

*The Swiss international meetings have always been held in high regard. Many GB cabrio club aficionados consider them to be possibly the pinnacle of European cabrio events. Having never attended an overseas event before I was keen to introduce myself (and the cabbie) to the glamorous world of international cabrio events. 2008 was the year the Swiss club were to be international hosts again. What better year to launch ourselves onto the international scene than this. We had to make the prestigious event this year or it would be another four years before Switzerland could woo us again.*

The original intention was for all the family to take a few days holiday beforehand and then leisurely drive the cabbie down through France and return after the event via an equally leisurely route back. However when it came to booking, fate prevented us from attending as a family unit. Due to circumstances beyond our control Gill (my wife) was not able to get holiday leave from her job at this time. It was therefore agreed amongst the family that we would spend the week before in northern France on a family holiday. Then, after Gill and daughter Lucy returned home, son Jack, cabbie and I would venture on and drive down through (virtually the length) France over the border into Switzerland and deep into the mountainous interior. The deal was done, deposits were paid, Ferry bookings made and commitment to attend sealed. I investigated with fellow club members to see if we were able to join anyone else for a GB convoy drive down to the event (which apparently is the usual practice) However it transpired that virtually all GB attendees were either holidaying beforehand close to the region

so embarking from more local destinations or crossing from completely different ferry ports on different days. Just when it looked like we'd be a 'Billy no mates' cabbie there and back fellow member Sally Wilde and friend Elaine saved the day as they too were looking to travel at much the same time and from same Ferry port. A few phone calls and several e-mails later we'd agreed a sort of plan and itinerary (Thanks to Sally's organizational skills with rough guide route and Hotel planner). The agreed agenda consisted of 2 1/2 days travelling down with a couple of mid day stop off's for a spot of sight seeing and civilised luncheons. Adding in a couple of over night stays with similar plan for the way back albeit via an alternative return route. What could be better a culturally varied route journey shared with equally cabrio enthusiastic female company - Perfect!. We met Sally and Elaine at Le Havre ferry port as agreed. It was at this point the realization of embarking on an almost 1,500 mile round trip in a 35 year old beetle began to sink in. For all my fears I needn't have worried the faithful old girl did herself proud and delivered us there

and back with competent dignity. For the first leg of the journey we opted to avoid toll roads. Easy to select with Tom Tom. Highly recommend Sat Nav for trips abroad, it really does take out the stress and make driving/navigation a doddle and much safer. It also has a neat feature that informs you of expected arrival times that can be programmed to your cabbies maximum travelling speeds - very useful! Having selected to avoid toll roads our journey took us along quiet fast straight roads through the relatively flat scenery of northern France to our first lunch stop at Amiens - Centre Ville. After crepes and cappuccinos we continued along equally fast straight roads again with very little traffic, slowing only to pass through the occasional sleepy picturesque French village until our arrival at Reims late in the afternoon. Here we had time to explore the cathedral and much of the old city as well as opportunity for some of us to sample local Champagne from this region. Sally had booked us in at the Holiday Inn hotel right in the centre of Reims, underground car parking included for an excellent 2 rooms for the price of one deal

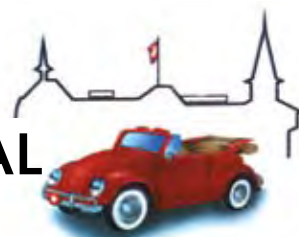
## SWISS INTERNATIONAL Open Meeting August '08





*continued*

## SWISS INTERNATIONAL Open Meeting August '08



- well done Sal! After tucking the cabbies up for the night in the car park the rest of us freshened up and ventured out for an evening in Reims city centre – Bon soirée! With breakfast behind us the next day's route was to take us via Dijon and ultimately way down south to the pretty town of Annecy located just on the French side of the Swiss border - Big gulp as the magnitude of distance for this next leg registered in my pea like brain. This was the longest jaunt of the journey and by the time we reached Dijon we discovered that the 'non toll' roads we'd enjoyed so far were starting to slow us down. The scenery had gradually changed to more undulated countryside with fewer fast straight sections and a significant increase in traffic. We decided to hop onto the toll motorways in order that we should arrive at Annecy in time for an evening meal. It was whilst travelling the fast motorway roads that I began to have concerns about engine temperature. This was a hot day and we were moving at 70-mph - all those warnings about watching your oil temp came flooding back. I'd reduce speed as soon as the oil temp reached 220°F/160°C. Towards the journey's end after climbing a very long, steep mountain section, struggling to get over 50-mph the temp rose just above the dials 220° mark. Son Jack now fully schooled in oil pressure paranoia screamed Dad! Dad! it's over 220°! I agreed to pull over also believing it too risky to continue until the engine

had cooled. 20 mins later we pulled away again only to discover we were virtually at the top of the mountain anyway. From this point on we enjoyed a spectacular downhill drive through some breathtaking scenery. The fast twisting road followed sheer mountain contours stretching out on high stilted sections ahead of us punctuated by long tunnels that cut deep into the mountain side. This was exhilarating stuff! The cabbies had gone from struggling up the steep mountain at 45-50mph towards the top and were



