



GUJ27 exits the sharpest bend on the run up the Prescott Hill climb in July 2016. Picture: Ian Lloyd-Graham 571 photography



John Dixon's 20hp has been in his family for 56 years, during which he and Magnificent Magdalena have made scores of trips involving climbs up the longest mountain passes

BY THE TIME I BOUGHT MY FIRST CAR in 1959 I had already ridden my Douglas Vespa and ex-War Department 16H Norton 10,000 miles in Europe, so I had a thirst for independent foreign travel and driving up every steep hill and mountain I could find. That first car was (and is) a 1932 Morris Minor tourer. As to be expected for £5, she needed some work but by the summer of 1960 I had fixed most things and drove her to Moscow and Yalta and home via central Europe.

Soon afterwards, my friend Chris Rogers came to see me in his 1932 Austin Seven. He had done a similar journey up to the North Cape and all over Scandinavia. In 1961 we both went to Turkey in our little cars and although our routes were similar we never met up. By 1964 Chris was finding his Austin a bit uncomfortable so when he saw an advert in the *Nottingham Evening Post* for a Rolls-Royce for £250 he was interested but not having that kind of money to spare, he drove over to Bingham to see if my dad would lend him the £250.

My brother and I happened to be at home that day so I drove them in my new Mini Cooper to Cotgrave to

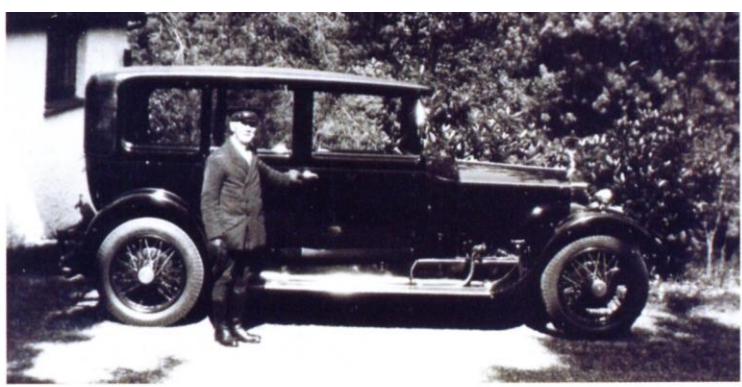
see the car and report back. We were all gob-smacked at the sight of this magnificent deep black limousine. I took the car for a test drive - it was wonderful.

Back home we talked incessantly about the car. Chris said it was too good for what he wanted - carrying bricks and junk around for odd jobs. He then cunningly worked on the idea that if my dad and I bought the car he would be able to have trips in it without having to pay for it or its running costs. About midnight dad said he was fed up with talking. He produced a wad of notes - exactly £250 - and handed it to me. "For goodness sake shut up about the car and go and buy it - but try to get the price down," he said.

I did as I was told but the vendor made me pay full price, saying the engine had been reconditioned. But after only eight miles on the way home blue smoke started coming from the exhaust. The next day I went back in the Mini to complain. The vendor changed his story and said the engine had been changed. Reluctantly he handed over the old log books. I contacted the previous owner Ken Smalley who still

Above: John came 10th in a 300+ km economy drive through Shropshire and Derbyshire. The photo was taken by the deputy editor of the *Caravan Club* magazine who volunteered as navigator. "Both he and the observer in the back were amazed by how we made it round the hairpin and up the 20% Darley Dale hill near Matlock at full throttle in first - the locals stopped and stared with the exhaust noise echoing off the stone buildings."

GUJ27 chauffeur William Bird at The Maples near Bournemouth in about 1932



had the original engine and various spares from a Rolls-Royce hearse. He said I could have the lot for £50. I borrowed a 5cwt trailer and somehow managed to get the engine, gearbox, steering column, shock absorbers, undertrays and many boxes of bits into it before towing them 20 miles home behind my Mini.

