

# Switzerland and the Klausenrennen by 3 Litre Bentley

## Prologue

This is the second part of a two-part tour of Europe in 1926 3 litre Bentley YR2876. The first leg took us to the South of France in July. From there, we flew home, then returned in September for the second part. This included the main purpose of the trip - to visit the Klausenrennen hill climb in Switzerland with friends from the Bentley Drivers Club 2006 New Zealand tour.

## Before the Start

Starting Mileage: 4573

One thing we clearly had to do in our four days on the Côte d'Azur with the Bentley was to show off. Unfortunately, we arrived in a thunderstorm, but it stopped raining while we were waiting for our bus from Nice airport, so we stuck to plan 'A', which was to get the bus to a mile from our apartment, then I would walk up the hill while Liz sat on the beach with our luggage and bring the car down to collect her. Of course, we should have just got a taxi ...

The rain started again just as got to Villeneuve-Loubet, but we made it OK with a lift from one of the staff at a café where we had lunch.

The next day, Saturday September 16<sup>th</sup>, we had booked dinner in one of our favourite restaurants, Les Vieux Murs on the ramparts in Antibes. I had mentioned that I would be in the Bentley, and they had parked their own van right in front of the entrance to reserve us a parking space. A lovely meal and a great atmosphere.



On Sunday, our friends Doug and Lydia came to visit, and we took them for a short drive along the coast before having dinner in a local beach restaurant.

Monday was our day to visit the yacht show in Cannes. Unfortunately, the town was absolutely packed, so we had no chance to park anywhere except a car park (even during the film festival, we have parked in the street before), and no chance to stop for photos. At least I learnt something about myself - that I am getting old. Liz commented that to be showing people round the boats if you were female, you had to be under 25 and surgically enhanced. I had been looking at the boats ...

Tuesday was our final sightseeing day on the Riviera, and we went to Monaco, collecting Doug from Nice and Lydia from her work in Monaco itself. Doug had said that Casino Square had a "door policy", but we would be OK. And so it turned out. We drove straight in, up to the Casino and asked the doorman if we could park there. This was no problem, and a tip probably helped.



A light lunch in the Café de Paris, then a drive back along the Grande Corniche.



Of course, there are occasionally other interesting cars taking advantage of this wonderful and under-used road.



It is a Pagani Zonda, for those who do not recognise it.

This was the end of a great four days on the Riviera. The next stage would be the drive to Switzerland, for which we had allowed two days.

Fuel: 46.90 after 197

## Day 1 Villeneuve-Loubet to Aosta

Starting Mileage: 4746

Distance: 231 miles

We made an early start, leaving at 7:30. We decided to start on the A8 autoroute, as the coast road gets very crowded and slow, and we would be in rush hour. So we took this to Ventimiglia in Italy, then the N204 north through the tunnel at Tende and on to Turin. We decided to go through the centre of the city, which, if you have seen *The Italian Job*, is not necessarily a good idea. Especially as we left the directions to Nancy, the GPS, and she took us over the river four times.

The Italians, of course, are car mad, and we had to spend some time talking to an elderly (Liz says "batty" is a better word) lady at a petrol station about the car before we could move on. We speak no Italian beyond "due capuccini per favore", but we seemed to communicate quite well.

From Turin, we continued north, having a picnic lunch by a lake before finishing at our destination, Aosta. There we had a bit of difficulty finding a hotel with its own parking, but eventually found somewhere with an underground car park a little way out of the town. Supper was a "dégustation de pâtes" in a small village a short walk from the hotel, followed by a digestif with the owner.

Fuel: 29.11 after 105

16.30 after 95

## Day 2 Aosta to Grindelwald

Starting Mileage: 4977

Distance: approx 148 miles

John Grant, one of the participants in the New Zealand tour and someone we would be meeting in Switzerland had suggested that we should go over the Grand St Bernard Pass if the weather was good, and through the tunnel if it was raining. Since the weather was good, we decided that today was the day to "get your skates on mate" and go over the top. And what a good decision it was.

From Aosta, we took the road to the top of the pass, getting up with no problems at all. At the top, we realised we should have got our passports out to cross into Switzerland, so we reversed back and parked. We had thought that the top of the pass was pretty empty when we arrived, but we were suddenly surrounded by people. Even the border guard came across to take photos on this phone, waving through anyone who stopped at the border. The weather was rather better than it looks in the photo. Yes, it was quite cold at nearly 2500m, but otherwise fine.



