



JAGUAR E-TYPE FORUM

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The torque of the tarn

Two Jaguar enthusiasts take to the open road, travelling deep into the heart of Southern France by classic E-type. Robert Wallace tells the story.



Robert Wallace, who accompanied Ray Parrott on this journey.

Our primary destinations were the awesome Tarn Gorges and the very impressive Millau Viaduct.

Like Concorde, the Viaduct and the Jaguar surely represent a fusion of brilliant British design and technical ability. These are two legendary achievements created some fifty years apart and with the E-type having celebrated its fiftieth anniversary earlier in the year, it seemed a fitting time to carry out this journey.

The car used for the journey was a 1962 E-type Series 1 Roadster in red,

a style icon, one of the original 900 right hand drive roadsters produced at Browns Lane during the heyday of manufacturing in the sixties. (Chassis No. 850451).

Owner of the car and my driver, Ray Parrott had fitted the car with a Getrag 5-speed gearbox, upgraded the brakes and equipped it with fully adjustable suspension. The torque achieved from the uprated engine and gearbox gives it outstanding performance and stunning road holding, proving essential for the challenging twists and turns of the roads in the Languedoc-Roussillon region of France. Modern cars might outperform the E-type on the straight but in the tight bends of Les Grands Causses and the Monts de Lacaune, this fifty year old Jaguar leaves them a distant memory in the rear view mirror! And the driving experience is what it's all about.

It's not so much about sheer raw power, but more the versatility it delivers to the driver. Because this car takes steep ups and downs in her stride without the need to change gear that often. Whilst there may be a temptation to swiftly change down at the sight of a daunting

looking downhill bend, simply lifting off the throttle will brake the engine sufficiently enough to slow the car down with grace and finesse. And similarly with an incline; full throttle will power you up and around a bend confidently and safely. The car holds the road like glue, thanks to the 15" x 6.5" off-set wire wheels.

The route



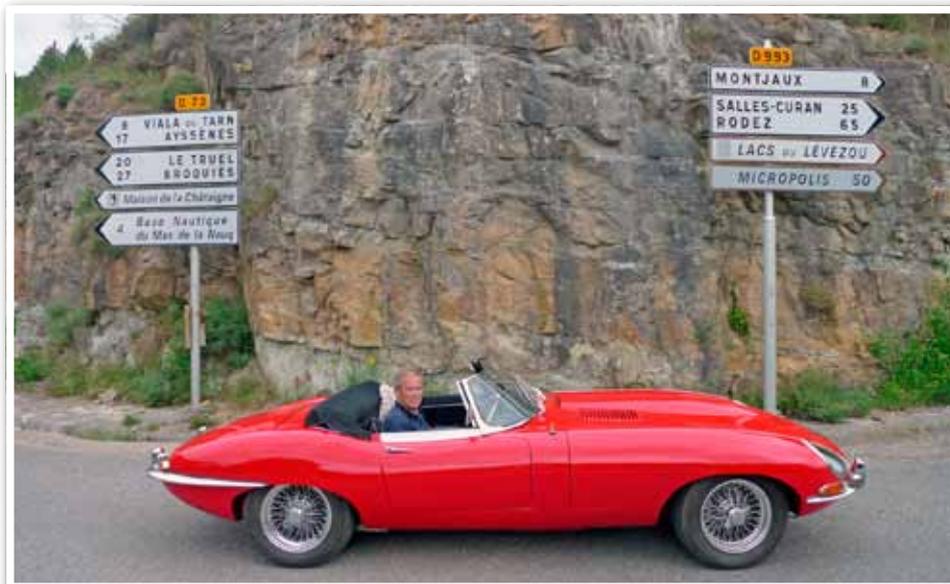
Map identifying the route.

For the first night, we stayed at 'Le Logis du Paradis' (see Jaguar Enthusiast, March 2008, Vol 24, No 3). It is located right in the heart of the Poitou Charentes. This part of the Charente is very special, set in the midst of the vines of the Premier Cru Grande Champagne Cognac region, famous for the very best Cognacs and Pineaux. As far as the eye can see, are acre after acre of vineyards dedicated to production. And nearby is the Dordogne with its medieval chateaux and historic Bastides.