EARLY HISTORY

Her first nine years were spent near Bournemouth, where GUJ27 had a chauffeur, William Bird, and was owned by the wealthy widow of the founder of Walter Willson, the northern grocery chain. The 1927 limousine then became a funeral car for the Co-op at Ashington, Northumberland from 1936 to 1943.

Fenwick Styan in Beverley, Yorkshire then bought her for taxi, funeral, wedding, Home Guard and general hire work until he retired in 1952. He sold the taxi business but retained GUJ27 for himself.

Don Massey from Hull then acquired the car and some renovation must have been done. On his death in 1958 the car was bought by Keith Tinker a student at Manchester University. He toured Scotland and then sold the car (to buy carpets for his new marital home). Next, John Bircumshaw (another Manchester student) bought the car with his parental 21st birthday present. He toured North Wales but sold it to Ken Smalley in 1963 with a badly knocking engine.

Ken put the engine (X2E) from the hearse into GUJ27. His wife could not drive the RR so he traded it in for a VW Beetle. A Nottingham businessman then acquired her for £165 and after six weeks' cleaning by his chauffeur sold it to us for £250!

One afternoon in May 1964, following a job interview in South Wales, I jumped out of my Austin Cooper and into the Rolls-Royce and drove Chris and my mother from Bingham near Nottingham along the old B roads to Banbury. We arrived at our hotel in Alton just before 11pm, ready to attend the great Goodwood Rally of 1000 Rolls-Royces and vintage Bentleys. This event was open to the public and was organised by several car clubs, the least significant



**Top: third owner Fenwick Styan used GUJ27 for wedding duties among other things
Above and right: she was also used for John and Jenny Dixon's own wedding in 1967**



GUJ27 and John's Safari caravan crossing Waterloo Bridge on 20 June 2004



Chris and I set off with the caravan for a 'test drive' to Poland. I had

(then) being RREC. Like many participants I joined the Vintage Sports Car Club (VSCC) and the RREC.

Many weekends were then occupied fixing the original engine (J3R). It took ages to clean out all the crud from the crankshaft. One new big end casting and the back main bearing casting were bought from Rolls-Royce at Derby. These then had to be machined to match the crankshaft by Midvale Engineering in Rugby. Despite this I still had to scrape the bearings.

At this time there were no instructions or drawings available, so things such as left-hand threads had to be discovered and I had none of the special tools so the left-hand threaded idler gear nut had to be undone with a hammer and blunt chisel. I made all the gaskets except for the cylinder head. In February with snow on the roofs, Chris and I hauled engine X2E out and replaced it with the renovated J3R. We finished the job and the car was on the road again.

However, the local garage seemed to take delight in failing her for the MOT. As a result, they fitted new

king pins and bushes for my parental wedding present in 1967. Twice more in later years the garage failed her, so on both occasions I took her to another garage in a nearby village where she passed with no trouble. Even now, testers complain about the lift on the king pins so I suspect the thrust washers were never right.

Chris drove GUJ27 to Sheffield for my wedding with my brother, his wife-to-be and my younger sister in the car. On the way home, a Sheffield bus pulled out in front and the whole of its glass fibre front was ripped off. My brother leapt out of the RR and berated the bus driver shouting: "Just look at what you have done to my beautiful Rolls-Royce." But on inspection there was not a mark. My Dad was never told about the incident – and neither was I until 30 years later.

Soon after buying GUJ27 in March 1964 John booked to attend the rally of 1000 Rolls-Royces and Bentleys at Goodwood on 22-23 May. This was the first time he had seen a Silver Ghost

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF ROLLS-ROYCE

In July 1979 my dad drove the family and Chris to Derby for the 75th anniversary of Rolls-Royce. We toured the old factory and drove past the Lord Mayor to the local park, where we were pleased to meet some of the old boys who had built our car 52 years before.

After this, the car was rarely used in the 1980s. My dad retired, aged 79, sold his pharmacy and moved nearer my sister in Calverton. I drove the car to her new home. Dad then decided to have some work done on the car and she was taken to Ristes in Nottingham. The amount of work required came as something of a shock – so we decided just to do the essentials.

