

Mille Miglia 2011

Brescia and Back – 2200 Miles of Classic Motoring!

As many of you will recognise, Brescia is the home of the Mille Miglia – the famous Italian road race which Sir Stirling won in 1955 at an all-time record speed! Nowadays, the event is staged again although run as a regularity event for 375 cars spanning the years the Mille was originally held, from 1927 through to 1957. In this way, many of the cars which originally competed now do so again, and the marque and model of many others also participate.

In many ways the trip to Northern Italy is a great way to stretch the legs of your Healey – great roads across France, and so little traffic, through one of the tunnels or Alpine passes into Italy and then past Turin and Milan to Brescia. This year we chose to run slightly further south through France and cross via the Frejus tunnel, or if it was open, the Col du Mont Cenis. On the way back, we opted to route north-west into Switzerland, offering the opportunity of a number of famous passes north of Lake Como en-route to the Interlaken area and then back into France via Beaune and south of Paris before a Moules lunch in Honfleur and the ferry.

Much of the planning I do on-line, initially, where it is easy to look at daily distances, options for stop-overs (I always start with Sawdays Special Places to Stay and then Logis de France) and decent roads – we never take the motorways, no fun and too costly! I recommend Multimap.com, ViaMichelin.com and (if you have access to it) Ovi Maps, which is the Nokia website available to you if you have a Nokia phone! Many of the programmes now allow you to insert waypoints, so if you wish to modify the route to take somewhere particular in, then you can, and you can usually select options such as 'quickest', 'shortest', 'non-motorway' etc. I plan for an average speed of 60 kph – this makes it easy to look at distances (in km!) and the time taken each day between stopovers. I suggest that 400km is about all you would wish to tackle – that's nearly 7 hours of driving and you will need to add in stops for fuel, coffee and lunch on top, so I find that's a practical maximum for a full day of driving! Plan for less if you want a lighter day or stops en-route for sight-seeing.



Anyway, we had a great run down through France, stayed at a fortified farmhouse at the bottom of the Loire near Nevers, then in a small hotel near the Frejus tunnel, and perfectly placed to check with the locals whether the pass was going to be open the following day – it was! Into Italy the following morning, skirting around Turin (great lunch for Eu10!), east through the rice-fields (Arborio!) near Milan and into Brescia – and not a drop of rain other than whilst waiting for the ferry at Portsmouth!

By the way, don't forget the AHC ferry discount deal available through the link on the National website!





Once in Brescia, we had a relaxed first day and then on Thursday mingled with the cars in and around the Piazza Vittoria before deciding to head up to Desenzano on Lake Garda for dinner and to watch to the cars come through during the evening – fabulous! Free day on Friday – shopping in Brescia(!) – and then out to the south of Brescia to catch the cars on the open road as they run north returning to Brescia at the end of the long drive up from Rome. This year it was ‘two for the price of one’ as to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of Italy, 150 Ferraris preceded the main race by one hour!





Leaving Brescia early on the Monday morning, we headed up past Bergamo to Como and across the lake on the ferry - stunning scenery - and then into Switzerland. We were in luck as, although 2 of the minor passes we wanted to drive were still closed (usually open from 1 June), we were told that the St Gotthard was open and we could avoid the tunnel! Fantastic drive up through the hairpins and over the top (2108m!) with deep snow still either side of the road – a sight and experience not to be missed! On to the lake (Brienz) near Interlaken and a very friendly B&B for the night on a tiny peninsula called Iseltwald. The next day west through Switzerland and into France for a stopover in Beaune – red wine country, and one of our favourite overnight stops and then the last night in a former royal hunting lodge near Fontainebleau and back to Le Havre for the late afternoon ferry!

2200 miles of virtually fault-free motoring – both Rob (TR4) and I each had a fuel leak, Rob's was a flooded float chamber and mine a banjo connection that had vibrated loose, but nothing that delayed us more than a minute or two! Just proves that good old-fashioned technology, serviced and maintained well, can be a fun-filled, reliable form of transport for 'holiday' trips across Europe! Why take a modern when you could take a Healey?!

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