

letters from abroad

Schmiten with our Chamois

Jean-Marie Schmit, Kehlen, Luxembourg



Chamois that you might remember from its LeJog adventure (*Impressions*, March and April 2011).

Since then the Chammy burnt some valves on its 998 and had to run for a while on a basic 875 Sport engine. That engine was also in the car on our way up to Perth for the Imp 50 National in 2013 and provided quite a lot of fun on the Knockhill circuit. Summer 2015 saw the rebuilt

998 back in the car again and following a session on the rolling road at the Speed Centre Geldermalsen (in the Netherlands) enabled the little screamer to produce 84.7 bhp on the R17 cam.

The car has done quite some navigation rallies and, apart from a broken throttle

cable, was very reliable. Over the last couple of years, we also discovered the pleasure of driving rallies with regularity sections on closed roads. The road-going part of these events is straightforward navigation with no gimmicks. The regularity part uses mostly small single-track country roads that are closed to all other traffic. These rallies are regulated by the FIA, all cars have to be road legal, and each team member must obtain a certificate of good health from his doctor and a FIA licence that can be bought on the day. The driver of course needs a valid driving licence and the only additional safety feature is that crash helmets have to be worn during the regularity sections. Like for every regularity rally, a precise distance meter and good time-keeping equipment will help. We use the well proven Retrotrip 2 Tripmaster and the Brantz Regularity timer while the top teams contending for the FIA Championship mostly use state-of-the-art Blunink or Terratrip Rally computers.

With my daughter as navigator and the Chammy with the lesser engine we were participating in the two first editions (2014 and 2015) of the *Boucles de Clervaux* (www.bouclesdeclervaux.lu)

No, the resemblance with the Team Hartwell Logo is not a coincidence! As I couldn't find the correct font, I thought I'd rather use a completely different one and my daughter didn't like the orange colour, hence the pink. Team Schmit consists of me in the driver's seat and either my wife Danielle or my daughter Isabelle in the navigator's seat, and of course our



No escape! Chamois firmly tied
Photo: Jean-Marie Schmit

organised in the beautiful northern part of Luxembourg. The average speed on this event is set below 50 kph (usually between 48.5 and 49.9 kph) on the closed sections. The lack of power meant that we were constantly running late on the ideal time but as driving was really sporty we had great fun, were running midfield in the overall classification, won our class each time (not too difficult as there were not many opponents in the below 1,300 cc class) and my daughter won the Ladies Prize in 2014.

As soon as the 'screaming engine' was back in the car, we decided to enter the *Coupe des Sources* 2015 (www.coupedessources.be). This is the oldest regularity rally for historic cars in Belgium. It takes place around the middle of September in the region of Spa and, above all, is organised by our friend and fellow 'Imper' (actually, now 'Claner'!) Pascal Collard.

As my daughter was not able to join me in time for the Friday evening navigational part for those competing in the 50 kph average class, we had to drive on Saturday with the 'big boys' at average speeds up to 65 kph: Porsche 911, Ford Escort, Opel Ascona and Manta, BMW 2002tii, Lancia Beta Monte Carlo, Renault Alpine, Volvo Amazon and, in our small class, two Autobianchi



Gaining confidence:
EMA 2015
Photo supplied by
Jean-Marie Schmit



The red mist descends!
875cc at full chat on
the Boucles de Clervaux 2014
Photo supplied by Jean-Marie Schmit

Abarths, two Mini Coopers, a Daf Marathon, Fiat 128, Citroën 2CV and of course our Chamois.

EMA (a circuit of the Peugeot Driving Academy), Ster, Theux and Creppe were the timed stages that had to be tackled four times, mostly in the wet as it turned out. The first test was at the EMA and my daughter was so scared that she sent us lapping the circuit five times instead of four. Bad for the penalties, but great for the fun! The second test was nearly dry and she became more confident and started to have fun as well. During the last EMA session, we were both enjoying the Chammy's capabilities to be steered on the throttle. We had no chance of keeping up to the required average speed in the wet, constantly running between two and ten seconds late. This was until we found the Ster special stage completely dry. Shortly after the first turn, the instructions from the navigator's seat were, "Two slow... one slow... one fast... perfect, on time... one fast..." This went on until we were held up by one of the Volvos that was running at a sightseeing pace. We were stuck behind it for a couple of kilometres and the "On time" changed to "44 slow" before the Volvo pulled out and we had a clear road in front of us.

