

DRIVING A Y-TYPE AMSTERDAM → MOSCOW → AMSTERDAM

Chris Backlund

Left Guernsey on the 9th August for Poole to pick up spares for the trip. On Friday evening took the Harwick/Hook of Holland ferry, the "Koningin Beatrix" a - very luxurious ship.

Arrived in Holland and made for Haarlem Suid, my base while in Amsterdam. On Sunday drove into Amsterdam and we all parked together (100 cars all told) and spent the day exploring Amsterdam on the canal buses. In the evening had a buffet meal at the campsite with music from a barrel organ.

Monday saw us off on the rally proper, at 8a.m., in groups of four or five cars, heading for Bruchhausen-Vilsen, a village south of Bremen. We were here to help celebrate the 25th anniversary of the local Steam Railway. Next day we drove on the Phohen, south west of Berlin, where we stayed in lakeside bungalows which had been used by East German workers who had pleased their bosses. Cleaned car after (not before) breakfast. Left at mid-day for Berlin.

After getting lost eventually found Mark Engels Platz where the cars were parked. After a snack we walked down Unter den Linden to the Brandenburg Gate. This was one of the most beautiful streets that we saw on the rally. At an Intourist office on this street we had our first taste of Russia, with balalaika and matrioshka (Russian dolls) in the window. After taking a photo of the car in front of the Gate we had dinner at the Grand Hotel, starting with a Berliner Weisze (beer and champagne). We then drove to the west side of the city and had our dessert (or pudding) at a cafe on the Kurfursten dam. Afterwards we visited the Memorial Church. The atmosphere on the street at night, with both classical and folk musicians, was very good. The following morning we left for Szczecin in Poland. Then while repairing the Dutch M.G.A. which had a fuel problem, we met a Polish person who was restoring a Citroen Dyane and who invited us all for tea. At the campsite that evening we had a

meal for .60p., which was quite good.

The next day saw us heading for Gdansk. At lunchtime, in Koszalin, I changed £100 and got 1,600,000 zloty and became a millionaire overnight. On the way into Gdansk we got lost and ended up in the bus station. After a long conversation in German with a bus driver, we were told "follow my bus". So a bus and four M.G.'s stopped at every bus stop on the way to the Novatel. Saturday we left Gdansk for Warsaw, stopped at Torun a nice old town. After arriving at our hotel, got a taxi into the old city and after a walk, had a meal with wild boar pate as a starter, followed by veal liver in orange sauce.

Sunday, on the way to Victory Square, our convoy got lost and we hired a taxi to lead us. All the cars parked in the Square and we had a buffet reception given by one of the Sponsors. When we left Victory Square we were led out by a military band.

On the 100 miles to the Russian border crowds lined the road, waving and cheering. When we came to the border there were Russian and Polish people who had been waiting to cross for four days, but we were waved straight through.

Arrived in Brest and at the hotel Intourist had a two course "small helpings" dinner. The next day we drove to Minsk and when we got to the Motel/Garage complex, the South African M.G.A. had a problem with their drive shaft. This was sorted out, very efficiently, by the Russian

mechanic for five U.S. dollars.

Following morning drove to Smolensk. On the way at 2 p.m. we tried to find a little village for lunch, but at the first one there were no cafes or food shops. The second village had a restaurant which re-opened at 3 p.m., but while our backs were turned, a queue of about 80 people had formed so we pressed on. Arrived in Smolensk in torrential rain, led in by a local car. Left Wednesday morning on the last leg to Moscow. My car would not start and we found that the battery terminals had shaken loose with the state of the roads. I needed to fill up with petrol but the first two stations had none, the third one only let us have 10 litres but the next one let us fill up. At times on our journey we had to queue for two hours at petrol stations. The cost for 35 litres was 13 rubles (about .25p.)

My co-driver's husband had trained up from Paris and met us in Moscow. His train left Smolensk at 8.50 am. and we left at 9 a.m. and we arrived 30 minutes after the train which was the Paris - Moscow Express.

After a quick dinner I took two children in our team to the Moscow State Circus, which was unbelievable. They had elephants walking on balls, and doves flying in formation around the trapeze artists. This is certainly the greatest show on earth.

