Guild of Motoring Writers' 'Bring Your Own Vehicle Day' – Cardiff to Pendine Sands (via Welsh hills and valleys)

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The Maestro pausing amidst the hills near near Treorchy.

Kim Henson was keen to join in with this ‘adventure’ to south Wales in October…

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I have always enjoyed driving events organised by The Guild of Motoring Writers, but sadly have been obliged to miss a few such excursions in the last few years. However, when the Guild announced their ‘Bring Your Own Vehicle Day’ for members, held early in October, and taking place in south Wales, my wife Elaine and I booked straight away.

In order to take part, participants are required to bring their own vehicles, rather than (especially) cars on loan for road tests etc.

The chosen day for the event was Saturday 5th, and we set off in sunshine in Cardiff, following a long drive from our home on the previous day. For this trip we chose to take our trusty 1990 Maestro 1.3 LX (family owned from new), in which we had driven to Pembrokeshire in 2018. Once again the Rover carried us safely, economically and comfortably to Cardiff. On this occasion we could spend just one night there, but plan to return as we love the city and want to explore further.



The Maestro ready to set off from Cardiff.

Our first stop, early on the Saturday, was a breakfast and coffee break at ‘P1NK’ (photograph below), a fascinating supercar community/coffee shop (p1nk.co.uk).



In company with around a dozen other vehicles of all sorts (from a Marcos to a Mercedes) we then headed approximately north-west from Cardiff, along the M4 motorway and into the hills and valleys of south Wales.



Mercedes, Maestro, Marcos!

Along the way we stopped at Church Village to ‘salute’ the Blue Plaque acknowledging the site where Gilbern Cars was founded in 1959 by Giles Montague-Smith and Bernard Friese. I have always thought that these were elegant sporty motor cars (including the BMC or Coventry Climax powered GT and the V6 Ford engined Genie, from 1968, and the further developed Invader, from 1969), and there is still a strong following for them today. The company was one of very few car building firms to hail from Wales.



At length, we reached the historical mining town of Treorchy and climbed the spectacular Bwlch (‘a pass’ in Welsh), with sun-bathed views in all directions (please see my heading shot). The Maestro romped up the long gradients and was fun to conduct around the hairpins.