This involved rebuilding the road springs, replacing worn shackle bolts, fitting the spare hydraulic rear shock absorbers in place of the non-existent friction ones, relining the brakes, a new exhaust system and having the Autovac overhauled. Even after all this work, the car would not exceed 30mph. After my dad died, I dismantled the scuttle petrol filter. All the discs were gummed together drastically reducing the petrol flow. This often happens when a car is not used for a



1977: The Queen's Silver Jubilee trip ends with GUJ27 being towed the last 50 miles home

In 1977, my sister's husband Eric drove the car from Bingham to Bromley, accompanied by my other sister and her husband Chris in their Land Rover. I then drove the car with six adults and four children to Windsor for the Queen's Silver Jubilee.

The next day Eric drove the car home. Cruising at close to 60mph for an hour up the A1 he did not notice the oil level had dropped so that eventually there was no oil pressure. The inevitable happened – bang, rattle, bang. Fortunately, Chris was following and towed GUJ27 the last 50 miles home. That Friday I drove from work in London to Bingham and was horrified to find Eric had dismantled most of the engine, piling all the bits randomly in cardboard boxes. I was not pleased.

All the big ends had melted and most of the little ends had, too. Furthermore, Eric had been so impressed by the beautiful brand new bodies we had seen on many cars at Windsor, he was trying to persuade my dad to pay for a brand new body for GUJ27. After some 'discussions' it was decided that there would be no new body and that my dad and I would fix the engine.

A company called Machinabilty in Loscoe recast all the big ends and spacers and machined them to match my measurements of the crankshaft. Similarly, the new little end bushes were machined to fit the relevant gudgeon pin.

In the meantime, we removed the block and its sideplates. I cleaned out the sludge which had been blocking about 60% of the water flow. I was careful not to damage the copper tubes as I did not fancy replacing them. We put corks in the various holes and filled the water jacket with hydrochloric acid which dissolved most of the remaining solids.

Some gaskets, such as the one between the block and the crankcase, were not available at that time so we had to make replacements. With hindsight we should have ensured that their thickness was exactly the same as the originals. Any thinner or thicker and the piston rings would hit the wear ridges at the top and bottom of the cylinders. As the engine did not burn oil, we decided not to fit liners to the 60 thou oversize bores, but to continue with the old pistons. Fortunately, the main bearings had survived the lack of oil. Working only at weekends we had the car back on the road for her MOT on 26 June 1977.

no idea how the old car would cope but we need not have worried

long time but is generally the last thing to be checked. The car now drove beautifully at 50mph.

In December 1991 I took the car to be tested. The cost of the MOT had just gone up and to justify the price the garage made a right meal of the procedure, taking over two hours instead of the usual 30 minutes. It was the coldest, frostiest, foggiest day of the winter and I had about 150 miles to drive the car back to my home via the A46 and A5 to Bromley in Kent. The hoar frost on the trees was magnificent, but not the ice that I kept having to wipe off the inside of the windscreen.

THE OVERSEAS ADVENTURES BEGIN

In June 1994 I took the car with my old tent from the 1950s on a five-day trip to Normandy to coincide with the 50th anniversary of D-Day and to visit many of the places where my dad had been in 1944. Hundreds of World War Two army vehicles were there, mostly belonging to the "Keep 'em rolling" club from Holland. I then drove across northern France to Calais on the same route my dad would have taken. I planned to complete a re-run of his wartime journey to the Baltic near Wismar the following April and May. On arriving home I saw my old Safari caravan in the front garden, unused since our last family holiday in it in 1983. I thought – why not take the caravan next time?

While Jenny was out at work I cleaned and painted the chassis, fixed the brakes and lights and got the 'van ready. I had a tow bar fitted at Watling Engineers at Radlett. This off-the-cuff design and manufacture took just one day. I asked for a hole to be drilled for an extra bolt to be used for fixing the towbar assembly to each side of the chassis. The number plate had to be repositioned and the whole thing made with the correct height for a level caravan.

