordinators
Ron Sadler – Committee Member	Eddie Loader – Technical Advisor
Julie James – Treasurer & Membership Sec	Bob Garrett – Secretary and Dep' Chairman

Apologies: Roly Alcock – Webmaster & Frank Sibly – Newsletter Editor

### 2 Minutes of previous meeting - held on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023

The Committee unanimously approved Version 2 of the previous Minutes incorporating all comments received as circulated prior to the meeting. A 'hard' copy of the approved Minutes was signed by Michael (Chairman) as a true record for the Secretary to keep on file.

### 3 Matters arising - (and not covered by the Agenda) –

The Chairman reminded the meeting of the five actions contained in the previous Minutes and it was unanimously agreed that all had either been completed or were included on the Agenda for this meeting.

### 4 Chairman & Secretary –

Chairman:

Michael reminded the meeting that he, Pat Caine and Tim Bradley had (with the help of the Manager) discovered how to show DVD 'films' at the Richmond Club. At the May club meeting, they had successfully completed a test set-up and showed a four minute clip of the first significant journey of a car propelled by an internal combustion engine. Michael said he already had four motoring DVDs and a huge amount other suitable material was readily available.

The meeting thanked Michael for his efforts and looked forward to some exciting viewing.

The Secretary:

In response to Roly's recent remarks on 'rambling Committee meetings', the Secretary circulated a note outlining his thoughts, viz .....

1. We are not the main Board of a top 100 UK Company - where ruthless efficiency and an absence of humorous stories at meetings would be expected. We sit on this Committee partly to enjoy the company of friends and take-in a pleasant lunch. Therefore, I believe our meetings should be relaxed occasions and not rushed
2. Nevertheless, I agree - it is entirely sensible to pre-circulate reports wherever possible and not ramble-on too much during meetings

3. We now have nine Committee members – Industry widely acknowledges that seven is the *maximum* for an efficient meeting and five (or fewer) is much preferred, especially for decision making

After a brief discussion, it was unanimously agreed that .....

- a) We will keep our anecdotes and digressions reasonably concise and save the longer stories until the end of the meeting
- b) Anyone anxious to leave the meeting before say 3.00 pm – should ensure that their items feature earlier on the Agenda (simply by comment on the Draft Agenda)
- c) The Chairman keeps a careful look-out for all cases of irrelevant digressions or protracted ‘rambling’

Roly subsequently said he was pleased that business and pleasure will be separated where possible in future meetings.

**5 Finance and membership** – Prior to the meeting, Julie kindly circulated a number of papers relating to Accounts and Membership.

**a) Finance –**

- Julie reported that whilst a number of receipts were awaited, she presented the meeting with an interim summary of the Accounts which was discussed, welcomed and unanimously approved
- It emerged that Julie was occasionally making payments on the club’s behalf from her own personal account and then reimbursing herself. After some discussion, it was unanimously agreed that she was totally trusted by the Committee and should approach the Bank to see if they would issue a suitable card – to enable her to make Club payments
- The Committee thanked Julie for doing an excellent job

**b) Membership –** Julie reported .....

- That the membership application form now includes a question asking how the applicant discovered the Hereford A7 Club

She had tweaked (updated) the welcome letter that she sends to new members. The Secretary offered one or two further suggested updates to ensure alignment with the Constitution and Ron said he would send Julie a template with the Club motto displayed.

**6 Events** – Pat & Jan pre-circulated their latest ‘2023 Events Schedule’ (Version 15) the day before the meeting.

- Pat & Jan thanked all those who have helped them with advice, information & corrections - in particular Roly who has been particularly helpful

- The meeting discussed the content of event schedules and whether distant events were really of interest to members. After some discussion, it was unanimously agreed that event lists sent-out directly by Pat & Jan and those on the club website could usefully contain all known events, however distant. However, only HA7C inspired events would be included in the newsletter '*Crankhandle*' (as suggested by Frank)
- Julie pointed out that if members wish to park as a club group at the Vintage Fair at Gwatkin Cider Farm on Sat 10<sup>th</sup> June – they would need to arrive in a group. Some discussion ensued regarding suitable locations to assemble

**7 Newsletter** – Frank pre-circulated a report containing the following points -

- Frank had received extensive support from Roly, which he is hoping will continue
- He feels he needs to be more organised, and find a volunteer in advance of HA7C events that he is not attending, who will then provide a report
- The newsletter is seen by many other clubs, so, he is keen that technical matters are carefully reviewed (and Eddie and Bob have been especially helpful here). This is important as he has little technical knowledge
- It continues to prove difficult to get club members to contribute but he has made a direct approach to some, who have then provided copy
- Please let Frank know if we can think of anyone who would write an article for us
- Depending on the Committee's views, Frank was proposing not to put the whole list of events into the *Crankhandle* but just highlight HA7C ones. Club members would need to rely on the emails from the events co-ordinators, and look on the website to keep up to date.

The meeting discussed, noted and where applicable, agreed the above points and thanked Frank for his report.

It was also unanimously agreed that .....

