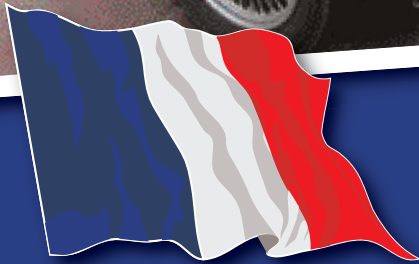


SEEING RED! Reg Plunkett's TC,
Pat O'Brien's MGA and Des Cole's TD.



Travel Journal 2010



**LOIRE
VALLEY**



SAUMUR



VANNES



FRANCE

5-17th

September

By JIM O'SULLIVAN

A travel visit to Dublin Airport and all it entails is enough to send me to the ferry terminal for a leisurely journey by boat, to France and often beyond. We first visited France on a motoring holiday in 1967. Then it was camping all the way and we went as far as Perpignan in the southeast corner of France. We have been to that country many times since and we have developed a great liking for the place. We were there in 1995 with the IVCC on the holiday visit to Quimperie. We did not make the trip two years ago as we had already been there earlier. So this year Bernie my wife and I with Cian our son decided to join the group and take part in its travels.

I was immediately impressed by the extraordinary work of Bernadette Wyer and any misgivings I might have had were quickly expelled. Ray Cowan struck me as a quiet and efficient

chairman who always wanted things done properly. At that early stage I had not been acquainted with the work of the other members of the committee, Fred Lewis and Pat Meehan even though we have been on a number of foreign trips with Pat. In due course we learned that the committee acted together and they collectively organised an excellent holiday for all. A big 'thank you' to you all, it was a pleasure to wander the roads with you.

The following article is the story of our experience on the trip and therefore it may not coincide with the views of others. Everyone had plenty of freedom to follow the route schedule or to follow their own route. Twenty-seven cars took part on the trip and that included the breakdown wagon kindly supplied by Michael Tynan and driven by our Club Chairman Peadar Ward and Bernadette Wyer, Club Secretary.

Trish Farrell, Eddie Keegan and
Riaan Els with Eddie's 1972
Rolls Royce Silver Shadow



Ray Cowan presenting Jacques Demion and
Pierrick Rebeyrat of Le Rétrovisseur Saumurois
with the IVCC AXA-sponsored Rally Plate.



And we have not left the Port yet...



Waiting for the off...



Lunch stop...first day



Local scenery



Sunday 5th

So! On Sunday 5th September at 7.15am, Bernie, Cian and I left our house in Sutton and headed for the ferry at Rosslare. We were travelling in our trusty K70, a vehicle we have used for the past sixteen years. Our road book required that we meet in the Whitford House Hotel between 10 and 11am for registration before boarding the ferry for France at 14.10 for France. All our cars were parked together on the ground deck of the boat, that is all except Richard Seaver and Mike Dennehy whose car was sent up the ramp to another deck. The sailing to France was very pleasant and after a good nights sleep we docked the following morning at 11.00am. On disembarking we waited for everyone to arrive and the cars lined both sides of the road. But Richard was missing, still trying to get off the ship.

We moved off together and now we were on French roads but on the other side. Some were using sat navs, others maps, while others were following the car in front and nobody was going to be left behind. So the speed went up and Henry Noonan

went by in the outside lane and there was smoke coming from his DKW 2-stroke. He was soon followed by Des Cullen in his Midget proving that he could go just as fast. Next came Tom Farrell in his Ferrari. I think he had decided to show those tourists a thing or two. We were close to the back at this time and I could see William Feeney behind. Our route required that we turn right at Valognes and Bernie who was navigating said our turn was coming up shortly. The turn arrived and to a man (or woman) all the cars in front flew past the turn at high speed. Regretfully and much to the annoyance of my navigator I did likewise.

