

# Monte Returns Home

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In February 2013, while buying *Monte*, our Chamois, I discovered it had previously been registered in Monaco. While restoring the vehicle, my wife Jane and I decided on a whim that one day, we would like to take the car 'back home'. So, this year being the 50th since our Chamois rolled off the production line, it seemed as good a time as any to make the trip!

I bought *Monte* from a former club member in Devon who had only the previous month (January 2013) registered the car in the UK. From the paperwork I managed to make contact with one of the car's previous owners in Monaco – a Scottish gentleman called Peter Murray Kerr. The car had been at a family property in Devon for several years and Peter, who still lives in Monaco, told me a little bit about its history. He bought the car in the early 90's from a *Madame Somerie* who was living at the same apartment address in Monaco and paid FRF 1,500 (approx. £150) for the privilege of owning a little piece of Scotland and probably the only Imp in the Principality. From the car's handbook, I had identified that *Madame Somerie* had bought the car new on 25th February 1970 from New York Garage, a Rootes dealer in Cannes. We exchanged a few e-mails and I informed Peter of my plan to one day drive down to Monaco and he signed off, "...looking forward to your visit".

Six years later, on a damp, cold Sunday in February, we started making plans. We chose May for our trip and began by looking for accommodation in Monaco, which incidentally occupies a mere 0.84 square miles. One hotel caught our attention. It was on *Avenue Princesse Grace*, a road between the famous Casino and the beach to the east of the port and harbour. *Monte's* address had been at the grandly named 'Columbia Palace', also on *Avenue Princesse Grace*, so it seemed appropriate to make this our base for a five-night 'rest' following the 1,000-mile drive south. After a six-year lull and through the power of LinkedIn, I was also very pleased to be able to contact Peter again to let him know we were finally on our way and, luckily for us, he confirmed his availability for our brief stay.

Our plan involved splitting the journey from Cheshire into five approximately 200-mile segments, giving us four overnight stops there and back. So, with the overnight ferry from Portsmouth,



Portsmouth Docks  
All photos: Mark Sistern

at our chosen destination in good time for some sightseeing. Anything we'd missed, or was of further interest, we could do on the way home!

We set off on Wednesday 8th May and the journey there and back went remarkably well with no mechanical issues at all despite *Monte* being heavily laden with luggage, tools and as many spares as I could conceivably imagine needing! The weather remained cool and occasionally showery between the north French coast and Orange, which helped with cooling (both us and the car). Beyond Orange the weather warmed to a pleasant and sunny mid-20's °C. Our Chamois attracted plenty of attention throughout the journey, either when stopped for a break or with the odd thumbs-up from passing cars or motorcycles. The further south we went, the more Italians we began to encounter, and their appreciation of our little car seemed to surpass that of all others.

Our run down from Riom to Orange was on a Saturday, which is *Gilet Jaune* (Yellow Vest) Day in France. On advice from a French colleague, we'd planned to avoid major towns on Saturdays as this was where most of the protests would likely take place (outside of the main event in Paris that is). So, it was not a great surprise to see a group of around 20 yellow vests at one of the toll booths just prior to St. Etienne on the A72 on the route out from Clermont Ferrand. Feeling nervous, we slowed as we approached and noticed that they were mostly smiling but also waving for us to stop. We did. Jane wound down the window and a very cheerful young lady passed us a leaflet and asked us for our toll ticket and explained that today the road was free, and we could just drive through. With that the yellow vests all gave us a wave and a mass thumbs-up and we were off (€20 better off in fact). 100 yards or so later a small group of *Gendarmes* were stood with hands on hips sternly watching on. I tried to engage them with a cheery smile and a nod as we went by, but they seemed not to be in any mood to respond.

On Sunday 12th May we were at last closing in on Monaco. We'd approached down the *Route du Sol* from Orange, skirted north of Marseille to turn east onto the A8 and excitedly caught our first glimpse of the Mediterranean just as we dropped down to follow the coast behind Cannes. The journey since leaving Tours had been punctuated by fairly long motorway gradients of 5 or 6%, each of which *Monte* had



Monte's old address:  
*Avenue Princesse Grace*





*Monte on the GP circuit*

taken in his stride despite, on some, needing to plant the accelerator pedal as far into the carpet as possible to try and maintain an almost respectable 50 mph. After reaching Nice, there was just one final motorway gradient to go before we'd turn off and drop down into Monaco. These final few miles of coastal motorway had been characterised by climb after climb. Also, this being the warmest day so far meant us keeping a close eye on the 'worry' gauges on each ascent. The water temperature needle invariably peaking before settling down again on the following descent. The final push from Nice required 3rd gear on a gradient that we felt would never end. *Monte* did well and we started our long descent into Monaco, at first through a welcome and cooling stretch of tunnel. Once through we could see glimpses of the high-rise buildings, the sea and the famous harbour as the road continued to descend before entering *Tunnel Albert II* which would take us out of France and into the Principality. The tunnel had a helter-skelter feel to it as it corkscrewed through the rock before ejecting us into bright sunlight and shadows in between the high-rise blocks, through small underpasses, all on seemingly narrow roads until eventually leading to the sea front and *Avenue Princesse Grace*.