- All HA7C event organisers will ensure that someone is tasked with providing Frank with a report and photographs
- Frank's approach to the newsletter was absolutely fine
- Eddie (and perhaps others) would ensure that Frank was provided with one or more technical articles for each edition of '*Crankhandle*'

**8 Technical Advisor's matters** –

- Eddie gave a brief report on the recent Club Technical Forum saying he thought it went well. It was unanimously agreed that we should repeat the exercise and drop the idea of 'Mini Surgeries'. He also hoped that in future – questions or topics would be forthcoming from the membership before the event
- Eddie confirmed that the content of the mid-Summer Shed Night would be '*A7 breakdowns and their remedies*' and a date would be advised as soon as possible

- Eddie suggested that one or more technical article(s) per issue of 'Crankhandle' would be desirable
- Pat urged authors of technical articles to include plenty of photographs
- Julie and Eddie supported the reintroduction of 'mystery items' into the Newsletter

The meeting noted and agreed the above points.

**9 Webmaster's Report** – Roly was unable to attend the meeting but submitted the following report:

- The website gets between 50 to 80 visits a week and has between 10 to 30 downloads of newsletters and technical articles
- I don't believe there have been any recent issues with the website
- Some new content has been added namely the video of Annie Peake's Chummy being mistreated by daughter Minna
- Regular updates of the Events page happen as and when I am furnished with fresh data
- Any suggestions for the website will be very happily taken by me
- Distribution of the Grey Mag continues. Currently 24 copies are being ordered

The meeting thanked Roly for his report and expressed the view that the club is lucky to have his expertise.

Earlier in the meeting, a question was raised about the need to 'password protect' previous issues of 'Crankhandle' on the website. After an extensive discussion, it was unanimously agreed to remove the current password protection and make all issues of the newsletter available to anyone visiting the site. Roly to action please. Subsequently, Roly pointed out that removing *all* password protection would contravene our GDPR legal obligations. However, he agreed to make publicly available - the most recent 6 issues of 'Crankhandle' for potential new joiners to read. Roly's suggestion was effectively agreed because the Secretary received no objections to his proposal.

## **10 Club Night Venue –**

The Committee had provided the Secretary with completed spreadsheets with their (and where applicable their partner's) data and ten out of eleven results overwhelmingly preferred to hold 'Club night' meetings at the Pilgrim.

Nevertheless, after a detailed discussion of location, parking, costs and risks - a clear majority favoured sticking with the Richmond Club. It was agreed the Secretary would write to Michael & Gill Harcourt and decline their kind offer to research other possible locations.

Roly subsequently expressed his disappointment at this decision.



## **11 Sixth Form matters –**

Michael explained that many A7 clubs share our concern that younger members are in short supply and somehow need to be encouraged if clubs are to survive. He therefore wondered if we should approach one or two local sixth forms to see if they would like one or two of us to take our cars along to show them and discuss their workings. The idea being, that such an experience might spark a continuing interest in Austin Sevens.

Ron suggested that the newly formed Hereford University (Engineering department) might also be considered.

These suggestions were unanimously supported by the meeting and Jan suggested early in the September term might be a good time for such visits.

The meeting accepted Michael's offer to approach the John Kyrle school in Ross and Ron's similar offer to find out who would be best to contact at Hereford University

## **12 AOB –**

1. Eddie informed the meeting that the Hereford Times no-longer directly employs a photographer and wondered if we could gain some publicity by submitting the occasional photo & caption. Possibly even an article with several photos of a HA7C event – perhaps 'Bring your A7 Club Night'?

Pat suggested charity events would be of particular interest and Jan wondered if we should publicise relevant events in the local press.

Eddie's suggestion was unanimously supported and he and Ron agreed to organise a short run prior to a 'Bring your A7 Club Night' KO at 6.00 pm

2. Ron suggested it would be interesting to see a plot of Club Night attendance numbers over recent years. If a volunteer would look back through the Attendance Book and provide the numbers - the Secretary agreed to plot the data and bring it to the next Committee meeting for discussion

**13 Next meeting –** Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2023 KO 12.00 Noon at the Pilgrim Hotel, Much Birch.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at around 3.05 pm.

### ***Summary of agreed Actions arising from the meeting -***

1. All - Keep anecdotes and digressions reasonably concise and save longer stories until the end of the meeting

2. All - Anyone anxious to leave the Committee meeting before say 3.00 pm – should ensure that their items feature earlier on the Agenda
3. JJ - Approach the Bank to see if they would issue a suitable card
4. RS - Send Julie a 'welcome letter' template that includes the club motif
5. FS - Only HA7C inspired events to be included in the newsletter 'Crankhandle'
6. All - Let Frank know if you or anyone you can think of, would write an article for 'Crankhandle'
7. All - Event organisers to ensure that a participant is tasked with providing Frank with a report and photographs
8. EL – Arrange and inform Pat & Jan of a date for the mid-Summer Shed Night
9. RA – Remove the Website password protection from the six most recent Newsletters
- 10.BG - Write to Michael & Gill Harcourt and decline their kind offer to research other possible Club Night locations
- 11.MW - Approach the John Kyrle school in Ross
- 12.RS - Find out who would be best to contact at Hereford University
- 13.RS & EL – Organise a short run and a 'Bring your A7' evening
- 14.EL? (Holder of the Attendance Book) – Count the attendance numbers for Club Night meetings for recent years and convey the data to the Secretary

### **Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs**

In 2007 the FBHVC noted that **for some events, participants are being asked to sign entry forms that indemnify the organisers against all claims**, however caused. FBHVC cannot emphasise enough that no-one should sign such a form, as in doing so they are likely to be breaching the terms of their own insurance policies and thus put themselves at risk of invalidating their insurance. An incorrect entry form indemnity can be worse than no indemnity at all. Any entry form indemnity that uses phrases like 'howsoever caused' or 'notwithstanding that the same may have been caused or occasioned by' is likely to fall into this category. Such wordings were made illegal by the Unfair Contract Terms Act of 1977 because they go against the principles of fair contract by seeking to hold the organisers indemnified against claims resulting from injury or damage that they may themselves have been responsible for causing. Do not hesitate to strike out the words and write "*Illegal by the Unfair Contract Terms Act of 1977*".)

