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The Crankhandle

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NEWSLETTER OF THE HEREFORD AUSTIN SEVEN CLUB



Heated debate at the Workshop session

A Dive into Vintage Engineering: My Foray into the Hereford Austin Seven Club

New member, Christian Montez writes: Merely two weeks after acquiring my slightly weathered 1937 Ulster(ish) replica, I found myself diving headfirst into the spirited community of the Hereford Austin Seven Club. With anticipation, I set forth to my inaugural 'Shed evening' — an affair marked by its promise of knowledge and camaraderie. It certainly lived up to the hype.

Nestled in the picturesque surroundings of Riddings Farm, Bosbury — the residence of club stalwart Frank Sibly — we began our assembly on the sunny evening of 15th August at 7:30 pm. It lasted until about 10 pm. Eighteen vintage automobile enthusiasts, myself included, congregated, eager to partake in the wisdom Eddie was set to dispense. A few A7s present further enriched our preliminary discussions, setting the tone for the main event of the evening.

Our guide, Eddie, opened the session with an engaging overview, sharing his expertise on de-coking the 750 engines and their service routines from his garage days. The centrepiece of his discourse was a pristine 1936 Austin Seven, bearing the license plate ATJ 899. This wasn't just a showpiece, but rather a testament to Eddie's meticulous craft; it purred with the finesse of a perfectly calibrated sewing machine.

For me, an intriguing takeaway from the session was about the Austin 12's distinct design. It had a dedicated tray in the engine bay, ingeniously crafted to accommodate a spare head gasket. Being familiar with contemporary vehicles, the notion of performing roadside repairs on such classic marvels offered a refreshing twist on engineering adaptability.

Transitioning smoothly, Eddie delved into the essence of the evening: diagnosing unexpected engine halts. These sudden stops, albeit frustrating, can often be pinpointed and addressed with the right blend of expertise and a handy toolkit — even on the side of the road.

Electrical Snags: A prime cause for unanticipated interruptions, electrical issues can arise in manifold ways. A straightforward diagnostic method is to check if lights or horns are operational. Simple oversights like corroded battery terminals or a mistaken toggling of the isolator switch can often be the culprits. Eddie stressed the significance of terminal greasing, and a lively discussion about the 6-volt positive earth system some of these classics employ followed, highlighting the galvanic protection it potentially offers the chassis.

Fuel Challenges: Vapour lock, the result of fuel boiling within the lines, stands out as a common antagonist. It obstructs liquid fuel from reaching the carburettor. Eddie's remedy? A thoughtfully positioned heat shield behind the carb, designed to fend off the exhaust manifold's heat. In cases where vapor lock acts as the party spoiler, cooling the

vehicle down is usually the solution. A quirky but effective hack from one of the members was using frozen peas to cool the fuel lines! If it's not vapor lock, then a blocked carb jet could be the cause. Eddie highlighted the indispensability of a comprehensive toolkit, particularly a carburettor jet key, and reminded us of the importance of engaging the fuel cutoff switch when meddling with the fuel system.

The Subtle Condenser: This unsung hero underneath the rotor arm can be the reason for a standstill when it malfunctions. Its main role? Absorbing surplus energy and thus smoothing the voltage surges. It is difficult to test whether it has failed, but burnt point contacts can sometimes indicate a failing condenser. Eddie's seasoned advice? Always have a spare at hand to see if replacing it gets the engine going again. He further demonstrated how to gauge the electrical system's robustness by evaluating the spark's range using the distributor's king lead, ½" of distance between the block producing a strong blue spark can indicate a healthy system. A word of caution: always ensure the car is in neutral — these machines can spring to life even if running on just two cylinders, and a pair of thick rubber gloves wouldn't go a miss!

The Point of Points: Contrary to popular belief, Eddie advised against using emery cloth for cleaning points, given it leaves an oil residue that can dampen the spark's vigour, or even completely prevent a spark. Familiarity with setting up these points, combined with maintaining optimal spark plug gaps, is pivotal for a smooth Austin 7 drive. As for spark plugs, Eddie vouched for those from the Ford CVH Engine. Their tapered design mandates a doubling up of spark plug washers, but they run hot ensuring a more efficient burn, especially beneficial for oilier engines suffering from buildup.

The 'Shed evening' marked more than just my debut with the Hereford Austin Seven Club; it was a welcoming immersion into the art of Austin Seven car care. I came seeking knowledge and left with not only that, but also a newfound appreciation for the close-knit camaraderie of the group.

The genuine warmth from club members truly stood out during my visit. Everyone was friendly, making it easy for a newcomer like me to feel at ease. I'm now doubly motivated to dive into my Austin 7 projects – it seems I've got two specials on my plate now. As things shape up, I hope to invite the lot of you to my workshop later in the year, giving a firsthand look at the progress with any tips and tricks more than welcome. I look forward to keeping you all in the loop about my Austin 7 adventures and am eager for the many gatherings to come.

Technical



Eddie's Mystery Object: What is it: page 13

Julie James: Her Austin7 Journey to date...

I want to share my joy of owning an Austin7, why are we drawn to these wonderful little cars? From my perspective it transports me immediately back to a time when travelling from one place to place, speed was not an option in these quirky, timeless cars, the car does the talking, it is the boss!

Time to wave and say hello to bystanders walking the pavements, especially children who love to wave back. The nostalgia and affection shown by so many people whose parents/husbands owned one. Allowing admiring children/adults to sit in the car when attending an event is special.

My background was not as many have had, I didn't have a father/brother/sister/husband interested in vintage vehicles. My introduction was born out of a low period in my life, my husband passed away 4½ years ago, leaving me wondering what on earth was I going to do, in order to regain a sense of balance in my life.

At that time Gerwyn (Lloyd) was desperately working hard on my husband's 1960 Morris Mini, sadly Roger didn't see the finished result.

It was when collecting the Mini from Gerwyn/Pauline it was suggested I came along to one of the Austin7 Club nights, I like driving cars, but I didn't own an Austin7, Gerwyn reassured me that was not a mandatory criterion! So with slight apprehension, I said ok!

They kindly picked me up, I felt very included from day one, and immediately realised I needed a car, I did not want to be the odd one out, relying on the good offices of fellow members...what was I letting myself in for?

Gerwyn sourced my 1936 Ruby (Gertie), it was most definitely a learning curve, steering, gear changing to name two adjustments, I loved driving the car from day one, it was a challenge at first, but knowing I had the support and backing of



experienced Club members I knew there was no going back..I was smitten! I have since sold the Ruby and acquired my 1935 Austin7 Opal (Flossy) impulse purchase! It hasn't exactly been a smooth transition, she has certainly challenged my enthusiasm on more than one occasion, I have learned to realise that is the nature of the beast!

That said, I drove to the Goodwood Revival A7 Centenary 2022, and back, trouble-free: over 300 miles in total! Subsequently 'Flossy' has been on many trips, some with and some without a hiccup! Gerwyn has carried out quite a bit of mechanical changes, here is hoping for a good summer's driving, without the need for RH recovery..!

'Flossy', me and my Border Dex who accompanies me from time to time, we soldier on, with a car that hopefully will allow me to enjoy the many Club events and beyond. The combination of the Club and car has broadened my horizon, taken me to places I would otherwise never have seen, at the very least I have made enduring friendships I would never have made or experienced sat at home!

Since joining the Club in 2019, apart from enjoying the company, I now find myself paying back the hospitality, by serving the Club as Membership Secretary & Treasurer, another learning curve!...be careful what you wish for. Do not look into Bob Garrett's eyes if a Committee vacancy becomes available!!! ha!ha!

The Chairman's Run

Pete Hewitt writes: Sunday 6th August and eleven Austin 7s turned up at the Butchers Arms Woolhope, a beautiful old half-timbered English pub complete with low beams inside. Eddie tells us the timbers were recycled from old ships!

After cups of tea & coffee, we got the briefing from the boss (Michael Ward) and were armed with our maps and instructions.

No-one seemed to want to go up front so I took the lead with my excellent navigator, Ben. After only a few miles we climbed high up to Marcle Hill and pulling over at this point, giving us a fabulous view of the Vale of Leadon and beyond:



During our brief stop, Tim got news from Jeremy & Tess who had a puncture (the A7, not Tess) and would be delayed in getting to the Butchers Arms. Michael very kindly offered to go back and restart his run with Jeremy & Tess - what a star!

We all set off again on very tiny country lanes, complete with the grass growing down the middle, the little Austins seemed quite at home on them!

Apart from a few short sharp showers, the sun shone all the way and provided us all with wonderful driving conditions.

We passed through little hamlets and villages called Kynaston, Brooms Green, Dymock, Kempley, Much Marcle, Sollars Hope and miraculously back to Woolhope.

Along the way I had to swerve to miss a chicken, nearly took off over a hump backed bridge and hit a random 'sleeping policeman' with no warning sign which nearly knocked my teeth out!

All the 7s performed fantastically even after noticing Frank & Eddie 'engine diving' in the car park before we set off: note the yellow chummy with its bonnet open!



We all arrived back at the Butchers Arms in time for a very delicious Sunday Roast which went down very well.



Wet weather gear for a Chummy, while owner having lunch

Thanks go to June & Mike for sorting the route, map and directions and Ben for his excellent navigation. Count me in for the next one - great fun!

Photos Ben Shoesmith

Derek Wynell-Mayow

It was sad to hear of the passing of Derek Wynell-Mayow on 27th July, 2023, at the age of 94. A number of us knew Derek because Member Robert would bring his Dad to various club functions and shows, in Robert's striking yellow Chummy.

Derek was an engineer, so had a keen interest in Austin Seven's, not least of all Robert's rebuild of his 1925 Chummy. Derek served an apprenticeship with English Electric from the age of 18 but was born in Ceylon before starting school in Australia at the age of 5. Always able to talk about almost anything, Derek was clearly a brilliant engineer above all else, filling in his limited 'spare' time with building an electric guitar and a colour television!