I told my friend Chris Rogers of my plans to go to the Baltic in the Rolls-Royce and caravan and he begged me to take him too. I told him not to let either Jenny or my mother know we were taking the caravan. However, a few days before we were due to set off Chris visited my mother, who said to him:

"Oh Chris, I do hope you won't be too uncomfortable in John's little tent."

Without thinking Chris automatically replied "Oh no, Mrs Dixon - we're taking the caravan."



Local boys pose with John's friend Chris Rogers and GUJ27 and the caravan near Gdansk in Poland

"But the Rolls doesn't have a tow bar..."
"It does now."

The wife of my friend and next-door neighbour Bill had died that January and I often spent a couple of hours drinking whisky and talking to him in the evening. He had his Bells and dry ginger and I took my own malt. He told me many stories about his war experiences. How the officers and NCOs abandoned the teenage soldiers one night to escape to Dunkerque. How they were then captured by the Germans and made to walk most of the way to Poland, where they became slave farm workers in 'Wossits' near Gdansk. Then there was the 'death' march back west when the Russians were coming in 1945, finally being liberated on the 'Island of Fear' – Fehmarn near Denmark.

As Chris and I were leaving, he said: "I do wish I was coming with you." I replied: "Bill, if you get a passport by the time I get back at 11pm in 23 days time I'll take you with me in the autumn."

John took his old tent to sleep in on the trip to Normandy in June 1994. Following that experience, the old Safari caravan was recommissioned

'TEST DRIVE' TO POLAND WITH A CARAVAN

So Chris and I set off with the caravan for a 'test drive' to Poland. I had no idea how the old car would cope but we need not have worried. I had planned the route to be as close as possible to the one my father took. I had his autobiography and many of the letters he had written home in 1944-45. We also planned to visit friends in Germany, Holland and Denmark before getting the ferry to Rostock and driving across Poland to Gdansk. The drive from Copenhagen to the ferry was memorable as there were candles lit in every window and large ones every 100m along the road to celebrate 50 years since the liberation.

All went perfectly to plan, until I tried to find Bill's village near Gdansk. We could not find the campsite at Pruszcz-Gdansk so stopped for the night on a large grassy area nearby. The local boys turned up to see the car. Then the local teenage girls came. We showed them pictures from our earlier trips. One girl called Magdalena was able to tell me where Bill's village of 'Wossits' was – it is Osice, pronounced nearly the same way. It was eight kilometres away and we parked by the school house where Bill had been kept prisoner.

I spoke to the Russian who had lived there since the end of the war and he got one of his sons to feel



amongst the inch of black dust on the ledge on top of an internal wall to see if he could find the photographs that a young German soldier had given to Bill and were left behind in the rush to escape the Russian army in 1945. He could not find them. In the meantime Chris had met an old Polish chap who had joined the Polish Air Force in the UK during the war. Chris had already been invited into his house so I joined them, Chris, Zygfryd, his wife, son and a friend. We had lunch and vodka. We then headed for the Russian border, hoping to visit Kalingrad before returning to Poland via Lithuania. This proved to be impossible without a visa so we turned round in no man's land and headed for home.

We visited friends in Marburg and Siegen. In the morning I dropped off Chris with some luggage at the station so he could have a few days with other friends in Germany. I drove 408 miles back across Europe during the day, plus a ferry from Calais to Dover.

I arrived home at 11.05pm just five minutes late after 3,489 miles in 23 days averaging 14mpg with the caravan on the back the whole time. Old Bill was looking out of the window and came running with his new passport in his hand. This meant I had to keep my promise and take him back to Poland.

BACK TO POLAND

A couple of weeks before I was due to set off again for Poland with old Bill, I checked the caravan and was horrified to find cracks in the A-frame at the front of the chassis. I called in my local welder who mended the cracks and fitted re-inforcing plates. I also had the portable steps for the caravan welded. I had arranged to join the Euro Rally at Ronneby in Sweden for the weekend of 8-10 September. So on 31 August we set off and just made the afternoon ferry to Le Havre.

