Motoring For Fun – ‘On Top of the World’ in a Maestro

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A HAPPY TOUR OF NORTHERN ENGLAND IN A ROVER MAESTRO…

Kim Henson was in the driving seat…

As with previous articles in this series (so far, covering separate trips to south Devon,

north/mid Wales, and the Isle of Wight), this one (Number 4) is all about having fun on a motor tour in a fascinating part of the world.

What inspired me to start and build this series were the similarly-themed articles that appeared in car magazines in days gone by, especially those published in titles such as the well-respected ‘Practical Motorist’ (and others) in the 1930s and again in the 1950s.

If you like this article, please have a look too at earlier examples in this series, and watch this space for more. The series deliberately includes both classic and new vehicles, plus some in-between, hopefully adding spice to the mix…

THE TOUR



In fact this nine day holiday trip, undertaken by my wife and I, took place in September/October 2014, and we decided to explore the north of England.

In the past we had often visited Yorkshire, which we love, and some other northern areas, but in addition to revisiting Yorkshire we wanted to spend some time in such places as the Peak District, the area around Chester, the Wirral peninsula and also Liverpool – which neither of us had ever been to.

For our journey it was a toss-up between taking my faithful 1955 Austin A30 (no stranger to the northern counties), and my 1990 Rover Maestro 1.3 LX, bought new by my late mother and always enjoyed; indeed it was her automotive pride and joy. So before making the decision I checked and prepared each of the vehicles; both are 'family favourites' which I enjoy driving.

However, the day before our departure I opted, for this 'adventure', to give the Maestro another long run 'up north' (as we live in the south of England). In any case the A30 had another northern trip planned, for May 2015.

Mum had often driven the Maestro to Yorkshire for holidays, but it had been 20 years since the car had last been there.

FIRST, A LONG WEEKEND…

By coincidence, a few months earlier, in May, 2014, my wife and I had driven the Maestro to Cheshire for a long weekend, covering just over 600 miles in total. That trip had been made to attend the excellent International Rally of the Standard Motor Club, but due to an electrical problem that, because of work commitments, I couldn't solve in time for the rally, my pre-War Standard was temporarily off the road, so instead I drove the Maestro.

On the main day of the Standard rally, other classic clubs joined the SMC and together provided a wonderful display of older vehicles at the Foxes Riding School at Ledsham, in the Wirral, and the Maestro/Montego Owners' Club was participating. They kindly invited us to

add our 1.3 LX to their magnificent line-up of shining Maestros and Montegos (thanks chaps), and it was great to be there – it was also the first time that our Maestro (second from left in the photo below) had ever been on show at a classic rally.



In fact it was this all too brief visit to the Wirral that started us thinking about a longer holiday in the north…

THE ROUTE

On paper, our planned holiday itinerary seemed a little illogical, as we travelled from the

west side of England north-eastwards to the east (North Sea) coast and then all the way back again (albeit via a different route), and indeed further west. However, this was dictated entirely by accommodation availability (as, due to work commitments, the bookings could be made only just before our departure). In addition, as intended, it took us through a wide range of different types of beautiful scenery, with many amazing 'cross-country' roads involved.

Our nine day long route was therefore to take us first from the south of England to Derbyshire and the Peak District, then north-eastwards through Yorkshire and across to the east (North Sea) coast, before returning westwards via the North Yorkshire Moors and the Yorkshire Dales, to the Wirral peninsula.

DERBYSHIRE

Our first day saw us covering many motorway miles northwards, before branching off through Lichfield, Ashbourne and Buxton, then across country to Hayfield near Stockport, where we were to stay for two nights. The Maestro purred along, easily despatching the 250 miles, and we particularly enjoyed the moorland scenery in the evening light as we approached Hayfield.

The next day we meandered through Buxton and Bakewell (well worth exploring but we didn't stop on this occasion as it was not long since we had driven our Austin A60 Cambridge here) to Matlock, an interesting town which we did stop to walk around.



A Maestro on tour and a Jaguar XJ-S meet up in Matlock…

Next stop was Matlock Bath, a spa town which was very popular in Victorian times because of the healing properties of its thermal springs. The town nestles at the base of the River Derwent valley.

From there we took a spectacular cable car ride, on the first ‘Alpine’ cable car system in Britain; this opened in 1984. We were blessed with a sunny day and enjoyed lovely views as our cable car rose up from the foot of the river valley to the hilltop park called ‘The Heights of Abraham’. This fascinating place was a ‘playground’ for the Victorians (access to the area in those days was helped by the new-fangled steam railway).