Now it was all about damage limitation and real sport. We were picking up time pretty well and were back at "18 slow" when suddenly, no more power. My first reaction was a very nasty shout in Luxembourgish. I had no choice but to knock the car out of gear and pull over to the side in order not to block other competitors. No stationary, I realised that the engine was idling happily. My mind switched to positive again as I remembered the good old adage: "To finish first, one first has to finish." Giving up was not an option. I jumped out of the car, yanked the engine lid open and immediately saw that a pin in the throttle linkage had gone astray. A cable tie proved to be a perfect repair and, a minute later we were back in the rally. Of course, this earned us masses of penalties, 181.95 to be exact, a third of a total of 548.61 for the whole event. What else went wrong? Well I missed the same turn four times in a row, even though my daughter shouted at me to slow down, I just didn't hear her with the 'little screamer' behind the back seat. Apart from an additional couple of dozen time penalties, no harm done, as I was able to pull straight ahead without hitting anything.

We continued to have fun for the rest of the event and enjoyed our Chamois to the full. Even though our driving was not as spectacular as the Porsches and Escorts, we seemed to make



"Keep left, one slow, hairpin ahead 700 meters..." Coupe des Sources 2015
Photo supplied by Jean-Marie Schmit

Below: Still going strong after throttle cable tie repair.
Coupe des Sources 2015
Photo supplied by Jean-Marie Schmit





Imps can sometimes lift a rear wheel... *Boucles de Clervaux 2016*
Photo supplied by Jean-Marie Schmit

the local Ardennes accent, “*C’était vous avec la Tsunbimm! Dites-moi elle tire à du combien?*” – “It was you in the Sunbeam! Tell me, up to how much does it rev?”

Despite our bad luck and errors, we finished 15th overall in the 65S competition, just missed out on the Ladies Cup to a



Screaming 998cc: *Coupe des Sources 2016*
Photo supplied by Jean-Marie Schmit



Famous Belgian hill climb: *Trôs Marets*
Photo supplied by Jean-Marie Schmit

quite an *impression*. During the special stages, when closing on a slower car, all – apart from the Volvo – pulled aside to let us pass. We must have looked like we meant business.

A great compliment came from a marshal during the dinner preceding the prize-giving who asked in

BMW 323i which placed 14th, but won our class.

Both navigator and driver learned some lessons and I also embarked on further improving the car. The cable tie in the throttle linkage was replaced by a proper bolt, secured by two nuts and a split pin. As the original Imp

seats proved useless for this kind of exercise, I fitted OMP racing seats and Willans harnesses. In order not to miss my navigator’s instructions any longer, I invested in two crash helmets with a Peltor intercom system.

Refinements carried out, the Chammy was ready with a week to spare before the *Boucles de Clervaux 2016*, just in time to drive up north the weekend before the Rally, do the ‘trip check’ and have a nice dinner with milady. This time the organiser of the *Boucles* had the splendid idea to add a ‘prologue’ on Friday evening: two short navigational parts and two special stages further up north around Wiltz. The second special stage was completely run in the dark and, as road-works were not finished, a part of the route proved quite bumpy, muddy and slippery... great fun. Add to this an uphill stretch, then a 160° turn followed by a roundabout to be taken in the wet and... the wrong way round. We were enjoying these laps to the full until our headlights let go. Fortunately not completely, as we were left with either the dipped beam or the two additional Wipac lamps, better than nothing but not really good enough. As you can imagine, later in the pub, we had to suffer the “Lucas, prince of darkness” joke more than once. However, British craftsmanship was *not* to blame, but rather my lack of knowledge of ‘electrickery’ that made me push far too much current through a poor French-made relay that had just melted away. But the Imp was still running. An Austin-Healey fared worse with no lights at all and could only re-join the competition next day, as did a Lancia Delta Integrale of the Portuguese team Carvalho/Caldeira. This fabulous team worked through most of the night to repair their broken gearbox. The Peugeot 104 ZS was less lucky as it hit the kerb on the famous roundabout, bent its front suspension and was out of the rally for good.

