



The Paris Motor Show 2006

The Paris Motor Show Weekend – How it was.

Friday 6th October.

The trip was to begin with us all meeting at Portsmouth Docks to catch the LD Lines overnight ferry to Le Havre. To this end, accompanied by Peanut and driving *CheckBeast*, I collected Elliott (in his Cooper convertible) and his mate Andy, at BMW MINI Cotswolds in Cheltenham and convoyed down with them. When we got there we met up with Matrog and Becca3003 in Matt's Cooper, E180803 (Ian) in his Works and Minisoopercooper (Paul) and his Mum in his red Cooper. There was just time for a dubious pasty and a coffee at the port before we boarded. On ship, we all had a drink together before Peanut and I retired to our cabin for a good night's sleep prior to the early start next day. Another French adventure was beginning.

Saturday 6th October.

A fast getaway from Le Havre was compromised somewhat when Matrog declared that he needed fuel. So first stop was a Shell garage a mile up the road, while we all waited for Matrog to get some fuel. We'll forgive him but only because no European trip is quite as er... interesting without Matt onboard!

The next challenge was motorway tolls and this time Minisoopercooper proved to be the villain. If memory serves correctly we did 3 toll booths on the trip to Paris and on each one Paul struggled. On the first one he didn't have any money, on the second one he followed us into the credit card queue to pay with coins and God knows what he did on the third but we all thought he must have been arrested it took that long! Anyway the main thing is that we can assure you that Paul can now do motorway tolls in Europe like a consummate professional. In fact, on the way home he was leading the way into the tolls!

What with fuel stops and toll delays this was not going to be a quick dash to the Motor Show and a spot of breakfast was called for *enroute*, to let everyone catch their breath. Croissants, baguettes, jam and hot chocolate was the order of the day for most of us, in a place at one of the motorway service stops that actually catered for *le petite dejeuner* really rather well.

Breakfast proved to be a damned fine idea, as before long we were battling with Parisian drivers in very heavy traffic as we neared the Motor Show venue and at least we were fighting on full stomachs! What



happened next was in truth, as a result of good fortune, but the official version is... "As a result of superb forward planning we rerouted to avoid an unbelievable jam on a section of the *peripherique* and found ourselves at the car park we were heading for about a half mile walk from the motor show"!

The Motor Show

Once inside everybody headed for the MINI stand to see the new R56 MINI in the metal. In short the general consensus was positive as we all seemed to like the car a lot. Minor gripes could be found and perversely, I quite enjoyed being picky at the expense of the new car... the rear guttering below the spoiler seems to be just glued on with sticky tape and was falling off, the front headlights are crosseyed and do not look as good with gaps between them and the metal bonnet, the rear quarter panel is an extra piece of plastic which in the flesh is a different colour black to the windows. The gap between the two looks like it will attract dust and get full of car wax and so on and so on. But then I decided to get a life and look again... The new aero kit is fabulous, the interiors are great, the character is still there, the colours are fine. Yes, the car is a winner and I'm sure that when the day to change comes we will be getting one!

Myself and Peanut though had a second reason to go to the show. Our Peugeot 206cc is 5 years old and a new convertible beckons. The Opel GT has caught our eye and we love the pictures and videos of it on the internet and so we had come to see the car in the flesh, so to speak. On sight it is indeed every bit as beautiful as it is in the pictures. The car looks good from every angle and our dream of having one of these cars was reinforced by seeing it first hand. Unfortunately though, we wanted to sit in it and see if it is comfortable and what the drivers view is like but we couldn't do that as the one at the show was on a revolving stand and cordoned off. So for now watch this space... I think for all of us, another memory of the show will be the sheer numbers of people there. I'm sure the London Show was not as packed as this. There were people everywhere. Heck, I was scared of breathing in, in case there was no room for me to breathe out again! God the place was heaving and nowhere more so than the MINI stand. The cars must be well built though, as those seats had more bums in and out of them and the doors opened and closed more times, than the average car would have in a 100 year life span!

Versailles

Tired and leg weary, we all headed for our regroup point just before the exit to the show, most of us worn out and weary long before 4.30! We waited and waited for Elliott and Andy and at 4.35 gave up and exited the show where we immediately found them waiting for us! Peanut assures me that I don't look too silly with all the knuckles on my left hand



chewed off! Anyway we walked through the Parisian sunshine back to our cars to head for Versailles. The Paris traffic was its usual challenging self, but in truth it wasn't a bad trip out and we all had time for a small nap and shower before going out for dinner in the evening. Lady Peanut and myself were in a different hotel to everyone else, not because we are richer and classier and snobbier than everyone else (though of course we are) but because our hotel was fully booked by the time everyone else got round to booking. Therefore, we decided to go and meet them at their hotel at 7.30.

