



Visiting Portugal 2017

Bob & Carolyn Owen (MGB/GTV8) recount the experience...

It was July 29th and over thirty MGs from all over Europe descended on the Hotel Riviera in Carcavelos, a town west of Lisbon, to join the Swiss MGV8/IG "Visiting Portugal" tour. The tour was conceived by Victor Rodrigues as a "prequel" to the MG Car Club European Event of the Year to be held in Oporto. As well as V8s and RV8s there were "honorary" V8s in the form of a couple of MGAs, an MGC, and even an MG YT! In addition Mark and Mary Randle had come in their "everyday car" as they sadly had a breakdown shortly after leaving home in the UK (but they were lucky compared to Ron and Ian Warr who's V8 broke down after they arrived on the continent and sadly had to miss the tour). And unfortunately Chris and Annie Yates also had problems with their V8 so had to "struggle along" in their *air-conditioned* MGTF (grrrr...).



Riviera Hotel with MG and Swiss Flags

Some of the cars arrived by boat at Santander or Bilbao and others chose to drive across Europe. Both groups experienced the searing heat and high humidity of the Spanish plains on their journey to the hotel (strangely, Chris and Annie had no complaints...). One group, however, all arrived fresh and relaxed: The Swiss contingent had "cheated" and flown in, having arranged for their cars to be awaiting them in the hotel garage. This was perhaps our first instance of the legendary Swiss skill for organisation.....

There was a very warm welcome from the main organisers, Evelyne and Victor Rodrigues, who handed out our "goody bags" and route books. We were also introduced to our Portuguese guides, Isabel Tinoco, President of MGCP, José Fonseca, Co-President and Ana Sousa. So, what was in store for us on the following five days?

A tour of the capital of Portugal was a must, but the organisers had obviously balked at the prospect of shepherding thirty MGs through the city streets, even though it was a Sunday. Of course, the silver-tongued Victor couched it as a rest from the days of hard driving that many of us had just experienced to get to Lisbon. So, with great relief we all boarded the air-conditioned coach and sat back for our tour of Lisbon and its environs. Very quickly we learnt that we'd been misled all these years and Lisbon was not Lisbon at all, but in fact Lisboa, the "s" being aptly pronounced like the s in "confusion". Lisboa is on the River Tejo ("j" as in English, not the "y" as in Spanish) which plays a very important part in the life of Lisboa, now and in the past, as is seen by the host of monuments to the many explorers who left to find the lands far over the sea.



Padrão dos Descobrimentos

The modern *Padrão dos Descobrimentos*, (The Monument of the Discoveries), was built to represent the prow of the early caravels, ships used for exploration in the 14th century. How lucky we were then, a little later, to see the *Vera Cruz*, a replica Portuguese Caravel sailing majestically up the Tejo.



Caravel, the "Vera Cruz"



Parque Eduardo VII

Parque Eduardo VII looks down towards the centre of the city and onwards to the Arrábida mountains on the other side of the Tejo.

The 25th April Bridge, looking very like the Golden Gate bridge, crosses 190 metres above the River Tejo leading us towards *Cristo Rei*, standing 110 metres, luckily with a lift.



25th April Bridge



Cristo Rei

Monday morning the cars were prepared and we were off for four very varied days. So which highlights will be

remembered and talked about over the years? One will be the route books created by Evelyne Rodrigues. For the British it was a new experience to have photographs of the junctions as well as instructions and an excellently annotated map for each day. To make sure we didn't get lost there were also "our leaders" Isabel / red MGA, Victor and Evelyne / Oxford Blue RV8 and José and Ana / harvest gold MGB.

Our "trips of delight" turned out to be very varied. We visited Sintra, a town built in the foothills so having a slightly cooler climate. It was the summer home of the Royal Family so boasted several palaces and gardens and was where Napoleon's forces surrendered to the British in the Peninsular war (Convention of Sintra. The French were repatriated by Royal Navy ships – very gentlemanly!)



