

B23 MG HAVEN ON THE ATLANTIC COAST

PROJECT: EUROPE 2012

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We put Cognac behind us and pointed the MG toward St. Jean de Monts in the Vendee region of France. This small seaside town is about 40 miles southwest of Nantes and was a destination we'd been looking forward to. It came with a price though.



A wicked wind bucked our progress all throughout the 120 mile trip. Louise and I pulled our hats down tight and I even resorted to using an under-the-chin strap on my new Tilley hat, looking like someone out of National Geographic. The wind strength kept flopping the brim up and down causing a good amount of double vision...especially when a heavy truck passed. Even worse, the side curtains flapped like a bird.



Louise and I held on to them until our arms tired and our fingers turned numb. My bent for field expediency, and two short bungee cords, came to the rescue. Problem solved except for one small disparity. We couldn't open the doors without undoing it all first. Well, nothing's perfect.



We were welcomed to St. Jean de Monts by Claudine Fleury, wife of Joel. He is the Director of the T Series for MG Club de France and oversees the activities of all T series MGs like our TF. Unfortunately, business affairs kept him in Paris so poor Claudine was forced entertain strangers in their lovely home.

If she was bothered, it never showed. From her first friendly smile to the four kisses on the cheeks when we left, she was the perfect hostess, caring for our every need, serving great appetizers and presenting a regional meal of cassoulet of white beans and ham that we shared with Joel's sister and her husband, also owners of a 1959 MG A.





The final touch was a bottle of the local red wine customized with an MG label. What class. Even though the conversation was 100% French, we had a lot of laughs. Ray's French came back in drizzles and drips, followed by drops and then intermittent showers.



The biggest problem is forgetting the right word and having to do mental gymnastics to get around the problem. Couple that with poor tense usage and flawed sentence construction and he has a language bouillabaisse that draws a perplexed smile from the French people.



Louise operates on another plane. She has a short litany of French phrases and drops them in when appropriate. The result is that the French think she knows more than she does but that she is shy and withdrawn, speaking only when spoken to. It seems to work well for her.



Being busy with meal prep, Claudine gave me free reign to poke about her husband's sanctumsanctorum unsupervised...a unique opportunity. Joel's garage is an example of MG heaven. It contains an MG A, a TF, a TA...all drivable...and a 1934 PA awaiting restoration.



To top it off is their daily driver, a 2002 MG F convertible...a model never exported to the US and now out of production.

He has surrounded himself with memorabilia and reminders of past rallyes.



This is not a male dominated hobby. Claudine handles much of the organizational paperwork and minutia of the T Series division of the MG Club de France plus participating in events. She has plans to drive in an upcoming Ladies Rallye and invited Louise to participate. It was at this moment that Louise lost all understanding of the French language..



No amount of gestures or sign language was able to revive it. After dinner Claudine made the supreme gesture of hospitality by insisting our MG replace hers and spend the night with its blood brothers. Oh to be a fly on the wall that night. The next morning she served a breakfast worthy of the best b&b,



After exchanging small MG gifts we headed for the Atalier des Angelaises garage in a nearby village. The Fleury's have their British fleet serviced there and we needed a carburetor tune after being accused of polluting their air by a Bordeaux policeman. Claudine made the arrangements for immediate service and they were waiting when we pulled in the driveway.





The carbs had been set for use in dry southern California and were overly rich for use in humidity-high France. The bougies (sparkplugs) were black but, after adjustment, are now a nice buff color and the MG runs better than ever. [So far we have been very lucky with MG repairs.](#)



The garage itself was interesting. Besides having a shop full of over the hill cars it has a showroom filled with examples of British automobiles in all condition. It's not called l'Atelier des Anglaises for nothing.



I'd describe it as a kind of a French Craig's List of cars only without the list.



Thirty euros later, after installing our new choke cable and cleaning the contacts on the turn signals as well, we followed the French example and had a roadside picnic. A baguette, ham slices, camembert cheese and local red wine is a typical lunch. Afterward we set our sights on Paris following an overnight in Le Mans. Yes indeed, we are back in the swing of things in France.

Louise and Ray