

The Kent Russet Run

A 100 mile tour around the Kent Countryside, Saturday 17th October

By Alan Ashby

As the days grow shorter and memories of summer begin to fade, the KRR offers participants the final opportunity to traverse the narrow lanes of Kent, visiting charmingly picturesque villages, before vehicles are polished and put away for their winter hibernation.

It has frequently been noted that the British are an optimistic race when it comes to our buying choices of motor vehicles. Even though our weather systems are influenced by an imponderable number of factors, to the extent that it is impossible for forecasters to give accurate long-range weather predictions, we own a higher percentage of rag-top cars than any of our European neighbours. As such, this optimism was evident on this year's Kent Russet Run which attracted 10 open top cars, (12 if you include the Mazda MX-5 Cabriolets owned by the event's organisers), from a total of 25 participating vehicles. Retro cars are popular, too, as participating vehicles included a VW T2 Camper Van, (of which more later), and a 2009 registered PGO 356 Speedster II – a rare retro styled Porsche lookalike.

Following a hearty breakfast at The Castle Hotel, Eynsford, vehicles set off, at one minute intervals, on a varied route of open and minor roads with seasonal leaf-litter scattered across the surrounding countryside. The geographical feature of the North Downs, a chalk ridge, and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) gave exceptional views across the Weald of Kent – a thirty miles wide valley that stretches across the southern counties into the New Forest. Many of the villages visited in this area boast fine Georgian houses, reflecting the wealth and prosperity of an earlier age; there was also the unexpected sight, on the village green in Offham, of a 'quintain' - a medieval tilting-post which tested the skills of mounted soldiers who would strike a panel with their lance and avoid being struck by the sandbag mounted on the opposite end of the swivel!

47 miles later and participants were directed into 'The Who'd a Thought It' Champagne and Oyster Bar, on the outskirts of the mid-Kent village of Grafty Green, for a welcome break and stretch legs! This bar boasts a magnificent range of over 200 different champagnes – oh the temptation of indulging in a flute, or two, but not (sadly) if you are driving!

By now the earlier cloud had given way to clear blue skies, (although it would cloud over again later in the day), and upon leaving this facility participants were presented with two locally grown Royal Norfolk apples, from orchards in the Darenth Valley.

The route, further south, ran parallel to The Royal Military Canal, (late 18th/early 19th centuries), and a 'pit-stop', in Rolvenden, to visit a unique collection of Morgan 3 wheeled cars, and motoring memorabilia, at The CM Booth Collection of Historic Vehicles. This private collection, owned by Chris Booth, has taken him over 40 years to amass and is, now, quite priceless.

From here, there was a choice to either continue the route around the upper part of Romney Marsh to the finish at Tenterden Station, on the Kent & East Sussex Railway, or opt-out and take the shorter and more direct route to the finish. Other than the two Marcos sports cars owners, who (sensibly) opted out due to the low road clearances on the marsh, everyone followed the prescribed route and all were 'logged-in' upon arrival – all, that is, except David and Cath Allwood. Eventually, and leisurely, they arrived and told us that their VW camper

van, which had been hired for the weekend, came fully equipped with a picnic hamper and they just had to stop off, whenever the fancy took them, and boil-up the kettle for a brew. Now that's what I call style!

One anecdotal story told me by Neil Harris, (1953 Series 1 Landrover), related back to the briefing session when participants were warned to be on the lookout for cyclists, joggers and horse-riders. In one narrow lane Neil came up behind an aged cyclist, wearing bright blue skin-tight lycra shorts, who saw no reason why he should pull over to the side of the road and let Neil, and other motorists, pass. (It's worth mentioning, here, that the cyclist was not taking part in a time-trial event). For ten minutes, which probably seemed more like two hours, Neil viewed two pulsating buttocks rhythmically going up and down until, finally, he found an opportunity to overtake. Toeing the accelerator pedal to the floorboard he managed to pass but as he did so the petrol build-up in the exhaust silencer caused a mighty backfire which, the hapless cyclist must have thought was a rifle retort. Anyway the cyclist, having wobbled somewhat, decided that it would be prudent to pull over for a minute and allow the build-up of motorists to disappear into the distance.

The event was clearly enjoyed by all and we look forward to next year when the run will, for a second time, be themed. So, next year do join us on the *Kent Russet Run – Romans Invasion*, which will be held on Saturday 16 October.

Footnote: We were shadowed around on this tour by Bob Le-Roi of Red Sands Radio. To view the variety of pictures taken by him, complete with captions, visit www.bobleroi.co.uk and 'left click' Kent Russet Run.