

letters from abroad

My Imp Year – 2021

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My Imp needed new tyres in 2020, so I had them fitted in March 2020, then of course the lockdowns came and the car hardly turned a wheel for the rest of the year. It wasn't until June 2021 that I ventured any distance from home.

Reims was the destination, the *Classic Sunbeam et Rootes Club de France* (of which I am a member) were invited to display various Rootes Group cars as the featured marque for what is normally one of the first indoor shows of the year here in France. It was postponed several times before being re-scheduled for June 2021 thus inaugurating the brand new exhibition centre. Despite continued restrictions the Imp was joined by Catherine and Bertrand Peurey's Stiletto and five other Rootes cars as the centrepiece of the event. Visitor numbers were capped at 5,000 – 30,000 typically attend – so there was more space to move around the halls than usual. The outdoor traders were literally swamped by overnight storms and flooding but the show went on.

This was the first outing for the Imp in quite a while but Reims is only 150 km from home so the

drive was easy and most enjoyable.

The next trip was in early September, a one-day event organised by a British cars club in the town of St Pierre les Nemours, 90 km south. Always a great event and well attended which includes a short navigation rally and a 'not too serious' concours

event. In previous years I've won prizes in the concours so this time I decided I wasn't going to enter. However, the organisers insisted right from the start that I present the Imp, and I came away with not one but two trophies; the first for the Mayor's favourite car (showing good taste!) and



September 2021: Andrew's Imp came second in a British cars concours held in St Pierre les Nemours. Daniel Plas's Morgan came first. See also front cover
Photo: Sylvie Webb



June 2021: *Classic Sunbeam et Rootes Club de France* display, Reims
Photo: Andrew Webb

A taste of things to come: a steep climb in
Côte du Rhône wine producing country.
Alpine owned by Jean-Louis and Jane Fournier
Photo: Andrew Webb



October 2021: British classics
at Morges, Switzerland
Photo: Andrew Webb

the other for 2nd place in the concours. I was also presented with hampers containing local produce and free entry to the town's museums. A wonderful outing on a lovely sunny day!

A month later my wife Sylvie and I were invited to join a ten-classic car convoy travelling to the Jura mountain region near Lake Lemman, taking in a visit to the annual Swiss British classic cars meeting in Morges not far from Geneva. This was far more than a short day-trip so with comfort in mind I planned to take my Sunbeam Rapier Fastback instead of the Imp especially since we would combine this mountain trek with another the following weekend in the Vaucluse region another 350 km further south.

However, since the parts needed to repair a steering problem with the Rapier didn't arrive on time (Brexit...), with very little preparation the Imp was loaded up and on a Friday morning we headed south for a full day's drive in convoy to our mountain retreat. It was a long but pleasant drive stopping for a leisurely lunch before the evening assault on the mountain roads. I've never driven the Imp on proper twisty mountain roads so I was a bit apprehensive... I needn't have worried, it went really well and it was fun!

The next day we headed for Switzerland. The town of Morges on the shores of Lake Lemman welcomes British-only classic cars for this annual one-day International event in October and even with some restrictions still in force there were an estimated 1,500 cars on display. Mine was the only Imp and I was surprised by how many Swiss, French and German visitors took an interest in the car. I was also surprised by the huge range of cars in attendance, from Triumph Herald to Vauxhall Cresta, Sunbeam Talbot to Ford Anglia as well as the more well-known classics such as MGs and Jaguars. My favourite? An unpretentious Morris Marina.



October 2021: Possibly the only Marina
in Switzerland, this was Andrew's favourite at Morges,
Photo: Andrew Webb

The good weather up to this point turned into torrential rain on the Sunday afternoon which meant driving was hazardous, but at least we kept warm and dry in the Imp, unlike some others on this trip in their Sunbeam Alpines with ill-fitting soft tops, though they fared better than the

Triumph Spitfire and Austin Healey!

