

# Five Go Wild in France

“I know, let’s do a driving holiday in France!”

“Better still, let’s do it in the TR!”

## Wed 26<sup>th</sup> August – Home to Lewes



Unlike many other occasions we actually found ourselves ready to leave early! We had planned to start our journey to my sister’s home in Lewes for our first overnight at 6:30 pm in order to avoid rush hour. At 5:45, a quick check on the internet confirmed the M25 was indeed being its normal self so we decided to high-tail it down to South Mimms at 6:15 for an early dinner. One Harry Ramsden’s & 45 minutes later we were on our way again. This early stop proved an excellent plan as no signs of congestion were evident thereafter, except one point where a 40 limit was imposed owing to ‘congestion’, the cause of which only appeared to be the fact that there was a 40 limit. As we progressed, at one point we heard an ominous whistling noise. Nothing appeared to be wrong but we decided to stop and do some ‘checks’ anyway. A quick glance around the car and under the bonnet produced no evidence of anything wrong so we continued on our way. All in all, St Pauls Walden to Lewes was a mere 2 hours 5 mins; so far, so good!

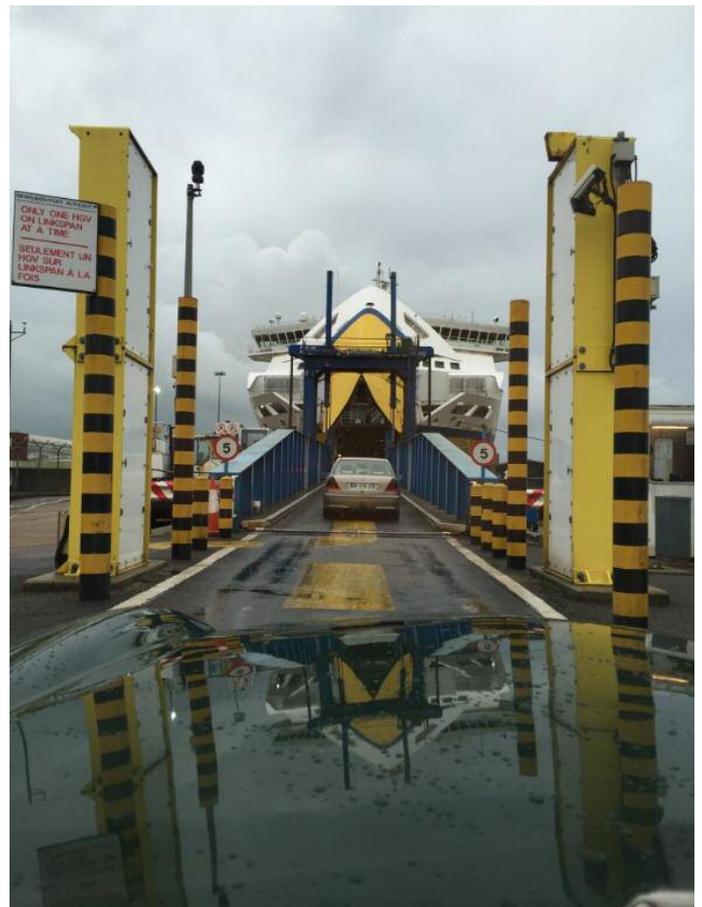
## Thu 27<sup>th</sup> August – Lewes to Valletot



An early start saw a wet drive to the ferry at Newhaven, a mere 10 miles from Lewes. We arrived at 8am (missing the terminal entrance first time round), embarked and headed straight for breakfast.

Whilst in the queue to get on the boat though, we saw 6 or 7 Frazer Nash, occupants with umbrellas, presumably with similar touring ideas to us. We got the impression they thought themselves superior to us in our TR though as they didn’t seem to even notice our presence in the queue alongside them!

As the ferry started, the p.a. announcer advised that the crossing was going to be ‘rough’ (did I leave my handbrake on?) and that great care should be taken if going on deck. It turned out however not to be bad at all and no incidents of any kind were encountered. Disembarkation was a doddle and we



*1Boarding the boat in Newhaven*

were soon on our way to Valletot in Normandy, the venue of our first overnight and home of our good friends Dave & Pam Hayes, their son Gabe & daughter Jess. That evening la famille Hayes took us to Honfleur, an incredibly picturesque town on the north Normandy coast near Le Havre, for a superb dinner. I won’t say “you have just got to go there”, but you do.