We spent two days visiting the beaches, memorials and cemetery and then stopped at the camp site at Abbeville, where Bill had been captured. I had a chat with a French family with two children. They spoke no English so it was a rare chance to practice my French. We had just finished dinner when there was a knock at the door. On opening it, the two children passed us two bowls of mussels cooked in wine accompanied by



As we set off in from Lingen, I saw a BMW Isetta bubble car and tiny caravan. We stopped at the first opportunity for a closer look

While waiting to embark the Lion Queen, we watched the lorries reverse onto the ship, which did not have a bow door and I wondered whether I would have to do the same with the caravan. However, there was plenty of room to drive through the ship and turn round inside the bow

a song. As soon as they had gone Bill said: "I can't eat that muck." I ate mine but it was a bit of a struggle never having tried mussels before. I collected the crocks to take them to the washing up place but as I put my weight on the newly-welded caravan steps they collapsed. I ended up on my back with pots scattered over the campsite. In the morning I checked the welding on the caravan chassis – it was okay.

We drove across Belgium and the Netherlands and at Lingen, just inside Germany, we met up with a BMW Isetta bubble car with a tiny home-made caravan. We continued a long drive to Fehrmann where we camped at a holiday site. This was Bill's 'Island of Fear' where his wartime captivity ended. He said the place was unrecognisable. Then we took the ferry to Denmark and camped near Boge By, just above the beach. After crossing to Sweden on the ferry we met the other Rally participants at the car museum at Rydaholm. On Sunday we stayed on at the car display after the others had retired to the nearby hotel, much to the disappointment of the public who had paid to see them. I told them where the cars had gone, then hitched the caravan and tootled down to Karlskrona for the overnight ferry *Lion Queen* to Poland.

The next day we drove to Osice and stopped outside the old school house where Bill had been a POW for five years. "This is not it," he exclaimed. There are no tram lines and no tree outside." But it was. Bill went in briefly but came running out – the place was filthy. I knew Zygfryd would have seen us so I turned around and parked outside his house and out he came. Bill had a great time chatting to Zygfryd, who kept sending his wife to fetch various people to meet Bill. One was the daughter of the woman who fed the POWs.

Then we headed for Dresden. As we got closer to the border with the old East Germany we came across our first horses, ploughing and dragging heavy loads just as in all of Poland in 1960. We squeezed onto a chain-driven ferry across the Oder and spent most of the next day in Dresden.

The route home was selected to be able to visit friends in Marburg and Bad Honnef – 3,089 miles in 22 days with just a puncture on the caravan.





GUJ27 above the summit on the Splügen Pass in Italy on 15 September 1997

Blenheim Palace for the RREC 40th anniversary then on to St Moritz to conquer the Swiss passes in 1997

In 1997 I went to the RREC 40th anniversary rally at Blenheim Palace – the day Princess Diana was killed. As people were starting to leave, the Essex ‘mob’ said: “See you in St Moritz in two weeks?” I thought: “Why not?” So I decided to see them at the Euro Rally.

I set off about the same time as the group from UK, but never saw them as I took the pretty, slower route. As it got dark in Epernay I was trying to find somewhere to park for the night when I was blinded by an oncoming car and a couple of seconds later there was a tremendous bang and jolt. I braked and there were two more bangs as each axle went over one of those traffic calming humps in the road. It was two weeks before I realised two leaves had snapped in a front road spring.

On arrival at St Moritz I was told the cars would set off for Davos via the Albula Pass at one minute intervals the next morning. I parked near the summit and watched most go by before following them on the descent.

Near the bottom, David Else was parked behind a Silver Ghost with a puncture. I lent him a trolley jack and David did what he could. The American wheels were in two parts, held together by studs, some of which broke. David mended the car so it was able to get to Davos where it was left to be fixed properly. In Davos the rain was torrential, lunches were abandoned and people set off back to St Moritz via the Fluella Pass. My leaky roof leaked with a vengeance so the next morning was spent drying out at the camp site. I then drove to the HQ only to find the concours was over and went into the hotel where I found the participants tucking into a BBQ. Several offered to

lend me their badge to get some food or drink but I refused in order to avoid the wrath of Eri (the organiser).