*Reims cathedral*



*Terry, Elaine, Jack!*





*Annecy Chateau*

now tearing down the other side through tunnels and stilted sections at 80mph with massive drops on either side of road. The adrenaline was pumping as we thundered down this fast mountain road. It seemed

that as we passed over that mountain we'd dropped down into a completely different country – We were still just in France but this looked and felt more like Switzerland – Oh Yes! – Yes! Bring it on! This is what

it's all about I said excitedly. At this point I thought we should stop to put the hoods down and let the alpine sun flood over us for a glorious sun drenched decent into Annecy. I then realised there was no-where to pull over and no hard shoulder – Oh my god! In all my excitement I'd completely forgotten about the oil temp, which by now was fast approaching the 220 mark again. I quickly slowed rapidly bringing the cabbie from the fast lane back in with slower moving traffic. What is he playing at? Sally must have been thinking behind. Well what ever she was thinking seem to make her face press hard against the windscreen and turn purple. Sheepishly I pressed on albeit at a more constant leisurely speed until we arrived in Annecy just as the sun was setting against the mountains.

Annecy had a very different feel to the rest of France we'd seen. The climate had changed it was warm and balmy the architecture in the old town was quaint with charm and character of a Child's story book the rugged alpine peaks provided the perfect picture post card backdrop. We were all eager and excited to get out and explore this pretty place so after a swift



*Annecy lake by night*



*continued*

## SWISS INTERNATIONAL Open Meeting August '08

check-in, shower with cabbies off to bed courtesy of yet another private car park, the posse descended into town as the last rays of sun disappeared over the mountain peaks. We ambled through narrow streets buzzing with lively bars and street cafe's so many in fact we could not make a decision where to eat. Eventually the girls decided upon a restaurant with balcony that over hung one of the crystal clear waterways running through the town. After dining



*Annecy lake early morning*



*Pretty architecture and waterway's of Annecy*

and drinks we decided to make our way down through the old town for a late evening lakeside stroll. The dark mountains silhouetted against a clear mauve night sky with full moon glistening brightly on the water's surface, the Swiss Alps beckoning in the distance. A magical end to a perfect evening! The next morning started bright enough and after a late rise we split up to

breakfast and explore more of Annecy by day. As the morning progressed the skies clouded and a mist rolled down from the mountains. We decided it was time to move on for our final destination. Because we'd spent longer than expected exploring Annecy we opted to take the quicker less scenic route to the Swiss event via the Swiss motorway. At first I thought this a shame as we'd miss out



*Cabs galore surround Paxmontanna Hotel*







*Cabs galore surround Paxmontanna Hotel*

on the more scenic alternative but as the day progressed the weather closed in and we endured some pretty filthy lashing rain and poor visibility along the flatter lowlands of Switzerland. The route took us north through more industrial areas around the perimeter of the Alps past Bern toward Zurich we then turned south in a big loop and as the roads began to rise up the mountains past Luzern, toward Interlaken the cloud cleared, rain eased back providing a dryer, brighter road up and on to our final destination at the

Paxmontanna Hotel in Flueli-Ranft. At Paxmontanna welcome marshals explained parking and registration detail ahead of check in. The sight of more Karmann Cabs than I've ever seen anywhere in one place (nearly 90) got the heart racing. As we pulled up outside the main entrance it seemed we were the last of GB contingency to arrive with the others enjoying frosty beers out front with many of the other attendees. At this point my head was swimming as we attempted to register for event, check-in at reception,

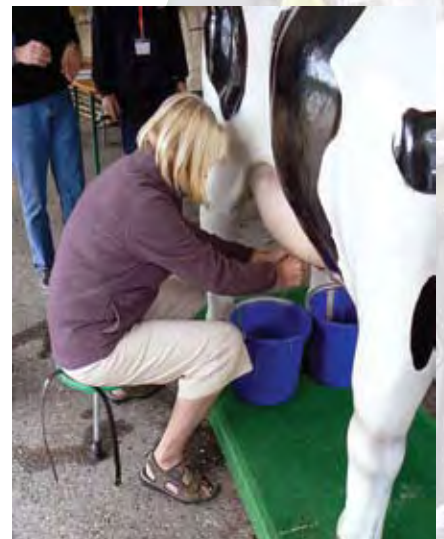
get luggage to the room and say hello to everyone that greeted us and move car to allocated parking area. We eventually got ourselves sorted and settled down to enjoy a beer or three with the others ahead of dinner and welcome meeting later that evening. We were informed we'd be divided into teams of six cabs for Saturday's itinerary. We drew team departure times spaced at 10 minute intervals to avoid chaos at venue points throughout the day. The next morning we indeed left at our allocated 9am time slot with a large breakfast bloating our stomachs. The agenda had been superbly organised with many well thought out activities that kept everyone entertained throughout the day. These consisted of cheese sampling, throwing balls in to milk churns, driving your cab around a slalom course, bob-sleigh ride, milking a plastic cow and firing a cross bow, not forgetting a hearty lunch thrown in the middle. Oh and of course, driving through some of Europe's most spectacular alpine scenery.