We were now heading away from our planned destination at Fougeres and so we decided to take a right turn at Carentan and get back on course. Our scheduled lunch stop was at Villedieu-les-Poeles and we arrived there accompanied by the Feeney's and the Meehan's. During our lunch stop we learned that Denis and Gertie Dowdall had to return to Cherbourg and Dublin as his brother had passed away. May he rest in peace. After lunch we headed off for our overnight stop at

Fougeres. Our lodgings for the night were at the Hotel Campanile.



Tuesday 7th

Today our journey was from Fougeres to Saumur. The morning was dull and wet after some overnight rain. There was great activity in the car park and there was a great sense of anticipation and everyone was in high spirits as the cars were examined and prepared for the journey. There was a great buzz about the place. We were sharing the car park with a professional cycling team who were preparing for a race in Fougeres that day. It was a large team with many cars and motorcycles and a large van. Racing bikes and wheels were everywhere. The scene was of great interest to me.

As we moved out the sun began to shine and with great eagerness we headed out onto French roads. Our first stop was scheduled for Vitre but we decided to omit this and carried on to Chateau Gontier for lunch. During our walk about we saw some very old houses with timber frames. It was not long before other members of our party began to show up. After a nice



The Deputy Mayor of Saumur Madame Marlen Volland (in brown jacket) with her assistant (second from left) pictured with IVVCC members Ray Cowan, Peadar Ward (President) and Bernadette Wyer (Secretary)



Gerard and his canine friend at the vineyard...

lunch we were ready to leave for Saumur. We travelled on small roads and reached our next hotel, the Hotel Mercure in Saumur without incident.

Our hotel was excellent. We, being a party of three, had a very nice room with all required facilities and we were looking forward to our stay.

That evening a reception was planned where we were welcomed to Saumur by the Deputy Mayor. There followed a dinner for our entire group before retiring for the night after a very full and enjoyable day.

The river splits in two as it passes through Saumur and so an island is formed in the centre. Our hotel was located on this island and very near to the centre of the town. We are now to stay at this hotel for the next four days and we don't leave Saumur until next Sunday. So we have time to explore the local area and sample the restaurants. Some drives are also planned for us by our hard-working committee and we should have a great few days.

Our first function to day was a walking tour of the old parts of Saumur. As we were all eager to get really involved in our holiday everyone wanted to take part in this tour. The group was divided in two. Our guide was a woman, a little older than 21 and with a good sense of humour and very good English. When she came to the town square, a place we were to spend much time in during the next few days, mainly eating with drinking for some. Our guide had a number of interesting things to draw our attention to. The old houses that were wider at the top than the bottom because tax at the time was based on

ground floor area. Also the two timber figurines on one old timber house who were, quote 'pissing' unquote down on onlookers like us.

Our tour brought us up to the magnificent Castle-de-Loire, unfortunately not open to the public due to restoration work. Our walking tour finished back in the Square where we had lunch and later, evening dinner. So started the eating pattern that continued most days when we stayed locally. The square was a small lovely place with many restaurants and great atmosphere. After dark the place was alight and friendly, with music and no through traffic.