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Today it features woodland walks with far-reaching views, and visitors are able to explore the Rutland Cavern and Great Masson Cavern, where old lead mine workings still contain the graffiti carved into the glistening rock walls three centuries ago by miners.

In addition, we climbed the 54 steps to the top of the 40 feet high Victoria Prospect Tower, the building of which, completed in 1844, provided work for unemployed people. Panoramic views are available from the external gallery at its top; the tower itself stands on a hilltop some 800 feet (244 metres) above sea level.

Incidentally, for the young at heart, it's worth noting that the Gulliver's Kingdom theme park is based at Matlock Bath, where illuminations and fireworks displays also feature in the summer.

After a relaxing day in the sunshine we pointed the Maestro back towards Hayfield, deliberately driving across the sunlit hill roads via Castleton and the Blue John Cavern area (please see heading photograph), where the famous mineral mine is located.

YORKSHIRE BECKONS

Our third day saw us heading north-eastwards via Glossop and over the winding, picturesque and steep hill roads (via Holme Moss Summit, 1,719 ft. or 524 metres above sea level) to Holmfirth, through 'Last of the Summer Wine' country. As it always has done, the Maestro rode comfortably and coped well with the steep gradients and sweeping bends along our chosen cross-country route.



"On Top of The World?" on Holme Moss summit.

On arrival in Holmfirth we had a pleasant time exploring this interesting town on foot, but on returning to the Rover (in a council-operated car park), frankly I was disappointed to find that an over-efficious traffic warden had planted a ticket on our windscreen. Fair enough if we had over-run our time by a wide margin, but we had a hefty fine to pay, for over-running our paid-for parking time by a very few minutes. This spoilt our visit, and our day.

Heading eastwards, we skirted Leeds and Bradford, then drove into the attractive town of Otley (just to the north), where I had enjoyed many happy holidays in my youth. Thankfully the character of the town seemed not to have changed for decades (and we didn't get a parking fine here…).

It was then a fairly short drive to the spa town of Harrogate in North Yorkshire, where we stayed for the next two nights.

We explored this Yorkshire gem on foot, particularly enjoying the 17 acres of the English Heritage Grade II listed Valley Gardens, which, apart from the beautifully-kept array of flowers, shrubs and other plants, incorporates attractive old buildings, including The Colonnades (with massive vines wrapped around the pillars) and the Sun Pavilion.

A very short walk from the Gardens is the Hales Bar, the gas-lit oldest pub in Harrogate, where we rested awhile and sampled a coffee. It was then on (still on foot) to the nearby 'Old Bell Tavern', renowned for its real Ales (and yes, I did try a flavoursome pint with a snack lunch; I wasn't driving!), then we visited the interesting Pump Room Museum; well worth a visit.

Later in the afternoon I was hungry again so we stopped off at the famous 'Bettys Café Tea Rooms', founded in 1919 by Frederick Belmont, and enjoyed a tasty afternoon snack.

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NORTH YORKSHIRE MOORS

One trouble with having just nine days in which to cover a great deal of ground is that it's necessary to move on quite quickly from any one stop, so the next morning we were off again on our travels. After its day of rest, our trusty Maestro seemed eager to take us onwards and upwards, as the fearsome gradients but beautiful vistas of the North Yorkshire Moors beckoned.

However, first, en route from Harrogate we travelled through lush green fields on our way to the market town of Thirsk, famous for its racecourse, its attractive cobbled market square and, of course, for the most well-known vet in the world. James Herriot (Alf Wight), a vet in real life, brought to life for others his experiences working in Yorkshire, through his wonderful 'All Creatures Great and Small' books (plus the film and television spin-offs).

There is a ‘James Herriot’ museum in the town…



We parked the Maestro in the market square and had a reviving coffee in ‘The Golden Fleece’ (a pub we had last visited in the summer of 1978 during a ‘Rotaract Club’ holiday… at that time travelling in an Austin A35).

Leaving Thirsk and driving directly eastwards along the A170, we soon came to the steep and challenging climb that is Sutton Bank, with its long 1 in 4 (25%) gradient (plus left-hander hairpin bend!) up which the Maestro romped with enthusiasm!

On reaching the summit (with lovely views westwards across Yorkshire) we continued in an

easterly direction, through miles of open countryside on the way to the intriguing Helmsley (worth walking around if you have time), next branching off the main road to reach Sutton-le-Hole, where we lunched in a roadside café.

On a beautiful afternoon, we drove across the North Yorkshire Moors, over the sun-dappled hills and eventually down the infamous 1 in 3 (33%) Rosedale Chimney Bank, then on to Goathland (famous for its association with the 'Heartbeat' TV programme).