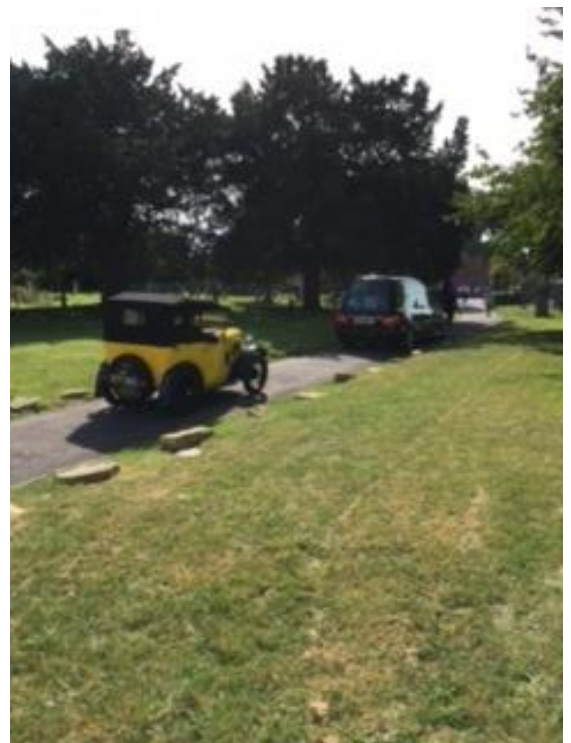
In his early years as a family man he had a motorbike and used to take all three children on it. Val on the back with Robert in between her and Derek and Michael on the petrol tank, usually on roads around Cannock Chase; whatever happened to health and safety? During his ownership of many different cars, one of his favourites was a Morgan three wheeler which he used extensively for rallying! It follows that his keen interest in Robert's Chummy was a natural progression.

In earlier years Robert's parents were keen ballroom dancers gaining many medals for their high standard. However, Derek's time was also spent supporting Robert and his brother Michael in their passion for motor sport; formula 1 racing at Silverstone and the Hill Climb at Prescott to name but two.

Derek sadly passed away while out for a day visiting Stanway House to view the gravity fed Fountain; active to his final few minutes.

The picture shows Robert's Chummy following his Dad on his final journey.

RIP.



Chairman's View.

The summer months are always a busy time for those with an Austin Seven in Hereford, this year has been exceptionally busy and has kept our Events Co-ordinators, Jan and Pat, busier than usual. I am of course referring to all events and not just our own. I, like you probably, enjoy driving my 'Seven' so usually only go to about three shows a year, the remainder of the time attending club runs and using any excuse to drive to Ross and back. However, this year I have been to a few more, and during July and August alone, attended four shows. The upside is that you meet so many interesting people, beyond that is, those who cannot wait to tell you that their uncle/father/grandfather/etc had an Austin Seven! This led me on to wondering about Austin Seven drivers of the future. Will there be any? At our committee meeting in June, I posed the question, 'how do we encourage the next generation of A7 drivers'? If you read the minutes of our meetings, you would have seen the discussion. I contacted John Kyrle High School in Ross and am due to meet with the Headmaster and Engineering teacher. I will be

suggesting that we take along a couple of our Sevens for one of their periods and discuss the engineering of a 100 year old v a modern. This, I hope will generate some interest and you never know, just might sow the seed of a next generation A7 driver. I was filling up recently, with E5, and a young lad came across and said 'what is this car mister'. That has lead to an introduction to a school in Monmouth. So, my question to you is, do you have a sixth form near you that you could pose a similar conversation. You never know, you could just be helping the next generation! Let me know.

Many of you will know of the sad loss of Derek Winell-Mayow, HA7C member, Robert's Father who, sadly died on 27th July. I have penned a brief report further on in this edition, save to say, he will be missed by members of the club who knew him.

We are now planning to have more club nights in the summer, in addition to the monthly one at the Richmond Place Club. These will be held in varying country pubs. Look out for these on the events emails!

Many of you who attended the club meeting in August enjoyed the film "The Best of Vintage Austin". If you have a preference for any particular film in the future, then please let me know as we hold a few in stock or can order what you have in mind.

Happy Sevenning,

Michael.

Webmaster Report Roly Alcock



I continue to regularly update the Events page (<https://www.ha7c.co.uk/events.html>) as and when I receive new information from Pat. I also publish monthly by email a pdf version of the events list to the membership.

Any input from the membership for the website will be gladly received. Particularly if you want to say something interesting about your car, with photos of course.

I am really looking forward to the club outing to Bishops Castle in October. Touch wood, the box saloon is performing well.

Most of my engineering efforts have been taken on the Triumph TR3A, leaking brake/clutch master cylinder, leaking carburettors and having the seats stitching repaired.

I did spot HA7C member Bob Chester-Lamb's RN whilst on a trip to the surgery.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2023

To all Members...

Its that time of year again when as Treasurer I shall be requesting your £10 subscription due on the 1st October '23, for those Members rejoining the Club. I need to stress and mention the Committee have agreed a slight change to previous years payment procedure.

a) In order to make my job a little simpler, could I ask you **DO NOT** make payments before 1st October, so much cleaner to have all incoming/outgoing cash in the same Financial year 1st October '23-30th November '24..Thank you

b) The Committee have also agreed we tighten the window Members have to pay Subscriptions... **the new dates in which to pay your Subs are 1st October - 30th November 2023.** Outside of these dates may result in your Membership being cancelled.

I apologise if this appears a little harsh, on a practical level it reduces the amount of time I need to spend checking the Bank for payments.

PAYMENT METHODS AVAILABLE

a) BACS: Please put your name on the reference section, so I know who has paid.

b) Cheques sent to me..Treasurer HA7c, The Garden Barn, Maund Bryan, Bodenham, Herefordshire HR1 3JB

c) Last resort if Members prefer, I will accept cash at the October and November Club Meetings

If any Member has query regarding the new Subscription system please get in touch. Thank you, Julia James. email: julijames1@hotmail.co.uk

MEMBERS REPORT

The Club continues to grow, albeit at a moderate rate. Currently there are 97 Members made up of 52 paid up Members; 45 family members. There are 5 Honorary Members, and 24 members subscribe to the Grey Mag.

FINANCIAL REPORT

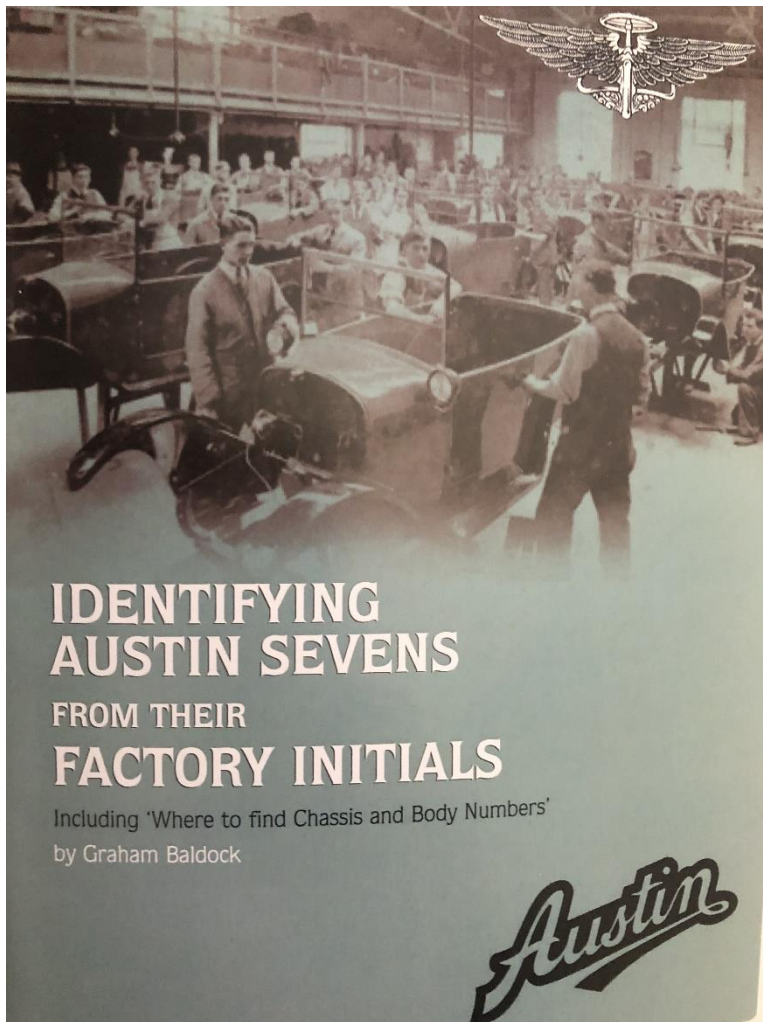
The Club is in a healthy state, with a current Bank balance of £1200, this will increase considerably after 1st October when subscriptions have been paid.

Identifying Austin Sevens Graham Baldock

Cover of my A5 booklet which explains the differences between all the factory models from 1922-39.

Over the 37 years I've attended many, many classic car shows, often being told 'my dad had a Ruby like yours'... Of course my car isn't a Ruby, that came two years later, so in exasperation, and being a graphic designer, I made up a poster showing the different models from 1922 to '39. However this wasn't quite good enough so the following year I made a further poster with sports, vans, and other models in between.

A3 in size, a PDF was put onto the A7CA website, so members could download it free of charge. Among others, Jim Blacklock of the Arrow Register admired the poster but



pointed out because of the lack of space, why didn't I turn it into booklet form to make it even more comprehensive? The committee of the A7CA were enthusiastic, as no one had done anything like that before. Phil Baildon the club's historian was a fountain of knowledge here, as were many others. I decided to categorize the booklet into explaining the differences between the models according to their Factory Initials. The first edition of the 24 page booklet had a print run of 4,000, and was distributed free to members of the A7CA. There followed, a year later, a corrected second edition, which was put onto their website.

Since then, further evidence came to light from the cards that Bob Wyatt (author of the book 'The Austin

Seven', rescued from certain destruction, with the help of Dave Martin who now has all the cards after the sad death of Wyatt. In light of the rescued cards, Bob admitted many of the 'facts' he had put into his book were wrong, and he asked me to help him rewrite his book. Sadly I had to turn him down as I didn't think I was competent enough to know ALL the facts. He also told me that after the success of his book 'The Austin 1905-1952' Bill Boddy of Motor Sport fame asked him to extract all the relevant data solely for the Austin Seven, and to bring out a new book. However he only gave Bob three weeks to do it, so many so-called 'facts' crept through the net.

With the help of Dave Martin and Phil Baidon (and the cards), I subsequently wrote a third edition of the booklet with a print run of just 500 to bring all the new information that was gained to hand. The cards were in many case a revelation, such is the mystery surrounding the manufacture of the Seven including the foibles of manufacture, whereby one end of the factory had no idea what was happening at the other end, and how leftover parts of one model were used in a later model, leading to great confusion. There is still plenty to learn about the Seven, which no doubt in the fullness of time will be resolved and clarified.

