

TYRE TRACKS

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The Road Trip To The Circuit Historique De Laon In France

When the Wensum TR owners club announced a group trip to the Circuit Historique de Laon in France, my mechanic Paul and I decided to go along in his Range Rover as support/recovery. At this point (early Feb) the Range Rover (Nigel) was still in bits at the back of my workshop part way through restoration work. With 14 weeks to go I was confident it would be ready in time. With less than 4 weeks to go and Nigel still not having an MOT or tax and his new engine still not rebuilt, my confidence was shaky but holding out. Paul then decided to run with the old engine, Nigel became road legal once more and I breathed a huge sigh of relief. I should have known Paul better! Due to travel to Dover on Thursday afternoon, he decided at 2pm on Tuesday that the old engine will not make it and the new one must go in. Sometime after midnight, with engine in but still not running, I finally manage to convince Paul that we are both starving and exhausted and that we have a much better chance of success in the morning. Having spent the whole of Wednesday ironing out numerous problems, at 5.30pm we finally have Nigel running and I feel close to a nervous breakdown!

On Thursday AM, With Nigel's new engine having now covered a grand total of 30 miles, we concede that the rest of the 500 or so miles of running in will have to be covered on the way to France and we begin loading with tools and spares. At 8.30pm Paul finally arrives to pick me up but has already received a panic

phone call from TR6 owner, Adrian, who is stranded on the side of the M20 awaiting the RAC with a suspected wheel bearing problem. We dash back to the workshop (not over 50mph though!) and as we don't have a bearing on the shelf, we resort to the next best thing and remove the entire hub from another TR6 I conveniently have lying around! Half way to Dover Adrian calls with the good news that problem is actually a misshapen tyre.

We finally reach our hotel in Dover at 1.30am to discover that TR4 owner Mark has hit the curb on the way into the hotel and put his tracking out. As his ferry sails at 8am we suggest getting it fixed once he reaches Calais, and as our crossing is later, arrange to meet there. We arrive at French 'Fast Fit' garage and immediately suspect the problem to be more than merely tracking as both wheels are at bizarre angles. On closer inspection Paul discovers that the wishbone has been ripped away from the chassis, oops! If there is any chance of fixing it we will need a welder. As I am the nominated French speaker (I can order food and drink, ask for directions and make small amounts of polite conversation) Paul turns to me and says

'Can you ask if they have a welder we can borrow?'

'Slight problem there' I reply I have no idea how to say welder in French.'

Cue phrase books and dictionary, which rather unsurprisingly don't contain the information we need. Eventually, after much frantic miming, we manage to ascertain that the garage don't have welding equipment. We then spend the afternoon visiting various garages and have differing degrees of success in explaining our problem. At 3pm we have finally discovered that the word for welder in French is Souder and by 4 pm have found a garage prepared to lend us their equipment but alas we are unable to realign the offending part so concede that Mark will have to complete the remainder of the journey with us. Leave TR4 at ferry port, finally arrive in Laon at 9.30pm, dump luggage and hit the bar! Remarkably, apart from a few minor repairs, most the rest of the trip passed relatively uneventfully. Paul and Nigel were well behaved, excepting an intermittent sticky tappet (Nigel not Paul) and as with all good trips, we consumed excesses of food and alcohol! The

rally on the Sunday was an awesome experience, 500 classic cars from all over Europe gathered in the square and at the station and in the afternoon, hurtled around the closed street circuit. Exhilarating! Returning to the UK on the Monday evening we were greeted by torrential rain, (which seems as if it has been almost constant ever since!) poor Adrian with broken water pump and a long wait for the RAC to recover TR4. Luckily party member Dave had a water pump but not a gasket, (cue cardboard and scissors) and soon Adrian was on his way. An hour wait for recovery turned into three and we finally made Norfolk at 3am, damp, tired and exhausted — but we wouldn't have missed it for the world.

Next year we are planning to go to Le Mans and Paul has plans to restore and modify a classic Mini in my workshop for the trip. Can my nerves stand it? Cue the Valium!

