

EUROPE 2011

B42 MG Rallying Belgian Style

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PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

SUBJECT: B42 MG RALLYING BELGIAN STYLE SCRIPT

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After our experience of automobile rallying in Great Britain you might think we'd not fall for the same situation. Well, guess again because here we are in Liege, Belgium about to embark on another trial of men and machines.



We trailed behind Yolande and Georges Collet from their home to just outside Liege's architecturally startling railroad station. It is the design of Santiago Calatrava, a Spaniard who happens to be both engineer and architect (as well as a sculptor and painter).



It was the perfect background for distinctly un-modern MG's. Perhaps it's the contrast that appeals to me.



We parked in our designated spot and began another fruitless search for other T Series MGs. As usual, the place was awash in MG A's, B's and Midgets.

In a spurt of patriotism for Belgium's National Day we unfurled the Belgian flag and draped it over the luggage on our rack. It was a gift from our daughter Chrise years ago and a reminder to dump the luggage before trying to run a rally. We learned our lesson in England.



Volunteers at the desk already had our name and gave us a packet of information regarding the rally route and a very large placard to hang on the car.



We were pressed to get in the starting line so I quickly installed the placard directly on the grille...a mistake when you consider that was the only source of cool air for the radiator. We broke away to leave our luggage at the hotel and imposed on the Collet's, once again,



to allow us to tail them through the rally route because all the instructions were in kilometers, not miles. Louise is pretty sharp at math but her calculations slow down a little while careening around country roads and up and down hills. For those with sharp eyes, yes, that's a Triumph Spitfire in the foreground maybe acting as a wannabe.



It was a hundred mile rallye. After thirty miles, we were grateful that Yolande and Georges pulled into a country inn for a beer. Belgian back roads are no better than English ones. The severe winter played hell with the surfaces and most haven't been repaired. The previous night Georges attempted to solve the problem of our sporadic windshield wipers by really tightening down the screws but I was skeptical.



By the time we stopped for lunch at an abbey in Stavelot, Belgium, we'd been through several rain squalls. The wipers worked for their usual five minutes and then went into "on again, off again," mode making driving over the back roads a real thrill. Louise's wiper quit entirely while mine was wiping in a pie shape of approximately 15% but not in the center of the windshield.

The rallye organizers shepherded the T Series cars, all five of us, to a spot that appeared to be designated handicap parking for the mechanically challenged.



We T Series owners take those things in stride though and continue to look down our noses at the younger generation of MG's.

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Our lunch was served in a really neat place, what I'd call the catacombs of the abbey. The hearty and ample food was brought as soon as we sat down and the beer was right on its heels. We were paid a visit by the Blancs Moussettes, a group of men in white.



They've been around since 1502 when the head abbot forbade his monks to take part in the local carnival. Just to tweak his nose, the Stavelot citizens put on white robes, face masks and stuck a carrot on their noses to make fun of this edict. Don't know how many of them were monks in mufti. All the while several MGers were trying to solve our wiper problem to no avail. The skies were still leaden so we swallowed our pride (again) and made a command decision to leave the rallye and head for the finish line at the Liege football (soccer) stadium. One guy intimated that we were sissies about a little rain but we stuck with it. We shunned the back roads and headed to Liege by autoroute. About ten miles out the skies opened up like we'd never before seen.



By now our wipers were inoperable, even manually. We were in a terrible pinch, driving on the autoroute at 55 MPH, unable to get off, slow down or change lanes so had to push on even through everything thing in front of us was a watery blur. The other cars and especially trucks had no such impediment so flew by us adding their spray to our predicament. Although I was too busy to pray, the thought crossed my mind once or twice before the rain finally let up.

After getting lost a time or two we pulled into the parking lot at about the same time as the participants so we didn't bother to tell them we were DNF (Did Not Finish). No one cared anyway. There was a nice wind-down session in the clubhouse where everyone accepted accolades and prizes for pulling off such a challenging rallye.



When I half jokingly mentioned there was no prize for coming the greatest distance, Georges Collet disappeared. In a short while the organizer announced one further award ...recognition of the visitors from California. I went forward, made a short acceptance speech in French and was presented with a dark green jacket with the Liege MG Club logo on it. In fact, it was

the same jacket you see the man wearing in this picture. Little did he know when he walked in that he wouldn't be wearing his jacket on the way out. Neither did I but it fits just fine. Louise, in a way that only women can, said, "I see they have a dog and cat." Funny, I never even noticed.

Tomorrow, on the way to Luxembourg, we uncover a great truth about the origins of our name and let go of a long-held belief.

