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Book review: Gullible's Travels – About two extraordinary 'against all odds' journeys, 70 years apart, undertaken in 1947 Austin Sixteens

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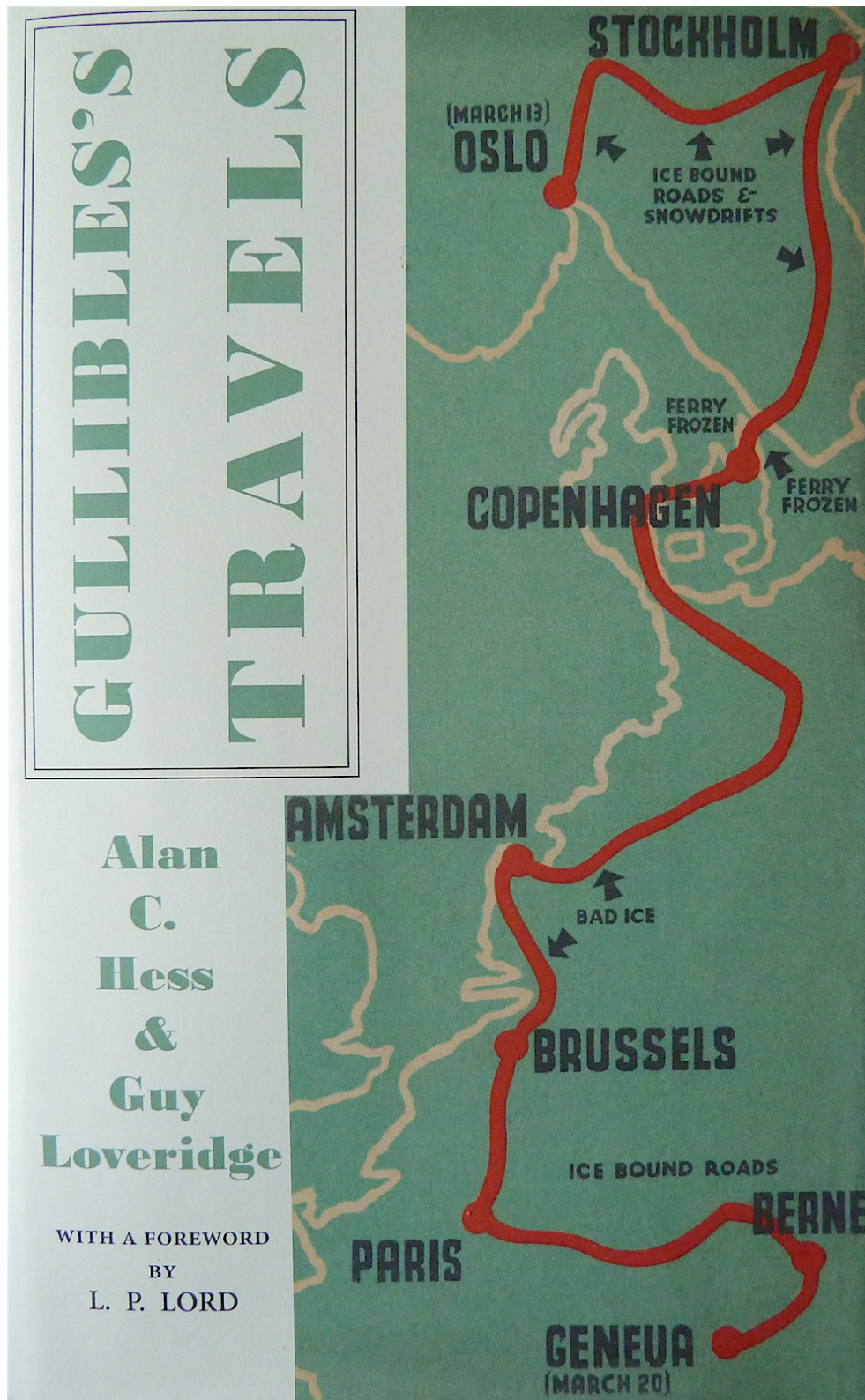
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Kim Henson reviews



this entertaining book, and says, "If you like motoring adventures you really won't want to put down this fascinating book, until you have finished reading it..."

Title: Gullible's Travels...

Authors: Alan C. Hess and Guy Loveridge (with a Foreword by Leonard Lord).

Published by: Douglas Loveridge Publications, 85, Warburton, Emley, West Yorkshire, HD8 9QP.

214 pages (hardback)

Price: £35 UK including postage

ISBN: 978-1-900113-12-0

Notes about buying: This is a limited edition book, with just 400 copies having been printed. Douglas Loveridge Publications has a Facebook shop with an ordering facility, or a traditional postal order may be sent, or a cheque payable to Douglas Loveridge Publications. E-mail orders to: GJCL69@aol.com

Gullible's Travels - Launched 70 years on...