I still get the odd 'my dad had a RUBY like yours' at shows, bless 'em.

PS My booklet is still for sale priced at a very modest £5 plus p&p. gbaldock120@gmail.com

A model Austin

But the icing on the cake for me has to be the fact that my car was chosen by Ricko, a Chinese model company (what else), to make a 1:18 scale die-cast model of an A7. (Long story)... It appears they had already been asked by BMW if they would make a die-cast model of the Dixi, the very first car made by BMW, who had previously only been known for making motorcycles.

Their Sales Manager in the UK turned up one evening at a pub club meeting of the EA7C



and asked me if they could use the same machine tools used for the Dixi to make an Austin 7? Sadly I had to say the answer was no, it would have been like comparing a Spitfire with a Messerschmitt! But I implored him to ask Ricko to make a model solely of the Seven, and how it would inevitably be a commercial success. No one else had ever done it. 1:42

scale, pottery models, yes but never in 1:18 scale. Before this, for many years when I was at the A7CA, we had implored UK model makers for a decent model of the A7 – it was, after all, arguably the greatest single influence in the 1920's for the 'man in the street' to own a car - but to date it was to no avail. Fast forward six months, and I received a phone call from the sales manager who had passed on the message to Ricko. It appeared my imploring had struck the right note, and the company had agreed to spend a quarter of a million pounds on new machine tools to make the first ever 1:18 scale model of an Austin Seven! And they wanted it to be of MY car! Understandably I was cock-a-hoop and within days he was at my home taking over three hundred photographs and taking measurements. Two years later 50,000 models had rolled off the production line, 20,000 in my colours (Blue and Black) with my number plate, and 10,000 of each in Red and Black, Green and Black, and Black and Black, all of which sported number plates from my friends in the EA7C. The only model ever, of any Austin Seven, to have such a scale model. So I'm pleased and comforted by knowing around the world on thousands of mantelpieces is a replica of MY car! There were subsequent plans to make an Open Road tourer based on the RN with the roof cut off but before that happened sadly the company decided that they would no longer make 1:18 scale die-cast models of cars, preferring to concentrate on the commercial market.

Originally sold at a recommended price of £29.95, prices for the models now on Ebay, range from £80 - £180. So a good investment - almost as good an appreciation of price as my little Austin!

Over the years we have met and become firm friends with many, many fellow Austineers, and to say our lives have changed forever through owning a Seven would be a massive understatement. And so a huge thank you goes to Eddie for selling me the car in the first place.

The best birthday present ever!

Graham Baldock
(and 'JUdith' my long suffering 1932 RN saloon)

Mystery Object Answer

Crankcase blanking plug which has to be removed to assess the lubricating pump bevel gear retaining nut

HA7C outing to Lynhales nursing home



This was on Sunday 3 Sept. Eddie recounts that it was quite moving to hear the residents recounting their memories of these cars from many years ago.

Austin Seven Club Visit to Earley Engineering Kingstone

Polished the car on the 5th August which I should have known would be a message to the heavens to be unkind, and indeed they were as the day of the visit, Saturday 6th, started with downpours, with only Ray and Barbara Moses braving it in their Opal for the visit. After coffee and biscuits at The Old House Vowchurch, we set off for our tour to start at 11am, the party consisting of John Griffiths, David Southcott, Julie James, Ray and Barbara Moses, Gerwyn and Pauline Lloyd, Bob Garrett, Carmen and myself.

Earley is based in Kingstone, but was started in Abergavenny by Nick Simpson in 1993, father of Alex who gave us our tour. The firm specialise in Alvis cars, doing anything from general service to a complete rebuild, and the standard of the workmanship is obvious-immaculate workshops, cars in various stages of attention, so our mouths appropriately watered. First car to get our attention was a unique and totally original **boat tail of mid 1920's**, with a sensitive/sympathetic owner who was wanting mechanics in full order, but minimum work to the beautifully patina'd body.



Although Alvis are the number one make for Earley, they do give their attention to other makes.. so next to be scrutinised was a rare post war **Invicta**, one of just 16 made:



Sitting to one side was my 1938 Riley Sprite, which had given me quite a fright street-



racing in France in June when two wheels seized up during a race, rear left and front right. Inspection this week revealed that gauze stuck on the brake drums behind the air vents to prevent ingress of grit or worse, had come unstuck and jammed between shoe and drum!



Complete gauzes and those that fell off and jammed the brakes

On into the engine rebuild workshop- everything spotless.



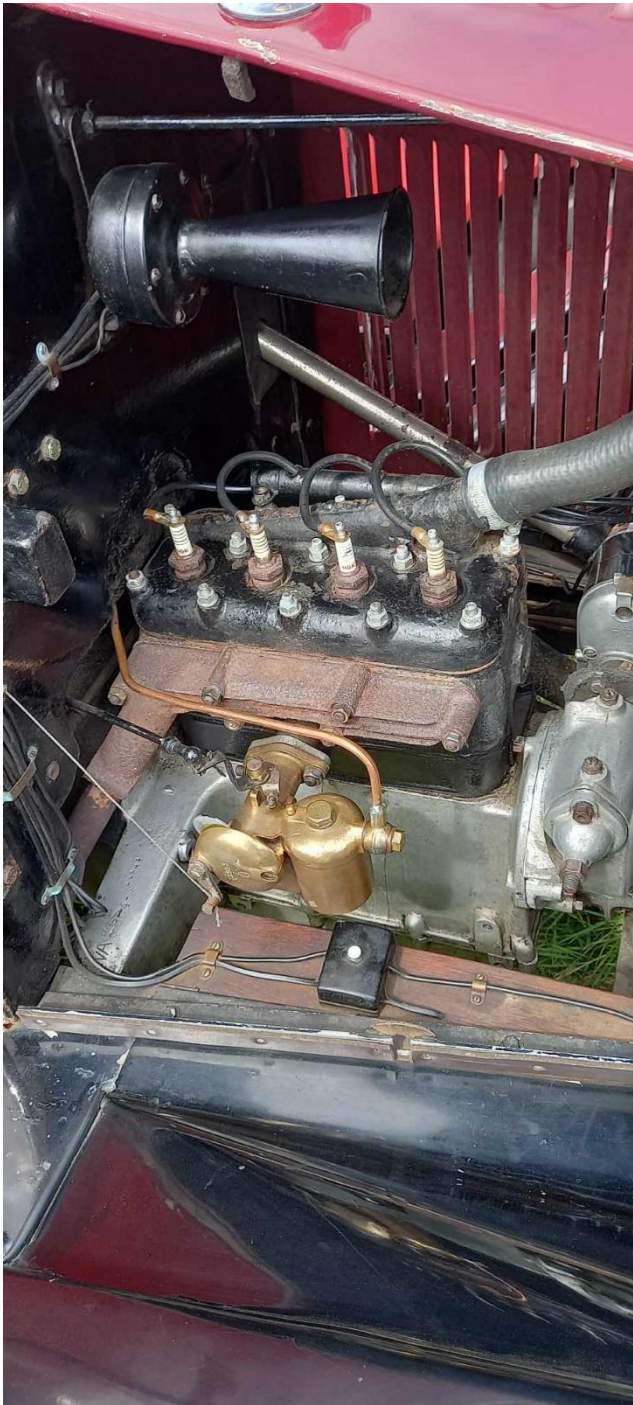
Alex showed us some of the parts which his firm now make for the cars. Then to the body shop, to look at cars nearing the end of full restoration, and others looking very much the worst for wear, full of rust, and getting ready to exercise their owner's cheque book. Final treat was a visit to the store, with some thirty cars awaiting attention. Alex's 1948 single seater Goodwood Special was awaiting a differential change, Alvis Silver Eagles loomed large in the shadows, and one could really appreciate the beauty of so many of the cars we saw, the skills that went into making them, and the skills required to keep them going. Indeed, Alex has two very young apprentices now beginning to soak up the knowledge of more senior employees who have worked for the firm since leaving school

many years ago. How much more useful than going for one of the more useless degrees now on offer, which end up with just a £30,000 debt, and nothing an employer wants. Hats off and thanks to Alex and his Company, who stand for excellence and pride in workmanship.



← The Body shop

Citroen copy of A7?



The attached photo is of the engine compartment of a late 20's/ early 30's Citroën Clover Leaf 3 seater, rumour has it, Austin designed the original Austin 7 after purchasing a Clover Leaf and copying the layout of the mechanically components.

I was impressed by the the similarities of the engine block. Eddie Loader

Market Place – For Sale

RN 1932 £7,750 **Dave Price** 07859 384 728 Newent

Old buff logbook available

Owned since October 2018.

The previous owner had the car for around 42 years and did a full nut and bolt restoration over a number of years. Although the paintwork could be fifteen or twenty years old it still looks good with a few age related marks but no rust. The interior was redone at the same time. Car number. B63546. Chassis no 160142. Engine no M169036. The registration number PO 6268 looks good for age of car. Has done John O' Groats to Lands End. I've just recently put an high compression head on her but the original one will come with the car. The reason for selling her is I don't get the chance to use her. I have MOT certificates going back to 1982.



The Brass Bonnet Badge is back

Please contact Julia James if you would like one. £15



Available Club Regalia

Windscreen Stickers £ 2.00

Sew on Embroidered badge £5.00 (Previously £10)



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/>

Minutes of the Committee Meeting – Held 12-09-2023 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 Frank Sibly – Newsletter Editor
Bob Garrett – Secretary and Dep' Chairman Roly Alcock – Webmaster

No apologies – All members present

Before the meeting commenced, Roly requested his Agenda Item 9 (Webmaster report) be brought forward, just in case he had to leave the meeting before we reached this point on the Agenda. It was unanimously agreed that Item 9 would be addressed between Agenda Items 4 and 5.

2 Minutes of previous meeting - held on 5th June 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 –

The Chairman reminded the meeting of the fourteen actions contained in the previous Minutes and it was unanimously agreed that all except Action 13 had either been completed, were ongoing or included on the Agenda for further discussion at this meeting. Action 13 was for Ron and Eddie to organise a short run & a 'bring your A7' evening that they were unable to arrange.

