

EUROPE 2011

B38 We Pay Tribute To Automotive and Aviation Pioneers

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After leaving automobile icon Aston Martin we decided to honor other pioneers in the automotive and aviation industries. That means we were on the way to Abingdon on Thames to visit the shrine of our own sports car pioneer, the MG

Hidden on Cemetery Road, a small lane that passes through a residential area, stands Kimber House, the home of The MG Car Club. It is named for Cecil Kimber, the father of MG. He built the company from a smallish local producer to a company that sent its cars around the world and, almost single-handedly, established the sports car craze in the United States.

I remember the first MG I ever saw in Tucson, Arizona in 1947. I was all of 12 years old but must have made a silent promise to own an MG someday. It took another 11 years, with Louise's approval, before I realized my dream. Little did I realize it would last another 53 years. Kimber House includes an exhibition of various memorabilia, a library of MG books and an archive of more than 10,000 photos plus production records for most MGs produced into the '50's. A young man asked our chassis number and promptly produced a hand-written page verifying our MG was produced on April 9th, 1954.

Kimber House sits right outside the gates of the original MG factory, shut down in 1980 by mega manufacturer British Leyland. We visited the factory in 1959 when it was producing the MG A and Midgets. It was sad to see this formerly vibrant building that once produced sports cars for the world, become a victim of conversion to condominiums.





tried to look past their practice of charging for WiFi after 30 minutes of use.

We stopped in Marlow to visit with Alyson and Steve Potter, a couple we met in the hotel bar in Rouen, France. Steve was table hopping trying to find the owners of that "magnificent MG in the garage." He is a pilot for British Airways doing research for a book he's writing about the crash of a Lancaster bomber during World War II. His uncle was one of the crew members who perished when the plane went down in Normandy. His research came up with a Frenchwoman who found the wreckage and buried the crew members before the Germans could find them. This is his first effort at writing, motivated primarily by

We pushed on to Marlow, a cute little London suburb with a big city traffic problem. We stayed at the Marlow Crown Plaza hotel, a complex primarily serving the traveling businessman since it is close to Heathrow airport. This was our first truly modern hotel on this trip and it was nice to slip back into the amenities of the 21st century for a while. We even



stories his father told about his lost brother. And, yes, he's tired of being asked if he is related to the better-known Potter, Harry.

They offered, if we stopped by for dinner and had a look at the first printing of his labor of love, to house the MG for the night...so we did. The Potters are another example of the great people that we've met on this trip. Also a testament to the wisdom of sitting in a bar and sipping wine. It helps to have a trinket, like the MG, to get the conversation going.



It was a short trip to Weybridge, the home of the Brooklands Museum. For those of you challenged in the history of automobiles and aviation, this is truly a shrine for both.



The world's first purpose-built motor circuit, Brooklands race track was developed in 1907 by a rich man with a lot of land. It was a hit from the beginning and became the place for auto manufacturers to come and test their latest products without having to dodge chickens and horse-drawn wagons.

It was also extremely handy for racing, especially since the roadway was made of concrete and included a banking that gave the cars a chance to achieve high speeds without flying off the road. This is all that is left of the famous banking and includes "Member's Bridge," a place where clients could stand and watch their cars performing under the stresses of a modern banked track.



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For years, if you were into cars, Brooklands was THE place to be and be seen and where to take your car for tweaking by high-speed technicians. It remained so until 1938 and the garages are still here.

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The advent of WWII caused Brooklands to convert to the building of warplanes and a runway was laid down inside the circuit. Many a plane took off from it and their first view after wheels up was of the bankings of the former race

track.

Today Brooklands is a museum honoring both of those transportation pioneering mediums. Aside from old cars and antique planes in pre-war hangars,



the latest addition is the Concorde, now retired from many years of pioneering super-sonic air transport. For an additional fee you can now walk through this latest icon and pretend you are a first-class passenger. One word of advice. Don't expect free drinks.

Right next door to Brooklands Museum stands a modern motordom palace built and operated by another automotive icon. Mercedes World is a combination showroom and demonstration track for products from the first automobile producer. From our parking lot vantage point we could see Mercedes cars performing on a skid pad and going through paces on an obstacle course. It really looked inviting but the day was almost over and we had to locate our hotel. At the beginning of our tour we were fortunate enough to meet a volunteer docent who gave us a brief verbal history of



Brooklands and pointed out the most interesting areas, including the rest rooms. When we inquired about the location of our hotel he offered to guide us there. This offer came after we told him what we were driving. It seems he, in his younger days, had also owned a TF. No matter how old, we MGers stick together.
Louise and Ray