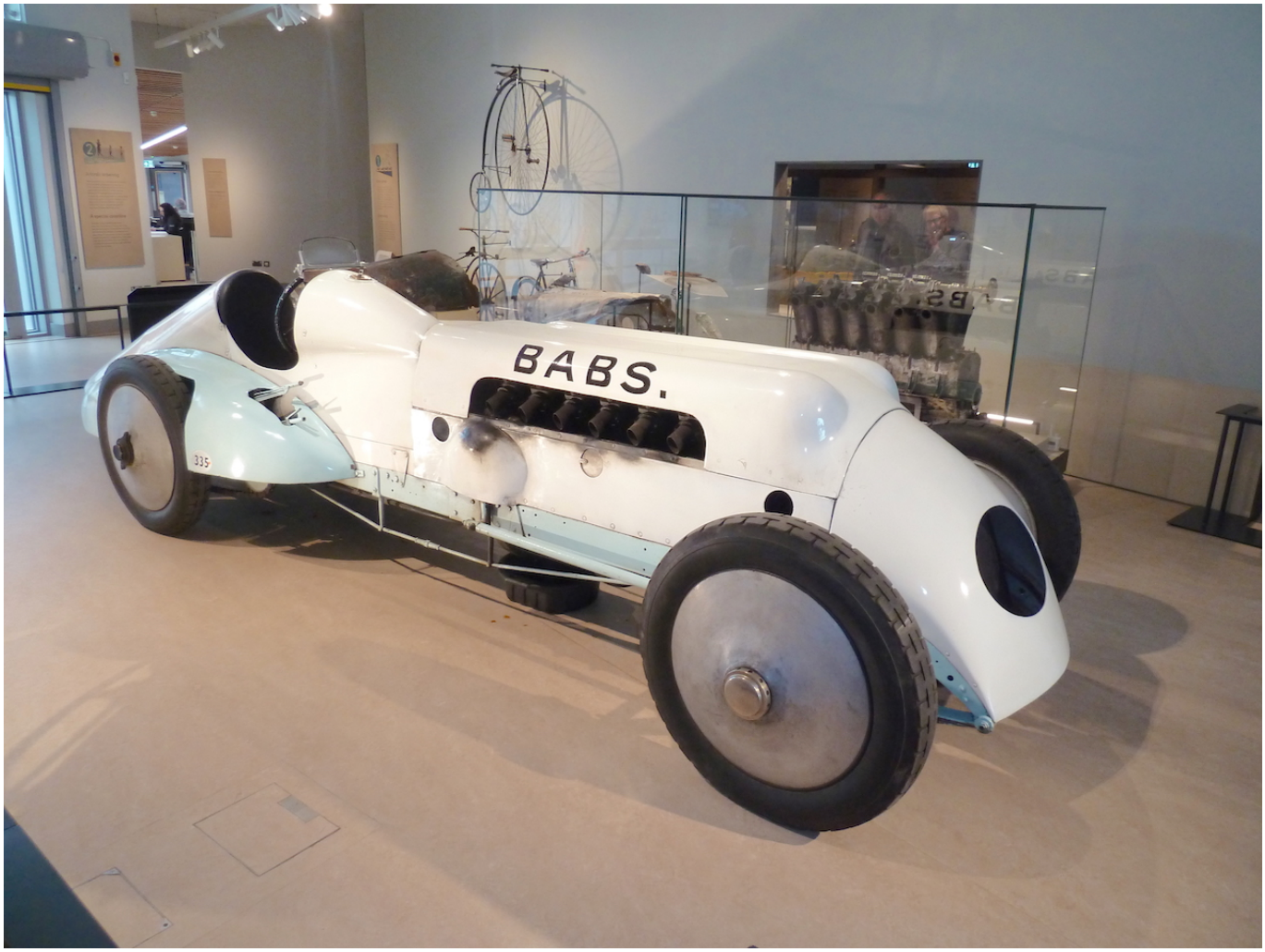
After some miles ‘on top of the world’. We descended towards Port Talbot, where lunch was taken in a fish and chip restaurant on the sea front.

Our final drive of the day took the form of a westwards motorway dash, then eventually meandering through twisting lanes to Pendine Sands, made famous by many beach drives