4 Chairman & Secretary –

Chairman:

Michael reminded the meeting of his recent survey of car badge suppliers that revealed a cost of £60 to £80 per badge and his consequent investigation of the source of original HA7C badges. This led to him effectively out-sourcing the search to Brian Wooster, who had finally come-up with a batch of twenty basic brass badges together with separate 'Hereford bull' inserts.

Ron offered to accurately drill a 'master' badge and Michael said he was happy to then drill and solder the inserts in position.

Julie (Treasurer) took an Action to pay £240 directly to the brass badge supplier and also reimburse the Secretary £60 he had already paid Brian Wooster for the inserts.

Secretary: The Secretary thanked Eddie for extracting a comprehensive schedule of monthly HA7C Meeting attendance numbers from the register and took an action to prepare and circulate a plot of the data to see if anything interesting might be learned.

9 (moved up the Agenda) Webmaster's Report – Roly pre-circulated the following points:

- The website is fairly healthily accessed, and 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
- 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 25 copies are being ordered
- The email accounts continue to be backed up, as is the web site
- I continue to help out with technical issues as and when they arise

Roly also pre-circulated the following regarding GDPR and the removal of password protection:

The Minutes of the June meeting contained this statement: "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".

Having read that, I immediately contacted the Chairman and Secretary to discuss my alarm at this decision taken in my absence, because the removal of password protection of historical newsletters is not something I feel able to do. This is because of privacy concerns and GDPR. Officially, any person who leaves the club should have all their contact and personal data removed within 12 months and older newsletters will certainly contain contact details of ex and deceased members.

I have already extracted all technical articles and made those publicly available.

After discussion with Bob I have agreed to make publicly available the last 6 issues of the Crankhandle for potential new joiners to read. The link will be found on the "Join Us" web page.

Finally, Bob Garrett contacted me to state that the Club Constitution on the website was an old copy. I have subsequently uploaded the latest version - V6.

The meeting unanimously noted Roly's submissions and agreed his actions.

Other Club communication matters:

- It was agreed that Committee communications should wherever possible be in 'MS Word' format rather than 'Note'. Then everyone can more easily access the information
- Jan thanked Roly for the help he had recently provided
- Michael reminded the meeting to ignore and delete all unsolicited emails without clicking to open anything
- Frank said he would like to include a 'Welcome' note to all new members in Crankhandle
- Frank reported that he believed he was not receiving all Committee emails. This was discussed and it was agreed that Members would all send 'test' emails to one-another. Also Roly reminded the meeting that it was important to use 'bcc' when sending emails to the whole membership but not necessary when communicating within the Committee (but very useful to 'cc' one another). Roly took an action to:

1. Send instructions to the committee on how to email a test to committee members
 - a. Using normal personal email addresses, using To: , not Bcc
 - b. Using ha7c addresses, using To: , not Bcc
 - c. Request all report back to him as to what they have received
2. Ask Julie what email address she uses to email Frank Sibly
3. Ask Jan what email address she is using to email Michael Ward
4. Make sure everyone is using the latest addresses for Michael Harcourt and David Southcott

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

- a) Finance –Not a massive change, other than the addition of two new members generating £33. The Lloyds account currently stands at £1199.05, this will dramatically increase after the renewal of subs on 1st Oct 23. I contacted Lloyds regarding acquiring a Credit Card (£1000 limit), after numerous phone calls, the following is required in order to obtain said card!
 - a) Covering letter signed by two signatories, which states how this would benefit the Club, plus it is the intention of the Treasurer to pay off any debt incurred at the end of each month. Our signatories currently are myself (Julie), Bob, Sidney (aka Brian), Derek and Ron.

- b) Copy of current updated Constitution, which should include the Clubs agreement to allow obtaining a Credit Card, or words to that effect.
- c) Copy of Committee Minutes which includes discussion regarding taking on debt through a Bank Card.
- d) Last year's Accounts (2022)

The above points were discussed & noted.

After further discussion it was unanimously agreed that

- The Club is content to take responsibility for a maximum debt of £1,000.00
- Julie James (Treasurer) should on the Club's behalf, apply for a Bank Card with a £1,000.00 limit
- We set-up a monthly Direct Debit (or equivalent) to pay-off all outstanding debt on an agreed day each month from the Club's Bank Account if a Credit Card is applied-for
- We ensure the card is signed by the Treasurer and normally only used by her
- We ensure the long card number and the CVV2 authorisation codes are only shared with the Club Secretary (Robert Garrett) – a current signatory on the Club's Bank Account
- The Card is only used for legitimate Hereford Austin Seven Club payments
- An annual Card Statement is made available to the HA7C Committee as part of preparing and approving the Club's Annual Accounts each October, or at any other time upon request by the Committee

Finally, it was unanimously agreed that the Secretary would draft and circulate a suggested letter for Julie to send to the Bank with our application.

b) Membership – Julie reported

The Membership currently stands at 97 (52 paid up Members) 97 includes 36 partners/known family members. 5 Honorary Members, 62 Members have signed up for Internet Communication, we have 24 Grey Mag subscribers. For the eagle eyed amongst us this is why the numbers don't add up! There are 4 members who were exempt from payment due to paying very late in the year (2022), they will start to pay again on 1st Oct.

Julie's report and membership matters were discussed and it was unanimously agreed that she would let Frank have a note for the September Crankhandle, to remind members about their 2023-24 subscription renewal and her preferred method of payment.

The Meeting unanimously agreed with Frank's suggestion that he would approach all new members and ask for an introduction piece for the Newsletter.

The Meeting thanked Julie for doing an excellent job.

6 Events – Pat & Jan pre-circulated their latest Events Schedule before the meeting.

- Pat & Jan reported that there was not much happening at the moment
- Roly was kindly helping to regularly circulate a Schedule of Events
- David Southcott's 'Autumn Amble' on Sunday 22nd October was still work-in-progress
- The Meeting gratefully accepted Pat's offer to arrange another Bowling Night sometime in November. He agreed to speak to the bowling outfit and circulate details when agreed
- Roly reminded the Meeting that the latest Events Schedule is always available on the Website

7 Newsletter – Frank pre-circulated the following points –

- After January, the Crankhandle will be about half the size, due to no longer having Kip's adventures
- I am still keen to get new members to write something, either about themselves or their car

- Distribution date is in 2 weeks-time, so please let me have any contributions by the 22nd
- I don't receive some of the committee round robin emails, and they are not going into spam, and only become aware of them when others 'reply to all'.

Michael mentioned that other Club magazines often include a few lines introducing new members (also see 5.b earlier) – Frank agreed and said he would need their email address & telephone number. Julie agreed to let Frank have details of all new members during the past year.

The meeting assured Frank that a reduced Crankhandle was not a problem. We then discussed, noted and where applicable, agreed the remaining points and thanked Frank for his report.

8 Technical Advisor's matters – Eddie provided a note prior to the meeting:

- The summer shed night was held on Tuesday 15th Sept. I believe my talk was well received, the subject was Roadside Breakdowns which attracted considerable interaction and numerous questions from the floor
- Since our last shed night, I have received via the Internet various Austin 7 themed questions (not exclusively from HA7C members!), the interesting ones will be forwarded to Frank Sibly for possible printing in Crankhandle
- With Frank's cooperation we plan to hold a late Autumn /early Winter shed night provisionally in early November, the topic will be preparing your Austin 7 for winter storage, also how to change your A7 road wheel and explaining what causes the wheel nuts to occasionally work loose

The meeting noted and agreed the above points.

9 Webmaster's report – Covered earlier between items 4 & 5

10 Approaches to 6th Forms – Michael reported that he has started the ball rolling by contacting the John Kyrle school and Monmouth Comprehensive on the lines of "We have an Austin Seven Club and if you wish, we could bring-along a car and talk about its engineering etc".

The meeting widely agreed with Frank's suggestion that we could usefully major on the A7's simplicity.

Ron had nothing to report on his approach to Hereford University. He hopes to have something for our next meeting.

11 Club Night Venue – Letters from Kip and Michael (H) were pre-circulated and the points that had not previously been discussed, were considered. A comprehensive debate ensued with all Committee Members contributing. It was agreed that a number of additional Summer meetings (arranged by Kip & Michael (H) would be very welcome, perhaps during the second week of the month; and we would also retain our established 'last Tuesday' meetings at the Richmond Place Club.

12 Club regalia –

Julie suggested we consider getting some club lapel badges believing they could be obtained at very low cost so long as 100 are ordered. She was surprised that the car badge inserts cost as much as £3.00 each. Nevertheless it was agreed she would explore this further and Roly agreed to send her a clean copy of the Club's current logo. Julie would also use this to explore the creation of a Club Compliments Slip.

Pat/Jan recommended a reliable (and known to them) provider of T-shirts – Colin Woodfield and agreed to pass his details to Roly.

See also Car Badge update in Section 4

13 A7CA Zoom meeting – Planned for Tuesday 3rd October.

Roly had previously written to the Secretary and the A7CA Secretary, saying he would away at Bishops Castle and therefore unavailable for A7CA meeting.

14 AOB – The Secretary asked if the meeting was aware of any plans or provisional reservation for a Christmas Meal. With no information forthcoming, he agreed to check with Michael Harcourt.

13 Next meeting – Tuesday 23rd January 2024 KO 12.00 Noon at the Pilgrim Hotel, Much Birch.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at around 3.10 pm.