# Club Regalia

Windscreen Stickers £ 2.00

Sew on Embroidered badge £5.00 (Previously £10)

Brass Car Badge £14.00



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

## 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/>

Please note that the views expressed in this newsletter are those of the writers and not necessarily those of the Editor or the Hereford Austin Seven Club. Whilst every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of technical advice and information, the Club and its officers accept no liability for loss, damage or injury from persons acting upon the advice or information given in this publication.

# **Peking to Paris 2011**

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **MONGOLIA AND THE GOBI**

As in 2007, we entered Mongolia in a sandstorm. The two travel systems could not be more different- we were immediately adopted by a guard at the Mongolian frontier, who ushered us to the front of all the various queues, took us to all necessary desks, helped us change money, took us to a shop to get some biscuits, and we were out within 30 minutes! No paperwork, no fuss. Dead simple.

We drove the short distance to the frontier town of Zamyn Uud, and stayed at a hotel costing twenty pounds for the night, parking behind the hotel to hide the cars, and covering them with a sheet to try and stop too much sand getting where it should not. We were sticky, dusty, dirty, thirsty, and hungry...and there was some room to feel tired too. I sat on the bed in our room making a few notes whilst a cleaning girl, Nara, gave everything a wipe over, and taught Carmen a few basic Mongolian words.

Although Susanna and Mr Gu were first class, it was very nice to be on our own at last and free to do what we wanted, when we wanted. What we had to pay for the week in China really was outrageous, and really quite unnecessary. I know about "when in Rome" and all that, but do the Chinese want motor tourists- perhaps not? Every other country we have visited on our travels, bar Turkmenistan, (where we had to have a guide and which took an hour or so to enter and several hours to exit), has treated us like responsible adults, and not made life difficult for us. Had a long shower, felt human again, went out and had a super meal in the same restaurant by the railway station that we had been to in 2007. We were ready to face the Gobi.

6 miles today making a total of 572.

Sunday 29th May

We rose at 5.30am and were away from the hotel by 6.15, and drove till 6.30pm reaching Saynshand in a single day- whereas in 2007 it had taken us two days.

The tracks had terrible corrugations, which I could not remember having suffered in 2007, and Myrtle began to chirrup- then the noise stopped, so maybe it was just some grit in the clutch. Several times we got stuck in sand. We came across one very soft stretch about a hundred yards long, but luckily there was a small truck trying to find a way through and together we managed, with some help with pushing and shoving, then a final dash, to get over it.

From time to time we would see the new road being constructed, in most places just a strip of raised gravel, and along it every four hundred yards or so a bank of earth across the road to prevent anyone using it. We did manage to get onto it for a short while,

dodging round the earth piles, but in the end had to give up as going round the end of the piles meant driving the cars at a dangerous angle near the edge of the road, and it was just too risky.

About an hour from Saynshand, we were caught in a storm, rain not sand this time- obviously an unusual occurrence in a desert, and this would not be our last dose of desert rain. The sky was very black, thunder rumbled, lightning flashed. Carmen was OK as I had put up Myrtle's hood up before we left Zamyn Uud, thinking it would be better on bouncy tracks to have the weight of the hood more evenly distributed. I got soaked and very cold.

We bounced and banged our way into Saynshand, pretty tired and feeling very dirty. Our hotel was OK, but the hot water in the shower and the fridge did not work, and the plug in the basin was jammed closed. The cars were put in an underground garage down a rather steep and very uneven ramp. Walked down town to find a restaurant where we ordered a sizzling lamb dish we had seen other people eating and it looked rather good. However, it was mainly fat, something Mongolians rather like, but not so good for us. I could not face more than a few mouthfuls.

140 miles driven, total to date being 712.

Monday 30th May

What a day! It was bad enough just trying to get the cars out of the garage, after delaying our departure (the Bank did not open till 9am) to change some more money!

Filled up with petrol (we always tried to keep tanks and the eight cans filled as much as possible, never knowing when the next lot of petrol would be available, and whether we would suffer leaks or whatever), then off into the desert once more- if we could find the way out of town.

No sign posts anywhere, and the only roads were those in the town itself. We followed one track only to end up back in the town. We passed a fellow in a 4x4 who happened to be an English-speaking geologist, and he not only showed us the way out of town, but warned us against trying to drive to Khovd as he said the stretch between Altay and Khovd of several hundred miles was extremely corrugated, and that the corrugations were very deep. That was a real blow as I had really been looking forward to seeing the western Gobi and the Altai mountains, but it was obvious that Kotka would not cope with all the shaking from such corrugations, so there and then I realised we would have to repeat our route of 2007, and head north to Irkutsk, and Siberia- a detour of several hundred miles along roads which would be bad, but at least not corrugated. I had tried for months before the trip to get good details of the road to western Mongolia, but even people living in Ulan Bataar did not really seem to know, and the only reports I managed to get were positive ones...but then those people were not driving old cars! Damn and blast really, but we were taking enough risks as it was and there was just no point in taking silly risks.