I decided instead to go for a drive in the mountains and headed south for the Bernina, Livigno and Stelvio passes. It was getting dark at the top of the magnificent Stelvio so I came back down for a mile and turned off onto the Umbrail into Switzerland.

The next day I followed the Essex members down the Maloja Pass into Italy. We followed Ben Grew in his 20hp through the pedestrianised area and parked in the square. I left them there and set off up and down the Splügen. I then headed for the Gavia. It was getting dark as I descended, heading for the Livigno the opposite way from the previous day.

It was completely dark when I got to the customs post and was told that the Swiss border would be closed at 10pm before I could get there. I said *grazie* and *arriverderchi* and headed up the pass. The border was shut with barriers and in total darkness. However, a 20hp is very agile so I squeezed the car around the barriers and made it back to St Moritz.

After a couple of lazy days I headed for the magnificent Dolomites. We climbed the Sella and Pordoi – two major passes and camped at the foot of the Falzarego. At the top I opened the bonnet and noticed tiny droplets of water coming out of the cylinder head but it was three years before I eventually replaced it with my spare.

At the top of the next pass, Tre Croci, the road was closed because of a landslide. No choice – we had to go back and get to Misurina via Cortina. According to my maps the E111 ran

straight eastwards towards the Loibl Pass – my next target. In the evening light with the sun behind this was a fabulously beautiful road with sharp bends in tunnels, several short steep (16%) hills and no traffic.

At Ferlach I detached the caravan at a car park and headed up the road towards the Loibl Pass. Even I knew it would be stupid to try to get the caravan up the old 30% narrow road.

I kept a look out for the old road that was the Loibl Pass and spotted it with its No Entry sign. I turned round before the tunnel at the present frontier with Slovenia. On my return down the hill I ignored the sign and turned onto the old gravel track. Soon we were in the clouds. Eventually we reached the summit where a hefty chain is hung across the road.

I returned to Ferlach, reconnected the caravan and set off for a drive across Slovenia but having entered the country I was required to buy third party insurance for £26. This seemed excessive because I would only be there for a couple of hours and for the same price I could have remained for a month. I did a U-turn, visited the duty free shop and returned to Austria. I came to a sign saying 15% gradient for 12km. At 200m from the summit the clutch started to slip. A tow truck helped me to the top, where I found that the gaps on the clutch toggles had disappeared. I adjusted them and the problem was solved.

I did not know it then, but the grandson of GUJ27’s earlier owner Fenwick Styan, who has original photos of GUJ27 from the 1940s, was living in Bratislava and I could have paid him a surprise visit.



Far left: the summit of the 2,650m Gavia Pass at 7pm on 15 September 1997

Left: the top of the old Loibl border with Slovenia (closed with a hefty chain across the road) on 20 September 1997

At the top of the Julier pass, a chap in a Ferrari took a photograph

2002 heralds a quick trip to Poland in Magnificent Magdalena to attend the real Magdalena's wedding

In 2002 I replaced the pinion bearing for the crown wheel assembly, fixed the prop shaft coupling with my spare and had the prop shaft balanced just in time for the Queen's Golden Jubilee at Windsor. Then I made a quick 2,000 mile return trip to Poland with the caravan for Magdalena's wedding in August.

Magdalena was the young lady who had directed us to the village of Osice near Gdansk on my first drive to Poland in 1994. I had been trying to find a suitable big name for the big car for years and 'Magdalena' seemed eminently suitable. We kept in contact and I had promised I would return with Magnificent Magdalena one day for the wedding of the real Magdalena.

Polish weddings have some peculiarities. After the church ceremony coins are scattered outside and the bride and groom have to race to pick them up. The one who collects the most coins is then the controller of the couple's finances.