Summary of agreed Actions arising from the meeting -

1. JJ - To pay £240 directly to the brass badge supplier and also reimburse the Secretary £60 that he had paid Brian Wooster for 'pin-badge' inserts.
2. JJ/BG – Prepare, sign and send Bank Card application
3. BG - To prepare and circulate a plot of Meeting attendance numbers to see if anything interesting might be learned
4. All - Wherever possible communicate in 'MS Word' format rather than 'Note'
5. All - Send 'test' emails to one-another to ensure we are all using up-to-date addresses
6. RA - 1. Send instructions to the committee on how to email a test to committee members
 - a. Using normal personal email addresses, using To: , not Bcc
 - b. Using ha7c addresses, using To: , not Bcc
 - c. Request all report back to him as to what they have received
2. Ask Julie what email address she uses to email Frank Sibly
3. Ask Jan what email address she is using to email Michael Ward
4. Make sure everyone has the latest addresses for Michael Harcourt and David Southcott
7. Sec - Ensure the Minutes suit Julie's requirements
8. Sec - Draft and circulate a suggested letter for Julie to send to the Bank
9. JJ – Send Frank a note (before 22-09-23) to include in Crankhandle to remind members about their 2023-24 subscription renewal and her preferred method of payment
10. JJ - Let Frank have details of all new members during the past year
11. MW – Reply to Kip/Michael(H)
12. RA - Send Julie a clean copy of the Club's current logo
13. PC/JH - Pass (T-Shirt expert) Colin Woodfield's details to Roly.
14. BG – Contact Michael (H) regarding HA7C Christmas lunch
15. BG – Update the Constitution to explicitly permit the Treasurer to hold a HA7C Bank Card

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 FOUR

SIBERIA AND RUSSIA

Wednesday 8th June

Up at 6.30 to collect the cars, then joined the short queue at the border crossing, which quickly became very busy. At the Mongolian border post they made a bit of a fuss about why we did not have a particular piece of paper from the border at Zamyn Uud, and I

explained that we had been adopted by a soldier who took us to all the various desks, and we had been given nothing by anybody! One of the customs ladies said she remembered us from 2007. Problems solved pretty quickly and we were on our way to the second border post by 8.30, exiting there for Russia at 9.45, where we had to hand in a piece of paper which had been stamped goodness knows how many times in the previous hour and a bit. It then took two and a half hours to get through Russian customs, after which we had a good run to Ulan Ude, where in 2007 we had stayed overnight then forgotten to collect the passports the following morning, necessitating a 200 mile round detour to collect them again, after being stopped by police who- luckily, as we were never asked this again- demanded the passports! This time we decided to press on, as it was still quite early in the day, and we hoped to find the B&B belonging to a Mr and Mrs Gorbachev, some 60 miles from Ulan Ude, where we had stayed in 2007.

Myrtle's petrol pump then packed up..dead as a dodo, so rather than fit the replacement, I shortened all the pipework, and tried gravity feed only- which, contrary to our experience in England, worked perfectly well for the rest of the trip. Kotka's transmission began to knock quite severely now, so I was on constant look-out for a suitable garage where I might borrow a large spanner, but did not want to suffer trying to get into a major town, with all the usual potholes.

We must have missed the Gorbachev's turning, because we searched high and low without success, and ended up driving in the dark, pitching camp between the road and a noisy railway line at 10pm, after more than 15 hours "on the road". We really did not understand how we missed the Gorbachev's because it was just after a blue garage on the left, and after their turning was the police checkpoint where last time we discovered we had left the passports at the hotel. We never found the garage, nor the checkpoint, yet we had definitely been on the same road..

254 miles done today, total 1483.

Thursday 9th June

At 6am I was woken by someone shuffling around outside the tent, but by the time I had emerged, he or she had gone. Lots of mosquitoes about, and got badly bitten. Packed up as quickly as we could to avoid being eaten alive, and set off.

We found a roadside garage with the right spanner for the transmission bolt, and asked if I could buy it, whereupon we were made a gift of it. That problem was solved! After a lot of uphill and downhill alongside Lake Baikal, we had lunch at the end of the lake, wondering whether we would come across the awful unmade uphill section of road to Irkutsk that we suffered in 2007. Luckily the road was fine, which bode well for the 125 miles unmade section of 2007 before Krasnojarsk. Ha ha!

We had borsch soup for lunch, which did not stay with us too long. Soon we both had tummy ache, and had to search for an appropriate place to stop where there was not enough room for other cars to stop too! We found a place in the forest, and then had to

find somewhere out of sight and away from the trees, to avoid ticks. Off we set in turn armed with paper and trowel. We both ended up with mosquito bites where normally one would not expect them to be!

The road to Irkutsk from the lake was up and up, and we were always dreading coming across the awful stretch of 2007, but it never materialised. We bypassed Irkutsk, and continued into Siberia with forests either side of the road, and not much by way of habitation.

Late afternoon, tired, we turned off to Angarsk, and asked about hotels. We were led to a hotel in the centre of town where an aggressive lady at reception made a fuss about us not having registered before in Russia (not needed now anyway, but she wouldn't listen) and then showed us a grotty room for which she wanted 55 pounds. I refused, and we left, feeling very moody, Carmen especially so, as she thought I was being unreasonable. There was no other hotel to be seen, so we left the town after walking up and down a few streets unsuccessfully searching, and asked frequently whether anyone knew where there was a hotel, getting blank looks. Then we stopped near a police car and taxi, asked again, and the taxi driver, Jena, said he would lead us to a hotel, which he did, followed by the police!

It was a very weird sort of place- tucked away behind an abandoned barrack building. As we pulled up, I heard an awful noise issuing from one of the cars, like a screeching, only to realise that it was a bird sitting on the gutter of the house. The price was fifty pounds- clearly prices in Russia had gone up enormously since our last visit, and as we were very tired and had not had much of a night the night before, we agreed. Clearly we were going to have to accept this sort of price in anything approaching a civilised hotel. It was a decent room too, and the landlady was charming, so it did not hurt too much. The landlady then said that she thought the cars ought to be garaged somewhere more secure, as there were some dubious youngsters about, so the police volunteered to keep the cars at the police station, so off there we went, following the police car and the taxi driver, who then took us back to the hotel via a shop where we could buy some food.

Dreadful mosquitoes, even in the room, but luckily we had brought some killer spray with us. That's the problem in Siberia- they are with you all day and every day, and are huge.

Tomorrow promised to be interesting as we would get to the stretch which last time had us on dirt and rubble roads for over one hundred miles. We hoped all would be well, particularly as the previously awful stretch from Lake Baikal to Irkutsk had been finished and properly surfaced.

Every time we stopped, crowds gathered round, and as we went along, people passing us would take photographs, sometimes leaning across the passenger seat and continuing to click away even with a lorry coming the other way, only to pull in at the last moment. No Russian hooted another (this seemed just to be reserved for tooting a welcome at us!), as this was just the way Russians drove. Crazy dangerous, and no ill intent, but unnerving

for us. The photographing also caused other cars to pile up behind us, so quite often we pulled in to allow them all to pass. We were also being hooted at constantly, a ghastly high pitched bee-ee-p from cars and a deeper hoot from lorries. It always gave me a start, even though it happened all the time, and became quite annoying by day's end when we were tired.

210 miles today, total 1693

Friday 10th June

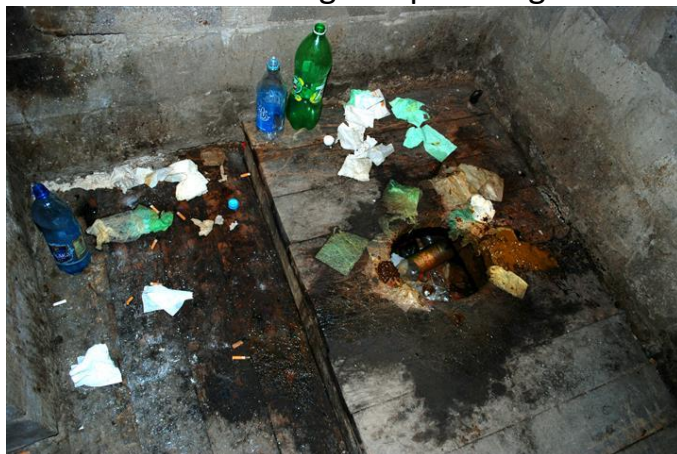
We discovered last night, when Carmen went downstairs to check the time on the hall clock, and met the lady owner, that we had entered a new time zone and that we were an hour later than we thought.

Jena came at 6, took us to the police station to get the cars and then led us out of town, refusing any payment for all his help. A real star. We had some very good road indeed, in parts with thousands of white/black veined butterflies clustering along the roadside and sadly committing hari-kiri on our radiators and windscreens.

Whilst refuelling, some Romanians came up to us- they had two cars, one parked either side of the road. One fellow was quite well spoken, and quite well dressed in a suit. In English, with lots of "dear sir and madam", he started to tell us how his family was poor, and how he needed money! We had had this trick last time in this area. Told him to scam. Later in the day, some fifty miles further on, we came across them again, trying their scam on someone else.

We arrived in the area where last time we had had bad road- and sure enough, there it was again, but just a preliminary stretch of about twelve miles. Very sandy in parts, otherwise just gravelly corrugations making Kotka hop about worryingly. So how long would this go on for?

Stayed the night at a roadside cafe for twenty pounds, outside pit loo, bucket and tank of water in the room, and two sofas to use as beds. Prices had certainly risen, as we would have paid less than half that price in 2007. Greased the cars best I could, and general check. During the day Kotka had seemed to get a second wind from time to time if you really pressed down the accelerator..this would happen from time to time on the trip from then on, and I never got to the bottom of it. Just like having a supercharger cut in!



Inside the Siberian Toilet Block

Worn out- twelve hours on the road.

266 miles today, 1,959 total so tomorrow we would break our second thousand.

Saturday 11th June

Slept well after some altercation with noisy neighbours, involving intervention by the landlord after they refused to move away from under our window where they were chatting loudly.

We set off at 7.30 and soon got into the rough stuff. Gravel, sand and rocks. Unlike 2007, where this awful road just went on and on, this time we had five or six fairly short stretches of about three miles or so each time...but it was unnerving as we had no idea how long it would go on for. During one bad stretch we could see a new road being built alongside, and it was tarmaced- but with the usual heaps of earth across the road to prevent anyone using it, plus steep ramps either side. I climbed up to have a look, and as far as I could see reckoned we could steer round the earth banks, so we set off, climbed a ramp used by construction traffic, and got onto the road. We drove happily along for about two miles, passing a few road workers en route who just waved, and then came to a very high bank of earth right across the road, and an impossibly steep bank on the left. On the right there was a drop of about eight inches off the tarmac onto the earth side of the road then deep ruts and a very steep slope for large construction vehicles.

I wasn't going to give up and have to drive back two miles, so collected stones to fill in the drop off the tarmac, then edged Kotka along the earth side of the road, and down the slope, coming back to collect Myrtle whilst Carmen filmed. Hairy, but I succeeded.

We had every sort of Russian road today-

1. Smooth tarmac on the new road
2. Gravel sand and earth roads, sometimes with and sometimes without corrugations, and with the odd loose rock dotted about.
3. Bridget Bardot roads- full of deep cracks in every direction, but no potholes
4. Ramps across the road every twenty feet or so, which were not too bad till you reached a ramp every quarter mile or so, indistinguishable from all the others, but which threw the cars into the air.
5. Small potholes everywhere, only 6-12 inches diameter and perhaps up to 2 inches deep
6. Few potholes, but really big ones, several feet across and up to four or five inches deep.

