



## Motoring For Fun – A dawdle in south Devon in an Austin A35

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*'Lazing on a Sunny Afternoon (in Summertime)'*

Kim Henson describes a relaxing meander on a hot day through a west country landscape where time has (almost) stood still.

*(Kim adds: Of course I realise that as I write this (April 2020), sadly for the time being 'motoring for fun' in the real world is not possible. **INDEED THE ADVICE TO "STAY AT HOME AND SAVE LIVES AND HELP THE N.H.S." IS VITAL.** However, I feel that our readers might enjoy some light-hearted accounts of motoring excursions from a little while back, and included on Wheels-Alive in the spirit of optimism as we look towards being able to undertake such trips again in due course. With that in mind here's a true tale about an*



*excursion to south Devon in a much-loved Austin. I hope that you find it cheering, and of interest...).*

It was nearing the end of July 2018, and late one beautiful morning, when my wife and I aimed our faithful Austin A35 westwards from Bere Regis in Dorset, towards Honiton. Appropriately, we were travelling in the A35 on the A35 (road), and, having been obliged to undertake a work mission first thing that morning, we had just half a day or so plus the evening to enjoy this outing.

In fact our journey on this particular day had started a little further east, from near Wimborne in east Dorset, but by just after noon, with the sun high in the sky we had passed Dorchester en route for east Devon. This would make a total round trip distance of about 120 miles by main road, so easily achievable, there and back, in an afternoon, and with plenty of time to tour and enjoy the area while there.

The A35 passes through some lovely rolling countryside as it traverses the county of Dorset, with green fields and verdant woods a-plenty on either side of the carriageway, where, on this fantastic day, we could see sleepy villages in the distance, nestling in the valleys and shimmering in the hot sunshine.

One of our favourite sections of the road is on the high ground around Askerswell, from where on a clear day you can see for miles across the gently sloping countryside to and along the Dorset and Devon coastlines, with blue sea and sky galore too on the day that we had luckily chosen for this outing.

## Our Austin



**'Snowflake', a faithful friend to our family for 40+ years.**

We have owned the A35 since December 1979, a two door saloon example dating from 1958. It has always been known as 'Snowflake' as the car was first used by us in the winter of 1979/80 and when it snowed hard it was difficult to distinguish where the snow on the ground stopped, and the car's paintwork above it, started.

My wife used the Austin daily for 11 years in her job as a nurse, including several years as a district nurse in country areas, where the hard-worked A35 had to cope with rough tracks, mud, snow and many miles each day. It passed that test with flying colours, but in 1990 I completely stripped down the car, and with help from friends it was fully overhauled and



resprayed. Since then it has covered fewer miles each year than hitherto, but is still driven all year round and has been much enjoyed by the family. Long trips have included many holidays and breaks in France, plus 'adventure' outings to Devon, Cornwall, London and the Midlands, etc, etc. In fact it has been a very good friend to all our family for the last four decades.

## The Devon Dawdle



[Arriving at Ottery St. Mary...](#)

On this sunny day the Austin seemed as happy as we were to be out on the road and driving westwards. Cruising at a steady 60 to 65 mph where legal and the road allowed, the car was



purring along and before long we reached Honiton. Diverting from the main road we headed through the lanes southwards towards Ottery St. Mary, stopping on the way at about 1 o' clock at a favourite garden centre café. In fact, if I didn't know better I would say that this little car knows its way there (as do many of our family's vehicles), for always as we approach the turn-off from the main A35 I seem to feel a leftwards tugging at the steering wheel (towards the south)...



These cheerful planters were on sale at the garden centre where we lunched...

Duly fortified at the café we resumed our route, driving slowly through the picturesque centre of Ottery St Mary and continuing southward on narrow but beautiful lanes, with cottages, bright flowers and pretty woodland backdrops everywhere we looked. This sort of



motoring is not about speed, but enjoying the experience, and we have found that the diminutive A35 is perfect for such exploration. It's short, narrow and nippy uphill and downdale, and in this Austin these narrow roads present no fears. It also corners very well for a saloon of its time and takes the sometimes rough surfaces in its stride. Its suspension has always been supple and accommodating, transferring few of the ups and downs to its occupants...

We soon arrived at the village of Sidford, on the twisting A3052 which can present an enjoyable alternative for those motorists not in a hurry, and who are driving between Lyme Regis (and what an attractive town that is, perched on the coast) and the busy city of Exeter.