Not far out of town, Myrtle began to squeak again, a noise similar to that which heralded the break up of the propshaft on Brian the Snail in 2007. Carmen came to a halt, and said she thought the noise was coming from the front of the engine, and that there was a smell of burning. On inspection, it turned out that it was nothing to do with the prop shaft, but the fan belt had tightened itself, was not turning, and it plus the two pulleys were extremely hot...the belt was beginning to melt! I slackened off the belt adjuster, and we set off again.

An ovoos was nearby- a sacred mound of rocks in which was planted a pole strung with blue material, and with various money notes and bottles tucked between the rocks. For good luck you are supposed to walk round these things three times, which is what I did, grateful that the problem had been solved- so I thought!

Then we were into dreadful corrugations again- not at all deep, maybe two or three inches, and spaced about a foot apart, and from the car they were not exactly easy to see, but my, did they bounce the cars around, especially Kotka, she being so light. Tried to suppress visions of broken propshafts, broken halfshafts, or worse.

It became windy, cold, and then started to rain again. This was the Gobi for goodness sake! We were even driving through puddles. Then a bonus- we came across two cranes, each about 5½ feet tall, light blue in colour, and using the wind to jump up and down in presumably a mating dance. They were wonderful.



In the Gobi

We decided to miss lunch and try to get to as near the tarmac as we could- that is, the proper road which started some 120 miles north of

Saynshand...unless in four years it had progressed further south. We had continued to see stretches of the new road being built, but still access was denied, both by the road being on a high ramp, and with the regular piles of earth across it.

Mid-afternoon, I had to adjust Myrtle's fan belt again and noticed that the top pulley was very loose. The bearing had obviously gone, so would need to be replaced in Ulan



A bit later, Carmen was leading and about fifty yards ahead. It was still cold and the wind was up blowing sand across our path. Suddenly we hit corrugations,

Kotka was thrown sideways, and when I tried to get back on a straight line nothing happened- the steering had broken. I hooted and hooted but Carmen continued on her way. I stopped, yelled and waved my arms but on she went disappearing into the distance, before eventually realising that something was amiss, and turning round to come back to me.

By the time she got back to Kotka and myself, I had discovered that the ball joint on the steering arm had broken just below the ball. I had plenty of spare steering arms, but no spare ball joint bar one that was attached to an arm that had part of the plate, which fits against the axle, broken. I looked at it, trying to see how the ball joint was fitted. It did not seem to screw in, it would not come out tapping it, indeed it seemed as if it was impossible to get it out and fit it to a new arm....so all I could do was use the spare arm as it was and hope for the best. It's sod's law with spares- take everything bar the kitchen sink, and it will be the sink you end up needing.

The wind was blowing harder by now, sand flying everywhere, and of course that meant every time you put a tool down, it would pick up grit, and even start to disappear! Then I realised that I could not get the broken ball joint out of the steering rod, as no spanner would fit the head of the bolt which went through the steering rod to retain the ball joint. I set to with a file to get the head down to a size which would accept a spanner, then tried to turn the bolt...it went so far then jammed, as the end had been bent when the ball joint snapped.

Pushed down slight panic attack, and set to with a hacksaw, thinking that having already extracted the bolt a quarter of an inch, if I now sawed off the remaining end of the bolt, it would give me a quarter inch to play with if I could get the rest of the bolt back in again. Luckily, having sawn off the protruding end, the rest of the bolt did come out easily. I

fitted the spare arm, and replaced the bolt. There wasn't enough stub sticking out to replace the nut however, so I wound gaffer tape round and round the joint and over the bolt head, then put half a dozen cable ties over all that, and crossed my fingers.



It took about an hour to do all this, and to begin with I had contemplated walking to a small village about a mile away to get help, but then thought no, I must try to do it myself. So I was pleased that I had succeeded, and it turned out the

"village" was just half a dozen shacks, and no-one seemed to be at home.

We set off again, trying to reach a small settlement called Ayrag, which we reckoned was some twenty miles away. We did have a GPS into which I had fed the co-ordinates of towns through the Gobi but we discovered that two towns were incorrectly named on the maps we had, and effectively "back to front". It was wet again, freezing cold, and as we approached the town we could not find our way into it as a railway branch line blocked our path. We had to drive a mile or two away from the town again to find a crossing point.

I was now shivering violently, and very cold, and thought that it was partly reaction to the breakdown, but certainly I needed to stop driving, as I was also beginning to feel rather dizzy.

There was only one hotel, and you would not have known it was one, and we only found it after asking around. We were the only guests, and it cost us just fourteen pounds for the night. The landlady was so obliging. She fussed over us, and showed us how to use the communal bathroom- with a rather dangerous looking water heater which had wires hanging everywhere. She poured some cold water into it, and switched on the plug, which was hanging from its socket and over which a considerable amount of the cold water had been poured! The loo had a bucket of water and scoop beside it with which to flush. I tried to find out whether there was anywhere to eat in town, but she did not understand our hand motions, and attempts to mime eating...so I thought. After a quick wash, we were beginning to tuck into some muesli bars when there was a knock at the door, and our lady walked in with a tray of food for us..beefburgers and rice, tomatoes, cucumber and bread. She was adorable.



We discussed doing the western Gobi after all, but decided to stick with the Irkutsk route rather than risking a serious break in one or both cars on corrugations. After all, a breakdown we could not fix might well have happened a hundred or more miles from anywhere on any one of several tracks representing the "road", and what would we then have done? I never actually decided what we would do under such circumstances, because whenever I started to think about it, it became such a horrendous complicated eventuality that I would prefer to think about something else rather than risk being put off the whole enterprise. Actually with two cars like Myrtle, I think we would have taken the risk of going west, but Kotka was just so light that she was being thrown all over the place whereas Myrtle, being much heavier, was taking it all in her stride

Went to bed with the thought that next day we should reach tarmac and we would at last be able to get out of second gear and stop being shaken about. Amazingly, neither car using much oil, and no bad leaks....yet!

