

The National Motor Museum, Beaulieu – ‘A Grand Day Out!’

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You don't have to be a car enthusiast to enjoy a day out at Beaulieu, as Kim Henson confirms...

I count myself very lucky as, over the years since the age of eight, I have fairly often been able to visit the vehicular mecca that is National Motor Museum at Beaulieu (and its forerunner, the Montagu Motor Museum). I always enjoy time spent there, and marvel at the exhibits.

Usually, in recent times, my visits have been made in a professional capacity, researching



car-related books (the library facilities are first class), also writing reports for classic motoring magazines and websites etc. (notably covering the amazing and world-famous International Autojumbles). However, there is far more to see and do at Beaulieu than just covering the automotive aspects - captivating though these are.

As a family of four, we visited the Museum complex about 20 years ago, and ever since have been saying that we'd like to visit again (even though our children now seem to have 'grown up' and are in their twenties!).

In particular we were keen to explore the beautiful Palace House (home to the Montagu family since 1538), also the Abbey, established by Cistercian monks in 1204. Such is the frenetic pace of activity during Autojumble weekends, there never seems to be enough time left over to do justice to these more tranquil areas of the Beaulieu estate.

Therefore imagine my delight when, for a recent significant birthday of mine, I discovered that my wife, daughter and son had kindly arranged a 'grand day out' for me to Beaulieu. The idea was to take a day off and, at a meandering 'touristy' speed, for once simply enjoy all the wonders that the National Motor Museum and other associated attractions have to offer.



Palace House at Beaulieu. The entrance hall of this wonderful building used to house historic cars of the original Montagu Motor Museum. These days visitors to the National Motor Museum can tour Palace House as well (included within the ticket price). The surrounding gardens are beautiful too.



On a fine day there's a pleasant walk around the National Motor Museum's grounds, between the various attractions. Alternatively this replica London 'General' bus will transport you, or there's a scenic monorail which actually passes through the roof of the Motor Museum, as well as circumnavigating the grounds.



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A view across the Beaulieu River, from an upstairs window in Palace House.



On the approach to Palace House from the car museum, you will encounter this building, currently housing the 'Secret Army' exhibition. This tells the story of the brave men and women who were trained in the Beaulieu area for service in the 'Special Operations Executive' ('SOE'), causing havoc behind enemy lines in occupied Europe, during World War II. The exhibition has fascinating displays (plus audio visual presentations) and tells an amazing, yet sometimes chilling true story. Sadly, many of the personnel involved never made it back to their homeland...



Beaulieu Abbey was founded by Cistercian monks in 1204. It's worth spending some time exploring and learning about the Abbey (included within the National Motor Museum entrance ticket price), and the adjoining cloisters plus the monks' herb garden. Much of the Abbey disappeared in Henry VIII's Dissolution of the monasteries, but there's still plenty to see and the displays give an insight into what life was really like for the monks who lived here.

PLANNING OUR DAY

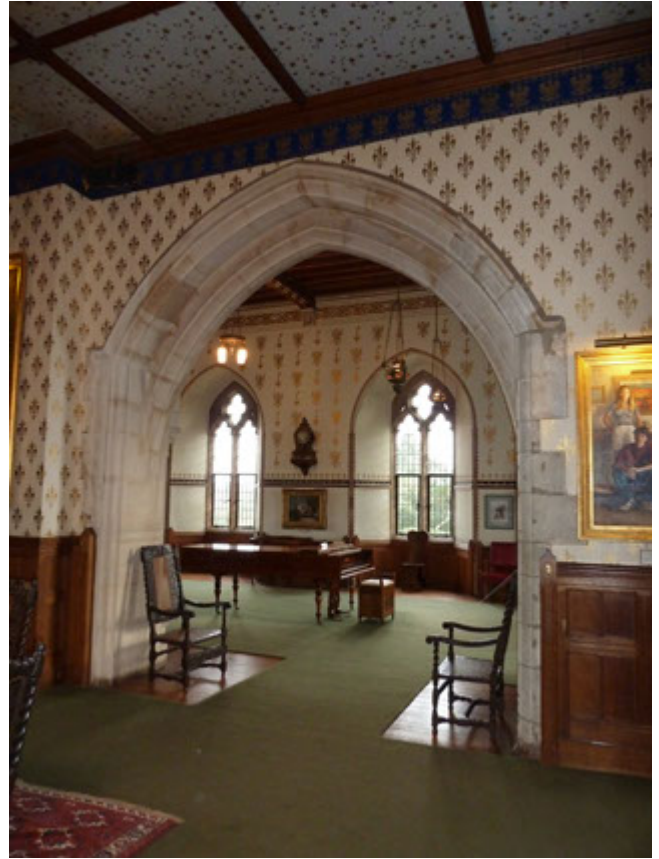
After our journey across the delightful New Forest to the Museum, all four of us were ready for a coffee, which we enjoyed in the Brabazon restaurant, while planning the rest of our day.