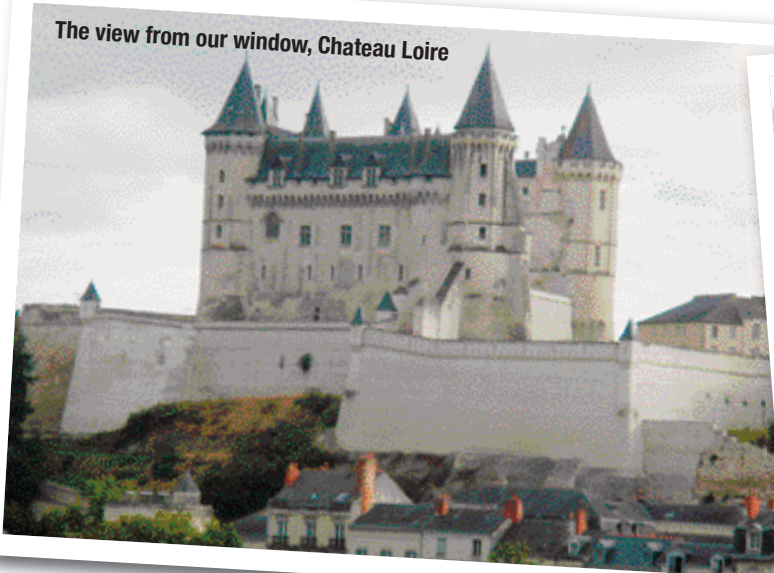
Wednesday 8th

The morning was bright and sunny and as I approached the window the view was breathtaking. Directly below was the wide expanse of the River Loire flowing along peacefully in its summer livery. On the other side of the river stood the Chateau. The magnificent Chateau-de-Loire as it reached to the sky in its dominant position overlooking the whole area. I stood for a while and watched and absorbed the scenery.



Thursday 9th

This was planned as a busy day and we were back in our cars. Our first port of call was to be a vineyard and it should not be surprising that there was great interest in this. After breakfast we were met at the hotel by a Gerard Beaumont who was supposed to lead us to his vineyard at Le Puy Notre Dame. I say supposed because after leaving the hotel it seemed like maybe Gerard got



The view from our window, Chateau Loire



Wine tasting...



Pet Meehan, Aidan Geraghty and Tom Farrell



Dick Smyth, John Lawlor, Kitty Smyth and Rose Lawlor enjoy a picnic!



Bernie, Jim and Cian O'Sullivan



The Square in Richelieu

buildings are very interesting and well preserved. It is at this abbey that the remains of the English King Henry II of Plantagenet, his son Richard Lionheart, his daughter Joan of England and his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine are buried. In 1804 the abbey was used by Napoleon to hold 1750 prisoners. It is now used as a Cultural Centre.

down. Our planned picnic required shelter and we found that in the corner of a local car park. There were very few people about but we did see several of our group cars as they criss-crossed the many road junctions in the immediate area. No! I don't think they were lost but visiting in their way what was a lovely corner of France.

a message that the vineyard was on fire or something. Many of our party got lost or could not keep up because of older cars but eventually all got there safely. Thank God for sat navs!

This was a very busy day, enjoyed in very nice weather. Our plan for the night was a walk followed by a light snack.

Our picnic complete we walked down the street and onto a beautiful square, quiet, colourful and bathed in sunshine, no clutter from parked cars or rubbish. On the right of the square as we entered there was a church and we went in for a few moments. It was in this church that Saint Vincent de Paul spent some years of his ministry We continued on to Place Du Cardinal, into the park and along a tree-lined walk. A class of school children, boys and girls, enjoyed a day out with their teacher in the sunshine. There were colourful flower beds and the ripple of water. Why do we have to leave this place of contentment, but we do and we have to be back at Saumur for 5pm.

Gerard explained and showed us how wine was produced and why his wine was better than any other wine in the area. Who would I be to disagree with him? I was surprised to be told that there was about 1.5km of passages and caves under the vineyard, now used for storing and maturing wine. Everyone enjoyed the wine tasting session and some bought cartons of wine for later use as it was very nice.

Friday 10th
 This morning the view from the window was not good. There was plenty of mist and we could not see the chateau across the river. During the morning the weather did improve and we later had plenty of sunshine. Yesterday Reg Plunkett told us he visited a lovely town called Richelieu so after breakfast we decided to go there. We were accompanied by Pat and Sheila Meehan and William Feeney and Margaret Nardone. We enjoyed a leisurely drive and when we reached Richelieu the sun was beating

It's now 5.30pm as we gather at the car park above the Chateau at Saumur. There are many old cars there for we

We were told by Gerard that lunch was to follow in a restaurant about 7km away. The location was known only to Gerard and it was down a narrow road with several junctions. Our host departed like he was trying to break the sound barrier and only those ready and prepared for this, managed to keep him in sight. The remainder of the party was lost and we thought we would not see them for the remainder of the day. However, hard work by Pat Meehan, on the mobile phone retrieved the situation and eventually everyone arrived at the lunch stop.

