

B50 WORKING ON PLAN B

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

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When we left the Best Western Hotel in Karlsruhe, Germany Mlle. Recalculaire began spewing instructions to the autobahn that would take us to today's destination, Broggingen. Surprising because she usually chose the most circuitous route out of town causing us to dart down narrow alleys and thread through crowded farmer's markets. "I don't want to go on the autobahn," said my bride. I couldn't argue. Yesterday the roadway was inundated by noisy, heavy trucks and oversaturated with cars driven at their full capacity. "Let's take the scenic route along the Rhine River," she suggested.



It was a good choice. Two lane roads and roundabouts be damned, we were going to enjoy today. It also promised an opportunity to finally address the heavy question of Plan B. What to do if the MG doesn't sell? The decision to find the "right" new owner for our car in Europe wasn't made lightly. "What if we can't sell it?" I asked of car guys in the States. The opinions went from, "Oh, they'll fall all over you with open checkbooks," to the more pessimistic, "What're you going to do if no one wants it?" We are two months into our 2 ½ month trip are we're closer to the latter than former. No matter how distasteful, it is time to consider a Plan B.

This project started out so upbeat. We were greatly encouraged at Le Mans when the MG was the hit of the Aston Martin parking lot. In fact, we were afraid someone would make an offer and our trip would be over before it started. We needn't have worried.



Then there was the mysterious e-mail at our hotel in Rouen, France. It read, "I'm in the hotel and know someone who could be interested in your car. Please send details." We quickly typed out a reply on our iPad and never heard from them again.



We were somewhat encouraged by Phillip Scott of Beaulieu Motors (pronounced Bueleey) who said, "It's a fine example and you shouldn't have a problem finding a new owner." His optimism was encouraging but he was mostly impressed with the load the MG was forced to shoulder.





Our best nibble came in the Aston Martin parking lot where a German family just finished touring the factory. The father, mother and daughter came over, sat in the car, examined the finish and expressed interest. We exchanged cards and took pictures but when their offer came in it was too low to consider.



The next prospect came from within my own Belgian family. A cousin said he might be interested until another family member sidled up and said, "He doesn't have that kind of money." You can lower the price only so far for family.



And so it went from Belgium to Luxembourg and now to Germany. At the Nurburgring the lack of interest was at it's highest. "That car couldn't get out of its own way," a helmeted wannabe taunted. Unfortunately, he was right. I have to admit we didn't have the greatest marketing plan. We'd breeze into town with three little signs on the windows. At nightfall the car would hide in a garage or courtyard where no one could see it and then we'd leave the next morning. "Your signs are too small," was the most recurring comment. My feeling was, if you're in the market for an MG, a large sign isn't important. Because of lagging interest, I was beginning to weaken on that point.





So, here we were, on the way to a Black Forest village of 800 people who generally are not interested in trinkets to round out their vehicle collection. This town functions on trucks and tractors and not on toys. It was the hometown of Louise's relatives, Anita and Wolfgang Schnaiter and they had a room waiting for us. All we had to worry about was the water pump and the heat because we had a bed for the night.



I was shaken out of Plan B thoughts while approaching the village of Izzenheim. On hitting the clutch to shift gears there was a slight "pop" followed by the sound metal dragging on the pavement. It went, "Ding, ding, ding, ding as it bounced along the road surface while the clutch pedal lay flat on the floor. Declan Kavanagh's words rang in my ears. "Get that part replaced as soon as you hit Europe," he stressed.

I did an “in gear” start in second gear and we limped into the village. The garage owner heard us before he saw us. He looked at the severed clutch rod, shook his head, said “Nein” and waved us off. I’m sure he envisioned the MG taking up space in his garage for weeks while waiting for an exotic replacement part.



His eyes almost bugged out when I produced, from what appeared to be my deepest cavity, the replacement part ready for installation. We pushed the car over his pit and he set the German equivalent of Mr. Goodwrench on the job.



In less than an hour we were ready for the road. It was a 35 Euro fix and Herr Shafer was eager to pose for the camera if it meant we would soon be on our way. I think he was afraid something else would break that I didn't have a ready part for.



The piece-by-piece disintegration of our MG brought me to my senses. If I didn't come up with a Plan B there might not be a roadworthy car to sell. Once again I turned to Hervé Laurent for a solution. He proposed we return to Paris and leave the car in the care of his brother who had experience in selling cars from the U.S. Of course there would be advertising costs and the matter of a commission when the MG did sell. The biggest impediment, in my mind, was we wouldn't know the new owner. We might as well have placed an ad in the LA Times and saved ourselves the trouble of coming to Europe.

While stopped for another tank of \$9.00 per gallon plus gas we popped open the iPad to check e-mail downloaded in Karlsruhe. There was one in French but the message was unmistakable. "I read your ad in the MG Club de France website," it said. "I am interested. Where can I see the car?" So Plan A might still be alive. Hope springs eternal.

Louise and Ray on the back roads of Germany.