Parked at the Palacio Nacional, Sintra



The group on the steps of the Palacio Nacional, Sintra

Onwards from Sintra to the Lighthouse at Cabo da Roca, the most westerly point of mainland Europe, where we received a warm welcome and a tour of the lighthouse and museum, and climbed to the top giving a marvellous view, both of the coast and our MGs in the carpark.



MGs at Cabo da Roca, from the Lighthouse



Lighthouse at Cabo da Roca

En route to returning to the hotel we visited the popular seaside town of Caiscais.



On the waterfront at Caiscais

Tuesday took us to the winery of José Maria da Fonseca, established in 1834 by the Fonseca family and home to the desert wine Moscatel de Setubal. Most of us found Moscatel to our taste and purchased a few bottles as presents and mementos. Our MGCC of Portugal guide, José Fonseca, denied any connection with the winery Fonseca family so, sadly, we all had to pay for our purchases (was that a wink I saw José giving or was it just something in his eye?).



A little Moscatel?



In the garden at the Fonseca Winery



Lunch at the Fonseca Winery; Sue Edmonds takes a photo while Tudur Jones (left) prays that the deacons won't find out.

Next morning we said Goodbye to the Riviera Hotel and started our journey north towards Porto, stopping at the Roman town of Conimbriga, a site which was first inhabited in 139BC. Our enthusiastic guide took us to the best bit first, to make sure we had plenty of time to enjoy it. It was the *Casa dos Repuxos* (the House of the fountains). As well as incredible mosaics it had a complete courtyard garden which still has the original lead plumbing producing many hundreds of little jets of water which criss-cross one another over the water channels.



Casa dos Repuxos, Conimbriga



Tudur Jones and his V8; Bob and Carolyn Owen and Derek and Anne Matthews take some shade.

After another of Victor's "snack" lunches we went onwards to Caramulo, a town founded in 1922 by Dr Jerónimo Lacerda to treat patients with TB. He built several sanatoria and associated medical buildings. The town flourished until the 1950s when it became redundant because modern antibiotics could cure TB. His sons decided to use the buildings for tourism and to put their car and art collection into a museum, hence our visit. Our guide was the actual owner Tiago Patricio Gouveia whose two uncles started the museum. He was very enthusiastic and knew the provenance and history of the many exhibits – including the story of the impounded car used by political prisoners to escape from jail. Some of the prisoners had persuaded the camp commandant that, in order to keep the car in good order, the engine should be started at monthly intervals and the car should be given a short drive in the compound. This they did, but one day they drove straight at the gates, broke through and escaped, complete with a few bullet holes!



1905 De Dion Bouton



Caramulo Main Car Hall

The Caramulo car collection includes an MGTC, and to see that and the many other interesting vehicles go to: <http://www.museu-caramulo.net/en/content/2-collections/17-automobiles>

On our last day of Victor's tour, heading to Porto, we stopped at the Maritime Museum in Ilhavo. A large part of the building is dedicated to Cod fishing, and includes a full sized replica of a wooden "mother ship", the *Faina Maior*. Its side is cut away to see the cramped living conditions, and on deck are the *dories* – the single person boats used to line catch the cod. Portugal was too far to return with fresh fish so the cod were salted on board and the boat was home to the crew during their eight month trip to the fishing grounds off Canada.

Salted cod still forms an important part of the cuisine of Portugal and much of the Mediterranean.



On board the Faina Maior

As you leave the museum is something rarely seen, a shoal of live cod swimming happily in a large aquarium.



A three year old cod in the Aquarium



Peter Lange leaves the Maritime Museum. His VA is home in Germany.

After the Maritime Museum we drove to the nearby Hotel Monte Belo which is in fact part of the famous Portuguese Vista Alegre porcelain factory. This was the final part of the SWISSMGV8/IG Visiting Portugal 2017 tour. Of course, Victor ended it with another of his by now famous "SNACK"-Lunches!



Bob Owen (L) and Tudur Jones ponder Vista Alegre porcelain from the Anglo-Welsh perspective.



The final Lunch "snack".

What things will we remember about Victor's event?

Victor's "Snacks".