In the afternoon we visited the Kontevraud Abbey located south/east of Saumur. This complex is very large and once housed close on 800 people including monks and nuns. The



Our cars at the Chateau



Hotskiss - French Club car



Art Deco Peugeot - French Club car



have a meeting and reception with the local old car club. We had a good meeting and even though we had a language problem we were made very welcome. The local club members had many lovely cars.

Our evening finished with an organised dinner for our group at a restaurant in the square. When we were fed and watered (wined) we returned to our hotel at the end of another busy but enjoyable day.

At this stage of the holiday everyone has become friendlier and we are starting to remember the names of people we had not known before our journey started. The hotel car park has turned into a sort of paddock where discussion and running adjustments take place and there is always a friendly face and a willing hand to help if required.



Saturday 11th

First up today is a visit to a local engine museum and everyone except the women wanted to see that. The location is not far from the hotel and we set off in lovely sunshine, not sure what to expect. We were not disappointed as there were engines there from everything from pedal cycles to big earth moving machines. I was particularly interested in some NSU rotary engine main components. I was also interested in a

very rare Citroen Rotary Engine from the Citroen Bi-Rotor car. That was Citroen's part in the development of the rotary engine.

There were many apprentices associated with this museum and they had great interest in the Ferrari of Dick Smith. They all took turns sitting in it with the engine running and showed no interest in any other car. Well I suppose that's youth.

When in Ireland I spend considerable time cycling around the back roads of north county Dublin. The area has its own beauty, the gentle rolling green fields and hills and away from noisy motorways. Then to get such an opportunity to experience the same conditions in France was unexpected. So it was when our group was given an invitation to visit the French home of fellow ARM members Derek and Ann O'Brien. True the road surfaces were much better than what I know in Fingal and the sun was shining.

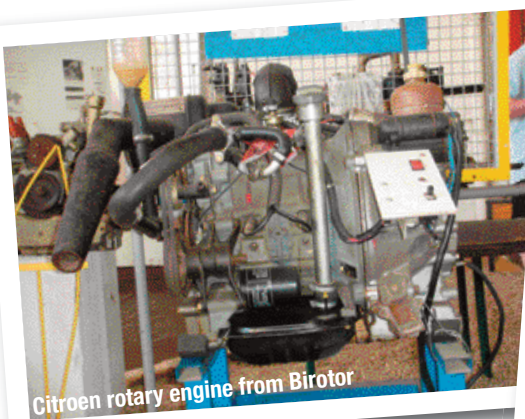
What a lovely country house the O'Briens have and they made us very welcome. They had a lovely buffet meal prepared for us and we spent a very enjoyable afternoon at the house. Many thanks Derek and Ann and we wish you lots of good luck with your new country home. There was an abundance of old cars about the house that day. I wonder what the neighbours thought?



Sunday 12th

Finally it was time to leave Saumur and sadly we loaded the cars and looked forward to the long drive to Vannes. It is not feasible for such a large group as ours to travel in convoy as generally traffic conditions break up a large group. It was now Sunday and not much traffic about. There are several routes to Vannes from Saumur and it was noticeable as we departed that our cars were taking different roads. The sat navs were in use again and maybe we were all improving our competence with them. As we travelled our chosen way along the side of the River Loire in company with the Feeney MGB we frequently encountered other members of our party. So it was for the remainder of the day.

The weather was dry with some sunshine so a picnic lunch was called for. As we drove along very near Chateau-Briant my wife Bernie spotted a nice picnic site along the roadside. This had trees, grass, and tables and they always have rubbish containers. Some even have toilets. Irish Authorities please take note. While having our food Reg Plunkett and Peter McIlwain in their MGTC and two other cars went by without seeing us. After our lunch we continued on to our hotel in Vannes which we reached at about 4pm. Pat had arranged for another Hotel Mercure with a



Citroen rotary engine from Birotor



Cian showing how it's done



The apprentices



Aidan Geraghty and Barbara Cooper



At the beach!