In the immediate post-War years, in the 'export or die' era, for car companies it was essential to produce and sell as many of their vehicles as possible. Against this background the Austin Motor Company was keen to re-establish and further enhance the respect and eminence in the car market that it had enjoyed during the 1930s. To help promote its products to the buying public, at home and abroad, a number of long-distance motoring adventures or 'publicity stunts' were arranged to grab the attention of the press and public alike.



One of these was the 'Austin Motor Company Goodwill Tour of Europe', set up by the indomitable Alan Hess, who was publicity manager for the firm. During one of the worst, coldest winters of the 20th Century, resulting in abysmal and dangerous driving conditions, he and his intrepid team successfully completed their tour, taking three (then new) Austin Sixteens through Scandinavia and south through Europe, to arrive at the Geneva Motor Show, intact and on time!

Fast-forward precisely 70 years, and motoring author Guy Loveridge (a long-time member and former Chairman of the Guild of motoring Writers) restored a 1947 Sixteen that had been dormant for many decades. With widespread support from the motor industry of today (but alas no Austin company, of course), he and his small but enthusiastic team then took it to Oslo and re-created, to the exact minute, the epic trip undertaken 70 years before by Hess.

The modern version of this tour managed to cover the same ground more quickly, with rather more favourable weather, although arguably with more mechanical challenges, but remarkably both the car and all participants in the team came home in one piece to tell the story, which is recounted so eloquently by Guy in this new book from Douglas Loveridge Publications.

The new book runs to some 214 action-packed pages, and at the outset cleverly incorporates a fascinating full facsimile reprint of Alan Hess's own book about the 1947 adventure, then goes on to cover, with the help of copious full colour photography, the story of the 2017 event.

Essentially this is a fun tale of a young enthusiast's determination to re-run this event; he had dreamed of doing this for 25 years before it became possible to undertake it. It serves also to tell of how someone like Guy can be inspired by the adventures of yester-year, and despite the forces of nature appearing to stack up against him at every turn, to apply perseverance and determination to succeed in his dream. Indeed in these respects it was very much like the original amazing journey of 1947.



Austin Sixteen – an important model in Austin’s line-up

In the aftermath of the World War II, to start with most motor manufacturers were obliged to re-introduce mildly updated versions of their pre-War models. The Austin Motor Company was no different in this respect, with sidevalve-powered Eights and Tens being produced after the Conflict, and with specifications little changed from their 1939 counterparts.

However, importantly the new Sixteen, introduced in 1945, featured an all-new overhead valve four cylinder engine, with a capacity of 2.2 litres and a very good turn of speed for its time. Although its bodywork and separate chassis were almost identical to those of the Austin Twelve of 1939, the Sixteen offered far superior performance – it was quite capable of 75 mph or so – and also came to be admired and loved for its reliability, interior space, comfort and practicality. The basic design of the new engine was to endure for many years in Austin’s line-up (and indeed BMC’s, from 1952, following the merger of Austin and Morris).

In his book (reproduced in full at the start of Guy’s volume), Alan Hess described the barren backdrop of a winter dominated by huge snowfalls, sheet ice, way below freezing temperatures and countries still emerging from the devastation of war. Written in the style of the time, the book captures amazing details of the various problems that had to be overcome to leave a frozen Britain and to make any progress at all through Scandinavia and northern Europe, en route for the Geneva Motor Show of 1947. It was truly amazing that they made it at all, and I thoroughly enjoyed this account.

The second part of this volume, written by Guy, also covers in full detail the magnitude and difficulties of his own planned adventure. This included first-of-all finding a suitable 1947 Austin Sixteen, getting it back on the road after decades of inactivity, and driving it on a gruelling tour, on an equally gruelling schedule, in winter, again to get the car to Geneva. (It should be borne in mind that Guy’s Sixteen was now 70 years old, whereas of course in 1947 the three cars used by Hess and his team were brand new, and had the backing of Austin agents en route).



The fact that Guy and his team achieved their aim is testament to their absolute determination to complete the task they had set themselves. Notably, Guy tells his true story with humour and a sense of fun; this was a trip that was intended to be enjoyed (although at times along the way there were serious impediments and it seemed as if it might not be possible to complete it). The enjoyment of the trip, plus the sense of achievement and relief at having completed it, shines through in the text, with fabulous photographs illustrating the journey. Indeed, while reading the book, in spirit I was there in the Austin Sixteen with the team, willing the car on to make it to Geneva (and back again to the U.K, where it arrived safely).

VERDICT

This is a top class read; quite simply one of the most enjoyable motoring books I have had the pleasure of reading. It pays full tribute to the efforts of Alan Hess and his team of 1947, and comprehensively describes the similar approach to the project undertaken by Guy and his team of seven decades later.

I am sure that Alan Hess and the others who took part in the 1940s event would have been highly impressed by what Guy and his colleagues achieved in 2017; Guy and the team should be very proud too. His book is a thoroughly fitting permanent reminder/souvenir which immortalises both epic journeys as examples of just what can be achieved if you have the will to do it. Thanks Guy, for writing it!