*2Hensman, Hensman- Malkowiak (to be) et famille Hayes, avec transports!*



### Fri 28<sup>th</sup> August – Valletot to Bordeaux via La Rochelle

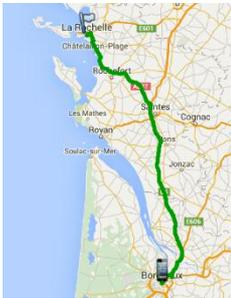
Friday was the first big driving day and with all the best intentions in the world, we set out late. Nobody's fault, just didn't want to rush the extraordinary full English Pam had laid on for us.

We set off around 10:15 (Pam, Dave and Gabe in their 911 convertible) down the A28 towards Le Mans, traversing some spectacular bridges (interesting and sensible in that they reduce large bridge widths to one wide lane in each direction, no overtaking but reduced construction costs) and picturesque countryside along the way. Those of you who know me will probably know I have always struggled to get decent mileage out of my tank. After some investigation & some advice from Professor David Dawson, my conclusion was however that I was simply not filling the tank enough! This was the first time that I had filled the tank to the brim. Result: 230 miles of motorway driving and still ¼ full at the next filling station instead of the usual 180 miles on the whole tank! I feel a bit



foolish that I simply wasn't filling enough but also relieved I finally have my answer! Anyway, back to the tour.

As Dave has never been to La Rochelle, we decided to take a "diversation" and go there for lunch. Magda & I have been before with the children a few years before and the place is so nice we had no problem with the suggestion. The traffic was a bit heavy in and out but it was worth it for the galette we had for lunch in the old harbour. By now the temperature in the shade was north of 30 degrees and we were starting to relax and get into that sunshine spirit. It was also surprising how easy and indeed comfortable the past 300 miles had been at a steady 70-80 mph on the perfect French autoroute.



La Rochelle disappearing in the rear view mirror, we then sped off for the last leg of our marathon drive to Bordeaux. Owing to the extended stop in La Rochelle, we actually arrived in Bordeaux quite a bit later than we originally planned, but hey, these things cannot be rushed. As a result, we checked into the hotel and went straight out to find somewhere to eat (having taken a little while to find a car park close enough to in the one way streets, and I'm quite sure we drove down some roads which were technically shut, but we were in classic cars so nobody seemed to care). As by this time it was getting dark, we decided not to explore too much that evening and agreed that a plan of action and energy the following morning was more in order. A total of 420 miles in the day made sure we were all suitably tired. Assisted by some local plonk (a nice Pauillac), we turned in full of expectation for the next day.



### Sat 29<sup>th</sup> August – Bordeaux to Bergerac via St Emilion

Wow, double wow & wow again! I can honestly say Bordeaux, or at least the parts we saw of it, is one of the most beautiful cities I have ever been to. Sandstone buildings, La Garonne river (which is almost 3-4 times wider than the Thames in Central London) and 35 degree heat but a cooling



3View of Bordeaux from our hotel

breeze. We spent an hour walking around this amazing place taking in breath-taking sites and architecture. We would really have liked to spend more time here and as part of the purpose of our trip was to scout for potential places to live, we were immediately impressed with the space, beauty and atmosphere of Bordeaux. Something told us that if everywhere on our tour exceeded expectation by this much, we were not going to narrow down our search for “potential areas to house hunt”.

After a short caffeine stop headed to the cars for the coming day’s travelling.



En-route to Bergerac we took in St Emilion for obvious reason. This is a village much smaller than we expected but well worth a visit and very beautiful. We had lunch here but no vineyard visits as it was quite busy and most vineyards require you to book. Again a very hot day allowed for amazing top down motoring, with of course a suitable amount of sun cream applied and head gear available for when it got too warm.



After lunch, with the Sat Nav set to avoid motorways, we meandered our way towards the tiny village of Lamonzie-Montastruc (or Lemony Monster Truck as it became known in our car) near Bergerac for night 3.

Our accommodation here could have been placed on earth by God himself; a renovated mill Le Moulin de Peychenval, run by Brigitte who I imagine we may meet next year if we come this way again!

We left Chez Brigitte for dinner in Bergerac with famille Hayes & what should we see? Nothing other than a pristine red TR6 on French plates as we pulled out of the drive! We didn't stop as we were sure we saw it turn into Chez Brigitte but alas when we returned after dinner, it was not there, nor could Brigitte or her husband Jean-Luc shed any light on the matter of where it may live, although



*4Le Moulin de Peychenval*



Jean-Luc did think that someone local may have a classic car or two. So “désolé” to the chauffeur de la TR6 for not stopping to say hello!