After that we set off in the Rolls-Royce for the reception and the tradition involves stopping en route at road blocks made from flower bedecked strings across the road. The couple take on board bags of sweets and small bottles of vodka to give to the children and adults before being allowed through - only to be stopped again and again. The reception lasted until the early hours when I took a full car of guests back to their various homes. The next day I took bride and groom and family back to day two of the reception - for other friends.

In the afternoon I escaped for a couple of hours to visit Zygfryd who I had met on two previous visits. There was no answer at his house, but his daughter who saw me arrive said: "I knew you were coming - I saw your car outside the church yesterday." Sadly Zygfryd had died a month earlier. She rounded up his widow and son and we had a chat. Then I took his widow to the cemetery to see Zygfryd's flowers. Back to the house where the local English teacher came to help with our conversation. I was asked if I could help find Zygfryd's children from his first marriage in England at the end of the war. He had fought in the British Army. As it happened, I had my CD of the electoral roll in the caravan so was able to track down one of the children. They last had contact 30 years before and the families were thrilled to be in touch.

It took just 2½ days to drive 1,100 miles home despite the bad weather with trees uprooted by tornados in Poland and torrential rain later in Germany. I took quiet roads across Germany, avoiding autobahns until near Hanover. The car returned 14.2mpg for the whole 2,250-mile trip (all but 50 towing the caravan) and used nearly three gallons of straight Penrite oil, almost all chucked out of the rear bearing and only a pint or two of water a day.



Marcin and Magdalena were chauffeured to their wedding reception in GUJ27 and later tried out the front of the car - no they couldn't borrow her for their honeymoon

2009 FAMILY WEDDING TRIP TO ITALY

In 2008 my second son announced he was to be married the next summer in Italy. He and his bride Paula hired a large villa near Lake Trasimeno to accommodate family and friends for a week and to qualify to be married in a civil ceremony at the Town Hall in Cortona, a few miles away. Naturally he wanted GUJ27 to carry out the wedding duties as it had for his brother earlier in the year.

I knew the off-side rear wheel bearings needed replacing and had tried to find a replacement hub and brake drum. I managed to find what sounded like a suitable assembly in central Wales and drove there to buy it. On arrival, I was told it was a near-side version, the only difference being the thread. With just four days before I needed to set off to join the family in Italy there was no choice but to buy it, despite its horrendously rusty state after being left lying around for over 50 years. It took three days to clean it, make a

large tool to undo the castellated nut, fit new bearings and reassemble everything. Then the car had to be serviced and packed for the wedding. The back of GUJ27 was full, not only with my junk, but also wedding dress, vases, silk flowers and candles for the reception. I also carried a Moses basket full of nappies for my two-week old grandson. The rest of the family and friends were flying to Pisa at the weekend.

The drive across France was uneventful. I by-passed Grenoble on a motorway almost as horrible as the M25 then headed for the Alps and Italy. Several mountain passes were closed to everyone but cyclists and I had to give the Galibier a miss to ensure I made it to Italy on time. The next day I headed for the motorway that goes past Genoa. At a major junction there were no signs for Firenze or Roma, just Milano, Genoa and Allesandria. I guessed wrongly and chose the latter. As soon as I realised I was heading north I turned off at the first opportunity and found the rear driver's side

of me and my Rolls-Royce



The Ferrari driver's Julier Pass picture with retouched banner that helped John win an expenses paid trip to the Rugby World Cup in New Zealand



The replacement brake drum as bought from Wales on 12 June 2009 four days before setting out for family wedding duty in Italy

tyre was flat. On changing the wheel, the valve on the inner tube came adrift. The next part of the journey involved a horrible coast road with dark tunnels separated by short stretches of sunlight and traffic passing at twice my speed of 45mph.

The family and wedding guests who had flown to Pisa reached Trasimeno a couple of hours before I did. On Monday I ordered two new tubes from the UK to be delivered to the villa. On Wednesday I took the bride and groom to Cortona for the rehearsal and on Thursday cleaned the car. As I was waiting to set off for the wedding, the new tubes arrived.

