

“CLASSIC CARS” PHOTO-SHOOT

Rover SD1 Club Events organiser, Dave Puzey called to offer me the opportunity to take my car to a photo-shoot planned by “Classic Cars” Magazine to mark the demise of Rover as the last British mass production car maker. I had one week notice. “Classic Cars” wanted to feature four of the landmark Rovers from the post war era. Their shopping list was the Matron Aunt 1950’s P4 75 Cyclops, a Legendary 1960’s P5B Coupe, a Sporty 1970’s 2000 P6 and (of course) the Iconic 1980’s SD1 Vitesse, preferably a Twin Plenum in Targa Red.

My car fitted the bill and was already in stand-out condition so very little work was needed. Some routine painting and cleaning under the bonnet, scrub the wheels and a good interior valet and external polish was the top and bottom of my preparation. Never-the-less it rained every other day in the week prior so I was dodging showers to get the job done.

Thus it transpired that four owners of the mentioned cars fetched up at 9.30 a.m. on Friday June 17 2005 at the picturesque Buckinghamshire village of Olney, famous for it’s pancake race, on what was to be a gruelling hot day, to do their best to please the “Classic Cars” features Editor – Glen Waddington and his Staff Photographer Lyndon (he with no surname – a sort of Litchfield of classic car shoots – I guess). The other three owners were Mike Wade (P4) from Cranfield, Colin Watts (P5B) from the West Midlands and Brian Stevens with wife Judy (P6) from Redditch. My trip from Bedford was only a short hop into the next county.



Glen treated everyone to a stand-up breakfast from the local sandwich emporium whilst we all got to know each other. He then explained the plan for the day which was destined to take in the three counties of Bucks, Beds and Northants. We started a short distance outside Olney in an off-road lay-by with leafy trees all around to generate the soft lighting needed for the interior and static shots of each car. I took advantage of the ambient conditions to take my own photos of the participating cars and of Lyndon at work on my own car. He has a fixed routine for each set of photos. First, short and long shots of each front interior, next, elevated and close-up views of the under-bonnet areas and lastly, featured details of the badges and other front views. No shots of rear interiors or back-ends were required. All this took about an hour whilst us four owners and Glen relaxed and chatted in our shaded haven.

At about 11.00 a.m. we moved to the attractive Bedfordshire village of Harrold which has a notable central feature on the village green which I believe is called a Buttery (whatever that is??). Here, Lyndon planned to set up a tableau of all four cars. It took nearly 3 hours to achieve all the shots he wanted and was not helped at all by several mutually inclusive problems.

- * Lyndon kept changing the positions of each car first, grossly and later, minutely.
- * Four aging drivers the youngest being 63 years and his car was 55.
- * The other three cars were less manoeuvrable than even my long, low Vitesse on full lock.
- * The P4 had no power steering and the owner was soon to feel the effect in his tired arms.
- * We were partly occupying a no-parking zone right outside the local school.
- * The adjacent road was too narrow for passing traffic to get by without mounting the kerb.
- * It was the hottest day of the year (so far).
- * Car windows had to be shut for the photos which made them intolerable to manoeuvre.
- * We missed out on a Pub Lunch, substituted with sandwiches and cold drinks on the hoof.

Eventually the tableau photos were completed and we moved on to the mobile part of the exercise on a quiet country road just outside the village. Again, Lyndon had a fixed routine. One car at a time, at twenty-five miles per hour, he wanted photos of each subject following him at a distance of about six feet and then making as if to overtake, then more photos of him following each subject at a distance of about four feet and likewise making as if to overtake. For this, Lyndon was perched precariously over the back (then front) of his Saab convertible with Glen doing the driving for him and, of course, each participant driving their own car.



Now, let me explain. I am quite an experienced driver with pretty good reaction times but I never drive so close to the rear of another car even at twenty-five mph which I could literally spit on. Moreover I rarely have another car driving within four feet of my rear bumper and making to overtake without the feeling that I am being seriously tailgated. God only knows how the ‘older’ members of our group coped? Scary, or what? It’s probably an “age thing” because Glen and Lyndon were totally un-phased.



