



Bracken 1218 sets out for the V8 Cotswold Tour which turned out to be quite wet! (Photo: David Waterton)

V8 Cotswold Tour

Over the years, the V8 Tours have been very popular, based on a hotel in an interesting region of the UK. For 2002 Peter and Sue Beadle organised a V8 Tour based in the Cotswolds. **Richard Parker** (BRG 3028) from Derbyshire reports on an enjoyable long weekend, together with a couple of notes from Gordon Hesketh-Jones (Harvest Gold 1904) from Cornwall.

The recent V8 Tour of the Cotswolds was based at Stratton House Hotel near Cirencester which provided a popular and comfortable base from which to explore this glorious part of middle England. Peter and Sue Beadle had put together a very appealing itinerary, taking in many interesting routes to events and places of interest.

On Friday, Autumn sunshine made a welcome appearance for our gentle run down the Fosse Way, stopping off in the little village of Bibury to have a look round the trout farm. Throughout the afternoon members of the party gradually gathered at the hotel in time for dinner and a good social get-together.

Saturday morning dawned fine and bright. Fortified by a monumental Stratton Court breakfast, we embarked upon the first organised event - it's a hard life!. A scenic route had been plotted to the **Three Choirs Vineyard near Ledbury**. Unfortunately this resulted in the first mechanical casualty, as Peter Beadle's gearbox succumbed to the unequal struggle and cried enough; this seemed rough justice for all the effort that he had put into the organisation. We were treated to a lively and interesting tour of the vineyard with tasting of course. Quite a few of us were surprised as to the origins of Champagne; in essence, it was originally devised as a way of enhancing fairly mediocre, still wine, with a second stage of bottle fermentation. The technique of freezing the neck of the upturned bottle to remove the resulting accumulated sediment seemed rather ingenious. The quantity of wine produced from this relatively small

vineyard was quite a surprise, although it was very noticeable that grapes grown so far north produce a very dry and tart wine, which was not to everyone's taste.



Morgans at Malvern - members of the V8 Cotswold Tour particularly enjoyed the tour of the Morgan factory. (Photo: Gordon Hesketh-Jones)

With the Beadles installed in their everyday car - at least they had the benefit of a de-misting windscreen during the following deteriorating weather! - we set off, via lunch at a nursery close by, to **Hidcote Manor Gardens near Chipping Campden**. A brief history was provided by one of the duty volunteers and we were then free to roam. For me, this was one of the most interesting gardens I have visited; a series of small, differently themed areas are individually enclosed with trees and hedges, and each narrow entrance opens into yet another beautifully kept garden area. It must be stunning in the Spring time. Well worth a visit. After a cream tea at Hidcote - by then it was close to two hours since food had been consumed! - the party headed back to the Hotel.

Dinner included an auction. With an imaginary gavel in hand, Peter Beadle did sterling service as our auctioneer, ably assisted by our two MGC members acting as floor runners. All lots were sold with the funds going to the V8 Register. There was an amazingly diverse range of items, not necessarily car related, with a prize for the most unusual item.

Sunday morning on a V8 Tour and Peter and Sue had laid out a leisurely **Treasure Hunt** en-route to the main venue of the day, **Berkeley Castle, near Sharpness** on the Severn Estuary. Several stalwarts stuck to the clues and managed to assemble a credible list of answers for entry into the scoring process later in the day. There were also one or two of us (myself included), who showed a rather less steely resolve - alright we gave up embarrassingly early and just enjoyed the drive! It was certainly a scenic route, although somewhat limited in views, owing to the gathering murk. It was a shame that the weather restricted our chance to appreciate the grounds of Berkeley Castle; however, we were treated to a fascinating guided tour around the interior; the rooms were

all on an unusually human scale for such a large castle, somewhere you could actually envisage living - as the Berkeley family do. The historical links with English monarchs over the years makes for a rich heritage and an interesting tour; highly recommended. On completion of our guided tour, a cream tea (yes another one!) had been laid on for us in the Great Hall, a magnificent and regal setting for the serious business of another feeding frenzy!