Victor's "snacks" were provided to keep us fully fuelled at midday so that we could survive until the evening. To the British, a snack is a sandwich, a packet of crisps and perhaps an apple. To be fair to Victor, one day we did have a bag with cheese and biscuits, nuts and raisins etc and a drink. But there was a reason for this, which I'll reveal later.

Our Sunday snack was in one of the best seafood restaurants in Lisboa situated on the bank of the Tejo. We had a three course buffet, with wine and incredible deserts. Well, it was Sunday lunch, so had to be special - we fully expected the catering to decline from now on. But again, we were wrong. Our winery visit included "tastings" and small samples of typical local foods. It may not sound much, but when there are thirty or so different foods to try, a little of each goes a long way. So, from now on, in the daily briefings when Victor said "he had arranged a little snack", with a twinkle in his eye, we knew what to expect - and we were never disappointed! This might lead you to think that our evening meals would be fairly parsimonious affairs. Far from it – yet another three course meal with bottles of wine and soft drinks.

The gala dinner was held in the cloisters of the Museo Caramulo, sitting outside as the evening temperatures became pleasant. The opportunity was taken to thank Victor and his team.



Gala dinner and presentations



Bob Owen thanks Victor and his team on behalf of the British V8s. Walter Kallenberg (behind) thanked on behalf of the German V8s.

The Swiss National Day.

Perhaps the pièce de résistance was on August 1st. Unbeknown to us this was Swiss National Day, a public holiday in Switzerland. The Swiss marked the occasion by wearing red and white, one gentleman even sporting red trainers covered in white crosses. In the evening the tables were decorated with Swiss flags, Swiss chocolates and red serviettes saying "Keep calm and eat Chocolate"



All in the best possible taste; Swiss National Day



Ready for the Helvetic Dinner; Swiss National Day, Aug 1st
L - R: Mary Randle, Roy Thompson, Stella Crowson.

The Swiss National Day on the 1st August also provided an opportunity to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Swiss MG V8 Group, headed by Victor Rodrigues. A commemorative cake was made and shared by the entire group after the ceremonial cutting by Victor and Evelyne Rodrigues.



Evelyne and Victor cut the Swiss MG V8 Group 5th Anniversary Cake

The weather.

Another memory will be the Iberian weather. Hot (36°C plus, 40°C in Spain) and dry with plenty of sunshine and often little shade. Crossing Spain's red hot interior we checked the temperature in Portugal to see what lay in store for us; 24°C it said – bliss we thought, but it was a cruel jest – when we got there the truth was more of the mid 30s.

The British prayed for rain, and our prayers were eventually answered, but sadly not exactly as we wanted. The prayed for rain started as we approached the lighthouse at Cabo da Roca, the chill wind started to blow and all ideas of eating our snack picnic bag, sitting on the cliffs looking over the sea towards America, vanished. 36°C had become 16°C! To rub salt into the wound, half an hour after we left misty Cabo da Roca the sun came out. But it's a British tradition to complain about the weather – it's rarely "just right".



36°C! Michel and Sylviane re-hydrate en route to Conimbriga



Stella Crowson and Brigitte Kallenberg cold and wet at Cabo da Roca



Victor "Just singin' in the rain"

It was the others!

Last but by no means least there were the other participants. People of all different nationalities gelled well into a coherent group and everyone had fun. Perhaps this was due to a common love of MGs, but most of the credit must go to:



SWISS-MGV8/IG

SWISSMGV8/IG Evelyne and Victor Rodrigues,

and the



MGCP in the guise of Isabel Tinoco and José Gouveia Fonseca.

Evelyne, Victor, Isabel and José must have spent hundreds of hours preparing for the event, an event which admirably combined the charm of the Portuguese with the precision of the Swiss. During the tour they were always there, unobtrusively making sure that we all had the best possible experience and one we're sure to remember.

Muito obrigado!



Goodbye! Tschau! Auf Wiedersehen! Au revoir! Arrivederci!

Text: Bob and Carolyn Owen

Photos: Bob Owen., Eric Pfändler and Evelyne Rodrigues