

Some Notes on the Swiss Trip 2017 by Bill Baker



After a shaky start which began at five in the evening on Sunday 21st May we actually got going from Warwick early on Monday morning. Having started the trip in Greg's 39 Commander which developed a rad leak near High Wycombe we returned to Warwick where we sorted out a '63 Lark from amongst Greg's desirable collection of Studebakers for another attempt.

At one in the morning the Motorways were relatively empty unlike our previous attempt where the jams started at Oxford so we made good time to Maidstone staying at the Premier Inn before an early start to get down to have breakfast with Peter and Jean Macy. Unfortunately due to a mid day crossing at the tunnel we were not able to stay long discussing all things Studebaker, but short as it was it was very enjoyable, and yes for those that know that they haven't been well lately it was good to see them both looking and sounding so well.

We had agreed to catch up with the Williamson's, Trevor and Steve and Darrell Webb at the services at J 11, with fortuitous timing all three groups arrived at the same time but unfortunately with Trevor's Hawk developing a misfire which ultimately caused him to abandon the trip .



The trip through the tunnel and on to the motorway was led by Darrell in his '31 All seasons President not because it was the oldest car so much as he had the sat nav and speaks the lingo should it be required, and in my case re acquainting myself with the toll payment system.

Greg was on that occasion riding shotgun with Darrell. Greg and I shared the driving of the Lark as well as subjecting our presence on Steve in his '49 1/2 ton truck or Darrell in his car, both of them drove all the way themselves which in what was gloriously sunny weather was no mean feat. We travelled nearly 300 k with stops for fuel etc to arrive at the Hotel Mercure Reims a little jaded.

A wash and brush up and out we went to a small Cafe at which we appeared to be the only customers so were well treated. Greg and Darrell were presented with a tabletop barbecue on which they cooked bits of meat. Steve and I had a sort of cheese salad, it being a nice warm night Greg and I then went for a walk round Reims Cathedral and finished with an ice cream at a Cafe lit by the lights from the Cathedral .

Thank goodness for the sat nav with the one way systems round Reims, but being tail end Charlie I might just might have run the odd light, our destination was then Mulhouse, as on the previous day a steady plod for hundreds of kilometres which gave me the opportunity to get a feel for the vehicles we travelled in .

Firstly the 39 Commander, which in spite of its water leak went well and felt adequately powered in spite of tons of spares being carried, of all the cars it had a tendency to wander a little which could have been a bit tiring in time. We changed from that car to a V8 powered Lark which felt surprisingly modern, the ride was firm, very European in feel, a crisp performer as one would expect from a V8, braking was adequate although the position of the pedal was a bit odd. In conclusion a better package for today's roads than a Hawk, in my opinion.

Steve's truck is powered by a very willing 6 cylinder motor and if carrying a load would benefit from the V8 option but the lesser fuel consumption of the 6 has advantages, the package is a very practical one even for use today and when compared with say the Austin A40 it was in its day well ahead of it's game.

Where do you start with Darrell's car, ignoring its good looks and overall presentation, I am a bit biased , The car drives directionally well with effortless power and is at home on the longer routes, the fuel consumption is unfortunate but what price perfection. We arrived at the hotel on the outskirts of Mulhouse, so piled into the Lark and went into the older part of the town where we again had a good meal this time in a very busy restaurant.

The following day we went to view the Schlumpf collection , 400+ cars from the 1880s onwards and more Bugatti's than Jay Leno could dream of, well worth a visit. Having finished my tenure as drivers mate I was then dropped off at Euro airport down the road from Mulhouse and curtsey of Ryan Air and British rail arrived home in the evening.