Once on the *Avenue*, a calmness returned; the road was quiet. To our right the sea and the beach. People walking in the shade of palms enjoying their Sunday afternoon. On our left-hand side, smart looking apartments, restaurants, a Ferrari dealership, a Rolls dealership, McLaren, AMG, Aston Martin and look, there was *Monte's* old place, Columbia Palace! We pulled up outside our hotel. *Monte* had made it; we were all grins! Be-suited staff from the hotel came out to help us unload and after a short discussion, I was given permission to drive *Monte* into the hotel's underground car park so long as I was accompanied by one of the Valet Parking staff. (It was normal procedure for the staff to do the parking, but I preferred to do it myself.) This was very different to the Ibis we'd been in the night before! Downstairs *Monte* was in good company; he settled in with a couple of Ferraris, a Porsche, three Rolls Royces as well as some high-end BMWs. Whenever I needed to take *Monte* out, I just needed to get the keys off one of the Valets and they would accompany me down into the car park. It felt a little awkward at first, but the system worked well. Each Valet without exception was interested in the Chamois and quite amazed that we'd come all the way from England to meet with one of the former owners. They fully appreciated why I would want to park *Monte* myself. None of them were familiar with a choke lever! On one occasion after starting *Monte* up, I heard a loud cheer and clapping. Looking behind, the rest of the Valet team and hotel *Concierge* had come downstairs to wave us out. I can't imagine they'd do this for a Porsche, Rolls or Ferrari!

Following breakfast on Monday, I called Peter to let him know we'd arrived in Monaco. Within the hour Peter had arrived at our hotel and we were sitting chatting and drinking coffee on the terrace. It was fantastic to finally make the connection with Peter and swap stories about 'our' car. It turned out that *Madame Somerie*, the first owner, was in fact an English lady who bought the car while living in Cannes before she moved into the Columbia Palace address. Peter had also been a member of the Imp Club which helped him obtain any necessary spares. Engine-out operations could be done in his parking spot under Columbia Palace; there was also street parking behind the building for more run of the mill maintenance and repairs.

Towards the end of the 90's Peter told me he took the car back to the family property in Devon.





Peter Murray Kerr reunited with his car

the battery almost completely depleted. In Devon, the Chamois remained on the property, largely unused save for a few driving lessons for his son until its sale in 2012.

Following our chat over coffee, we went down into the car park where I was able to re-acquaint Peter with his car. I was quite nervous as *Monte's* appearance is quite changed from Peter's time of ownership, but I need not have been. Peter was delighted to see the car in such good shape and well cared for! Following a couple of photos, we took the car out for a drive around. Peter sitting where his steering wheel used to be before I converted *Monte* to right-hand drive. First, we passed by Columbia Palace and then onto the sea front where we could stop to take more photographs.

Preparations this week were underway for the Monaco Grand Prix which was to be held on the weekend of 25th/26th. Peter guided us around the course before we broke off for a spot of lunch by Fontvieille Harbour before heading back to the hotel. It had been a wonderful few hours chatting with Peter, who is an absolute gentleman and made us feel the long trip had been worthwhile. But that wasn't the end. Two days later Peter picked us up from our hotel and very kindly took us for a sightseeing trip into nearby Italy. We visited the small town of Dolceaqua with its Roman bridge and hilltop castle, both interconnected by a warren of narrow, winding streets and passageways. Following lunch in the square we then went to the coast for proper Italian ice cream at the town of Ospedaletti. Back at the hotel, we made our farewells and I promised that I would send Peter a copy of this article.

Friday 17th, our date to leave Monaco, came around all too quickly. We'd had a great time getting there, meeting up with Peter Murray Kerr and experiencing the sites in the Principality. Our other lasting memories are of *Port Hercule* brimmed with expensive yachts. The supercars accompanying the boats lining the harbour and roaming the streets, their exhausts resonating off high buildings, particularly at night. Our little drives around Monaco, adding our own more modest exhaust note to the background noise. All the while people giving us thumbs-up, pointing, waving and acknowledging our

The car was taken by train up to Calais with the intention of crossing by ferry to Dover. However, there was a strike in Calais and Peter had to drive to Dunkirk and cross to Ramsgate. After an overnight stop in Eastbourne, Peter then continued to Devon with wipers, lights and fan all on, arriving with

Chamois, as if they were also welcoming *Monte* home. This had been a great trip, but we still had another 1000 miles of Imping to look forward to. Our holiday wasn't quite over. On the Saturday run from Orange to Riom, we met a German lady at one of the services on the *Autoroute du Sol*

north of Valence. She told us that a friend of hers in Cornwall also owns an Imp and asked us to photograph her next to our car. Tuning into Facebook that evening, there was the photo – her friend is none other than Imp Club member and Cornwall Area Centre Organiser Bob Blackman!

After spending our final afternoon in France visiting D Day sights at Sword Beach and the Pegasus Bridge memorial, it was time to board the overnight ferry from Ouistreham back to Portsmouth. The following morning, we would complete the final 220 miles home to where we began two weeks previously. It had been was a fantastic trip. In the process of taking *Monte* home, we'd covered 2,150 miles and enjoyed every single one of them!



Peter and Monte at the sea front



Sword beach, Normandy