Saturday was a typical April day with a mixture of damp, wind, showers, dry and even a bit of sunshine and we continued to enjoy the rally to the full and, even more so, to learn. In fact it was the first time we really had to ‘regulate’. This meant ‘maximum attack’ in the tricky parts and ‘crawling’ at around 50kph on the straights and the larger roads. We also learned that cutting the corners is fine when you’re always running late but makes you actually faster than you think you are. I also learned that a “four too fast” cannot become a “three too fast” and then a “one too fast”. No, it needs to move from a “four too fast” to an “on time” within a couple of metres. We were surprised as well by the fact that there were changes of average speed during a leg. While we were able to find out how to set up the regularity timer, we did not succeed in driving through these changes properly which earned us a couple of dozen penalties. To make matters even worse, during one timed stage with two average speed changes in a short distance, we made a navigational error and had to drive an additional lap which cost us 600 penalty points. It was clear now that we would end up far back in the classification, but still we continued to have fun throughout the day and decided there and then that we would be back with a vengeance in 2017. Yes, we won our class again, but both my daughter and I believe that we did not really deserve that accolade.

September, and here we go again for the *Coupe des Sources* in Spa. Competition aplenty in the 65S class with 52 starters of which 13 were in the up to 1,300cc class. Unfortunately the Daf did not make it to the start, but there was the great 2CV Azam, two Minis, one of the previous year’s Autobianchi Abarths, a Ford Fiesta, an Alfasud Ti, a Skoda 110S and two NSUs. To achieve a good result, no errors or breakdowns were allowed. Although three of the Special Stages wore the

same name as the year before, they were quite different. EMA's configuration is flexible and the route had to be driven the other way round this year. New, at least to us, was the 'Trôs Marets', a famous Belgian hill climb. Apart from two bends, driving up the hill at 65 kph was quite boring but then, in the middle of a straight came a sharp 145° back to the right on gravel to be followed 150 meters later by a 90° left into the woods and then steep down on gravel into a quarry. Absolutely no way to keep the car straight or to hold the 65 kph average speed but a very dusty affair.

Unlike 2015, the *Coupe des Sources* 2016 was run in splendid sunshine and with temperatures mostly above 25°C. A great many spectators watched the special stages and were also present in the *Parc de Sept Heures* in Spa where a Time Control was installed next to the fair 'Vintage Village' where all cars passed by at the end of each of the four legs.



Well worn brake shoes!
Photo: Jean-Marie Schmit

So what went wrong this time? Well, my 'Goodyear city tires for small cars' proved rather inappropriate in the heat and were very 'spongy' especially on the circuit. Nevertheless, we were able to get closer to the NSU 1300 that started just in front of us on the EMA just to lose it again on the straights, especially the one going slightly uphill. 300 fewer cc's took its toll. Nothing wrong with the oil consumption though: just a bit more than a litre on these 320 kilometres, of which 100 were competition work, is acceptable. I was, however, slightly concerned about the coolant loss; we needed more than two litres. Not enough to slow us down as we were able to refill after each stage at the technical assistance in Malmédy. It turned out the loss of coolant was due to a leaking radiator-to-thermostat hose, since replaced. However, we did lose some time due to the clutch. Not that it was slipping, sometimes it just failed to disengage making



Trophies and Bobeline!
Photo: Jean-Marie Schmit

changing down from third to second a 'crunchy' business and from second to first impossible. Suspecting the clutch hose being defective and expanding under pressure I had a chat at the Time Control in the centre of Spa with Pascal who suggested that it might well be boiling brake fluid making the operation of the clutch difficult. Thinking about it, it did indeed always happen in the 'heat of the action', and, yes, when changing the master clutch cylinder I refilled from an already opened container, not best practise. I have now bought top quality racing brake fluid that will go in during one of these long winter evenings.

Apart from a couple of slow corners that needed a change down to first gear, the rest of the event was just FUN. Great route, great sportsmanship on the track. Special thanks to the 2CV Team Maréchal/Beaujean for letting us pass without time loss. Great chats as well with fellow competitors while waiting for the start of the timed sections, during the dinner before the prize-giving and the drinks thereafter. Again we had a good reason to have a couple of drinks: we finished, in fact we finished 21st overall, well within the first 50% of starters and... we finished first in our class, 415.9 points ahead of the NSU 1300.

Now the Chamois is due for some thorough maintenance. The top radiator hose and the rear brake shoes are already replaced. The brake and clutch fluid will be changed for the aforementioned racing type, the front brake shoes will be checked, brake balance set and the worn kingpins replaced. With a new oil filter and a couple of pints of fresh oil, the Sunbeam will then be ready for the next *Boucles de Clervaux* on 12th/13th May.

Anybody else want to join in the fun?

(My thanks to all the enthusiastic photographers who sent me photos of my car in action. Unfortunately their names are not known so they cannot be credited.)



"The smile of my navigator after a job well done. Thank you, Isabelle!"
Photo: Jean-Marie Schmit