The day we visited proved to be chilly and overcast, but we chose to walk to Palace House, to take in from ground level the sights of the gardens. Later on we availed ourselves of the services of the elevated monorail, which is fun and gives a different perspective of the site. Although this time we didn't travel on the replica vintage 'London' bus, it runs frequent services around the grounds, taking the strain off tired feet, if required. We made a note to try this 'next time'!

On our way to Palace House we stopped for some time to take in the displays and audio-video presentations in 'The Secret Army' exhibition. This pays tribute to the hardy souls who underwent training locally in the Beaulieu area, for 'Special Operations Executive' (SOE) activities behind enemy lines in occupied Europe. The dedication, ingenuity and sheer bravery of these people was incredible. As we studied the exhibition, it was very sobering to appreciate that many of the agents who travelled abroad in those dark days never had the chance to return home.

We moved on to Palace House, where we were able to walk freely around the 'public' rooms within the building, enjoying the décor and the views from the upstairs windows. Even on a dull, cloudy day, the views across the Beaulieu River (in particular) were beautiful. Helpers in period attire were on hand to answer any questions visitors might have about the house. Here, as throughout the Museum and surrounding attractions, we found the staff friendly,



It's well worth taking time to explore the lovely rooms within Palace House, which has been home to generations of the Montagu family since 1538.



helpful and knowledgeable. It was so pleasant, and good to feel that they were enjoying their work.

Next we visited the nearby Abbey, learning much about the Cistercian monks of the 13th Century, and their austere lifestyle. After half an hour in this area we could imagine a little of what it must have been like 800 years or so ago.

THE CARS

After a re-invigorating lunch in the Brabazon, we walked the short distance to the main Museum complex.

However often you visit Beaulieu, there is always something new and different to see in terms of automotive exhibits. Currently (February 2013 as I write), in addition to the main vehicle displays in the Motor Museum, visitors can enjoy seeing 'On Screen Cars' (those made famous in films and on TV screens), 'The World of Top Gear' (including many of the vehicles 'modified' and filmed for the television series), and 'Bond in Motion'. Accommodated within the Museum building, this is a spectacular tribute to the James Bond films, and especially the vehicles used in daring exploits as part of the film plots. It's a terrific idea, and we spent a long time here. This is scheduled to continue on display at the National Motor Museum until 5th January 2014.

The cars in the main part of the museum tell



Yours truly in front of one of my favourite exhibits in the National Motor Museum, the 1903 shaft-driven 60HP 9.2 litre Mercedes.



the story of motoring in entertaining and graphic terms, from the very earliest 'horseless carriages', through the days of the 1920s and 30s when 'motoring for the masses' started to take off, then through the post-War austerity years, and up to date.

This was one of the fastest and most advanced motor cars of its era, and my grandfather used to drive one in Wiltshire in about 1910. The car was capable of a top speed of 75 mph. It is believed that there are only five surviving examples in the world.