Once we had allowed several people to sit in the car to have their picture taken, we were off into Switzerland and down the other side of the pass.



As the morning wore on, the temperature rose appreciably, until it was quite hot at lunchtime, when we stopped in Sion, which is in a valley on the Swiss side of the pass. Whilst there, we had a chat with the owner of a 1923 Citroen and an Austin 7, who was interested in the Bentley. In fact, if we thought the Italians were enthusiastic about cars, that is nothing to the Swiss. Everywhere we drove, we were flashed, hooted at and waved at. Always in a friendly way.

After lunch, we had to cross the Berner Alpen, which we did the easy way, putting the car on the train through the Lötschberg Tunnel, then driving on the Grindelwald, where we were to meet up with the others. On arrival, we found that John Grant had had a terminal clutch problem as he was arriving in Grindelwald, and had left his Derby in a garage, flown home and was driving back down in a Range Rover. Meanwhile, we met the rest of the group, and had a very nice dinner courtesy of John and Ishbel Grant, the only downside being that John was not there himself. Still, we had several toasts to "absent friends".

Fuel: 18.63 after 51  
24.58 after 89

### Day 3 Grindelwald

The group by now consisted of Kurt Fürger and his wife Heather, with the 6.5 litre that they bought after they decided a 3 litre a bit slow in New Zealand, Kurt's friend Hans and his wife Margrit, Roger Jaques from Switzerland (who was in New Zealand as Kurt's passenger and owns an XK140, which was unfortunately off the road) with his wife, another Margrit, Ishbel Grant and Liz and me.

Today was a non-driving day. Instead, the group (minus Hans) took a cable car up the mountain and went for a walk, having lunch at a mountain restaurant before getting the bus back down and meeting John, who was waiting at a café.

Since I had noticed a little oil under the diff when I had parked, but had not brought the tool to see the oil level, Kurt and I went to a local garage, which had a spanner that nearly fitted, and checked it. It was fine. After a walk around Grindelwald, we had dinner in the hotel restaurant with John and Ishbel.



## Day 4 The Klausenrennen

Starting Mileage: 5125

Distance: 110 miles



We had heard various different opinions about driving to the Klausenrennen. Kurt had been told that the pass that we needed to take to Linth would be closed from 10:30. I had contacted Chris Godwin (4.5 litre) who I knew was also going there, and he had said that we were staying the wrong side of the pass and that we would have to leave Grindelwald at about 05:00 to get over. So Kurt phoned the police in Altdorf at the foot of the pass, and they said we were OK until 11:30.

So we arranged to leave at 07:00 and meet some others from the New Zealand Tour at Altdorf. These were James Berggren and his wife Laurie. Roger and Margrit had gone home by this time, and Heather had stayed in Grindelwald with the other Margrit, so the party was now James and

Laurie in their very short and light 3/4.5, Kurt and Hans in the 6.5, and we took John and Ishbel in our 3 litre.

The climb up the Klausen Pass was quite a challenge, with a stop needed to let Kurt's engine cool. Kurt was also suffering from occasional clutch slip.



We seemed to get through several police check points OK, and at the top of the pass we were told that we could continue down to Linthal if we wanted, but we would have to decide quickly. In the event, we decided to stay at the top, which was the finish line. By that stage, we were past all the official parking places, so, while others were being told to turn round and go back down, an official removed a cone and let us go up a steep gravel path towards a farm and park there. This was a bit of a challenge - too fast and the wheels span, too slow and the car was likely not to make it. But we all made it, and, as usual, attracted plenty of attention.



And what a great place this was! We were parked right by the finish line and several cafés, and it was easy to walk down to see more of the hill. So, after a coffee and buying a Klausenrennen T-shirt for Kurt (it was his birthday), Liz and I wandered off down the hill to watch the racing in perfect weather.



The Klausenrennen is entirely for pre-war cars, and there were several hundred taking part in various categories, as well as display runs by more modern machines such as a Ford GT40. Most were doing the regularity trial, which meant driving the 21 km in as close as possible to 25 minutes (with one intermediate checkpoint). These were good to watch from down the hill, as the time was quite a challenge for the older cars, but not so interesting to watch at the finish as many were going slowly to finish at the right time. More interesting were those going for speed, and there were plenty of these in all classes.

After we came down the hill, it was our turn to have clutch problems, with the clutch "dragging" sometimes, making it hard to get into gear from stationary. Dinner that evening was at a lakeside restaurant, with some friends of Kurt's joining us.

