

B57 MINUTES AND MEMORIES

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011
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With Charly Page's parting words, "You can come back by train, you know," ringing in our ears, we aimed the MG's nose downhill in the direction of Basel and back to Germany. In an e-mail Michael Stadler explained his request for our arrival in Nidda no later than three PM on Sunday. His oldest daughter is to be married the following weekend. In between he had to fit in the bridal dinner and a Monday business trip to Poland. Sunday was it or we'd have to wait a week. What he didn't know was we had airline tickets from Paris to Los Angeles for Thursday. There'd be a penalty for a change so Sunday had to be it for us as well. Our mission was clearly drawn.

His casual, "Call when you get to Nidda and I'll direct you in," wouldn't ordinarily be a complication if we hadn't run out of minutes on our phone. We found that minutes for a French phone could only be purchased in France, typically from a Tabac (similar to a small convenience store in the States.) "No problemo," I told Louise. "When we get to Basel we'll just swing off the autobahn, dip into France, buy the minutes at a Tabac and hop back into Germany. " What could be easier I thought. We arrived in Huningue St. Louis shortly after noon and, ably guided by Mlle. Recalculare, pulled up to a Tabac. "Ferme" said the sign on the door. "Closed on Saturday," I said. "What gives?" Then Louise reminded me, "It's after twelve and you're in France. They won't open for two hours." Thinking, "They can't all be closed," I turned again to the GPS. The next Tabac was not only closed but the accordion gates were locked. "Vacances" said the sign. That was even worse because the French go on vacation for a month.

And so it went until we found ourselves on the autoroute heading for Colmar, some sixty miles away and still no minutes.



The situation was just as bad in Colmar. We passed Tabac after Tabac closed for vacation until we found ourselves right in the center of town. Colmar is one of those “cuter than can be” storybook villages that draw huge crowds on summer weekends. We asked two traffic gendarmes for directions to an open Tabac. They consulted and demanded we park the MG immediately as photographers were creating a traffic jam. I'd have to go on foot. Sprinting the final two blocks to an open Tabac, I bought the minutes just before he closed early for the day. “Too many people,” he complained.

So our day of casual driving had taken a twist. We'd lost over two hours searching for minutes and were 30 miles west of the German border. It was pedal to the metal time again. Before long we settled into the tedium of autobahn driving...the type that lets your mind wander and ponder. Louise and I began to reminisce about the experiences we'd shared in the MG over the past 53 years.



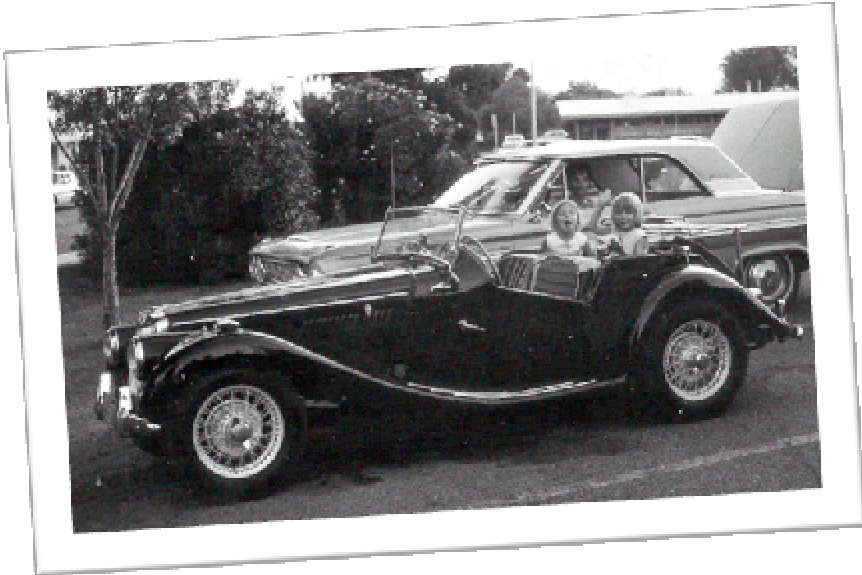
We remember the weekends spent in Paris just bumming around because we had no money. In 1958 it was possible to park in front of the Eiffel Tower to take this photo. In 2011 there would be a gendarme in the picture and he'd be writing you a ticket.



On New Year's Eve we somehow managed to get four adults in this car with the top up. Before that we went to a sports car club party and came home with the Christmas tree, ornaments and all. Top was down then even though it was raining.

Our first Christmas together was spent in Bertchesgaden, Germany at Hitler's former VIP chalet just under the Eagle's Nest. We learned to ski here and our beer bill totaled more than the room.





After the Army we drove across the states ending in Phoenix, Arizona because that's where we ran out of gas money. Seven years and three children later, Channel 2 in Los Angeles paid for the gas and we moved on.

The MG's luggage rack was the stage for wannabe model Andrea and later served as a royal coach for two high school homecoming queen candidates.





When we wanted to learn more about California wines, the MG suffered the indignity of a bike rack on its tail. During the Napa Valley trip we had a life-threatening experience when the MG caught fire in the middle of a dense, dry forest. Quick thinking and a bottle of vermouth brought things under control but my hand still quivers when I think of the possibilities.



Our Mighty Girl even spent some time in the snow when we traveled to Mammoth Mountain for a ski vacation. She looked silly with chains on and it didn't do one thing to improve the ride.



I taught all three of our daughters to drive stick shift in the MG and later it served to shuttle their children around the neighborhood. Here Remy and Alec argue over who's going to drive.

I've even passed on "Pride in ownership" tips to grandson Kade who insists he likes washing cars. He probably thought it was going to be his when he got older.





We didn't really talk about it but were both wondering if anyone else could experience so many facets of a car during its existence. It wasn't like we'd planned it. Originally the MG was only going to be with us for a year and somehow it evolved into the better part of a lifetime. Are we going to experience seller's remorse? I hope not because we made a commitment. Now we only hope the buyer has the same resolve. What if they back out when they see the car? Too late to think about that now. Tomorrow, by 3 PM, we'll be in Nidda.

You can eat up a lot of miles in the reminiscing mode and that we did. Before we knew it we were approaching Heidelberg, one of the places we visited during our first honeymoon some fifty three years ago. Mlle. Recalcaire must have gotten a little teary eyed as well because she couldn't do something as simple as finding the Marriott Hotel. We had to ask a cabbie.



Louise and Ray and our last night with the MG