

B54 PUTTING THE PEDAL TO THE METTLE

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011
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 DATE: 23 AUGUST 2011

Eager to start our trip to Switzerland, we showed up bright and early at Willi Storz's garage near Emdingen. He personally supervised the replacement of our faulty water pump and even tightened nuts and bolts that had worked loose during our travels.

Willi is very proud of his garage and the work it performs and made no effort to hide his fondness for the Ferrari product and the people who trust him with theirs. He described our MG as "uncomplicated" but said he enjoyed working on it. I guess it showed him how far automobile engineering had come since 1954. Louise asked if his given name was Willi and he answered, "Wilhelm." "In English that's William" she



said, "so your nickname would be Bill." "Just like Bill Clinton?" he asked. "And just like Bill Gates," she added. He liked the idea so much he announced to his office manager that, from now on, she was to call him Bill. We could hear her still laughing as we drove off in the MG.

It had all the makings of a beautiful day; some humidity, warm but not too hot. Basel, Switzerland was just over an hour away but I noticed the heat gauge beginning to climb. Not too fast but climbing just the same. "I thought the new water pump would take care of that problem," I said to Louise, pointing to the gauge. As we neared the Swiss border truck traffic began to back up and we were crawling along with barely enough speed to cool the engine. Just as I was about to shut it off and become a traffic hazard the border emerged. We pulled into the shade and immediately popped the hood to cool off the engine. For the next half hour we were under the steady gaze of border guards who wondered if we were trying a new way to sneak into their country without paying the mandatory 50 Franc fee (\$60 approx) for an autobahn sticker. The question now was, "Do we turn around and drive back to "Bill's" garage to see what needs to be done or forge ahead to our destination in Romont, Switzerland, trusting there'd be a garage there that could cure the problem?"

Once again we rolled the dice, paid the 50 Francs and pointed the MG's nose toward the mountains. Keeping our eyes glued to the heat gauge, we began a slow, steady climb out of Basel and toward Romont. All this time I was trying to diagnose the problem. "Most likely the radiator is clogged," I shouted to Louise over the truck noise. "Needs to be back flushed." The climb steepened and the heat rose as we ducked into a tunnel. "Great," I thought. "Tunnels are cooler and relatively flat." Not this one. I swear it was more muggy and warmer inside and went for ten miles on a steady incline. Just like the Nurburgring, there's no convenient place to pull off without getting creamed in the rear so we pressed on. Just as I reached my point of highest anxiety we popped out the other end and coasted into a rest stop for engine cooling.

A man stopped to look at the MG and asked the problem. I gave him my own diagnosis and he said, "My brother has an Old Timers garage not far from here. Let me call and see if he can help." All we could think at this moment was, "This is God at work."



The guy wasn't wearing wings but otherwise he was an angel. We punched the address in our GPS and headed for the small town of Toffen. It was well after lunch when we pulled up in front of the *Old Timer's Galerie*. A guy named Reinhard came out and had his mechanic drive the MG around the block. They conferred for a while and he said, "Radiator needs to be rodded." I know what that means and I knew it couldn't be done while we were having lunch. "Let me think it over," I said and ordered a pizza from his adjacent restaurant.

“Take a look around and I’ll join you at lunch,” he said, gesturing to his garage. We walked in and couldn’t believe our eyes. There were at least 100 cars under roof with more scattered around outside. Most of them



had pedigrees of some sort and all were on somebody’s collector list. “This guy doesn’t run a fix-it shop or have a car collection,” I said to Louise. “He’s an auto broker.” He sat down and got right to business.



“We’ve estimated the damage to the body and radiator repair work and figured the import tax we’d have to pay,” he said with the briskness of someone who does this for a living. “I’ll pay you this amount,” he said writing a figure in U.S.

dollars on a napkin, “and you can be on your way today.” When we balked at the figure he raised it a thousand dollars.

“Why do you want our MG,” I asked somewhat naively. He pointed to a smaller sign that read, “The Swiss Auctioneers”. “That’s what I do,” he said. “I don’t have a TF in my inventory and yours is perfect. Someone will want it. I just need to make a profit from it.” He then raised his offer by another thousand.

Yesterday there were no buyers in sight and today we’re sitting across from a guy offering to pay cash right now before our beer got warm and the pizza cold. Maybe, if we’d ordered another round, he might have upped the ante but we were really uncomfortable with the idea of the MG sitting up on an auction block waiting for some stranger to claim it as a prize. If ever there was a time, this was a test of our mettle. We were at put up or shut up.



“I wish you luck,” Reinhard said as he pointed the way out of town. “The offer still stands if you change your mind.”

Keeping an anxious eye on the heat gauge, we started a slow climb into the Swiss countryside. Louise broke the silence. “That was our only real offer and you turned him down,” she said. “What do we do now?” Not wanting her to know that I was completely out of ideas, I bought a little time. “When we get to Romont,” I said, “I’m going to send an e-mail.” Fortunately, she didn’t ask “To whom?”

Louise and Ray lost somewhere in the rolling hills of Switzerland