Fuel: 46.35 after 159

## **Day 5 The Klausenrennen**

Starting Mileage: 5235

Distance: approx 110 miles

Today we decided to go to Linthal to be on the start line. I tried tightening my clutch stop to see if that would stop the dragging, but it didn't. We then started the day with some discussion on the route to take. With Kurt's slipping clutch and overheating, and my clutch problem, there seemed to be some benefit in going the long way round the mountain instead of over the pass. In the end, we decided that this was too boring, so we went back over the pass and down the other side to Linthal. This meant driving the race course downhill, so we could get a feel for the speed necessary for those racing. We had to go slowly past the many pedestrians, and were stopped several times by police and officials, as a result of which we took 33 minutes to get down.





We had a bit of difficulty getting to the "oldtimer" car park, but eventually found it, and even John blagged his way in in his Range Rover as our "support car".

We were really glad we did a day at each end of the course as the experience was very different. Here, there were far more people, with grandstands, a pipe band and trade stands. Altogether more atmosphere, but the view of the racing had been better further up the hill.

We left Linthal before the end of the racing as we wanted to get some miles towards home, and left Kurt and Hans, who were heading back to Grindelwald. Meanwhile, we were accompanied by John and Ishbel as we headed north past Zürich to find a guest house, which we did near the Rhine Falls at Schaffhausen.

One thing that became clear was that tightening the clutch stop had not only not helped, but probably made things worse.

### **Day 6 Schaffhausen to Mondorf-les-Bains**

Starting Mileage: 5345

Distance: approx 287 miles

By now, we were regarding the holiday as over, and our main job was to drive about 650 miles home in two days. For that reason, we decided to take the autoroutes.

We started the day by slackening off the clutch stop again, then left, rather later than we intended, for the journey on northwards. After a short time the rain started, and we found we were having electrical problems. We could drive on sidelights, but if we turned on the headlights, everything electrical, including the overdrive, failed. When we stopped once, John told us that we had also lost

a brake light. Later, when we stopped for petrol, he said that we had lost the other one as well. At that point we decided to change both bulbs (in the rain). We carried on for a late lunch of cold (but not intentionally!) soup, then John and Ishbel left us to head to Épernay, and we carried on to Luxembourg. After some trouble finding somewhere to stay, we found a really good hotel on the spa complex at Mondorf-les-Bains and went for a relaxing swim in the thermal pool before dinner and bed.

Fuel: 24.4 after 134  
36.39 after 101

## **Day 6 Mondorf-les-Bains to Home**

Starting Mileage: 5632  
Distance: 368 miles

This was to be the long slog home, and so it proved. I had a look at the electrics in the morning, but could not find the problem, then it was back on the autoroute to get our 8pm ferry at Dunkerque. Given our problems, we decided to get there as early as possible, but it proved impossible to catch the 4pm ferry, which might have got us home in daylight, and we settled for 6pm. At least we found we could use the headlights, and it wasn't raining.

It was getting dark as we arrived back in England, so we decided to stay with the slower traffic in the inside lane of the motorway and hope someone would flash us if we had a problem with our rear lights. And that is exactly what happened. Both rear lights failed, and someone flashed us, then escorted us off at the next motorway exit. There we could pull off the road easily, and change the bulbs again (luckily I had plenty of spares!). Back onto the motorway, and after a short time a police car cruised past, having a good look at our lights, both front and back. I suspect that whilst we had had a good Samaritan who had helped us (and even offered to escort us much of the way back), someone else had just called the police.

At least we made it back safely after the furthest we have driven the Bentley in a day.

Fuel: 40.60 after 147  
31.50 after 141  
15.41 after 85

Final mileage: 6000  
Total distance: 1427 miles  
Trip home: 1254 miles  
Overall mpg: 17.6

## **Epilogue**

It is a shame that this diary ends on a bit of a low note with poor weather and electrical problems. But we knew that this was just a way of getting back after the holiday itself finished in Linthal. Kurt had decided to have his car shipped back to England rather than drive for exactly that reason. Well, that and the 8-9mpg of his 6.5. Overall, we had a fantastic time - being seen in all the right places on the Côte d'Azur, a great drive through Italy and over the Grand St Bernard Pass to Switzerland, the enthusiasm for the car of the people we met, seeing friends old and new in Grindelwald and Altdorf and two days at a hillclimb for pre-war cars in fantastic weather. In fact, the weather was perfect for all the important parts of the tour.