

Torquay – an Autumnal Automotive Detour

Mark Sintern, Audlem, Cheshire

An autumn road trip was always on the cards. Jane and I had planned to spend a few days in Torquay prior to Wicked Welsh, but with the latter's cancellation we decided to turn our trip home into an automotive themed tour.

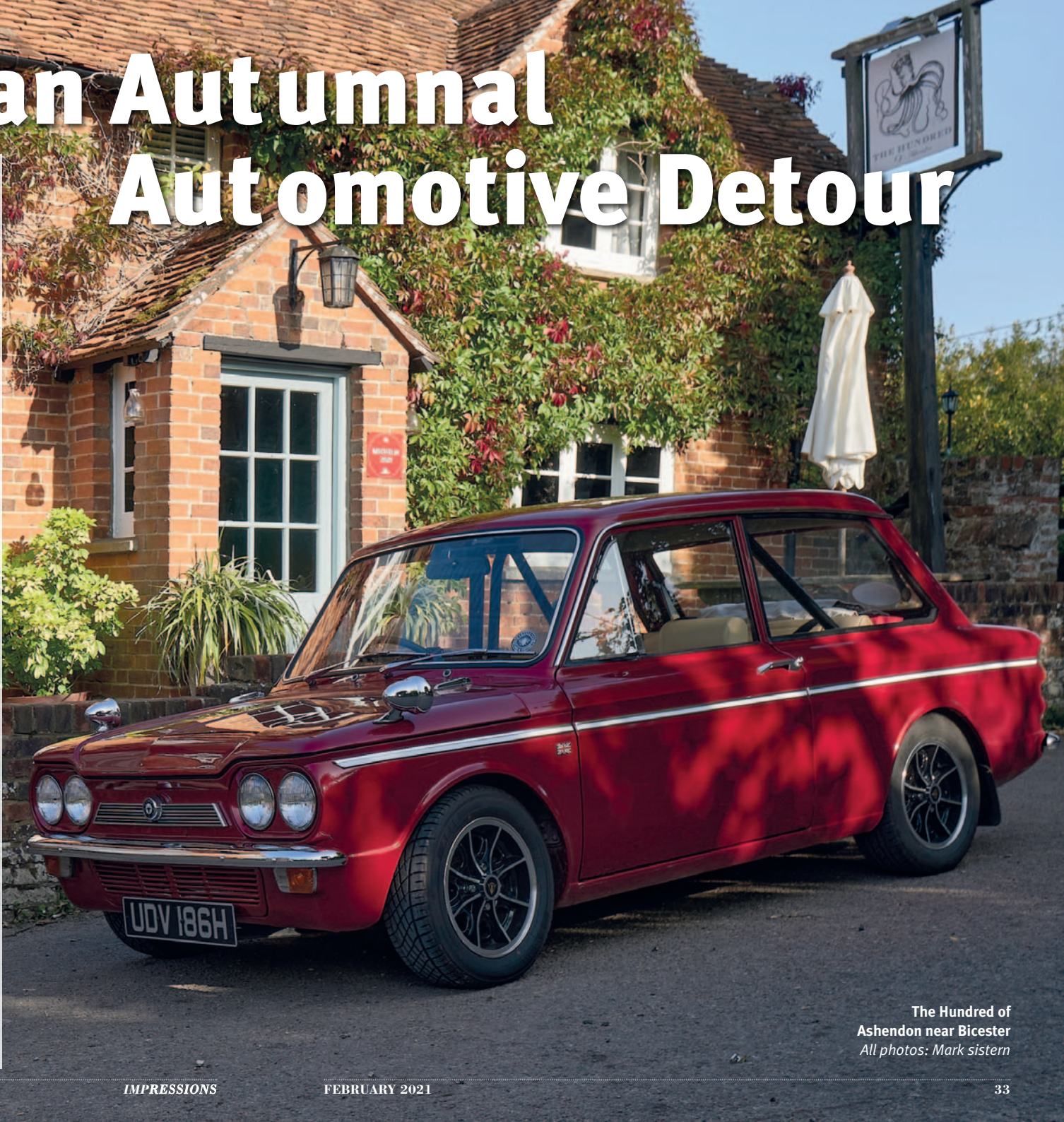
Torquay was perhaps fitting. We'd taken *Monte*, our Chamois, on a 2,000-mile round trip last year to Monaco (*Impressions*, July 2019). It was in Devon where *Monte* got laid up in the mid-'nineties before his current lease of life. Today he bears a Devon heritage registration plate.