Did just 89 miles, and 9 hours driving. Total 801

Tuesday 31st May

A horrid, horrid final day in the desert. There is no road. You know the railway line from Peking to Ulan Bataar is somewhere to your left or right as the case may be, depending on your exit from the last town, and there are also some telegraph poles going to Ulan which you can keep in sight. However, there are a myriad of tracks going all over the place, and we just had to choose the one we thought looked the smoothest, so we were constantly shuffling hither and thither over the desert, trying one track then another, to get the best surface.

We had rocks, sand, and corrugations, and I was scared stiff of another break, for I had no more ball joints. We were flung to and fro, no matter how careful we were. It was truly awful. The gearing in Kotka made it very difficult to keep a constant slow pace, so I was sometimes having to accelerate, then take my foot off the accelerator, or get into neutral, then into gear again for another small push. The banging about was slapping her propshaft, as I just could not keep a constant pressure on the accelerator pedal. More drizzle too, and both cars had now started to leak oil, Kotka more than Myrtle.

Our maps had said it was only ten miles from the "last" town to the tarmac, but it was more like fifty, as the names on the map had been reversed, so my GPS details were wrong. We went on and on, thinking we would never reach the tarmac.....were we lost?... but eventually there it was- no further south than it had been in 2007. What a relief- did the silly American "High Fives", we were so elated!

We thought we would be able to "fly" to Ulan Bataar, but in our fill up the night before we must have bought some rather dodgy petrol as neither car seemed inclined to go very quickly, and both cars' plugs kept fouling. Myrtle's fan pulley had become very loose, so rather than risk it coming off and smashing into the radiator, I removed the fan belt..both

cars were both running very cool anyway. At least the road was smooth, and we made our way to the capital, arriving at 8.30pm after negotiating some pretty dreadful roads on the outskirts, full of potholes, and not helped by trying to avoid the same yet also having to avoid swerving into cars trying to overtake us.

We found our hotel- the Kempinski- a modern and rather plush hotel where we would be put up free for three nights. The manager, Sven Fritsche, a charming East German, welcomed us, arranged for the cars to be parked over some cardboard to pick up the incontinence, and then showed us to our suite, which would normally have cost over one hundred and fifty pounds a night. Luxury - fluffy white towels, his and her bath robes, hot water in bath and shower, soap, shampoo, bath hat, flushing toilet, comfy bed. Bliss!

Ulan Bataar- a Soviet creation really, though there was a town of sorts here before they came along in the 1920's. Bits of concrete everywhere, rather scruffy buildings plus some quite ornate and imposing ones, lots of traffic and no obvious speed limit! Potholes, dust, and very dry air so we were constantly feeling thirsty. It's meant to be the coldest capital in the world, with winter temperatures frequently down to minus 30 degrees. In a way a sort of mix between a shanty town and an up and coming modern city- no doubt in ten years or less it will be totally changed.

203 miles done in 13½ hours of driving. Total now 1,004, so we have broken the one thousand mile barrier, and we are both averaging 31 mpg. Not bad considering we have been in second gear through the Gobi.

Wednesday June 1st

Mother and Child Day today, so it is a public holiday. We had a superb breakfast- everything you could want from English to Chinese to Mongolian food, then several hours working on the cars, being interrupted by meeting an American missionary, Bill, who gave us his phone number for emergencies, and Sean, the owner of nearby Hennessy's Irish Bar!

At 3.30pm, Dr Erdenesaikan from the Childrens' Clinic came to pick us up with a colleague who was an orthodontist. The clinic was wonderful- there were balloons and banners to welcome us, and we were introduced to the children and their parents. The walls were covered with cartoons, beds had colourful quilts on them. Everything very relaxed and friendly, though being a Russian building of the eighties, it did look a bit "tired". The maxillo-facial section had seventeen beds.

We were told that in the embryo, the lips start to form 4-6 weeks into the pregnancy. They are naturally split before then, then come together. This process goes awry in kids with the cleft problem. The palate forms 8-12 weeks into pregnancy.

1. At 2-3 months they operate for the cleft lip
2. At 1-2 years old they operate for cleft palate, followed by speech therapy if required
3. At 5-6 years old they carry out any further remedial work on lips and palate

4. At 5-7 they use a removable orthodontic appliance like a plate to cover the hole in the palate to aid eating. If such a plate is not used, the tongue can actually make the cleft bigger. This obviously contradicts item 2, but maybe I misunderstood, and this is perhaps a temporary measure when kids come in at an older age.
5. Gum work starts at about age 9, but only if a bone graft (usually gristle taken from the hip, which becomes as hard and durable as bone) is required
6. Brace work from 16-18 onwards

When repairing a cleft, they quite often make two further splits, one each side of the cleft, in the soft tissue closer to the gums. This enables the central cleft to be brought together with less strain on the stitches, and the slits at the side are left to heal naturally. A cleft lip operation usually took 1-2 hours depending on whether both sides split or not, and a cleft palate usually only 30 minutes or so.