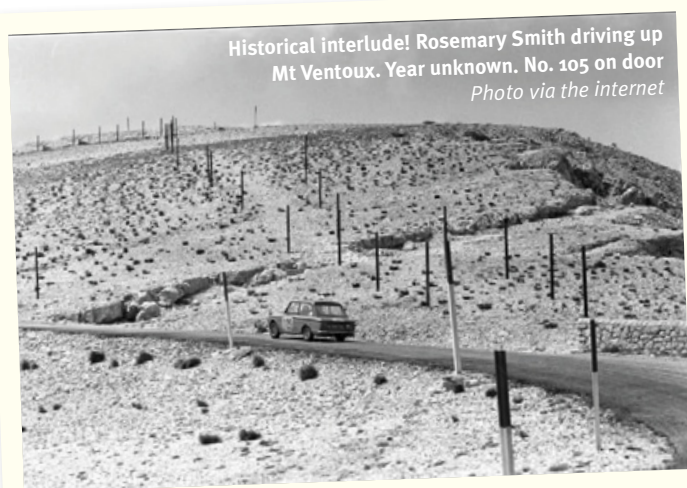
As the rest of the group headed home on Monday, Sylvie and I went in the opposite direction with no particular plan, just to visit a part of France that neither of us knew at all. We picked out places of interest at random during the week knowing that we had plenty of time to get to the start of the next weekend's drive to the summit of Mount Ventoux (1,909 metres) well known as a stage on the *Tour de France* cycle race.

We stayed in Annecy, Romans sur Isère, Montelimar and Orange before joining our hosts Jean-Louis, Jane and Olivier in the heart of the *Côtes du Rhône* wine producing country on Friday.

The weather was once again fine and sunny as we drove around the area on Saturday morning and stopped to stock up on the local wine. We had a roadside picnic before our group of three cars – Sunbeam Alpine, Imp and a superb Renault Caravelle – embarked on the serious business of

heading up the Ventoux.

The Imp had coped well so far but this would be another challenge! Whereas the Jura had long straight roads with fairly gentle curves as the altitude rose, here the road was much steeper and with plenty of tight hairpin bends. To keep up a decent speed most of the climb was in 2nd gear – very noisy! As if the bends weren't enough



Historical interlude! Rosemary Smith driving up Mt Ventoux. Year unknown. No. 105 on door
Photo via the internet

Halfway up the Ventoux. Caravelle owner Olivier (with the splendid hat), Andrew, Sylvie and Jane with Alpine
Photo: Jean-Louis Fournier (Jane's husband)



the good weather had brought out dozens of cyclists and my concentration was tested trying to avoid them and oncoming traffic at the same time. We just about made it to the top but I miscalculated the final turn and had to drop into 1st gear to avoid running out of steam at the last hurdle!

I hadn't noticed on the way up but we were now literally in the clouds so there was no view from the summit. It was pretty cold too. After a few minutes' contemplation it was time to take the 'easier' road down the other side of the mountain... easier, yes, since the road was wider, but standard Imp brakes are not the most effective, and those cyclists were all over the place! We broke cloud cover and came back to level ground. Going up mountains is fun, going down is definitely not.

The following day we had to head home, nearly 700 km away. We touched on another mountain range – the *Massif Central* – on the way, and though there were no hairpins the long relentless climbs in 3rd gear were not too pleasant. We followed the old RN7 main road (a sort of French Route 66) back to the Paris area; it is more suited to Imp speeds than the motorway, and made one more overnight stop before arriving home on Monday evening.

The Imp ran perfectly throughout the trip and clocked up 2,411 km (1,498 miles) over the ten days.

The only other outing of the year was to get the CT (French MoT), valid for another two years. The tester made me laugh when he commented how good the brakes were for an old car!

It would be great to meet up with other French Impers, but France is big country!



View from the top of the Ventoux
Photo: Andrew Webb



Despite some seriously steep ascents and descents, Andrew's Imp ran perfectly
Photo: Andrew Webb