All the vehicles on display contribute significantly to the history of motoring, and whether it's a humble Reliant Regal three wheeler or BMC Mini, or a mighty Mercedes from 1903, or one of the Land Speed Record cars, or the race cars mounted on the elevated 'trackway' sections, there is much to take in and enjoy.

While we were there, it was clear that some of the 'family' cars on show were of special interest to visitors, no doubt because of fond memories of trips to the seaside, holidays or whatever, in days gone by.

As time was running out we took a short but highly enjoyable trip in the pods of the 'Wheels' ride, which, through a series of beautifully detailed three dimensional scenes, takes visitors on a trip through time, showing how vehicles and motoring have developed so far, and also looking ahead to the future.

We managed to see most of the Museum's attractions before closing time dictated our exit. I even managed to sneak five minutes in the shop to have a quick look at the vast array of interesting motoring books (etc.) on offer.



The 'On Screen Cars' exhibition comprises a variety of vehicles made famous in movies, from the Ford Anglia used in Harry Potter movies, to Mr. Bean's Mini, to Del Boy's Reliant Regal Supervan (of 'Only Fools and Horses' fame), to a faithful recreation of the DeLorean DMC-12 (shown here), as portrayed in the 'Back to the Future' blockbusters.



Even if you are not a regular viewer of the BBC's 'Top Gear' programme, it's fascinating to look around the exhibition at Beaulieu devoted to the variety of 'special' vehicles that have been filmed for the programme, over the years. This shot shows two of the



famous 'Cross Channel' vehicles.



The Motor Museum is a magnet for car enthusiasts, of course, but the more than 250 vehicles within its walls, and the displays relating to them, tell the history of motoring for anyone to enjoy. On the day we visited, these iconic cars from the 1950s were on display in the entrance hall.



Whenever I visit the National Motor Museum, I enjoy returning to look closely around the recreated garage workshop set up within the museum. Incorporating vehicles, tools and artefacts of all descriptions depicting how garages looked back in the 1930s, it is a



wonderful place to spend some time!



Another beautiful car from the early days of the last century is this 1903 24HP De Dietrich. Looking closely at vehicles like this, which represented state of the art motor transport in their day, helps to put in perspective how we've come in just over 100 years, in terms of car development.



The 'Wheels' ride through automotive history (located within the Museum building) is a must for all the family to enjoy. Visitors are transported in open 'cars' through a series of beautifully detailed three dimensional scenes, depicting how motor cars have progressed through the ages. This shot



highlights a scene giving an insight into how the new-fangled motor cars were originally treated with suspicion, and how, in their earliest forms, they were often seen to cause mayhem.



I always love seeing this recreation of an 'art deco' Shell garage frontage, complete with period advertising and the Lambretta motor scooter, finished in 'Shell' colours.



Yours truly in front of one of my favourite exhibits in the National Motor Museum, the 1903 shaft-driven 60HP 9.2 litre Mercedes.

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VERDICT

A truly superb day out. If you have never visited Beaulieu before, or haven't been for some time, I highly recommend it. Even if you are not a person who is hugely interested in cars, you will find much to enjoy. My wife, daughter and car-mad son all said how much they had appreciated our visit – as I too did, of course.

WHAT GOES ON

The National Motor Museum is open every day except Christmas Day. For further information, and for updates on the various exhibitions, telephone (01590) 612345 or visit



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In addition to the exhibits mentioned, there are many special events happening throughout the year, including those specifically arranged with young people in mind (including school holiday activities).

The entry ticket entitles visitors to visit Palace House, the Abbey and other attractions, in addition to the Museum, plus free rides on the monorail and the replica vintage 'London' bus.

The huge International Autojumble for 2013 is being held over the weekend of 7th and 8th September. This year the event is being sponsored by 'Practical Classics' magazine.



The spacious fields close to the National Motor Museum host the world-famous International Autojumbles, where components for vehicles across the ages can be found by those who search! This stall, photographed at



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the September 2012 event, was crammed with original unused body panels for a variety of classic cars.