The Ulan Bataar clinic has worked with Smile Train for a year, after failing to raise money from local big businesses, and from other international organisations. They have operated on ninety-seven patients so far, for each of whom a dossier is prepared for Smile Train, with before and after photographs, full case notes and details of how money is spent. They get their money from Smile Train after every fifty patients.

The doctors reckoned that one in every 1340 children in Mongolia have cleft problems. There were far, far more cases in countries like Pakistan, where they have special cleft clinics to cope with the problem. The causes were not entirely known- could be a mix of



Smile Train Clinic Ulan Bataar

all or any of genetics, poverty, pollution, poison. In Mongolia, it was usually children of poor people, and because distances are so vast and travel so difficult, the Clinic sends out teams to distant communities to do the operations, consisting of a surgeon, a speech therapist, an orthodontist, and nurses. The teams train local doctors in how to give advice, and to put a stop to ideas such as one local midwife blaming the husband because "he must have been drinking too much".

Some patients were into their late teens because of problems of distance, and lack of finance and of hospitals.

In September, a team was due to go to Altay and Uvs provinces in the west of Mongolia, and will spend a week or so operating. Before their visit, they would be warning the local hospitals so patients could be brought in and made ready.

We took photos and videos of the children and their families, then there was a group photo of everyone. Dr Erdenesaikan and the orthodontist took us out for an early evening meal in a private room of a restaurant, where just after I had been asking about Mongol script, (not used in Mongolia since the Russians came, but used in Chinese Outer Mongolia), they presented us with a wall plaque, engraved with thanks for our efforts- and including some Mongolian script! The main word on the plaque means "Mongol", below that is the sign for "eternity", and beneath that a sort of token of goodwill which has been in use since the time of Ghengis Khan, which roughly translates as "Under Blue Skies Forever".

Dr Erdenesaikan had spent five years working in Sheffield, and even now his wife does "Sunday Roast" from time to time, complete with Yorkshire Pudding! When they went to the UK, their son was eighteen and a student. He was refused a visa, so they had to leave him behind with his grandparents. He is now a medical student- a loss to the UK,

Thursday June 2nd

What a day, full of tension and worry. Because the day before had been a public holiday, we could not bring the cars to the garage till today, and limped over bumpy roads to the outskirts of town, some eight miles, where we met Lawrence Melchers, who has an import business, dealing with some ninety plus well known world-wide companies- including Mercedes-Benz, for whom he has the local concession, and a very modern and well equipped works. He was prepared to give the cars a thorough check and service for nothing. His other concessions included champagne houses, and washing powder firms!

We met his chief assistant, Keith de Villiers, a tall South African, and drove the cars into the works- just as Myrtle developed an ominous rattle from underneath somewhere, but this turned out just to be a loose propshaft, rather than the differential as originally thought!

Ulan Bataar garage  
Mongolia



We left the cars there and went by taxi to the Russian embassy to see if we could bring our visas forward, as we were not due to cross into Russia until Wednesday 8th June, but would now want to cross earlier as we

were going to make for the entry point near Lake Baikal rather than at the western end of Mongolia. We were hoping to leave the next day and therefore to cross into Russia on Saturday 4th. At the embassy we had to deal with a man behind one-way glass, who spoke very quietly, so it was very difficult to understand what he was saying, especially as he also spoke no English. Eventually he came out of his office and pointed to a board on which was a notice in Russian, which we were given to understand said that non-Russians could not be dealt with before 2pm.

We decided to walk back to the hotel, visiting the National History Museum en route, which had quite an impressive display of dinosaur remains. Had a short nap, then took a taxi back to the Embassy, where the same gentleman as before told us to go to a different office where we had to fill out visa application forms, even though all the information was precisely what we had given before, just with one date different- namely the date we wanted to enter Russia. The form was infuriating- it wanted details of schools, educational qualifications, military service, employment and so on. Whilst we were fretting with this, another official came out of his office and as he spoke English, we asked if we really had to go through all this form filling. He told us that they could not change the visa at the Embassy- they only issued transit visas, and you had to travel a minimum of 500 kilometres a day! What a damn waste of time- why on earth could we not have been told that in the morning? Screwed the paperwork into a ball, flung it in a bin, and left.

We tried in vain to get a taxi to take us to the Mercedes garage, and then tried doing what the locals do, just holding our arm for a lift- and a fellow stopped, and took us to the garage for a modest fee.

The news at the garage was good. Both cars had been fully greased, distributors shimmed (with strips of Coke tin- same as had been done in China in 2007!) so they were no longer wobbling about. The fan pulley on Myrtle had been rebushed, and refitted, and there

were just a couple more small checks to be made, plus a check on the noise from under Myrtle. We ogled at a new 6.2 litre, V8 180,000- pound Mercedes Gullwing, (we asked Keith where on earth a Mongolian would drive such a car- he said cars like this were often taken to a disused Russian aerodrome south of the capital, and raced up and down the runways!) then went upstairs to a rather posh coffee bar/nightclub complex, all part of the Melchers empire, had a coffee and another snooze, then Keith came to tell us that Myrtle's noise was just a bit of looseness at the front end of the propshaft. We explained that we would be in Ulan three more days because of having to wait for our border crossing date, so Keith suggested we left the cars with him, and he would deal with Myrtle's propshaft the next day. His driver took us to the centre of Ulan Bataar, and we walked the rest of the way to the hotel.

We had to talk to Sven, the manager, about our delayed departure, as we realised it would be unreasonable to ask for three more nights free, and he kindly agreed to let us stay on for those nights at just fifty euros a night....cost price in effect. We had thought we might have to move to a cheaper hotel, so that was a real relief. Our scheduled crossing into Russia on the 8th would now put us just one day behind our 2007 schedule, so not too bad.