As we walked over we passed an Internet café and dashed in to play *The Newminiseverns Daily Quiz*. There were no questions on *Coronation Street* this time, so 10 out of 10 in forty seconds ensured us of victory – and better still Paul, armed with his laptop and wifi access in his hotel forgot to play! We all gathered in the lobby and waited while Elliott decided that now was a good time to talk to Orange Customer Services about why his mobile would not work abroad. Hungry tummies rumbled but not so loud that Elliott could hear – our tummies were far too polite for that!

Before this though I got a few recommendations from the rather attractive French *mademoiselle* at our hotel reception, who was also able to suggest where we should eat! A good night in a reasonably priced pizzeria, three doors down from our hotel, ensued. We all went to bed pretty tired that night but full of dreams of MINIS and nights in Versailles – or was that the reality?

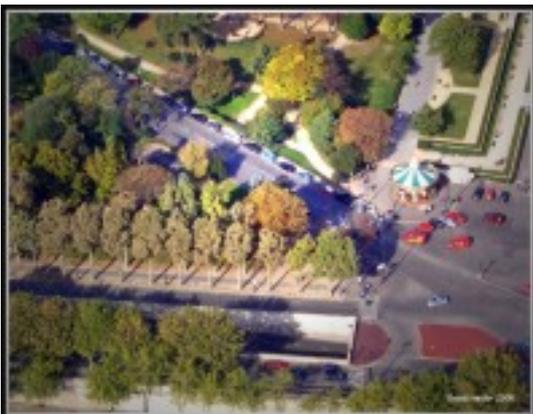
The Eiffel Tower



We were all ready and revving at 9.05 on Sunday morning – well except for Elliott who wasn't taking his car into Paris, as they were staying a few extra days so was hitching a lift with us but realised his wallet was in his car and he needed it. Was I sensing a pattern here? I don't know but I sensed a Meldrewian moment coming on as

we all hung around waiting for him but heck he is such a lovely fellow, that I just smiled stoically when he turned up and kept my lecture entitled *The Return of National Service* for another day. Could the Beastmaster be chilling out? Nah Heaven forbid!

So anyway at 9.30 (typed with heavy presses of the keys) we all drove off to The Eiffel Tower. We really did rather well with this and drove straight there with unbelievable ease and managed to park in a street about 800 yards from the tower and in full glorious view of it. We got a good picture of the minis from the top of the tower too! I had been up the tower a few times before but never by the stairs! I have to say, I'm glad we did it that way though as it felt more real somehow.



For some though it was their first time! Matrog fell by the way side at the first stage and would go no further. Fortunately for him, he had been telling me at the last MiniAddiction pub meet about his genuine dislike of heights, so I was actually able to be quite understanding about this and never gave him a hard time. Still renamed him "The Nearly Man" though! Minisooopercooper

however, had not discussed a fear of heights with me at any time in the recent past, so we dragged him to the top kicking and screaming and showed no mercy along the way, as we discussed in lurid detail how

people could jump off if they wanted to! Credit to the man he made it to the top and that is why he is Leader of *The Newminiseverns!* It was a gorgeous sunny day – just right for Paris and once down from the tower we basked in the sunshine snacking off crepes and paninis from kiosks in the street for our lunch.

Finally, it was time to head for home so we said our goodbyes to the young Byron in our midst - Elliott - and his pal Andy and headed off for Le Havre. Our exit from Paris was quite straightforward, though I did have to drive for about 2 miles before my sat. nav. got a signal. During this time the usually faultless Matrog was inadvertently less than helpful and when



asked if he had a sat. nav. signal to guide the way replied, "Yes, but its sending me to Calais at the moment". It was at this point that the blind leader nearly went over a zebra crossing, through a red light and straight into the arms of a waiting *Gendarme!* Matrog's infamy was established on *The French Weekender* in Normandy when, in a similar situation his response to "Where are you" was – "By a red traffic light". We suspected that telling us he was being directed to Calais when we really needed some constructive direction was his attempt to surpass the fame he achieved in Normandy! Still all's well that ends well and we got back to Le Havre safely and in good time for a very smooth and calm crossing back to rainy England!

The weekend was fun, the new MINI was exciting to see and the gang on the trip were as great a bunch of people as I could ever hope to have putting up with me! On the ferry back I was browsing through some French tour guides - *Le Weekender Francais 2007* is being planned as I write!

Beastmaster October 2006