

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE E-TYPE JAGUAR

ITALIAN JOB TOUR

UK, FRANCE, SWITZERLAND and ITALY

by David and Luci Crookes

In July 2011 we decided on a 'once in a lifetime' E-type adventure called The Italian Job Tour, organised by Sarah Dowding of Classic Travelling (www.classictravelling.com)

The tour would re-trace the 1961 journey taken by Bob Berry, Jaguar's PR man, from the Browns Lane factory in Coventry to the launch of the E-type at the Geneva Motor Show.

Starting on 9th August, it would take us from the docks of Dover to the Port of Calais via a gargantuan car ferry and then follow the original (pre motorway) country roads as closely as possible, through France to Geneva, Switzerland, and on to Courmayeur, the ski resort at the foot of Mont Blanc in Italy.

We sent our 1961 Jaguar OTS 3.8 litre to Cape Town by auto carrier where it was containerised with another 'E' belonging to cousin, Dave Lyons of Hout Bay. He and his wife Janet were to join us on the tour. The vehicles took about two weeks to reach Felixstowe in England.

We collected our Jag at JD Classics in Maldon, Essex, and spent the first night at Chateaux Tilques near St Omer in France. Each participant was given their own set of route directions with points of interest to visit along the way, allowing freedom of choice to enjoy whatever took one's fancy during the day. Needless to say, the camaraderie was awesome as we met many very interesting, quirky Jag enthusiasts from the USA, Australia and all over the UK, Germany, Italy and Switzerland.

Amongst many a memorable highlight, was dinner at the Hotel Geneve.

Jag 9600 HP, owned and driven by Philip Porter, was parked amongst the tables in the banqueting hall as per the original launch! Philip and his car are well known in Jaguar circles.

We had a luncheon at the lovely Parc des Eaux-Vives overlooking Lake Geneva, scene of the March 1961 launch. There was also a gathering at the top of the spectacular (and very cold) Grand St Bernard Pass, and on another occasion in Epernay, a fascinating private tour of the exclusive Champagne house of Pol Roger (reputed to be Churchill's favourite), not to mention all the days of driving switchback after switchback through the glorious Alps, taking in all the picturesque villages and towns, along with many a gallery and museum en route.

Once we had arrived at Courmayeur the accent shifted to the making of the film 'The Italian Job'. We stayed in the hotel where the film crew was based, and toured all the passes in the area, eventually driving back to France through the 12 kilometre long Mont Blanc tunnel.

On our return to the UK two weeks later, it was quite a relief to drive on the left once more. A much anticipated visit to the Brooklands Motor Museum (Est.1907) was a charming trip down memory lane. Volunteers act as stewards and guides and also don overalls for work on aviation and motoring projects – we saw a number of Classic cars being 'prepped' on site for Silverstone.

We set off to participate in the Silverstone Classics weekend and an attempt to break the record for the highest number of E-type Jags on the track at any one time! Managing 800-odd Jags rolling four abreast over the 2.5mile track was quite something – there were said to be 1100 Jags at Silverstone that day. The entire event is thoroughly well organised and patronised by thousands of enthusiasts coming to enjoy the thrilling air displays, exhibitions, trade shows, racing and auctions.

Needless to say, topping up with fuel each day was a rapid way of emptying one's pockets – we covered about 3000 miles (5800ks) – but wouldn't have missed it for anything!

Our Jag was delivered safely and efficiently back to Durban by the agents. The officials were quite fascinated so we got extra attention and no delays!

David and Luci Crookes