Monday morning brought, if it were possible, even more rain. A pleasant amble through the lanes had been arranged, through some very scenic areas - what we could see through the mist and gloom anyway. The route brought us to the **Bugatti Trust Museum and Prescott Hillclimb**. This time it was my turn for mechanical maladies; the exhaust decided to partially detach itself from the downpipes, leading to a passable imitation of a racing Cobra! We managed to drive gently to Prescott, kindly chaperoned by Sue and Peter, but we decided that the risk of the exhaust ending up on the floor was too great, and so we returned home on a breakdown truck! At least we had plenty of time to look around the museum, which, though small, holds some intriguing exhibits. I had not appreciated the inter-twining of art and engineering excellence which was so much part of the Bugatti family ethos. There were a number of books on display showing some of the artwork creativity of the family, (sculpture, furniture etc), which helped to put the more obvious mechanical exhibits into context. It is obvious that a great deal of work is carried out from this museum in bringing the history of Bugatti to a wider audience, as well as helping to ensure the survival of many of the cars, through parts sourcing, manufacture and distribution. Some of our members stayed on for another night, completing their Tour with a visit to the Morgan factory at Malvern Link. Unfortunately I was not able to extend my stay for this.

All in all, a really enjoyable V8 Tour and only my second, so I am still a novice! I know that I speak for everyone present when I say a huge "thank you" to Sue and Peter for all their hard work in putting together a superb tour. The setting, the hotel and the variety and content of the trips arranged all came together to make a great weekend. Next year, Cornwall is being tentatively mentioned, so if you have not been before, I would strongly recommend giving it a go.

Gordon Hesketh-Jones particularly enjoyed the visit to the **Three Choirs Vineyard** and noted they "now have 85 acres of vines and produce 200,000 to 250,000 bottles a year from their own grapes. Originally the vineyard used German-style vines but with the effects of global warming they can now get good crops from the classic French vines. Inside their ultra-modern processing plant everything is stainless steel. Some of their wines are blended to become house or own-label products, others are sold under their own name. They also produce a further 200,000 bottles of wine using grapes from neighbouring vineyards. My wife, Jennifer, and I particularly liked their dry sparkling wine produced under

the correct champagne method of introducing yeast to obtain the second fermentation.

For Gordon "the visit to Prescott Hillclimb brought back memories for I often held the "hockey stick" there in the late fifties and sixties which operated the timing mechanism for the competitors, so always drove home after the events drunk on the fumes of Castrol "R"! The Saturday afternoon was free for shopping and the combination of Jennifer, Cirencester and a plastic card brought tears to my eyes!"

For Gordon Hesketh-Jones the high point of the V8 Tour was a visit to the **Morgan Car factory at Malvern**. This small company continues to make cars in the traditional way and any worker from Abingdon in the 1930s would have felt totally at home their today! Of the 161 employees, 141 are involved in the factory - an excellent ratio. Currently they produce ten "traditional" cars (Plus 4s with the two litre Ford Zetec engine and the remainder Plus 8s with the 3.9 litre Range Rover engine) and four or five of the "new" Aero models. They still take on apprentices and 70% of the workforce is former apprentices. Their dedication and commitment to Morgan was clear when we stopped to ask questions - everyone there is an honest salesman or woman for Morgan. Many ash frame parts are mass-produced in the machine shop and then a craftsman assembles the complete ash frame for a specific car. Customers can choose any colour of paint provided it is on a list of 33,000 colours Morgan offer! The spray work is superb. The upholstery and carpets are made in-house too.

The memorable visit to the plant by the "television troubleshooter", Sir John Harvey-Jones, produced 400 sales over the subsequent three months as a response to his controversial recommendations of "improved" production methods. The Morgan family simply reaffirmed their commitment to building cars in the traditional way and the market responded. Long may they both continue to do so!"

Report by . Richard Parker (BRG 3028) from Derbyshire