So, we set off in scorching September sunshine, south to the M54, M6 and onto the M5. George, our son, and his girlfriend, Vicky, were to join us for our Torquay leg. We had agreed a coffee rendezvous later in the day at Clevedon just off the M5. The journey started well, only to learn on the M5 that it had been closed around Tewkesbury due to an earlier accident. We therefore diverted via the M50, A40/A449 and onto the M4 south of Bristol to re-join our route. George and Vicky had set off later in their somewhat quicker BMW but got delayed on the M6 before joining a now fully open M5. They caught us up as we turned into the Clevedon Craft Centre, a mile off the M5 for a well-earned break. Perfect timing!

Fuelled up with coffee and cake, we continued in convoy to our hotel by Meadfoot Beach in Torquay. There, we could finally relax. Taking in the sea air prior to dinner, after which we settled down with a few beers and some excited chatter before retiring for a very good night's sleep.

During our four-day stay, the Chamois was quite an attraction to other hotel guests and the hotel owner. We got into some lovely reminiscences with people about their own Imp-pasts. All the usual stuff that members will be familiar with. Out and about there were plenty of waves from people, and on one occasion a builder in his Transit had a long conversation with us over the course of several red light stops on the Torquay ring road as we returned from a day out in Salcombe!

Thursday, after a wonderfully hot and sunny stay, it was time to bid George and Vicky farewell as they headed back to Cheshire and



The Hundred of
Ashendon near Bicester
All photos: Mark Sintern

1947 Chrysler – a far cry from the austere cars on sale in post-war Britain



we made our way to Bicester for the Classic Car Drive-in Weekend event, taking us back up the M5 and then up Birdlip Hill near Gloucester to follow the scenic Cotswolds A40, eventually reaching our night-time stop at The Hundred of Ashendon, an excellent watering hole just 20 minutes or so from

the Bicester Heritage Centre at Bicester Airfield.

Friday morning, after an evening enjoying dinner accompanied by *Side Pocket for a Toad* from the Tring Brewery and an excellent breakfast, we headed for the Heritage centre. I'd booked our Chamois into the classic car visitors parking area. This was right by the main visitor entry point on the airfield. We had parked among an interesting array of classics which were arranged for people to view as they walked into the event from the main car park. By chance, we arrived just as another 'Chrysler' had parked up – an American cousin, about four times the size of *Monte* which caused some amusement to parking marshals and visitors alike as they wandered past and into the show.

Inside was a pits area with rally and racing cars from the early 1900s to the 1990s. These were to be put through their paces on a small, closed circuit at various points throughout the day and at times proved to be quite entertaining. On the field was a mix of cars from car clubs and in between



Chamois next to more American heavy metal

these and the pits, an area for traders. There was a lot to see and take in. Again, it was bright, warm and sunny and being Friday, not too busy as the main crowds were expected for Saturday and Sunday. Late afternoon, we left and avoided the busy M40, choosing A and B roads for our final night-time stop in Kenilworth, Warwickshire.

Following a night at the excellent Old Bakery on Old Kenilworth High Street (great selection of real ales, superb breakfast and fantastic service to boot!) we headed for Caffeine and Machine, a



You wait all year to see a McLaren and then...

renowned automotive Mecca at Ettington near Stratford-on-Avon. All types of cars and bikes are welcome. Again, the weather was kind allowing us to mingle in short sleeves and drink coffee. There was a group of McLaren owners (I

don't think I have ever seen so many in one place), Ferraris, modern and 'classic' classics – too many to mention. *Monte* got more than his fair share of attention as always. What is it about Imps?

Caffeine and Machine were operating a two and a half hour visiting slot, so unfortunately it was soon time to leave and make way for the next bookings. This, however, had been a great way to end our automotive detour, and it was with a friendly wave from the gate marshal that we pulled out onto the A422 for the short trip to the M40 and the drive home.

After a couple of hours, we were back home having covered a total of 720 miles over the week. Great fun.



"Hey, it's Doyle from The Professionals!"

Gorgeous Sunbeam Tiger

