





Going Dutch

Mike and Clare Trippitt take George the campervan abroad for the first time and make their maiden visit to The Netherlands

  Mike Trippitt

I confess that I am a somewhat fickle armchair motor racing enthusiast. My interest in Formula One, for example, ebbs and flows with the fortunes of the British drivers. There's been nothing like a dominant Vettel or Schumacher over the years to have me turn off the TV and head outside on a Sunday. So, when our friends Mike and Jane invited us to go motor racing with them, the question was whether we had time to fit it into our summer schedule. That was until we realised, we had the chance to go abroad. We found time easily enough! Mike races a Lotus Cortina under the auspices of The Historic Sports Car Club, but for the first time had decided to enter the 'Masters Historic Grand Prix' at Zandvoort in Holland.

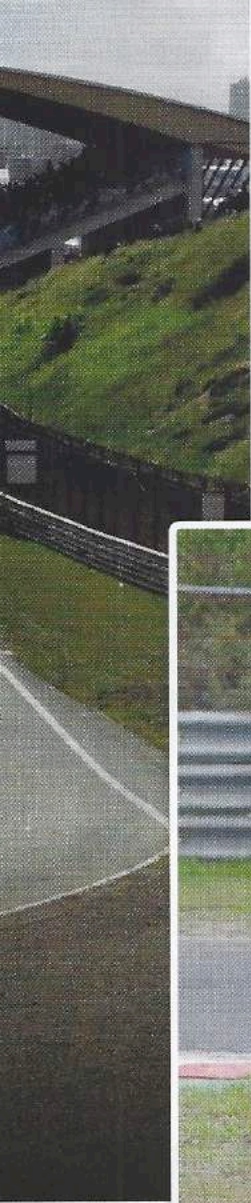
So, on a late afternoon in early September last year Clare and

I set off in George, our VW T6 campervan, to make the two-hour journey to Harwich.

Before that, we had had to prepare for George's first trip abroad, and our first time of taking a vehicle away from our shores. We've both driven in Europe before, so the thought of driving on the right did not faze us. But we wanted to make sure we remained within Dutch traffic laws. It was to the RAC that we turned. First their website had a handy downloadable checklist for driving in Europe. It identified the items we would need to buy to comply with the rules: a reflective jacket for all passengers, a warning triangle, headlamp deflectors (though we were not planning on driving in the dark) and a GB sticker. As our number plate was not a GB Euro one, we bought the RAC's own European Driving Kit that had everything we needed.



George waiting to board the ferry



Mike in the heat of battle



1965 Mini Cooper S



An early start



The sounds, the smells, the excitement and the atmosphere are all compelling

As well as recommending the equipment to take: spare light bulbs, fire extinguisher, spare oil for example, the RAC checklist reminded us of the documentation we must take. Therefore, when we arrived at Harwich International Ferry Port we had our driving licences, vehicle insurance, George's V5 and MOT, European breakdown cover and our travel insurance with us. We were fully prepared, and somewhat childishly excited.

"Are you aware that the ferry is running about an hour late?" asked the helpful Stena Line marshal when we pulled up in the port. Mike and Jane had already passed through passport control, so had rung us with the news. A late departure did not bother us (the ferry had been due to depart at 10.00pm), but the sea conditions and weather forecast did. "I don't

want to be seasick," I told Clare. "So, I'm not going to stay on deck to watch the lights of Harwich and Felixstowe when we sail. I'm going straight to the cabin and going to bed. No-one is ever seasick when they are asleep."

Clare was of a similar mind.

The overnight crossing was scheduled to last eight hours. It had made complete sense to do the outward journey at night. It had saved us taking time off work, and having a cabin was an added bonus.

We boarded much later than had been expected, and even after we'd had a drink in the lounge with Mike and Jane, the ferry had not set sail when we climbed into our bunks at 1.00am. I was sound asleep before Stena Britannica left her berth. We had arranged to meet our friends for breakfast at 7.00am, but when we awoke



Mike's 1965 Lotus Cortina

We are struck by Holland's wide vistas and elegant waterways

to our alarm at 6.00am the cabin was pitching and yawing. "I'm not getting out of my bed until five-to-seven," said Clare. We were once more in complete accord. Luckily by the time we did get up the sea had calmed, at least to an extent that the ship was now behaving in a more lady-like fashion. The risk of seasickness was gone.

