

THE GRAND TOUR (TAKING ITALY BY STORM) – Ron Clements

The summer of 2012 had been wet, event after event cancelled and no sign of the sun.

My brother Pete had an idea..... Italy. Spend a few weeks basking in the late Mediterranean sun, driving the Mille Miglia route down to Rome and back. It had never been done in a Morgan Three Wheeler. My response? “No way”!

The idea was then suggested to Ian and Maria Parkinson; the fact they had completed the German Opening Run showed the reliability of their car. Plus, their organisational skills would be a bonus. But their response was the same as mine; it was just too far for a Mog to go.

As the wet summer continued something strange happened. The idea germinated and started to grow. Eventually, everything was sorted. The cars were checked over and new boots fitted ready to jump The Channel on the 27th August. On the way to the ferry, the first problem; Pete’s newly fitted brake shoes shed their linings so he re-fitted the old shoes which were brought down from home by Ian. The moral? “If it’s not broke, don’t fix it.”

The drive through France was uneventful. Two camping stops were made at Troyes and Bourg en Bresse and on 30th August we entered the Mont Blanc Tunnel and emerged in Italy. The following day we met Oreste Bianchi and his wife, had a superb pizza, visited Monza racing circuit, were shown Oreste’s superb F Type and welded up Ian’s headlight. We headed off to Brescia, then to Lake Garda as the sky fell in. We covered 80 kilometres in pouring rain and then had to put the tents up in a hurricane. What fun!!

Eventually the sun returned and on the 2nd September we gate-crashed a village Ferrari show – and stole it! On Monday 3rd September we set off on the Mille Miglia route towards Ravenna. We were met on the way by Renato in his MX4 Sports 2 Seater. On the way to the B & B he had found for us we drove through the worst rainstorm I have ever had to endure. It was so bad, even the tin-tops had to stop and we sheltered beneath umbrellas in a farmyard, waiting for it to end. None of the Mogs missed a beat, astounding. The meal that evening was spent with Renato, his family and son Francesco. It was Renato’s birthday and we were his unexpected best present, what an honour.

Next we followed the Mille Miglia route to San Marino, Europe’s smallest state, and stayed in the one and only campsite. The old city is charming; full of souvenir shops selling crossbows and swords, most odd. We visited the Abarth Museum then, after dipping our feet in the Adriatic, we headed up to Assisi. Perched half way up Mount Subasio, Assisi is a spectacular city.

The route from Assisi to Rome was truly breath-taking. Some of the mountain passes had been burnt by forest fires and the smell of smoke was still in the air. We stayed in the Tiber Campsite in Rome and spent two days sight-seeing. Not enough time but I’m lucky to have visited before.

On Monday 10th September we headed along the Mille Miglia route towards Sienna on the Via Cassia, a superb road for truly enjoyable driving. The following day was spent walking around Sienna, an enchanting city.

We followed the SR2 to Florence which was, yet again, a superb road to drive. It’s not difficult to imagine what it would be like to race a high powered Italian machine along such roads. The Morgans loved it! We side-tracked off the Mille Miglia route to Pisa to visit the leaning tower, a lean that is most notable when walking around the top! With 2,000 miles now covered, we decided to check over the cars. A quick wash, greasing of the nipples and even an oil filter change. Then we had time to sit and chill.

Saturday 15th September, met Alessandro Natali and family, with his Matchless MX4. They escorted us to the Kursaal Car Club. We were treated like heroes. I was part of a winning treasure hunt team (still confused!) and we were guests of honour at a superb evening dinner.

On the Sunday, as we were preparing the cars to leave next day, Pete's Matchless back-fired and shed its external flywheel. An amazing feat considering it had been on there for 30,000 miles or so! The engine was removed and, with help from a local machine shop, a new key was made. The engine was soon back on the car and ready to roll by Monday lunchtime. (Note.... Pete and Ron don't use key steel for the keys, they use mild steel which is much softer. This means that if the key shears, there is much less likelihood of damage to flywheel or mainshaft. Remember, the key isn't there to drive the car, it's there to stop the flywheel from creeping on the mainshaft).

We then followed the SS64 over the mountain to Bologna, yet another awesome drive which started with a 9 mile climb. Bologna itself appears to have a traffic system which ensures you're always lost! Whilst staying in Bologna, we visited the Ducati factory – great and the Ferrari museum – great. However, the Ferrari factory tour was a huge disappointment, we were not even allowed off the coach.

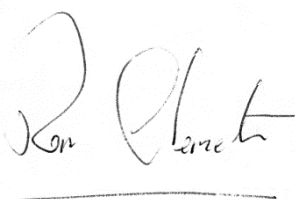
Thursday 19th September we headed back to Brescia and so completed the Mille Miglia route. That night we stayed at a small campsite on the shores of Lake Iseo, gorgeous.

And so, time to head homewards. Our last stop in Italy was at a campsite in Chiavenna at the foot of the Alps. On the way there we stopped at the Moto Guzzi museum. I was amazed by the technical innovations that existed in past generations of this famous marque.

On 22nd September the sky was blue for our drive over the Alps through the Splugen Pass. To quote Ian, the Splugen Pass was "absolutely incredible, awesome, unbelievable!". The mountain is 2,113 metres high, or around 7,000 feet and it was crossed by three Mogs. A great, unforgettable, drive. On our way to meet the Simmanks, the rain began again! I must thank the Simmanks for their kind hospitality, playing hosts to the weary travellers.

The drive back to England (and for Pete and myself, straight to the AGM weekend) was luckily uneventful. So – that is the end of The Italian Job and it goes to show just what a three wheeler Morgan can do if you dare to try.

Just do it!



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ron' and 'Pete' with a horizontal line underneath.