A few days after the celebrations GUJ27 and I headed to the Dolomites to climb a few new passes and some old favourites. The next morning we sailed non-stop up the Stelvio with its 40 hairpin bends, followed by more passes to St Moritz and up the Julier.

At the top, a chap with a Ferrari took a picture of me and my car. Two years later, when in Sydney, I entered a Quantas competition to win a trip to New Zealand for the Rugby World Cup supporting the Wallabies. The task involved submitting 12 videos and a photo of a banner. I used a retouched version of this photo and video recordings of my trips with GUJ27 and scraped second prize – free flights for two from the UK, use of a camper van, tickets for three matches, food, events, lots of booze – but with a breath test every morning.

It was very wet the morning I set off for Chur. I passed through Vaduz (Liechtenstein was to be my only new country) with massive storms to the west as I headed for Lake Constance via the tip of Austria. I drove to Freiburg, where the traffic was horrendous. I gave up any hope of getting to Strasburg and headed for Colmar. At Breisach, just before the border crossing at the Rhine, traffic was gridlocked. I turned off and headed through the lanes to find another way over the Rhine. I stopped at a hotel in Achkarren, hoping the problem at the bridge would be sorted. I remember using my new all-singing, all-dancing smartphone there – but that was the last I saw of it. I did not notice it had vanished until the next night.

In the morning there was only a short delay before we reached the traffic lights at the bridge, which was reduced to a single lane for repairs. When the lights turned green the car behind me was slow to pull away so the lights changed again and he was met by the oncoming traffic. Cars were head to head in both directions, horns locked, and the road blocked. That's what must have happened the previous evening. Anyway, there was a queue of stationary traffic for several miles in the other direction and no-one caught

up with me for 30 minutes.

As I drove through Colmar I must have been within a kilometre of the road to St Die, but the signs sent me on to the motorway to Strasburg, I took the N59 and checked my maps. I had driven more than 15km at right angles to the desired direction. At Nancy I took the ring road to Toul. There were massive signs for Bar-le-Duc, but at the junction where I needed to turn – not a mention. I knew I was on the wrong road when all the signs read St Dizier. I turned off and looked for a hotel. That's when I discovered my phone was gone. I had been too tired to download the photos the previous evening so these seemed to be lost. I later e-mailed the hotel, found their reply in my spam folder and got my phone and photos back.

In the morning I got to Cambrai via the D960. The rain was torrential, but dried up as I neared Dunkerque. The clock, which had refused to tick since the cold of the Alps, now started again. Once on board the ferry I went to the restaurant and had a decent meal followed by a quick stop at Maidstone services for petrol. I was home a couple of hours later. Welcome to Lewisham! Three miles of horrendous humps with jay walkers on their phones everywhere.

The trip home involved 1,353 miles in six days at 16mpg. I climbed 12 major mountain roads and several lesser passes and the temperature gauge only lit the red light a handful of times when I had forgotten to open the radiator shutters. The only worry was a knocking noise. This sounded like an engine bearing but I'm convinced was the resonance from the split front mudguard. A lolly stick stuffed between the mudguard and the chassis did the trick.

In addition to the longer trips, I have attended many Club events, 20 Annual Rallies, 20 other rallies, some Section lunches and pub meets, done 20 weddings, made six day-trip runs to Calais, attended scores of vintage events and various other days out in GUJ27. The YouTube videos of my adventures with Magnificent Magdalena show without doubt that Royces are for driving.

My videos can be found by Googling 'vt7709' and more detailed accounts of these and other trips can be read and downloaded at www.rrec2ohpregister.com

GUJ27 at Villa Baroncino. Wedding organiser Marco has the use of a 1938 Chrysler that many couples hire for their big day. He was amazed that I had driven my Twenty from England as the Chrysler is brought to the villa on a trailer and is only used for the short round trip to Cortona