This went on for perhaps two hundred miles, but in 2007 it was over a hundred miles of just dirt, so better in some respects. The trouble is that the way Russians build roads is bad- from what we saw, there is a base of perhaps three feet of sand, then rock, then gravel, then tarmac. Russian lorries are so heavy that the sandy base just cannot cope, and even roads which looked relatively newly tarmaced had big grooves, lumps, and humps in them. In places old tarmac had been ripped up, but instead of replacing it, the road had just been left for you to negotiate as best you could.

We needed some cash, so drove into Kansk, and although we could find no bank open, we did find an ATM machine where we could withdraw one hundred and eighty pounds worth of roubles. The usual crowd gathered, and one man gave us twelve pounds for Smile Train. Then we could not find our way out of the town, and were lead out, very very slowly, by a fellow called Alexander.

Today both Carmen and I just missed being involved in accidents with passing Russians. All caused by them trying to photograph us as they pass, and ignoring what was coming from the other direction. I should think my miss was a matter of a foot. The Chinese and Mongolians were pretty mad drivers, but at least we did not see the huge evidence of road deaths that you have in Russia- tombstones every mile or so along the roadsides, and yes, these people are buried where they fall. Often the tombs would have a little table and bench alongside, as was the case in proper burial grounds, so presumably relatives come and take a cuppa with the deceased from time to time.

Finding somewhere to stay each night was a problem as hotels- or gostanitsas as they call the roadside hotels- were few and far between, and tended to crop up like London buses- none for ages, then two or three close together in the middle of nowhere. As we wanted to get in at least two hundred miles a day, we might be fairly close to but not at that figure, pass a hotel, then find nothing for the next couple of hours.

Stopped very late as we could not find accommodation, and therefore had to camp under constant attack from mosquitoes and gnats. Our Deet spray and lotion seemed to be ineffective, but we managed to service the cars and get a meal before retreating into our tent. Kotka had developed a bit of a shudder, which was down to two loose engine mounting bolts, which I tightened up, then had a general tighten up all round on both cars.

The gearboxes had started to leak oil, especially Kotka's via the speedo cable. Myrtle's starter had begun to fail and would now only work if you turned the end with a screwdriver first. Both cars had started to leak a lot of oil from the engines. A problem with servicing the cars was that wherever we stopped crowds and mosquitoes would gather, and then Carmen would get chatting whilst I was covered in oil trying to get a spanner from somewhere clean. Nasty fine dust everywhere, which meant all tools got mucky, and had to be constantly cleaned, and always having to tell people to keep their hands off the cars, stop wiggling steering wheels, trying to get in etc etc. What we needed was somewhere quiet, clean and private! Thank goodness for baby wipes, which really came in handy.

As we were getting to bed, a cuckoo started to call nearby, and was answered by another some way off. This went on well into the early morning, and at one time the cuckoo must have flown very low over the tent. The tent started to get very wet again on the inside- not pleasant. Our third night camping, whereas on both previous trips we only camped once.

This day had been a horrid one. The roads had caused me constant worry, and indeed at one time, just as we were exiting a particularly bumpy stretch, the steering did go, and I came to a halt feeling distinctly sick as I had no more spare ball joints. Carmen halted alongside and said that I just had a puncture, and sure enough the front right tyre was completely flat. Changed the wheel and carried on, relieved.

It is amazing how close to absolute panic you are on roads like this. You constantly envisage broken half shaft broken prop shaft, or worse, and what on earth would you then do? Such thoughts have just to be suppressed though, and you just hang on for grim death, in a sort of daze, trying to be nothing but positive.

290 miles today, total 2,249

Sunday 12th June

Up at 7, but actually it was 5am as we had gone through yet more time zones without realising it. This we discovered when we arrived at our destination at the end of the day thinking it was 7.30pm, only to be told it was 5.30!

We aimed for Marinsk, where we had stayed in a pleasant hotel in 2007, and owing to our time slip up, we had plenty of time to see to the cars. Kotka was being the most incontinent, and after making a thorough check, I discovered one of the block bolts, the one just behind the dynamo, had come off and was just sitting behind the dynamo. I had a magnetic rod, so retrieved the nut only to find it had part of the bolt in it and had sheared off. A mechanic in an adjoining workshop (who refused any payment) took off the dynamo for me, and refitted a thin nut over the stub of the bolt, and it made a small difference in the amount of oil oozing out.

Myrtle's speedometer packed up, so from then on we relied on my GPS for distance travelled. Her starter totally packed up, so from now on it would be a push start every morning.

During the day we had found a tyre workshop, where the puncture was repaired free of charge. A huge nail- four or five inches long, had penetrated the tyre from top to bottom. Lots of eagles/buzzards flying over the roads. Quite a lot of evidence of forest fires ..would they be started by one of the many burning fag ends chucked out by drivers?

Found our old hotel, now under new management, and no meal available as it was a Sunday, but a nearby store was open where bought some basic provisions, then came back to the hotel to eat them.

295 miles today, total 2,544. Myrtle has consumed 353 litres to date, and Myrtle 349, at an average of about 33 mpg

Monday 13th June

We had hoped to reach Novosibirsk today but it was not to be.

Mid-morning, I checked Kotka's prop shaft and the universal joint end was slopping up and down, so clearly breaking apart. We drove into Keremovo to look for a garage, and whilst crawling slowly along, a man came past in his car and started taking photographs.

I hailed him down, and although he could speak hardly any English, I managed to get through that the car had a prop shaft problem, and did he know of a garage? The man, Sergei, explained that the day was a public holiday, but he knew someone who would help, so we should follow him.

We did so, and went on and on for some ten miles. I was wondering where on earth we were going, when on the outskirts of the town he pulled into a scruffy yard, where a topless middle-aged man with bulging tummy was working on some cars. This was Yvgeniy, moto-cross champion and former ice hockey player. He crawled under Kotka and immediately knew what the problem was.



He dismantled the prop shaft, and the universal joint was indeed falling apart. So it had to come off. Yvgeniy took the shaft into his workshop where he proceeded to hammer it whilst I just hoped he would not break something- then a chip of metal flew off the shaft. Oh dear! Eventually the joint came apart, and we all piled into Sergei's car to go into town to find the spare part. Luckily the shop was open, the spare we wanted was there, and the only one remaining. Back to the workshop, after visiting an ATM for more cash.

Sergei disappeared but was back soon afterwards with his partner, Olesya, and her three year old son, Arseny. Olesya said rather disarmingly that she was not sure whether Sergei was the father or not! She looked very young, but was a doctor specialising in TB/lungs. Luckily for us, Sergei would normally have been working in his own plumbing company, but had a day off as it was a holiday.

Yvgeniy invited us into his house and cooked us a meal of ravioli. then he set to with the repair, only to find that another piece of the joint needed replacing, so back down the town he went to get the part. Everything was back together and working by 5pm, for which we were charged the high price of one hundred and fifty pounds, but at least we were mobile again, and what service we had had on a public holiday....if it had not been, we would not have met Sergei, and would never have found Yvgeniy.

Both cars were now going well, Kotka had decided to be less incontinent for some reason. Myrtle was driving superbly..she really gave a much better ride than Kotka, and much quieter.

We saw lots more eagles, and thousands more of the white butterflies, clustered at the roadside. The roads were OK with just a bit of ridge and furrow. Quite bright sunshine but I could not wear sunglasses, as these hid the potholes, so quite sure I have developed a squint.

Our hotel pretty expensive twenty pounds, plus five pounds each for access to a shower and lavatory! The "male" loo was an ordinary lavatory with no seat, surrounded by a platform on which to squat, no cover on the cistern, no handle, pee everywhere. Yes, you certainly pay through the nose for rubbish. I began to wonder what the hotel in Novosibirsk would cost as I had promised Carmen we would stay in the quite plush hotel we used last time, so that we could have a decent rest.

We now decided to cut out the Crimea, as we had had no response from the Volgograd clinic which we would have visited en route, and had heard the roads there were very bad. We had done some 600-700 extra miles anyway by going via Lake Baikal rather than western Mongolia, so at the end of the day total miles would be about the same as originally anticipated. A shame yet again, but yet again risks had to be measured, and general tiredness also had to be taken into account.

We were on schedule- just!

172 miles today, total 2,716

Tuesday 14th June

The roads to Novosibirsk were a mix of very good, and pretty bad (this time undulations, and "pimples" about twelve inches in diameter, and about four inches high- how on earth were they formed?)

We arrived in Novosibirsk and I thought my sense of direction to the hotel was letting me down, so we stopped to ask for directions, and yet another kind Russian showed us the way on his scooter- I had been heading in the right direction after all. Luckily Carmen could remember the name of the hotel- Hotel Novosibirsk! I cannot stress how awful it was driving in Russian cities. Quite often the roads were in a worse state than in the

country, with the added problems of the volume of traffic covering what lay ahead so we more often fell into potholes, having to go slowly and getting the plugs sooted up, negotiating tramlines, railway lines and even cobbles on occasion.

We arrived at the hotel at midday, cost of the room one hundred and twenty-five pounds! We needed to change dollars, and went to enquire at the hotel exchange desk. Twenty-three roubles to the dollar. I thought it best to go to a bank, and sure enough there we received twenty-seven, saving some fifty pounds which we would have lost at the hotel exchange office. So the hotel had tried to rip us off. Not a good start.

Checked the cars and found Kotka leaking a lot of oil from the front of the block. I had already tightened what I could, so there was nothing to do but keep an eye on it. We were making reasonable progress, and had three more weeks to exit Russia before our visas expired. No problem as long as there was no serious mechanical hiccup.

There was a gift shop in the hotel, which usually we would ignore, but as we were going to the lifts I spotted a mammoth tooth, so went into the shop to try and bargain an acceptable price- succeeded, so that is our memento of the trip.

Began to relax a bit- we knew that the roads ahead would not be good, but the worst was behind us...so we thought! The forests had begun to draw back from the roads now, and we were travelling through more open country, long straight undulating roads - at the top of each rise the road would stretch ahead four or five miles to a dip and another rise. Usually any hotel would be at the top of a rise, so that by the time we started to look for somewhere to stay each night, we would be eagerly anticipating something at the top of the next rise, and the next, and the next. No hedges or fences anywhere. In spite of the rather boring scenery, our day always seemed to pass quickly.

