

B24 DRIVING THE TRACK AT LEMANS

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

SUBJECT: B24 DRIVING THE TRACK AT LEMANS SCRIPT

DATE: 2 JULY 2011

We rolled into Le Mans with a plan to exercise a sublimated desire...to drive the Le Mans racetrack while the smell of hot oil and burning rubber was still fresh. This is possible because, during the rest of the year, 80% of the track is a highway and open for public use.



Wearing our Aston Martin Racing ball caps and getting as close to the Start/Finish line as possible, I dropped the MG into first gear and headed for the first turn. With video camera in hand, just in case we set an unofficial course record, Louise documented my flawless up shifts and downshifts, deft heel and toe brake-to accelerator movements and precision setups for the best line through the many curves.



Unfortunately, we chose evening rush hour for this record attempt and my efforts at passing laggard cars were foiled by oncoming traffic and reactivated traffic lights...certainly nothing a professional driver at Le Mans ever had to endure.



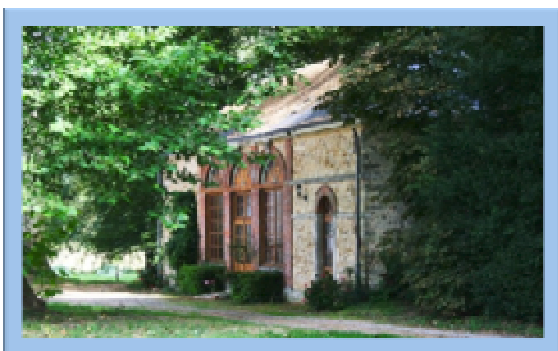
Ray in the MG pits circa 1958

My greatest disappointment came on entering the stretch that runs past the grandstand and pits and under the Dunlop Bridge. It was blocked by cement pylons...closed to all us Walter Mitty's. This wasn't the case 53 years ago when we ran the same course and were able to pause victoriously in the MG pits but that was then and this is now. MG is no longer the brand to beat in class and, because of the track closure, we were unable to show our new allegiance to Aston Martin by parking the MG in their pits. We hope they understand.



Instead we sharpened our sports car rallye instincts trying to locate Relais des Cailleries, a B&B in the tiny farm community of Saint Pavace, just 10 minutes from the track. This is another of those "been a family farm for decades" stories with the present generation trying to find an easier way to make a living off the land.

Martine and Pierre Saint Remy have been open for business for one year and already have plans for expansion. The building in which we stayed was once a barn and Pierre remembers pitching hay into our room. His father used to house pigs in the room where we ate our wine and cheese. Once again the human factor has prevailed. Everything is new and beautifully styled by Martine. Our room was good sized, had a large bathroom and a glassed shower big enough to wash a horse...if you could get it up the narrow stairs, that is.



Breakfast was served in another newly renovated outbuilding with the amount and type of food preselected and served on a tray. I'm sure seconds were available but the basic serving was enough for us. Their next move is to rejuvenate the part of the main house they don't occupy and make their dream self-sustaining. It is really fun to listen to people like Martine and Pierre and be a part of making their dream come true.

Now on to Paris to join our daughters, their children and good friends who have come together to help us celebrate the moment you've all been waiting for.

Louise and Ray