Keith had said Kotka was fine bar a leaky carburettor if you forgot to turn off the petrol tap when stationary. Myrtle should be fine too, so one day would not be a problem to make up. Keith also said that at the last "official" Peking to Paris run, they had had to service no less than forty of the cars!

Friday June 3rd.

Visited the Monastery Museum, where in one temple there were various gods and goddesses in amazing sexual positions, then bought tickets for Aida at the State Opera next evening (just eighteen pounds total), and generally felt a bit sick worrying about the cars. We went back to the hotel and early afternoon, Lawrence rang to say the cars were ready and he was sending a car to pick us up. Frabjous joy!! They had redone the repair to Kotka's steering, so that was now perfectly safe, all was well. We arrived at the garage at 2.30 but then problems...neither car had any power at all, and Myrtle could scarcely climb up the slight slope from the works to the road. So back inside the works went both cars, distributors came off, and a lot of fiddling ensued, not being quite sure whether there really was a problem or whether it was rotten fuel. There was a fuel shortage, tanks at garages were getting very low, and all the muck at the bottom of tanks was contaminating the fuel! We did the best we could, and left the garage at about 8pm as it was getting dark. We knew it would take half an hour or so at least to get to the hotel, so it was not going to be pleasant both in the dark, and with lots of traffic.

We were about three miles from the hotel, and had been crawling along in very heavy traffic, and it was dark, when I saw Carmen pull in to the side of the road, enveloped in black smoke. Feeling absolutely dreadful, I pulled in too, dashed back to Myrtle to find that the fan belt had seized up again, and that both pulleys were red hot, and that the replacement pulley was just about hanging off! We had to wait for everything to cool

down, for even the fan was terribly hot, then I cut the fan belt off, and we made it back to the hotel, where I rang Lawrence- "bring Myrtle in again tomorrow". Bloody hell...but we do not plan to leave till Monday. How much stress can one take?

Saturday June 4th.

My nerves were beginning to get very frayed, as I was sure were Carmen's. Got up at 7.15 to get Myrtle to the works as early as possible, and was there on my own at 8 to find everything shut up! No-one appeared till 9, and Keith shortly afterwards. I told him I had spoken with Clive Smith, who had suggested that the fan pulley had been tightened the wrong way (actually it had not- it was just the same as on Kotka). Keith disappeared, then reappeared shortly afterwards saying he had to go home to receive a delivery and would be back in an hour or so...he then appeared again four hours later, but then he was being so helpful, and it was costing us nothing bar worry!

Snoozed in the cafe and felt miserable and sorry for myself. A mechanic explained that as it was the weekend, he would have to take the fan pulley into the city to get it remade, and hoped to have it back by 4pm- but we had tickets for Aida at 5! Agreed with Keith that I would come back the following morning, unless he left a message at the hotel to say otherwise. Had to get a taxi back to the hotel, then another to go down town again to the Opera, where of all people we met Lawrence Melchers and family. Our seats were rather to one side of the circle, so a quarter of the stage was out of view. As the show started and the lights went down, we, and some others, moved towards the centre where there were plenty of empty seats..but then as the show progressed, more and more locals came in late, and a rather chaotic situation ensued as people found their seats taken! But we managed to stay where we were, and enjoyed a good performance.

Afterwards, we tried an Indian restaurant recommended by Lonely Planet, and it was rather good. We had just finished when a young couple, who were on their honeymoon, came over for a chat. She was a very bubbly character, and rather pretty. She explained how they had come by train from London, and were making for Vladivostock with a break in Ulan Bataar. At the Russian/Mongolian border, there had been a lot of delay whilst Russian soldiers had searched all cavities "that is, bar bodily ones of course" she said quite innocently, then burst into giggles. Then chatted to an American lady called Louise, a health visitor, who told us how unhygienic Mongolian and Russian hospitals were, in spite of doctors and surgeons being very good. I said I supposed they had not got the right antibiotics, to which she replied that that was a good deal of the problem- they used too many antibiotics, and did not use them properly. Anyway, she made it quite clear that if we needed an operation, we should be flown out to China, and gave us twelve pounds towards our Smile Train fund.

Sunday 5th June

Keith called at 8.30, saying that new bearings had been fitted to Myrtle's fan pulley, and now it just needed to be fitted. I was getting punch drunk with worry now, and felt I could not cope with any more problems for a while. After lunch we went to pick up the cars, and all was well. That evening we decided we would go to the Mongolian Barbecue,

an American franchise outfit which we had enjoyed on our last visit. However, this time I certainly thought it was awful- the idea is you go up to a buffet and pick out raw meat and vegetables which you then take on your plate to a large circular grill some ten feet across where your choices, and those of others, are cooked in flamboyant fashion by two cooks standing in a space in the middle of the grill. The trouble was that the meat was awful- no matter what meat, it all looked the same- half dried, very red (the meat part) and very fatty, and tasteless. I was very happy to get away, as it was a huge disappointment. The beer we had served to us at the start was flat and warm, and they did not like our complaint, and even tried to charge us for it at the end, even though they had replaced it with fresh cold beer! Our taxi driver, who had agreed to meet us at a specified time, was nowhere to be seen, but after ten minutes or so, we found each other- he had been waiting on the other side of some coaches, and could not see us, nor we him!