After breakfast and a slow disembarkation, George ventured

out into The Hook of Holland for the hour-long journey north to Circuit Zandvoort. Holland was as we expected: clean, green and very, very flat. By avoiding Rotterdam, Delft and Haarlem we kept to roads through a countryside lined with greenhouses and nurseries, one intersected with dykes and canals. Cycling is part of the Dutch psyche, and it was apparent immediately that cyclists

are considered when roads are designed and built. Even on rural single carriageway roads, dedicated cycle paths are commonplace. So too are cycle crossings, although it is not immediately obvious when cyclists have priority. We learn quickly to give way to a cyclist if in doubt. Though the Dutch did not invent the bicycle, their 'Omafiet' (Grandma-bike) is ubiquitous, and has come to be known as a 'Dutch-

F1 cars lining up



1979 Ligier JS11/15 F1 car



A lonely Mike



Fabulous Split Screen transporter



The beach at Zandvoort



1983 Tyrrell 012 F1 car



A pair of Lotus Cortinas

There's even a revival of the 1952 Dutch Grand Prix, with the oldest car a 1937 Maserati

style' bicycle. It is upright, heavy, sturdy and traditional. Someone said to me a few days later: "There is no fashion in Dutch cycling."

For the duration of the weekend we are pitched up in the car park at Circuit Zandvoort along with race teams and marshals. Mike had obtained passes for us to camp on site and also to access the paddock. We had full use of temporary showers and toilets as well as breakfast and lunch in the hospitality marquees. Spectators have to camp on a nearby site.

There's been a racetrack at

Stena Line operates two ferries *Stena Britannica* and *Stena Hollandica* between Harwich and The Hook of Holland. There is a day-time crossing and a night-time crossing each way every day. Car and one passenger fares start at £59. Journey time varies between seven and eight hours.

Zandvoort since just after the Second World War. The circuit hosted the Dutch F1 Grand Prix from 1955 to 1985, and Formula One comes back in 2020. This meeting is the last before Zandvoort closes for necessary work ahead of its return to top-flight racing. Though the facilities are less impressive than we were expecting, the location is nothing like we imagined. The track is set in sand dunes north of the town, and just a short distance from the sea. It is an extraordinary venue. During the weekend we would walk and cycle the footpath through the dunes that goes all the way round the circuit, offering great vantage points along the way.

Once Free Practice begins at 8.05am on Friday morning Zandvoort is a cauldron of noise. Through until 6.00pm touring



1958 Talbot Lago GP car



George pitched up at the circuit



Minis on their transporter

The circuit hosted the Dutch F1 Grand Prix from 1955 to 1985

cars and single seaters from the forties through to the nineteen eighties scream around the 4.3km circuit, each driver seeking to post the quickest lap in qualifying.

There's even a revival of the 1952 Dutch Grand Prix, with the oldest car a 1937 Maserati. Mini Coopers, Ford Escorts, Porsche 911s, Lotus, Ferraris, E-types and Formula One cars race at breakneck speed, their engines revving almost to bursting point. The sounds, the smells, the excitement, and the atmosphere are all compelling.

And so it is all weekend. Our friend Mike and co-driver Callum post a very respectable qualifying time and start their Sunday race on P2. Though they lose places, they put in a respectable performance. Having someone to cheer on, and having access to the paddock to see all the cars being worked upon, both before and after races, adds an extra dimension to our weekend.

When racing is finished each day we make for the town. Zandvoort is among Holland's premiere resorts.

The Formula One Heineken Dutch Grand Prix takes place at Circuit Zandvoort 1st - 3rd May 2020. For tickets and more information see www.dutchgpp.com

It has plenty of restaurants and shops but is renowned for miles of golden beaches. Lowestoft, England's most easterly point, is just 116 miles away.

Once Mike's racing is over, we leave Zandvoort, and after an hour in the pleasant town of Delft, spent among its canals and boats, we finish our weekend at a rural campsite at Noordwijk, halfway back to the ferry. It's another coastal spot, where we can spend the afternoon in the pleasant late summer sunshine. Again, we are struck by Holland's wide vistas and elegant waterways.

When Stena Britannica leaves The Hook of Holland bound for Harwich early on Monday afternoon there is nothing about the weather that concerns us. Under benign cloud, the North Sea is all but a millpond. For the daytime crossing home, we do not have cabins, but the easy chairs of the passenger lounges are comfortable enough. We're back in Essex by 9.00pm, ready to be at work the next day.

George's first adventure abroad has been a huge success. The driving was easy enough and knowing that we had all the



Rainbow over Zandvoort

documents and equipment we needed should we have a problem, kept any worries away. Our ferry crossings were chosen wisely (by Mike, rather than us) and the little campsite at Noordwijk was a fine end to the weekend. Above all, we had enjoyed the time at the racetrack immensely, and our appetite to take George to a British, or even Dutch, Grand Prix in future has been well and truly whetted. ☺