

A Bentley Touring Holiday To The Sunny Algarve

For many years we have regularly flown to the Algarve but have never before driven and we decided to remedy this by taking a leisurely drive with plenty of hotels en route, the choice of which I would normally have 'winged' but on this occasion had to be booked ahead as Heather had other ideas. What transpired on the first day of the journey perhaps served to underline the fact that she had a point. The five week trip began on the first week of June driving down to Plymouth. I had chosen Plymouth as I wished to visit a sick relative en route. As we were not in any hurry and I enjoy the driving (Heather navigates when Tom Tom gets his knickers in a twist), we had decided to break the journey with an overnight stop around Taunton after a pleasant lunch somewhere halfway and for this first stop had not bothered booking anywhere as it was 'only England' but had not counted on the fact that it was towards the end of half term and everywhere we tried was fully booked. By 6 pm we were getting desperate and since, by then, we were virtually on the south coast I phoned an old favourite - the Palace Hotel in Babbacombe and was relieved they had a room for us and plenty of safe parking for the car.

The following day we drove to our pre-booked hotel - Borringdon Hall, just outside Plymouth, and since we had never stayed there before were very relieved to find it exceeded our expectations and the dinner was fabulous.

What should have been a drive both ways was spoiled by the French petrol blockade so now involved a ferry across to Santander. I must say the outgoing ferry aboard Brittany Ferries' flagship the 'Pont Aven' offered an excellent meal in their restaurant which is more than can be said for the return route from Cherbourg aboard the three hour crossing to Portsmouth on the catamaran where only a snack is available.



From Santander we journeyed to Salamanca with a stay at the Puento Romano Hotel with an excellent spacious private underground garage. Having never been to Salamanca before we were mesmerised and determined to repeat our stay there on the return journey. A visit to the Museo de Historio de la Automoción de Salamanca put the icing on the cake where I found their 1910 Hispano Suiza 30/40 particularly interesting.

Cacares was the next stop at the Gran Hotel Don Manuel which also had a semi-private underground car-park. A final stop at Evora and the Albergaria Do Calvario with another underground car-park concluded the stopovers.

After three sweltering weeks on the Algarve with temperatures regularly hitting 35 degree in the shade we hoped for some cooler weather on the way home.

We returned via Seville en route for our first night in Salamanca and the mercury went off the scale. The 'external' thermometer in the Arnage was by now recording an air temperature just above 40 degrees. I was pleased these cars were trialled in the desert and I feared for the sun causing damage to the paintwork - unfounded I was relieved to find. Taking a week on the return journey hotels were located in Biarritz, Rochefort and Saumur all with the requisite secure parking. At times the privilege of driving a model that was the world's fastest 4 door saloon car when produced was quite useful, especially when called upon to pass a slow moving lorry on one of the more tortuous lanes. I am sad to relate that during the whole month whilst abroad I only saw one other Bentley. Incredible.



Of all the places where the car seemed to get the most admiring looks, the home of the Belle Epoque in Biarritz was the one. As the referendum took place just before our return I was also pleased that no bricks were thrown as we passed through Spain and France! A steady 80mph (130 kph) ticking over at 2000rpm on those fabulous open roads with neither the engine nor me under any stress. Then we took the ferry from Cherbourg across to Portsmouth and back to reality!

Tony Littlewood. July 2016