Arriving at the junction between our road and the A3052, we had to decide whether to head south-west, towards Sidmouth, Budleigh Salterton and Exmouth, or to turn to our left, initially towards Lyme Regis, and driving along said A3052. We chose this option, deciding to leave those other worthy destinations just mentioned, for another day.

From Sidford it is not very far to Seaton, but on the way, albeit a few miles off the main road but worth the diversion if you have time, are the Devon village gems of Branscombe (only reachable through very narrow, high-banked lanes) and Beer. A unique fishing village with a picturesque main street, Beer is a wonderful place to visit, which is why it becomes busy in the summer months, especially during the school holidays.



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The A35 pauses on the approach to Beer, before descending to the village.



We were lucky to find a parking place in the main street, close to St. Michael's church.

From the seaward end of the main street, there's a steep descent to the shingle beach, from where boat trips around the bay can be taken, or you can sit on the beach and enjoy a cuppa, a sandwich or an ice cream from the brightly-coloured kiosks nestling beneath the steep cliffs at the back of the beach.

If you do go to this beach, you need to take care if venturing into the water; the shingle bank slopes steeply and you can soon be out of your depth, with strong undercurrents just offshore too.



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Beer beach, looking eastwards and surprisingly quiet given the beautiful day.



Beer beach looking towards the west, with boats a-plenty in evidence.

Fresh fish can be purchased from sellers just at the end of the main street, adjacent to the beach. There are many small fishing boats that still work from the beach here.



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Flowers everywhere brighten up the village...



Flower displays brighten Beer's main street.

There's much more to the village itself, with pubs, gift shops, a fish and chip shop that's been family-owned for generations, and so on.

If you have time it's worth driving up the lane that starts just to the west of the main street, by the beach, and climbs steeply to a clifftop car park providing amazing views over the bay towards Seaton and all points east.



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The lane (Common Lane) to the west of Beer village, that climbs to the clifftop car park.



Late afternoon sunshine illuminates the Austin, in the clifftop car park, also Seaton and Lyme Bay in the background.

I should also mention that a trip here late in a sunlit day in summertime is unforgettable, as the evening sun illuminates the sea and the sky with a palette full of shimmering iridescent colours.

From this grass-covered car park, on a day like the one we were so lucky to be experiencing, there are some superb coastal walks to the west, with sea breezes, sunshine and attractive views galore to savour. I should also mention that there are similarly invigorating walks eastwards from Beer too.



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On this particular day it was still late afternoon when we picnicked here in the open air, and with few people about, while taking in the beautiful vista across the bay towards Seaton, reflecting again on the natural beauty of the area. In fact my family has been visiting and enjoying Beer and district for about 120 years (maybe more), and we hope to return often.

Eventually we pointed the Austin eastwards and drove back towards east Dorset via Lyme Regis, the spectacular B3157 with its amazing coastal views from on high, and Abbotsbury, en route towards Weymouth. The view from the top of Abbotsbury hill looking eastwards towards Portland has to be experienced to be believed, for its breathtaking beauty. Another of our favourite places in Dorset for sure.





Homeward bound, our A35 takes a break while we enjoyed a cuppa and the amazing view.



Sunlit rolling Dorset countryside, Chesil beach and The Isle of Portland beyond add up to one of the best views in the county.

Often there is an ice cream van parked here, although on this day we arrived a little too late. No matter, we stopped and enjoyed the view all the same, while partaking of a last cuppa of the outing, from our flask.

It was then an easy drive back for the remaining 40 miles or so.



## CONCLUSIONS

At the end of the day we had enjoyed every minute; a real tonic. In our diminutive Austin, which ran beautifully, we covered around 160 relaxing miles, using about 3.5 gallons of petrol (so approximately 45 mpg average) and came home with happy memories of our 'Lazing on a Sunny Afternoon (in Summertime) in south Devon'.

Music link: [Sunny Afternoon, by The Kinks \(No. 1 in the UK charts in June 1966\):](#)

Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Our Austin, 'Snowflake':

1958 A35 two door, four seater saloon

Engine: 1098cc overhead valve in-line four cylinder (originally 948cc but early in life fitted with a 1964 low compression A35 van engine), 45 bhp @ 5,100 rpm; 57 lb.ft. (77Nm) torque @ 3,000 rpm.

Transmission: Four speed manual gearbox (baulk ring synchromesh type from 1964 A35 van), driving through rear wheels via an open propeller shaft.

Performance:

Top speed: 80+ mph

'Happy' cruising speed: 55 to 65 mph

0 - 60 mph: 20+ seconds

Fuel consumption: 35 to 48 mpg