The amount of petrol we had with us, plus the consumption rate, meant that we would use roughly a gallon an hour per car, so that we would have to stop and fill up every two hours or so. If we set off at 7, we would go on till 9 or 9.30, fill up, then look for somewhere for breakfast. Another fill up at midday, and another at about three when we would have a late lunch. Another at about 5, then we would start considering accommodation.

Discovered I had a tick on my left shoulder- foul thing, which I must have picked up when camping two nights previously. Carmen took it off with her tweezers, and I wondered briefly about tick-born encephalitis, one thing we had not been injected against simply because the jab was so expensive!

Only 120 miles today, total 2,836.

Wednesday 15th June.

We got the impression that Russian city dwellers led very insulated lives, and probably hardly ever went beyond city limits. Asking for directions beyond a city, e.g., "what is the

general direction of (next city)"? would often draw a complete blank, or arms pointing in two different directions at once. That is why we were so grateful when someone volunteered to show us the way!

We struggled against a nasty head wind along the usual mix of good and bad roads, and Kotka's speedo drive was losing a lot of gearbox oil. I looked for my mole grips to tighten the bottom casing of the drive, but could not find them..must have left them somewhere. On the outskirts of Novosibirsk we stopped at a garage, and borrowed some grips to do the job. I asked to buy them, and was given them as a present.

The countryside was getting flatter, and the roads better overall, but as always the need to keep eyes peeled for holes, so not much time to study the view. The mix of silver birch and pine had now become mainly silver birch.

We passed a car on the other side of the road with the bonnet up, and a priest in his long black robes praying beside it. Was he asking for divine assistance? I suppose we should have stopped, but his was a car I could have done nothing with, and there was plenty of other passing traffic.

Shortly before stopping for the day, we came upon a man running along the side of the road, pulling a three-wheeled, canoe-shaped contraption about ten feet long, consisting of a sleeping compartment and luggage rack. He was 50-ish, very weather beaten. We stopped and asked him what he was doing. In broken English he explained that he was Josef Wiliewski, a professional marathon runner, and that for ten months he had been running round the world. He had started in his home country, Poland, then across the USA to Los Angeles, then onwards from Vladivostock. He was averaging 43 miles a day. He was raising money for a children's charity. We wished each other luck, and parted.



One trouble we had been having in Russia was a reluctance of garages to let us fill plastic petrol cans. They would have been quite happy had the cans been metal! We came across this again today and nearly had a refusal, but managed to persuade the lady to turn a blind eye, and filled up surrounded by nasty buzzing wasp-like things. In Russia you go to a kiosk at the garage, behind the one-way glass of which is someone who asks you how much petrol you want, and you then have to make a guess and pay accordingly. Only after that is the pump turned on, you take the petrol and that is that- unless you have over-estimated, in which case you get a refund. It is a very effective way of stopping people making off without paying for petrol.

At 9pm we at last found a rather scruffy looking gostanitsa, with no loo or basin in the room, just a basin under a tank in the "restaurant" and a one hundred yard walk outside to a very dirty toilet block. These details do not much matter when you are worn out!

Having been on the road 13 hours, we did our best mileage to date, 311 miles, bringing the total over the next barrier to 3,147

Thursday 16th June

A good start to the day then really bad roads from midday till about 4.30. Rocks on the road, loose tarmac, bumpy tarmac, undulating tarmac, ridged tarmac, potholes, and cracks. Then a really good but short stretch followed by one of the worst bits we had encountered, which ended in a mogul field of mounds. I was down to walking pace at times, holding up the traffic.

We stopped for a break at a roadside café beside which there was large cage. Inside was a large brown bear, clearly very distressed/mental as it swayed to and fro from one front foot to the other, swinging its head from side to side. Hope it manages to eat its owner one day.

I have mentioned about Russian driving- today I had a lorry come at me head on, and we only missed because I went off onto the side strip- lucky it was there. Their overtaking technique never ceased to amaze me. Near misses never elicited any hooting between Russians- that was reserved for us as a form of greeting.

Lots more eagles, and very flat countryside full of silver birch woods/copses, surrounded by grassland. Quite a few garages had no petrol, so thank goodness for our eight 5 litre cans, which we kept topped up when possible. Driving at approx 30 mph and doing 30 plus mpg, we were using two cans an hour between us, so apart from what was in the tank, we always had four hours/120 miles reserve of fuel.

Restaurants- we thought the portions were a bit mean, especially when compared with the over generous helpings we had had in China. But Russian men are quite big- so how come their size on these portions, when the Chinese are relatively small?

We found a marvellous gostanitsa about 20 miles south-east of Ishim, at forty pounds, expensive, but a very plush room with all our own facilities and decent hot water. .

260 miles today, 3,407 total.

Friday 17th June

A day of long straights. Lots of silver birch, some good road, some bad. Our map, too large a scale really, took us off the main road across country to Kalgan, but we came to a dead end after four or five miles, and had to retrace our steps, during which I nearly drove into Carmen as I reversed rather carelessly! When we did find the side road that we needed, it turned out to be in much better condition than the main road, which was, after all, the main road from the east to Moscow. We had previously asked several times where the side road was, without any success, just a lot of confusing arm waving.

We were stopped by a police car, and for the first time in Russia had to produce all our papers. Very pleasant though, and the man called up a mate in another police car to come and have a look.

Plenty of people at roadside selling forest mushrooms. Yet another "empty" petrol station, but eventually found somewhere to fill all our cans amidst much tut-tutting about plastic.

Getting a beer in a bar when you are thirsty takes for ever. You order the bottle which is handed to you. Pause. Bottle opener? That is given to you. Pause. More pause. Glass? Person behind bar disappears as though going to a safe, and returns with glass. But anticipation when suffering from huge thirst is a good thing.

Stopped for the night near Kalgan at another very good gostanitsa, cost forty pounds again.

300 miles today, 3,707 total

Saturday 18th June

Lots of silver birch trees seem to be dead, but then the tops look as though they have been deliberately cut across. Roads so very straight that we could almost throw away the steering wheels, and it's boring.

Filled up mid-day, and as we set off the black sky became a torrential downpour. We just got the hoods up in time, and I levered myself into Kotka as the storm broke. We drove for a bit, not exactly comfortable for me as the hood was too low for my head, but then I decided it was just too dangerous. We could hardly see a thing. So we pulled in to a café after less than a mile, and sat it out. The storm seemed to pass, so we put the hoods down and set off yet again, only to have the heavens open once more- but this time we kept going. We both kept reasonably dry behind our windscreens, that is till I stopped to

ask directions during which time a passing car went through a puddle and it sprayed all over me, soaking me to the skin. Felt very, very tired and rather depressed.

The rain did not ease off, so we "retired hurt" at 3.45 at a very pleasant gostanitsa' having covered only 205 miles. At least we had passed Chelyabinsk, so doing well schedule-wise.

I was really beginning to get cross with Russians photographing us en route. It was so dangerous, what with other traffic behind being held up, passing cars swerving this way and that during the photographing, lorries coming the other way. And the constant honking!

Got even more cross that evening trying to service the cars with an audience, and not having Carmen readily to hand to give me tools. It was made worse by greasing always taking so long, more often than not the grease going round the nipple rather than into it, and having to swop nipples around. I probably got more grease on me than I put into the nipples.

We were off to sleep pretty quickly only to woken by a family arriving just before midnight, talking at the top of their voices, kids yelling. I went out and told them to be a bit more considerate, but it made no difference.

Sunday 19th June

Up early and working on the cars by 6am, trying to adjust the brakes. Myrtle's really were pretty bad in spite of taking up loads of adjustment, and cleaning the rear brake shoes. It looked like it was going to be a sunny day, so for once we applied sun lotion- we needn't have bothered. This was the day for crossing the Urals from Asia into Europe. Last time, we hardly noticed the mountains, which we crossed near Perm. Now we were further south, and did not expect it to be any different....perhaps an hour or so of reasonably easy driving.

All our expectations were confounded. It turned out to be a nasty cold overcast day, with some drizzle (we kept the hoods down), and constant going up and down, with some pretty steep climbs- perhaps a hundred miles of this. It was made even worse by terribly bumpy roads, with corrugations, ridges, humps and bumps.

A bonus, though, was all the roadside stalls selling this and that. Lots of stalls selling honey in a variety of colours. We stopped at one, and I thought the lady said a pot was 80 pence equivalent, but no, it was six pounds or so. We bought two pots, and just as we were leaving, she made a present of a third. Other stalls were selling stuffed animals, straw items, bicycles, vodka distillation machines, fishing gear, blow up dinghies, and blow-up dolls!



Driven off the road once by an oncoming lorry which decided to overtake irrespective of my presence.

After lunch, the bumps and humps continued, but at least it stopped raining. We drove into Ufa to get some cash from an ATM, then headed for Samara where we felt sure we would easily find a decent gostanitsa.

Then we came upon a long queue of traffic- there had been an accident ahead. Lots of photos taken by other drivers, then we crawled forward and passed two cars. Carmen saw the body of a typical Russian "babushka", a large lady in a flowery dress, with a cloth over her face, lying dead in the road. I didn't look.

We had been looking forward to more frequent accommodation opportunities once we entered "Europe" but it was not to be. Still none for ages, then several hotels together. Road signs were also pretty hopeless, sometimes with two signs within a few yards of each other pointing to a particular city, giving totally different distances..for instance, a sign on the right saying 320 kilometres to Novosibirsk and another on the other side of the road saying 270. There would be a sign indicating a rough road when the road was smooth, but never anything when the road was bad. Sometimes a sign for cattle, when no cattle anywhere to be seen and swamps either side of road! It was as if somebody had been given a truckload of different signs and had just been told to dump them every half mile or so, irrespective of whether relevant or not.

My attempts to solve Kotka leaking oil from the driver's side of the engine seemed to have worked, but now she was leaking from the other side, which I could not tighten as my spanners did not fit! Myrtle becoming more incontinent. On topping up today I

mistakenly poured the remaining half pint of 140 oil into Kotka and Myrtle, being oil meant for the axles. No damage done though.

We did well today, covering 308 miles, and 4,220 in total so another barrier broken. However, it took us 13 hours on the road, so very tired.

Monday 20th June

We were woken at 3am by the gosta's yappy dog, which I would happily have killed. Distant curs then joined in a discordant canine chorus. Up at 6, and braved a shower in the damp musty shower room, which I could not face the evening before.