The following morning we charted our route through the Midi-Pyrenees down to the Languedoc. The hood was down, the sun shone and the roads were more or less empty, save the odd tractor or 2CV! The scenery rapidly changes from vines and solid earth to rolling hills and green meadows. A stark contrast; empty villages with honey coloured brickwork and blue shutters. There are avenues of trees which marry together above you, as the sun glints through the branches onto roadside lakes and rivers.

Our mission was clear: brilliant driving on smooth roads to see dramatic ancient gorges and rivers – views that simply take your breath away.

After a night at Saint-Sernin-Sur-Rance, at the gateway to the Aveyron and Tarn Departments, halfway between the Millau Viaduct and Albi, the journey really began. The food was exceptional in this area. For example: Le homard frais du vivier grille et flambé. And the local wines are both cold and tres sec.



Ray Parrott with his modified E-type that was used on the journey.

We travelled East along the D999 through the Grands Causses up to St-Affrique. The road snakes along the river to the Viaduct de Millau. It gradually comes into view, like some unearthly structure, which somehow shouldn't be there and yet looks absolutely perfect. A triumph of highly elegant architecture, meshed into the rugged landscape.

The viaduct was conceived by the engineer Michael Virlogeux and designed by the architect Lord Norman Foster, the Millau Viaduct took only three years to build. The structure cost 400 million Euros to achieve, including 80 million for the toll barrier. It consists of 7 concrete piers, pylons and a steel deck. The highest point of the world's highest multi-stayed viaduct is 343 meters. The total length is 2460 meters. The laying of the first stone was 14th December 2001 and the inauguration was 14th December 2004. Fifty-five people work on the Viaduct every day, around the clock, 365 days a year. It even has its own security system and weather stations. For your information, it might be free to get on, but it costs 6.50 Euros to get off! So have some change ready!

The journey concluded with what has to be one of the most incredible drives in the world; this is from Millau on the D907 to Saint Enimie. The road climbs 15% North-East through the Tarn Gorges – the Cirque des Baumes – the Cirque de St. Chely and into the pretty riverside town of Saint-Enimie. Here an omelette fromage et jambon, washed down with a glass of iced tea, can be enjoyed whilst watching the world go by. In season the river is busy with boats and canoes and the medieval bridge completes a picture postcard location.

Here in the Tarn, you find kilometre after kilometre of twisting roads, often only 3.5m wide with spectacular driving through ancient towns, rock enclaves and tiny clusters of houses that seem to be moulded into the high cliffs over 500m above. How these settlements were founded seems a mystery. The Tarn Gorge roads are where the improbable surely meets the impossible; nature and human endeavour thrown together to produce a stunning result.

And what of the car?

The car, of course, performed perfectly – a high speed magic carpet – that powered us through those ancient passes in a part of France largely undiscovered by tourists. A nut and bolt restoration can sound a little cliché, but this car certainly fits the bill. It was crafted by a perfectionist with attention to fine detail (Ray Parrott himself); from the gleaming paintwork to the immaculate engine and interior.

During our travels, we discussed the legendary Norman Dewis, who drove 77 RW from Browns Lane to the Geneva Motor Show in the March of 1961. This was in the days of black and white television; pre-Beatles, pre-Bond movies. It was a very different world from today; no sat-nav, nor mobile phones or internet.

As Mr Dewis said at the time: "We broke all traditional methods of building a car

Approaching the bridge, a wonderful piece of engineering and style, just like the E-type!



Wonderful countryside, great roads and interesting villages on the route.

and built it around aircraft principles rather than the normal concept of starting with a chassis and adding everything on to that. It was two years before Formula One cars started adopting our principles – so we were two years ahead of F1 with these cars which is an indication of just how much of a breakthrough this design was. When the E-type was launched (in 1961) we were selling a car that could do 150 mph to the general public and there were

not many people who could say that."

A final thought

Whether motoring through the Poitou-Charentes or the Tarn Gorges, the E-type still has the power to turn heads and that is a legend we should be very proud of. She really is 'the torque of the Tarn!' More information about the author on www.rob-wallace.co.uk

E-type lighting improvements!

David Moisan was intrigued about the lighting improvements made to the E-type previously published in the magazine. Over the winter he carried out his own improvements to his Series 1 and members might be interested in the result. David claims his change has improved the lighting to two-candle-power!