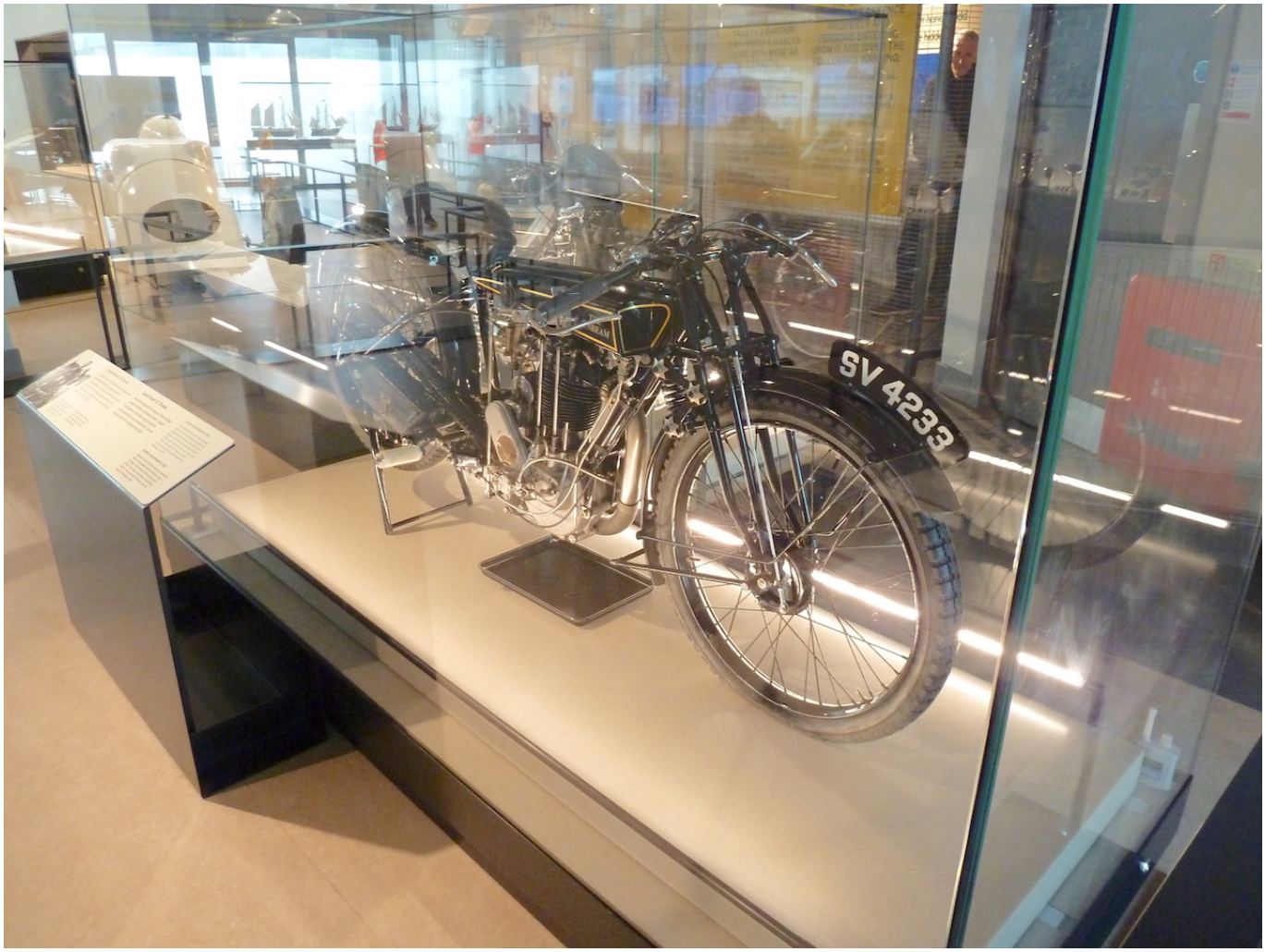
and speed record attempts. Notably this included John Godfrey Parry Thomas, who, sadly, was killed in his world speed record attempt in ‘Babs’ (when the car overturned) in March 1927. The car was buried in the sand, later to be exhumed (42 years later) and, amazingly, rebuilt to running condition for display.

There is a superb new museum on the Pendine waterfront… The ‘Museum of Speed’ is dedicated to Babs and the memory of Parry Thomas, plus the wide variety of other two and four wheeled vehicles (plus their brave drivers) that have performed on the sea-washed sands: https://www.pendinesands.org › history › museum-of-speed

Babs was built as a record-breaker and was powered by a 27 litre aero engine. In this car Parry Thomas had already pushed the world record to almost 175 mph in January 1927.



Above: ‘Babs’ on display today.



Above: Historic motorcycles form an important part of the Museum displays.



Above: Evocative film footage of vehicles (including motorbikes) being bravely driven/ridden in their heyday on Pendine Sands is shown on wall-mounted screens in the Museum.



Above: Sunset over the beach at Pendine Sands, this shot taken from The Museum. What history is held within this amazing place.

At the end of the day...



Marcos, Maestro and TR7 await their owners at Pendine, at the end of the 'Bring Your Own Vehicle Day'.

Elaine and I thoroughly enjoyed our day. Our grateful thanks to the Guild of Motoring Writers for arranging it, and to our fellow participants who helped make it such an enjoyable day. We rounded it off with a cuppa with many of them, in the café next to the museum.

I am pleased to report that our faithful Maestro ran faultlessly and averaged almost exactly 41 miles per gallon, including queues.

(Further exploration… That evening we moved on to our base for the next four nights, an inn near St. Clears, where on the Saturday evening we enjoyed a great pub meal with local

friends. From there, over the next few days, we explored Pembrokeshire and south-west Wales).