

David Pelham recalls
the Y-type invasion
of Brittany

French Leave

CHRIS BACKLUND OFTEN CALLS ON Dennis Doubtfire when visiting from Guernsey. It was at one such meeting, almost one year ago, that the idea of a Y-type tour of Brittany was spawned. While this would be a small trip for Chris - of Amsterdam-Moscow fame, plus many others - for the rest of us Y-type owners it was a rather ambitious project.

The date set was the beginning of September. The school holidays would be over, the weather should be pleasant and the roads relatively free of holiday traffic. Dennis asked for interested parties to contact him, and I wrote to reserve my place. It was only later that I considered the potential problems of taking a 41-year-old car to Brittany.

The trip was meticulously planned by Dennis and Cohn Rea. The base camp was set in Guilliers, a small village north of Ploermel. The distance was such that overnight stops had to be organised; at Mortain on the outward journey and Villedieu on the return. We were fortunate to have a Y-type owner who was willing to accompany us in his Cavalier and provide added insurance against breakdown. AA 5-Star cover is fairly limited for



cars in excess of ten years old.

It was an early start on the morning of Friday September 4th, as checking in time at Portsmouth was 7am which meant I had to leave no later than 4.30. I actually arrived just before 7am to find I was the only 'Y' there, the Ys of Alan and Gill Anderson, Paul and Joy Rundell and Peter and Janet Cornelius, together with David and Barbara Hague, arrived soon afterwards. There were four Y-types, two black and two maroon. The colours



Writer David Pelham's Y-type on display in Josselin.

may seem irrelevant, but to Brian Moyse, another Y-type owner accompanying the Rundells, strategic placing of cars was required to obtain the best photographs.

We travelled to Caen on the Normandie, the recently-launched flagship of Brittany Ferries. The Ys were first off the ferry and had to wait for the support car which was located on an upper deck. We set off for Falaise, birthplace of William the Conqueror, to meet the Continental Y-types of Chris Backlund and Victor and Evelyn Rodrigues who had travelled 1,500 kms from Zurich to join us.

The rendezvous' was set to be the Marie (Town Hall). Dennis assured us that all towns had one; he, as always, was right. Chris quickly took over 'pole' position and led us to the Town Square. A reception had been arranged by Chris at the local tourist office. If the reception we received was typical, we were in for a really enjoyable trip. Chris and Victor made our Y-type total six. Fortunately Chris's car was maroon and Victor's was black, keeping our colours synchronised. We then set off for our 'pit stop' at Mortain, arriving two hours later. I don't know what Chris or Dennis said to the owner when making the reservations but he was surprised to see all the cars driving into the garage block unaided, without bits and pieces hanging off.

We left Mortain soon after 9am on Saturday, and good progress was made until we arrived in Fougeres. Here the traffic was so heavy that a large number of pedestrians held conversations about our 'voitures antiquites' - I think it means classic cars. It was amazing that despite being separated we managed to meet up on the outskirts to continue on to Vitre for lunch. Chris, in 'pole' position, with Dennis navigating, spotted a wedding procession. Chris stopped and presented the bride and groom with a bottle of champagne.

Eventually we set off, only to be flagged down by the support car. One of our Ys had either failed

to start or Peter and Janet had gone to the wedding. We formed an orderly queue and waited for the missing Y to catch up. At this stage a second wedding party parked opposite. One of the guests asked if it was possible for the bride and groom to be photographed with one of our cars. We said that they could have all of the cars for a photographic session, which clearly pleased both parties. It was not yet noon and already we had been invited to two weddings. Unfortunately we had to decline because we had a strict schedule if we were to reach our base camp at Guilliers. We arrived in Vitre, one of the best preserved old towns in Brittany, and spent a couple of hours sightseeing before continuing our journey to Guilliers.

Victor had cultivated a cold on his journey from Zurich which necessitated a stop at a chemist's shop. Whilst waiting for Evelyn to secure the medicine we were informed of a motor museum and rallycross 'just up the road' at Loheac. We were escorted into a special parking area which appeared to be reserved for us, although Dennis denied this was planned. In addition we were given complimentary entry to both the museum and the press area of the Rallycross, which was actually the French National Championship! We arrived at Guilliers later than scheduled to find Chris, Carol and Jason Sweby, who had travelled from Plymouth via Roscoff. We were now complete - seven Ys: four black and three maroon.

On Sunday we set off for Josselin, a small town by a canal dating from Napoleonic days with an impressive chateau. The town was adorned in bunting, not for our visit but for a religious festival later in the week. In the afternoon Paul and Victor's car broke away from the convoy. Victor wanted to see the sea - there isn't any in Switzerland!

On Monday it was decided to visit the Resistance Museum at St Marcel. In the afternoon the party split, with Victor's and Paul's Y returning to another beach whilst the rest of us



The Y-types halt with Mont St Michel in the background. From the left: Paul Rundell, Joy Rundell, Victor Rodrigues, Evelyn Rodrigues, David Pelham and Brian Moyse.

visited Rochefort en Terre.

Tuesday - it was time to say au revoir to Guilliers, but first it was necessary for a photo-call of all the Ys in front of the hotel. We departed for Villedieu, planning a lunch stop at Dinan and an afternoon sightseeing stop at Mont St Michel. At this point we said farewell to Chris, Carol and Jason who were returning to Plymouth via Roscoff. We arrived at Dinan just before lunch but were unable to find six adjacent parking spaces; something we were quite unused to. In the car park, Alan's core plug blew, fortunately Chris had a spare, and my boot catch broke into three pieces. Despite my extensive list of spares and those of my colleagues, nobody had brought a spare! We managed to locate a garage and the owner, Rene, was sympathetic to old cars, he himself was restoring an old Panhard. We found a suitable piece of metal which was quickly fabricated into a boot catch. We promised Rene that we would recommend that Central Garage, Dinan, be added to the list of approved MG repairers and set off to find the others. They had repaired the core plug and set off for Mont St Michel without us.

Mont St Michel is one of the most impressive buildings I have ever seen and would strongly recommend that all travellers to Brittany pay a visit. We left for Villedieu, our last overnight stop. The hotel in Villedieu provided garaging which tested the driving skills of all of us. The last meal at the hotel was in keeping with tradition around a

single large table. Victor presented Dennis with a card - made by Victor - signed by all of us, thanking him for his organisational efforts.

On Wednesday morning we had to say goodbye to Chris, who was returning to Guernsey via St Malo after an extended absence. Chris had joined our tour on his way home from Luxembourg. Victor, however, had decided to see us to the ferry! We all travelled to Grand Camp Maisy - it does not sound very French does it? - at this point the party split, with some members deciding to visit Bayeux and the tapestry and others going to Arramanche and visiting the D-Day museum.

We reached Caen, said farewell to Victor and Evelyn and were waved straight on to the ferry. The Y-type Cavalier followed us on to the ferry having made the journey from Arramanche in record time. We had made it - the four Ys with mother Hen, the Cavalier -were all heading for the UK.

I believe that the inaugural tour of the Y-types - yes, I understand it will become an annual event - was one of the most rewarding experiences that I have had in an MG. The company was perfect, the accommodation excellent, the food and wine of the highest standard and the planning could not be faulted. The tour surpassed all my expectations and I, on behalf of all the participants, would like to thank Dennis Doubtfire and Chris Backlund for the time and effort in organising the 1992 Y-type Tour of Brittany.

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