Bergerac itself is not picturesque like Bordeaux but is nonetheless a very nice town, sitting on the Dordogne with ample restaurants and a charm of its own, especially in the old town. This again is a smaller town than I expected; it seems wine production in this region has literally put these famous locations on the map.

### Sun 30<sup>th</sup> August – Bergerac Area

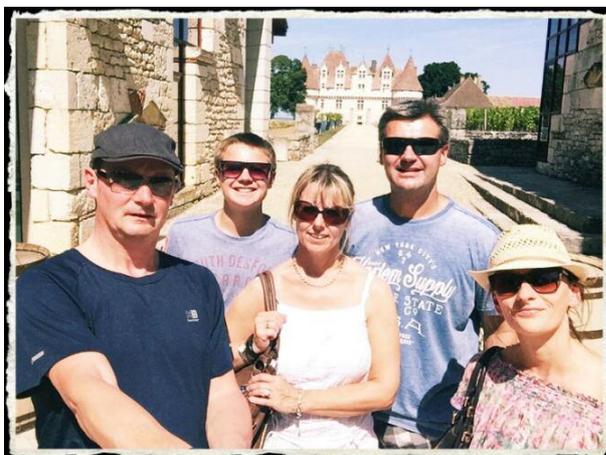
I start day 4's offering sitting in the grounds of Le Moulin de Peychenval, contemplating the day ahead. No travelling planned for today, instead a day's respite for relaxation, but also for adventure, thoroughly checking out the local area. As we are prospecting for potential property purchase during our tour, we have decided to circle Bergerac, visiting as many villages as we can to see what we can see. If the local village of Lemony Monster Truck is anything to go by, we are in for a treat. Mme Brigitte suggests we visit Issigeac, so we do.

(Later) So it turns out Lemony Monster Truck is indeed one of the finer villages surrounding Bergerac although the bustling market town of Issigeac was very picturesque. The market was in full swing when we got there and the range of products was impressive; the French do know how to market. The age of the buildings in some of these places is extraordinary and how some of them still stand is beyond the laws of physics.





It also turns out that trying to survey over 20 villages was slightly too much for one day, but we did manage to take in a vineyard at Monbazillac together with free tasting which resulted in the purchase of a couple of bottles.



One of the greatest impressions we got in this area was the amazing accommodation and hospitality afforded us at Le Moulin de Paychenval by the owners Brigitte and Jean-Luc and if you are ever in the Bergerac area, I implore you to treat yourself by staying there.



*5 Chateaux Paychenval*

### Mon 31<sup>st</sup> August – Bergerac to Villeneuve-sur-Lot



Monday saw a cooling of temperatures which had been 35+ down to a more stately 25+ and it has to be said, rather a lot of rain. Unfortunately, the electric roof on Dave's Porsche is no longer electric and consequently takes 10 minutes to raise and lower; that's German engineering for you. Dave battled the rain valiantly during his time in the back seat (what back seat?!!) by getting Pam to put pedal to metal, but eventually a succumbing was inevitable and we stopped to up-roofs just before the thunder &



lightening set in.

Our drive took us through Castillonès and Marmande but owing to the inclement weather, a quick fuel stop was all that was afforded in either of those places, and I have to say in any case, neither were the best place we visited on our tour. Our evening's destination of Villeneuve-sur-Lot (pronounced 'lot', not 'low') was relatively speaking unimpressive, although not helped by the torrential storms that hit the region that evening. Despite very impressive aerial views as seen below, ground level proves to be a much more "normal" experience. That said, we had by now seen such incredible villages, towns and cities that perhaps we were just spoiled, a bit like saying a Jaguar feels a bit sluggish when you've just got out of an Aston Martin.



Despite almost every restaurant in France being closed on a Monday, we did manage to find a nice place to eat on the recommendation of Pam & Dave's hotel. This was not before an amusing instance whereby we had previously stopped for a coffee and Gabe had phoned up to book one of the only restaurants the interweb said was open in the town on a Monday, only to find after we left that it was the very one we had been sitting in for coffee. There was a clue in the fact that when trying to figure out where this mysterious restaurant was, Trip Advisor said it was opposite the town theatre, which was staring us in the face. The closest we got was "well it must be very close to here then!". Idiots, one and all.

This was Pam, Dave & Gabe's last night before their daunting 8h drive back to Normandy, so we said our goodbyes until Saturday when we will encroach on their privacy again, this time at their Paris home, on our way back.

Today's biggest drama was that, as a result of the by now torrential rain, a windscreen wiper fell off. No problem, just pushed it back on. We joked to ourselves: "Well, if that's the only problem we have on this trip ....."



*6The last supper*