We retired to Hennessy's Bar to have something else which would take away the foul taste of the barbecue. Our taxi driver had quite a bit of trouble getting his car to move smoothly..."Benzine" he said throwing his hands in the air. That was good news, for at least it meant that what we had heard about the petrol was true.

Local taxi drivers are amazing- they talk on the phone whilst driving, send texts, cut up other drivers, drive at the highest speed they can, crash over potholes, ignore red lights, and swerve about- but all in good humour, no-one seems to get upset, and no-one hoots in anger.

Monday 6th June.

The day to leave U/B. Got up at 5.45am and decided to check gear box oil. One handbook said we should have 2/3rds of a pint, the other 1½ pints, so settled at ¾ pint in each. We set off at 6.30 and reached the outskirts of the city only to find the road was blocked for roadworks. We had to retrace our way into the city, getting caught up in the business traffic and being carved up by a particularly nasty Mongolian bus driver, who made off when I got out of the car to have a word. We just could not find our way, so asked for help, and a local took pity on us, agreeing to show us the way out of the city. We ended up going on a long detour of about ten miles, passing the Mercedes garage yet again, and ended up on the correct road after an hour or so, just a quarter of a mile away from the road block, and which on closer inspection we could have easily have driven around.

Kotka decided she would play up, and ran very roughly, then we had two hours of rain. Eventually I just had to stop to see what was causing Kotka's problems, and found the distributor cap was not seated properly and was in fact 180 degrees out, so I changed the cap round, and had to move all the cables accordingly. It made a huge difference, quite naturally. So much for expert garage attention.

We had been aiming for Darkhan where we had stayed in 2007, but as we arrived rather early, we decided to move closer to the border, perhaps another fifty miles or so, and to camp. We stopped on open plains covered in iris, with mountains close by, and everyone



passing wanted to stop to look at the cars, and the inhabitants of some three or four gers nearby also came to visit. Cows, horses and sheep also came to say hello. Meanwhile, we tried to service the cars and get a meal ready before the inevitable mosquitoes became too much of a problem.



Mongolia Steppe

A young girl and her baby sister appeared and we gave them some bubble fluid and party poopers. They disappeared only to reappear on the back of a motorcycle driven by their grandfather, with the mother and grandmother eventually joining

them. The grandfather was very sturdy and squat, with typical Mongolian boots curved up at the toes, huge hands, and wrinkled face. He stood ape-like, with arms hanging at his sides, and with somewhat bandy legs. Some young men then turned up, and shared their beer with us. Last visitor was Inspector Uzi Somon of the Mongolian Police! All very friendly and pleasant, but we rather wanted to get on with our meal and get to bed! We managed to get our meal, with the Mongolian family constantly coming and going.



The last appearance was when they came to collect dried horse dung in plastic sacks. There we were in the middle of nowhere, watching a family who lived in pretty much the way such families had lived for hundreds of years, when the lady's mobile phone rang and she began to chat. Now how come Carmen cannot get reception at Vowchurch?

We climbed into our sleeping bags only to find trying to get to sleep punctuated by young voices, and party poopers blowing around the tent!

175 miles done today, and with the odd few miles toing and froing in U/B our total is 1189

Tuesday 7th June

After the party poopers had stopped blowing, we did get to sleep, but woken from time to time by frogs croaking and some rather loud birds singing away in the dark. Woke again at 3am feeling very cold, and discovered the inside of the tent was very wet, with water actually dribbling down the sides. Presumably condensation. We got up at 8, and set off for the border, where we would have to spend the night before crossing into Russia the following morning.

Beautiful countryside, beautiful day, both cars went well.

At one of our stops to refuel, I discovered the rear prop shaft mounting on Kotka was working loose, and that I did not have a big enough spanner to fit the relevant bolt. That would have to wait till we reached Russia.

We stayed at the border town in the same hotel as in 2007, and they even had one of our 2007 stickers on the wall of their reception, so we gave them a current publicity photo. Greased the cars as best I could, checked oils, steering and water, and tightened a few nuts and bolts. The underground garage at the hotel was no longer a garage so we had to park outside, in full view of passers by, who annoyingly would touch everything as I was trying to do the servicing. Mongols cannot just stand by and look. I was servicing the cars at the same time as saying "don't wobble the steering wheel", "don't open the engine compartment", "don't sit on the mudguards", "don't try to get in the cars", "don't wiggle the headlights", and "don't turn the crank handle"!! I tried to persuade a border guard to let us park in no man's land, but he would not agree. He did, however, introduce us to a local restaurant owner who had a secure compound, so we moved the cars there under the eye of a watchman.

Our room- the same one as in 2007- was OK, but this time no bathroom- it had been blocked off. We had to share a single WC and basin downstairs, which was a bore. The basin tap handle came off when I turned it on, and I panicked when for a while I could not refix it. No loo seat, no cistern cover, and no flush handle- just a piece of cord attached to a bit of plastic, which if you pulled too hard meant that the loo constantly flushed, with some engineering required to put it back together again. There was, however, a decent shower in the basement, right next door to the washing machines and all their associated electric cabling. The water heater was huge, and was suspended over you with various wires going here and there. Once again, electrocution became a distinct possibility.

Verdict on Mongolian food- awful. Bar the meals we took in foreign restaurants, and at the Kempinski, the best meal we had had was the first one at the border with China at Zamyn Uud. Vegetables in short supply, and meat was stringy and very fatty.

Slept after a fashion, being disturbed by howling dogs all night.

Just 40 miles today, total 1229