On the Oscar Wilde, Cian at the Helm watched by the Captain Michael McKenna

reception shortly after arrival and a group dinner that night in the hotel.



Monday 13th

As we are now at a new destination we have new places to explore. On a bright sunny morning we decided to walk to the old town of Vannes. The walk took about 25mins and was welcome after the long drive yesterday. The old town was very beautiful and has a lovely cathedral. Many of the old houses have a timber mainframe construction and some appear to be leaning. Many of our party could be seen drinking coffee and wandering about the town. The walk along the waterside, back to the hotel was also enjoyable.

In the afternoon most of us went for a boat trip in the bay. This took three hours and some thought the trip was long as they felt cold.



Tuesday 14th

The weather was holding good and an easy day was the choice. We spent the time with Aidan and Maeve Geraghty and Fred and Chris Lewis. We went to Port Navalo on the southern side of the Gulf of Morbihan where we sat in the sun. We also spent some time with Ray and Helen Cowan.



Wednesday 15th

The morning was wet and we were nearing the end of our holiday. Tomorrow we must leave and so it was time to do some shopping. We went to a local shopping centre. When we returned the weather had improved so the evening was spent on a walking tour of the local area adjacent to the hotel. Another easy day.

Thursday 16th



This is our last day in France as we have to be in Roscoff this evening for



Jacques Delegay's 1964 BMW 700S

departure to Rosslare. After breakfast we prepared to leave our hotel in Vannes and head north for Roscoff. The weather was warm and dry and good for travelling. We travelled with William Feeney and Margaret Nardone and stopped for our usual picnic before reaching Roscoff. Our ferry sailed for Rosslare at 6.30pm. Gerry Bradley was trying to get permission for Cian to meet the Captain on the Bridge. Gerry came back and said that we were to be at reception at 9.10am tomorrow morning. We kept this as a surprise for Cian.



Friday 17th

We were up early this morning and at 9.00am Cian and I were sitting opposite reception. It was then that I told Cian where we were going. He was very surprised. A young man from the crew collected us and brought us along some corridors and up a stairway to the Bridge. The Captain, a young friendly man put Cian seated at the Helm, gave him his own cap to wear and Cian was like the cat that got the milk. Of course he wanted to keep the cap. He then asked the Captain when does Reg be on the Bridge. The Captain looked at me with a puzzled expression and I had to do a bit of quick thinking. Apparently Reg and Cian are good pals and Reg had told Cian he is often Captain of this ship. A quick word that Reg was not on duty today, saved the situation and the Captain understood. So Reg you are still employed on the Oscar Wilde.

I got good information about

stabilisers and ships engines but I won't bore you with the details.

The ship docked at Rosslare on schedule at 11.15am and after disembarking we all headed up to the Whitford House Hotel for tea-and-scones and debriefing. It was lovely to see Denis and Gertie Dowdall arrive to meet the group after their sad bereavement. Soon it was time to say our goodbyes and head off in our different directions.

We headed north on our way to Dublin. We travelled many kms through France without incident and made many new friends and met some old ones. The first large town we encountered was Enniscorthy and on the road was painted "Welcome to Enniscorthy" while just beside this was another standing sign that read "Pay Parking Operates Here". Yes we are back in Ireland, the land of the rip-off. Will we ever learn?

Our hard-working committee did a very good job in organising this holiday and deserve our sincere thanks. Such an event does not just happen and many months of work must go into the preparation. The route was very good for such a large party. The two main centres, Saumur and Vannes were ideal. We even had a Broom Wagen for anyone in trouble.

Now if a large group of old cars are sent driving around France some problems might occur and they did. But they did not dampen the enthusiasm. I think it brought the group closer and everyone was willing to lend a hand. Poor Dick Smyth got a puncture and the next day a piece of metal came up from the road and punctured his fuel tank. What rotten bad luck and those problems could have happened to any of us. We had many a laugh and a joke and the company was always good and yes it was worth the effort. Thanks to everyone for making this holiday so enjoyable.