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We continued across the hills to the east (North Sea) coast, through some beautiful, unspoilt countryside, to reach our overnight stop near Robin Hood's Bay.

The same evening, we drove into the fishing town and tourist destination of Whitby, after first visiting the evocative Benedictine Whitby Abbey, on its hilltop perch just to the south-east of the town.



The evocative Whitby Abbey as dusk approached.



The Maestro rests by the peaceful harbourside at Whitby, as night begins to fall.

In Whitby we sampled a mouth-watering fish and chip supper at the harbourside, then walked along the waterfront and onto the west pier. On the night we visited the sea state was peaceful and calm, but I have previously been there during a winter storm, when the North Sea waves were mercilessly pounding the structure and it was best to keep well clear, to admire nature's power from a respectful distance!

MORE MOORS

The next day the rain was pouring down and mist shrouded the hilltops, so we elected to visit the town of Pickering, where we walked to the station, where a steam-hauled train operating on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway was just arriving. It was great to see and hear the steam-powered beast haul its passenger train out of the station. We have pledged to return on another occasion and travel on this railway again (the last time we did so, we thoroughly enjoyed the ride through the lovely moorland scenery).



Heavy Freight locomotive 2807 arrives in the rain at Pickering station on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway. This ex Great Western loco dates from 1914 and is the oldest surviving standard class engine (the standard class steam locos were introduced by George Jackson Churchward, who was Chief Mechanical Engineer of the GWR from 1902 until 1922).

The skies cleared a little so we drove on to Quainton, then had a picnic lunch at a quiet car park called Cockmoor Hall (operated by the North York Moors National Park Authority).

Following moorland roads, we aimed for Scarborough, then took the coast road to Ravenscar before returning to our overnight base at Robin Hood's Bay.



The Maestro arrives at the North Sea coast…

ACROSS THE NORTH OF ENGLAND

The next day was a Sunday, which dawned bright and sunny, and we decided to walk down through the village of Robin Hood’s Bay to the beach, before driving approximately south-westwards on a circuitous journey towards our next overnight stop near Tarporley in Cheshire.

We knew that this would be a long day as we were deliberately taking winding minor roads where we could, to cover the 200 or so miles.

So we enjoyed our leisurely walk downwards through the narrow, winding main street of the village, which reminds us of Clovelly in north Devon. Admiring the calm sea, we climbed back up the steep hill via picturesque pedestrian alleyways. About halfway up, we found a delightful coffee shop, which provided views across the sunlit sea from its small verandah. We sat in the sunshine for a while, and were reluctant to leave, but had a long way to drive that day.

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The Maestro wafted us along on sun-bathed Yorkshire roads, through Pickering, Thirsk and Ripon, and on across the switchback route through Pateley Bridge. By this time (early afternoon) we were getting peckish and were looking for somewhere to stop and eat. We tried a roadside café, but found that it was fully booked for the afternoon. However, I soon noticed that the nearby Park View Stores had the words “Home Bakery’ emblazoned on its window awning. Better still, the door was open…



ROLLS EXTRAORDINAIRE?

Inside we went, enquiring, “Have you any sandwiches or rolls please”. The friendly reply came back from the two ladies looking after the shop that the stocks had all but sold-out, but that they would make specially for us some fresh rolls or sandwiches, and what fillings would we like?

Well, my wife and I ordered two rolls and two slices of delicious-looking cake. Until we unwrapped them, a little later in the afternoon, we had not fully appreciated the sheer size of the rolls that had been made for us, nor the generous quantity and amazing flavour of the

fillings (in my case, prawn salad). The cake was superb too. I mention all this because (home-made picnics excepted) these were, for sure, the most delicious rolls and cake I can ever remember eating.



The River Nidd, Pateley Bridge.



Signs on a wall in Pateley Bridge, on the undulating B6265.



A wonderful old garage sign on a wall in Pateley Bridge.

After further moorland driving westwards from Pateley Bridge, primarily along the switchback B6265, and with magnificent views in all directions, we turned south and meandered through a sunlit Wharfedale on this delightful Sunday afternoon. Quite simply, we were having a lovely day out, in the magnificent county of Yorkshire, in the warm sunshine, and were on a happy road trip in a much-loved car that was driving beautifully, AND with an exquisite picnic to stop and enjoy… Bliss! Thanks very much to the ladies of the Park View Stores Home Bakery; you made our day!



The view from our picnic halt amidst lovely scenery across Wharfedale.