The next three days were spent in Moscow. Thursday all the cars drove to Gorky Park. We left the car in the park and the three of us took the Metro to meet Versa's pen friend Mike

who lives in Archangel. First place to visit was St. Basil's Cathedral, Red Square. After looking around the Cathedral we went for a walk past the British Embassy which is on the opposite side of the river to the Kremlin. That evening we went to the Moscow School of Music to see the girls' choir (Joy) singing national folk songs from different republics. Friday morning we had a three hours city tour by coach and in the afternoon we went shopping to Arbor (the local artists' Street). That evening back at the hotel we realised the rally had made the back page of Pravda. In the morning we had a tour of the Kremlin and saw the world's biggest cannon, which had never been fired. The Zsar bell - 200 tons - which would have been heard 100 kilometres away and the three cathedrals, one where the Zsars were crowned, one where they are buried and the Royal Chapel. Then we went to the Armoury (the museum of the Zsars) an absolutely fantastic collection of clothes, crowns, thrones and fifteenth century coaches. One of the gold bible covers had 800 diamonds on it. They also had twelve of known forty seven Faberge eggs, one of which contained a clockwork model of the Trans-Siberian Express in gold. We had a gala dinner that night in a cellar restaurant in the centre of the city.

Chris and Vera at St. Basils Cathedral



On Sunday we drove to Red Square for a photo session and then left for Orel. When we stopped for lunch we noticed the Dutch TC was leaking brake fluid, so we changed one of the rear brake pipes. Next day was the longest run of the trip (360 miles) so we left early. We were making good distance at 1.00 p.m. when we were passing a petrol station and were told that it was the last one before Kiev. So we filled up which took us till 3.00 p.m. Arrived at hotel 7.15 p.m. and had dinner accompanied by Russian champagne. On the way in Kiev looked a beautiful city so we decided to get up at 6 a.m. the following morning. We caught the bus and then the metro and first went to St. Sophia's Cathedral and then the Gold Gate – the original city gate. While Vera went to a Monastery I went shopping and bought five Russian dolls and two wooden eggs which cost 3,550 rubles and I paid in 25 ruble notes which covered the sales counter. Left at

11.30 a.m. and after uneventful journey arrived in Rouno. Following morning headed for Lvov, lunchtime stop was at a cattle farm. A lot of children arrived with a football, so we had a game, Holland v Ukraine. Arrived Lvov at 3.15 p.m. and the police escorted us to a stadium to park the cars. We were then bussed to the Hotel Sputnik where we stayed.

Thursday. Left for stadium at 10.30 a.m. for Uzhorod, called at petrol station waited for one hour and then was told he would only take coupons which we did not have. So an English speaking teacher sold us 20 gallons for 20 dollars. We headed through the Carpathian Mountains, which was the best Soviet scenery so far. Avoiding a large puddle I moved to the centre of the road and at that moment a passing lorry sent a wave of water through the open window onto my passenger's lap.

Our hotel in Debrecen was reputed to be the oldest in Hungary. Went for a walk round the town and in the evening went

to a folk evening and a meal of real goulash. Left Debrecen at Mid-day for Budapest and arrived at 7.00 p.m. following a journalist's car after getting lost again.

Sunday our group got two taxis into Pest. After a walk around the old town we crossed the Danube into Buda and went up to the Royal Palace. In the evening we had dinner in the Fisherman's bastion, a fairytale fortress overlooking the Danube. Left Monday morning for Gyor. On the way we stopped and all the cars were photographed by a church. At the campsite a Rumanian started to talk to me about by car and I thought he was wanting to buy one for restoration, but it turned out he wanted to sell a rare Rumanian car (that nobody had heard of) for 30,000 German marks.

Tuesday left Gyor for Vienna. When we arrived we parked in the centre and went for a horse carriage ride around the old city. We then drove to Tulln where we had a puncture as we arrived, only our second problem of the

trip. I met a person from the M.G. owners Club of Vienna who asked me back for a meeting that evening. Next morning after an oil change we left for Passau.

The valley from Linz to Passau was very attractive along the Danube. After a quick shower, had a champagne reception then an evening meal accompanied by a French rally participant playing the accordion.

On Wednesday headed for Nurnberg, stopping for lunch at a campsite by a lake. Next morning on the way to Mainz we stopped at Rothenburg, a beautiful mediaeval town, where we spent four hours before proceeding on our journey. After an early morning walk around Mainz we followed the Rhine to Koblenz. We then headed into the Eifel mountains where I spent the afternoon watching the Oldtimer Grand Prix at the Nurburgring. We spent the night at Maastricht.

The final day we drove the last leg to Amsterdam, a round trip of 4875 miles.



By the Brandenburg Gate



Moscow Security Police

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