Off at 6.45 along a hellishly bumpy road with just a few good stretches. You really are part and parcel of any road works here, as the works are never fenced off and kept apart. You drive where the road has been ripped up, over hot tarmac, manoeuvre between machines and oncoming traffic, drive into and out of enormous ruts, and move like a snail.

We stopped for breakfast. Carmen chatted with a lorry driver who gave her a wooden engraved cross. Another lorry driver let us look in his cab- what space! Everything bar the kitchen sink and a loo.

Still lots of honey on sale, and I kept wondering how it could be so varied, being a real kaleidoscope of perhaps a dozen different colours. The countryside is so "dull" yet there must be many different nectars and pollens about to give the variety. There is no real indication of a lot of any one thing that could be enough for bees to make honey of a particular colour. A mystery. Still mostly silver birch trees, but with some oak creeping in, otherwise a lot of grass with just a few flowers.

In spite of the horrid road, and being banged and skipped about, we covered 177 miles by 1pm, and stopped for lunch at 2.15 pm only to discover we had gained yet more time, and that it was only 12.15!

Rearranged things a bit in the cars trying to solve the problem of always wanting something which is "at the bottom". There is no solution to this..a sort of sod's law really. What you need today you do not need tomorrow.

We aimed for Samara, and according to our small scale map there was a northern bypass. Beyond that, we wanted the city of Penza, and having seen just the one sign for that city, we took that road. Then no more signs to Penza, so we started asking. Penza is pronounced as it is spelt, for if it were not, one could understand blank looks. But blank looks we got in part, otherwise "straight on"....and we ended up in the centre of Samara after taking to the dirt at the roadside as the tarmac was so bumpy. Totally lost, hot and befuddled, and the cars not liking it at all crawling along in heavy traffic, though Myrtle was not as bad as Kotka, whose plugs I twice had to clean. Constant annoyance from Ruskie pulling alongside and photographing us, and paying no attention to the road ahead! This was the price of celebrity status of course (thank God we are not real

celebrities), then once we reached Germany we were ignored, and felt a bit put out! So silly. One car was alongside for so long, and came so close taking photos whilst I was bucking from side to side on the humps and bumps, that I nearly threw a lavatory roll through the window of the car...he got the message in time.

Whilst doing a plug clean on Kotka, we were approached by a jolly lady who wanted to have a chat and take some photos, then she led us out of the city. Much later, looking at our web site, it turned out that she was a journalist for the Ukrainian paper "Reporter" and we ended up with some photos and our details in that paper, linked to our site.

Consolation for the day was finding a perfect gostanitsa on the east side of the Volga, which we would cross next day. We had no decent maps (service stations did not sell them!) for our detour via Penza to the border, but the gosta owner, Tim, did some copies for us. So many Russians were helpful beyond our wildest dreams. Others just stood and gawped if asked a question, and seemed very, very thick, others launched into a non-stop tirade of nothing that we could understand! On the whole, lovely charming people who allegedly only twenty years or so ago would happily (allegedly) have A-bombed us. Only twenty years ago many of the cities we drove through, including Samara, were closed to foreigners.

It seems in many gostanitsas that having a fridge, fancy shower, or whatever in the room is sufficient to tick a box- but often they just do not work. We had seen several power showers, for example, with multiple nozzles, but we would be lucky to get a dribble from the main nozzle (nothing from the others!), and even luckier if the water was really hot.

Tim's gosta was A1 though, and we had a good night after another 263 miles, 4,483 in total, averaging now 35 1/2 mpg. Few corners, and mostly flat (bar the Urals) roads necessitating little gear changing, was clearly upping the figure.

Tuesday 21st June.

Up early and off at 6.45. Dreadful road and had to stop for a break at 11 for a late breakfast.

The heavens then opened and we had to rush out of the café to fix the covers. We then set off with light rain for the next two hours. As frequently happened with rain, we were rewarded with simultaneous good, and very good, road! You do not want rain and potholes you cannot see.

Then the sun came out and dried up all the rain, and we were back to horrid road again, having to retire for lunch at 3.15 by which time Kotka's starter had decided to pack up, so now down to two push starts a day, after which both would happily start on the crank. Kotka was awkward to push start, whereas Myrtle would start right away in second. Eventually found out that Kotka needed more choke, and bump starting in second rather than first gear.

We were stopped for speeding, and before I knew it I had done a John McEnroe "you must be joking"..the policeman smiled and let us on our way. On the official P2P rally, with the boys and their Bentley et al type cars paying Forty Thousand Pounds entry fee, the police are known to extract heavy fines for speeding, even when people have not done so. Maybe the fellow was joking, maybe not. We had been in a 30mph zone, and perhaps we had been flying along at 35! Anyway, he shrugged his shoulders and waved us on. Our cars did not exactly bring out the worst in people, very much the reverse.

We came towards Penza, and were stuck in a very long queue at traffic lights. We drove off onto the dirt at the side of the road and made our way inside all the traffic up to the lights, skipping in front of the queue. No-one minded. Penza we bypassed, then on towards Tambov, stopping before that city at a little cluster of gostanitsas. As we pulled up, I was welcomed by two large, inebriated and unfortunately not too attractive ladies. They rushed up to the car with open arms, and enfolded me in fleshy embraces, uttering squeals of delight! I escaped into one of the gostas, a somewhat plush affair, to enquire about rooms, but a rather grumpy lady indicated they were full- or perhaps we were too scruffy.

I exited into the courtyard trying to avoid my two new lovers, but received more hugs. Their attention was then turned to Kotka, one of the ladies draping herself over the hot exhaust pipe to lean on the windscreen, which promptly cracked. She was too far gone to notice, and the hot exhaust did not seem to penetrate her layers of fat. I extracted myself and fled to the next gosta where a room was available, and we then drove the cars to the back of the building and a private yard, away from inebriated female attentions, Carmen having collected a small donation for Smile Train from one of the ladies' husbands.

Kotka had been flying along in the evenings, or at least she felt to be so doing. But the constant worry of something serious breaking, half shaft for example, was wearing me down. Carmen and Myrtle were doing marvellously. In spite of this being another main road to Moscow, which was quite close, the road had been terrible, wearing us out both mentally and physically. A disgrace really, with the damage on the roads quite possibly caused simply by lorries being too heavy, or the construction of the roads being shambolic in the first place- probably both. Samara area is rich in oil, but even with that richness, roads were not in a decent state of repair. Even "new" tarmac was frequently terribly bumpy.

We settled down in our room, and were thinking about a meal when there was a knock at the door. I opened it, and standing there was a jolly large Russian, his diminutive wife, and two boys. He announced that he, Slava Krasnikov, was the owner of the hotel, and that he would like us to join him his wife Olga, and boys Stepan and Micha, for a meal. We left his hotel, and headed for the first hotel I had approached, where the two femmes fatales were sitting outside - they immediately made a bee line for me - and I hid behind Slava as we made our way into the restaurant. But we kept on going, and ended up in a first floor private room, with a beautiful table ornately laid for dinner.

It was a peculiar evening. Slava had learned some English whilst studying agriculture in Holland.



My fan club and our hosts at the hotel

the family he stayed with spoke no Russian, and he spoke no Dutch, so English was used instead. His dream was to own a farm with two thousand cows, but instead he had ended up owning a hotel. Clearly a bit of a wheeler-dealer, and very much interested in himself, as we talked about nothing else all evening. Still, a kind gesture- we had stayed with no Russians on this trip, and we seemed to have bypassed all the villages we passed in 2007 (including the two near Irkutsk where we had firstly been invited to a wedding feast and stayed with the local chief of police and secondly, the following night where we had stayed with a forester in his wooden house), so had little opportunity to have a real chat to anyone other than in the stressful situation of trying to get out of cities.

273 miles bringing the total to 4,756

Wednesday 22nd June

Set off at 7am after finding help to bump start Kotka. I can easily manage to get Myrtle going, but Kotka seems not to like Carmen being in the driving seat, and she need to be pushed faster than Carmen can manage. Foul roads.

Needing to change more money, we made our approach to Tambov down wide straight roads with huge grass verges edged with trees- rather like an approach to a stately home. At 11, we stopped for breakfast and Carmen was given a box of chocolates by another customer, we thought a travelling salesman. We became a bit confused outside Tambov and had to ask for directions, where Carmen received a kiss on her hand from an elderly gent.

Tambov was a pleasant place- good roads in the city, wide clean streets, lots of restoration work on the churches, with many newly gilded domes, and just a nice atmosphere. Next stop was Veronesh, and en route there just outside Tambov, we came upon a concrete road with hidden dips in it- there was a cracking noise, and Kotka began to sag to the right. I stopped, got out of the car but could find nothing wrong. No sign of anything broken, and if I pushed on the chassis or bounced the car, it was fine. But every time I went slowly over dips, there would be a grating sound. Once we arrived back in England, this noise stopped altogether, but maybe under all the spring tape there will be

a problem to be discovered such as a broken leaf. On our last trip, Brian broke a rear left spring leaf in the Gobi and listed the rest of the trip without any reduction in performance or handling.

This concrete road outside Tambov was one of the worst we encountered simply because for some reason obstacles were terribly difficult to see, whether lumps, humps, bumps, dips, or whatever, so we really had to crawl along.

Then we were caught in a thunderstorm, which started as nothing much so we had not stopped to put up the hoods- then once the rain really started to come down, there was nowhere to stop. Going along almost blind at 20 mph did seem to keep a lot of the rain off us, but we still were soaked. Then out came the sun, then a bit more light rain, and we began to pick up speed again.

No bypass around Veronesh, and we had the usual problems finding direction signs. We were stopped at the side of the road contemplating our next move, when Ivan, with wife Irina possessing legs to die for, stopped to help us. Shortly afterwards, we found a decent gosta so stopped for the night after the best mileage day of the trip, 325 miles, breaking the next barrier at 5,081 miles, and up to 36 mpg.

We sat down to eat, and another customer gave us a bar of chocolate.

The state of the roads was often something we talked about between ourselves. We had passed some enormous holes that day, some quite deliberately cut out of the tarmac for some sort of resurfacing, and measuring about 6 feet by 4, and up to 3-4 inches deep. How did Russians cope driving at night? And Motorcyclists? Carmen said she had watched cars going over some of the worst holes and they did not seem to have much trouble....so that is just modern suspension. Even so, the state of the roads must cause accidents and frequent repair.

We have just 140 more miles of Russia, then the border at Belgorod. We seem to be approaching a point after which we almost certainly will make it home, and can try to relax a bit.