That is how it was for the next hour. Fifteen minutes for each of us, up and down the same stretch of road between a pair of lay-bys a mile apart until Lyndon gave each the thumb’s-up that he was satisfied. All this with windows tight shut! Muttering abounded.

It was now going on 3.00 p.m. with the temperature soaring above eighty degrees and this sleepy Bedfordshire village was about to be transformed into a raging torrent of humanity, steel and rubber as 600 students exited the school to alight on a fleet of buses or meet with their parents in their Chelsea Tractors. It was not a good time to leave the cars in the adjacent no-parking zone.

I moved my car away from the turmoil but had a close encounter of the weird kind. I parked up in a legal spot directly adjacent to a house driveway on the other side of the green, being careful to not block the entrance. Sometimes, however, you just know you are being watched and sure enough, as I emerged from the car, a resident popped up to inform me that I was only just not-obstructing his neighbour’s drive. Being a nice bloke, I did not rise to the bait, but engaged him in conversation about our photo shoot location and the traffic subsequent turmoil that had suddenly appeared. He had been watching our proceedings (from a hundred meters distance) and observed that we were all illegally parked from 3.00 p.m. and it was not good enough. It was people like us and all these Chelsea Tractor owners that were spoiling his lovely village. Poor chap! He was incandescent about

the whole kit'n'kaboodle happening outside the school twice a day. I felt fortunate that I have my hobbies and pastimes which give me a life outside of worrying about village parking problems.

At the very same point in time Glen and Lyndon disappeared to suss out a new location for their high(er) speed mobile shots with a static camera position. When they returned Glen soothed the ruffled feathers with more cold drinks and ice cream.

It had taken them nearly an hour to find a suitable spot near the Northamptonshire village of Bozeat. Here was a gentle but fast country curve with a very wide grass verge between two more lay-bys. In turn, again with windows tight shut, we were required to drive back and forth for another 10 minutes each whilst Lyndon completed his work for the day.



Finally, Glen requested that he sedately drive each car himself so that he could get his journalistic juices flowing. This took another half hour and the day was wrapped with short interviews about the cars, owners and mug shots all round. Whilst he was driving the Vitesse along a restricted country road, I took the opportunity to extol some of its virtues, particularly how it is glued to the road around fast corners, how it emulates a Saturn 5B rocket when the throttle is floored in 2nd or 3rd at 3000 rpm, how, in 5th at 30 mph, it is as docile as a sleeping baby, and how, with retro-fitted Cruise Control, the beastly TP Vitesse is transformed into a long-legged economical touring machine.

By now, Glen was literally drooling and a little later, with everyone else gone home, I offered him the opportunity to try the above features for himself, this time on a fast arterial highway. I think he was very suitably impressed.



And for my impressions of the day? Well, these things can be a double-edged sword. They are promoted by the publisher pointing out that owners can benefit in the reflected glory of seeing their cars in a popular glossy magazine and that the marque/club will benefit from the publicity given to well-presented examples. However, the downside is that participants give up a whole day, having driven perhaps a hundred or more miles, and put in a boringly hard day's effort for the relatively insignificant return of a promised free copy of the magazine, a few sandwiches or pub lunch and the dubious promise that the organiser will "try" to get you a portfolio of glossy prints ("but its not always easy"). Almost as an afterthought participants are requested to submit a petrol receipt for their travelling expense. Don't get me wrong, I am not being overly jaundiced about the day, in fact I quite enjoyed it and for an inveterate extrovert like me it was a good opportunity to promote my own interests too. So, would I go again? Well, yes! But in the knowledge the scales are firmly weighted in the favour of the publisher.

Footnote: On this very hot day my normally reliable air conditioning failed and I had to assure Glen that with the A/C set to "full on" it was not normal for vented face level air to scald one's skin. Hot, hot, hot, would be an understatement. The refrigerant got so hot without the compressor even functioning that the normally cold evaporator was in superheating mode. And the fault? A dodgy connection in the fuse box, no less! Electrical problems remain the bane of an SD1 owner's life.

Ramon

Website: <http://www.vintagemodelairplane.com>

Blog: <http://uk.blog.360.yahoo.com/maureen9235>