After our delicious picnic, we drove south past Bolton Abbey, and then continued westwards on scenic hill roads. Eventually we descended into Skipton, then being obliged to undertake some main road and motorway driving to get us to our last base, for the next three nights, near Tarporley.

FERRY CROSS THE MERSEY

The next morning we drove northwards to Birkenhead and on to the Seacombe Ferry Terminal at Wallasey, where we parked the Maestro and from where we took the passengers-only Mersey Ferry (‘Royal Iris’, dating from 1959 – so a classic ferry) to

Liverpool, for our first experience of this great city. (Incidentally, we were advised that it was more cost-effective and easier to park at Wallasey than Birkenhead, for our ferry trip).

The weather improved as the morning progressed, and the sunlit waterfront was wonderful to behold, complete with the famous Royal Liver Building (topped by the Liver Birds) just a short walk from the pier head.

We had planned to see so many things in Liverpool, and indeed there are many attractions close to the waterfront, including the Martime Museum, the Museum of Liverpool Life, Tate Liverpool Gallery and the Albert Dock. So many places, so little time in just one day…

Having walked southwards along the waterfront and via the beautifully refurbished Albert Dock, we decided to visit 'The Beatles Story', which we thoroughly enjoyed (it even incorporates a replica of the Cavern Club), and which we took some time to study (we grew up in the Beatles era, and there was much we still had to learn!). To our amazement we didn't finish exploring until the museum was closing and it was time to re-cross the Mersey, collect the Maestro and drive back to Tarporley. For further information about the museum, there's more at: www.beatlesstory.com

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As we looked back across the River Mersey towards Liverpool, the sun was setting and a near-full moon was rising, and we reflected on another grand day out. As strangers to the city, and indeed to the Wirral, we were particularly grateful to the many helpful, friendly people we met who helped advise us re. car parking, ferry routes and timings, etc. Thanks very much; you helped us get the most out of our day.

It's a shame we didn't have time to see and do more in the city, but we would like to return soon.


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Dusk falls over the River Mersey and Liverpool.

ZOO TIME

Our final day was spent at Chester Zoo, started in 1931 by George Mottershead and his family. It is operated as a charity, with no government funding, and undertakes important conservation work. There's much information at www.chesterzoo.org

We toured the animals and were aware that, sadly, many of the species accommodated and looked after here are under threat of extinction, not least the orangutans (with habitat loss occurring at a rapid rate in their home countries).

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We were impressed by the enthusiasm and evident dedication of all the animal keepers to whom we chatted.

HOMEWARD BOUND

An uneventful but rain-soaked journey home took us through Whitchurch, Ironbridge (where the world's first iron bridge was built, and the area has a fascinating history; well worth a visit), Kidderminster and southbound motorways.



Ironbridge in Shropshire deserves time spent to explore.

IMPECCABLE MOTORING

It’s no secret that a 1275cc Maestro is not a road burner, nor a sports car – it was never intended to be, and this version was always – deliberately – more about economical performance than outright speed (larger-engined Rover and MG versions were available for those in pursuit of more power).

Yet on this trip, as always from new, our example had been comfortable and relaxing to drive throughout, performed eagerly, cruised effortlessly at 70 mph on the motorways when required, and was an ideal companion for our journey; on arrival home it had clocked up a

total of 1,138 miles.

The car had required no attention, and needed no top-ups of coolant or engine oil, en route or when we got home. The overall fuel consumption was almost exactly 41 mpg, which included our twisting hill routes and hold-ups in traffic, etc.

I was delighted that it had run impeccably throughout the trip – which was as I expected and hoped (as it always has done).

My late mum always had fun using her cars on motoring jaunts such as this one, and doubtless would have been proud of the way her beloved Maestro had performed, some 24 years after she bought it.

All in all this was a terrific, highly enjoyable trip for my wife and I (plus our faithful Maestro) and we look forward to undertaking another holiday ‘up north’ as soon as we can get there.

In conclusion, I will just say that a holiday trip to any of the areas we visited is highly recommended; there is so much to see and enjoy in the north of England.

OUR CAR FOR THIS JOURNEY:



Our Maestro, seen here near Robin’s Hood Bay on the North Sea coast.

1990 Rover Maestro 1.3 LX

History: Family owned since new, in December 1990.

Engine: 1275cc overhead valve pushrod (‘A Plus’), four cylinder

Transmission: Five speed manual, front wheel drive.

Power: 69 bhp @ 5,600 rpm.

Torque: 102 lb.ft. @ 3,500 rpm.

0-60 mph: 12.5 sec.

Max speed: 95+ mph.

Fuel consumption: 35-48 mpg (actual figure achieved on this trip, over 1,138 miles, 41 mpg).