

Headcorn Airfield Rally 27 September 2009

Headcorn is developing into a two-day event as the years roll by and when I arrived mid-morning on the Saturday there were already two motorhomes there and three riders about to set off for a scratch run to a local car museum. The Booth Collection of Morgan Cars housed at Falstaff Antiques in Rolvenden proved to be a winner with Mike, Renate and Terry, three microcar as well as cyclemotor enthusiasts, but they failed to keep the owner, Chris Booth, distracted long enough to liberate one.

Back at the airfield I'd pitched the tent on the back of the car, my new home-from-home following the sale of the camper van. The sale was inspired by the realisation of its' limitations caused by my upgrade to Partner and Family 1.1 (available in all good divorce courts running Windows Vista Professional) and plans are already afoot to acquire a caravan for future family holidays, something that was always denied me under the old regime, the excuse being that "we're too young for a caravan!"

The Gill brothers arrived en masse but regrettably sans microlight as the nights are drawing in and there wouldn't have been enough daylight for William to fly home safely. We welcomed a couple of new members, non-riders but with interesting vehicles - one a Husky kit car made of a Ford Escort and several sheets of 8 x 4 MDF. The other was a UMM Alter, a Portuguese ex-military 4x4 with Peugeot and Jeep underpinnings. Somehow a rather smart Rolls Royce sneaked in under the radar but there was no sign of a bike trailer attached to it and no oily rags or two-stroke oil on the seats so we assumed he wasn't one of us. Also in the car park was a home-chopped Austin A35, an open-topper with no sign of a hood. Other members arriving were the Rutledges with the Mini Motor and Daves Arnott and Watson fresh from Norfolk via Kempton Park autojumble as was Ian McGregor, arriving later in the day. Dave Casper called in on the way home from a break in Normandy.

Two hot-air balloons provided entertainment as they were unloaded and readied for take-off. One was up and away in double-quick time but the other struggled under the weight of a generously-proportioned lady who required a helping shove from three blokes to pour her into the basket. There's never a fork-lift truck around when you need one, is there? Headcorn on a fine Saturday is always buzzing with activity and a stunt plane kept the crowds pleased while parachutists floated from the sky - some landing more accurately than others who faced a long walk back to base. There was an exotic Russian aircraft being put through its' paces and several microlights, too. Marvellous free entertainment. At the end of the day the pilot of the parachute plane was given his head and buzzed the tower and the car park before landing for a final time. Noisy sod.

A chill descended in the evening and we headed for Wings bar, a very friendly establishment housed in one of the old wartime buildings still standing on the site. Ian spotted the piano and gave it a good work-out in spite of it needing a good tune-up. Fed and watered, it was back to the camp through the fog and into bed.

Sunday morning didn't so much dawn as crept up on us. The airfield was shrouded in a blanket of fog and still cold. The morning held the promise of warmth to come, however, and as the fog cleared the airfield came to life. I met a terrified man in the car park, waiting for the balloon crew to arrive and whisk him and his wife to wherever the capricious winds would take them. He'd bought the flight for his wife's birthday and was regretting his decision. Bacon rolls and croissants from the Gill Field Kitchen fortified and warmed the early risers while other participants rolled in. Signing-on completed and membership cards inspected, 25 riders left the airfield, heading for lunch at the Wild Duck, Marden Thorn. Despite thorough route planning and each rider being in possession of detailed instructions and a map, it was a case of Follow the Poirier as my French trike led the field out of the car park. Ken was an early stopper on the La Française Diamant but he was collected by Richard Layton, kindly providing sweeper services in his camper. We caught up with them at the pub but not before another unscheduled stop caused by a carb full of water on the Poirier. It was going well until I lifted a rear wheel in a bit of enthusiastic cornering, presumably tipping several years' worth of condensation into the fuel pipe. It lost power on a very narrow back lane and held us up while I drained and washed out the float bowl.

We were virtually the only customers at the Wild Duck, a very pleasant pub in the middle of nowhere. A nearby house that had featured on Grand Designs was a talking point and after lunch it was off to Brattle Farm Museum, a return visit by popular request. Brian and Anita, the owners, have been collecting farming by-gones, tractors, cars and commercials since the seventies and his restorations are first class. Unfortunately Brian's health is in decline and his last planned restoration - a 1930s Trilox invalid carriage - was exhumed over a lorry chassis by the brute strength of several members of our party. Exploration of the site revealed Rolls-Royces, buses, fire engines, various commercials and horse-drawn carriages. Some showed evidence of current use and displayed valid tax discs. Renate Hele's RM6 snapped a throttle cable at the museum and completed the journey in the recovery van. Richard certainly had his work cut out and we were glad of his services.

The return leg to the Airfield was another back-lane run, only crossing one major road. Unless, that is, you have problems with "TL into Ayleswade Lane BEFORE MAIN ROAD" and overshoot, completing the last two miles on a very busy A274. Memories of my National Rally error which found three of us on the southbound A1 surfaced but nobody died.

Back at the airfield, more croissants were pressed on us by the Gill Brothers Catering Services as prizes were awarded to Dave Arnott (furthest travelled), Maurice Rogers (regular supporter) and Renate Hele (bike I'd most like to take home). This last prize was awarded despite the breakdown - just drop it round to my house next time you're passing please. So, to the riders - regulars and new faces whom we hope will become regulars - and support, a very big "thank you" for turning up and making the weekend a success.

Nick Devonport

September 2009



Balloon lift-off, but only just!



Keith Rutledge's Mini Motor



La Francaise Diamant



Michael Gill puts his back into it



Mike Hele's YB100



Ready for the run



Terry Day's Moto Morini



Topless A35

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