*Paxmontanna photo call*



*Judd & Graham wait their turn*



*Carolyn milking*



*Our Team*



*Bobsleigh Jack*



# Swiss International Open Meeting

August '08 – Part 2 Second report by Terry Coldicott

*Continuing with part two of the Swiss international report from previous issue of Open Top.*

Saturday evening provided the GB team the excuse to gather for yet more beers and reflect upon the days activities before embarking on dinner followed by evening entertainment consisting of what can only be described as a strange mix of a robotic dancing, pop, cabaret rock band. Before the band had finished my bed began to call. I retired for the evening leaving son Jack with the others who by now had moved to the lounge area for story telling and to reminisce over old times late into the early hours.



Carolyn, Alan—too many beers



Jack, Maddy & Elaine



Phil & Judd - tongues but no hands!

Sunday morning had me up early and raring to go. I left Jack submerged under his duvet to rise in his own good time. I was off to clean the cabbie, which was looking pretty mucky and battle scarred with dead insects plastered across the front. The cars had been parked bumper to bumper on a drive in front of the Paxmontanna just below the dining room in preparation for the convoy drive to Luzern. Being the first out (how sad am I?) to clean his car you can imagine how everyone above enjoying breakfast took great pleasure in tapping the window and pointing at cabbies indicating I should clean theirs next. This was obviously an international joke! I was still waving and smiling back in agreement through gritted teeth after the 20th tap on the window ha! ha!



Cabs at the ready



Convoy drive to Luzern



Cool dude doggies



10.am was the allocated time to leave en-masse for a scenic convoy drive to Lake Luzern. The weather was scorching and the scenery breathtaking! After a delayed start we eventually left to enjoy a convoy drive that proved to be a truly exhilarating experience. On our arrival at Lake Luzern we were parked into tight rows dominating every corner of the car park. This complex positioning operation was smoothly co-ordinated with the precision of a Swiss watch, within no time we were parked and making our way down to the quayside.



Soleil's arrival!



*continued*

## SWISS INTERNATIONAL Open Meeting August '08



*Precision park up!*



*Boarding the boat*



*Me & jack*



*Phil acts the fool*

The Swiss event team had organised an impressive boat trip that was to take us on a comprehensive tour of lake Luzern. The weather by now had warmed significantly. Many of us had anticipated it would be cold and breezy on the water and were wrapped with coats and fleeces. As it turned out we all stripped to tee shirts and basked on deck in glorious sun as we cruised the lake taking in the spectacular views all around. The provided packed lunches kept us adequately fed and watered for the duration. On board entertainment was provided in the form of fellow GB member Phil Soliel who kept us amused with his fooling antics, supposedly for the benefit of just his young son Calum (Yeah right Phil!).

Our boat trip eventually ended mid afternoon and was followed by a fair-well gathering on the quayside where speeches and thankyou gifts were exchanged between clubs. For many this marked the end of our event weekend. For everyone else another night or two at Paxmontana awaited them. How I wished our stay could have been extended so we too could have enjoyed another night but we had a long journey ahead of us with pre-booked ferry crossings to meet. By late afternoon we'd said our final good byes and were on our way to Belfort the first destination of our return journey.

*GB mob photo call*







*Glorious Lake Luzern views*

Sally had picked another hotel gem from her rough-guide book (We were now looking for more economically priced accommodation, funds being some what drained). The hotel in Belfort however turned out to be rather grand with excellent rooms as good, if not better than we'd stayed elsewhere. All very reasonably priced with private rear parking too! A relaxed walk through the petite town centre eventually led to a busy restaurant where we enjoyed crepes all round.



*Lunch stop*



*British phone box*



*Medieval streets*



*Auxerre boasts 3 Cathedrals*

The next day's drive was to be the longest of the return journey. We decided to stop just past half way for lunch at Auxerre and spend time relaxing and explore the old part of this town that boasts three cathedrals. During our stroll around the narrow medieval streets we stumbled across an old red British telephone box. Apparently a gift to Auxerre from it's UK twinned town Redditch!



*The Swiss event team*



*Colourful Carousel*



*Orleans Cathedral*



The journey ended as dusk fell at our final destination of the day, the city of Orleans. A large monument uncomfortably reminded us that this was where the English burned Joan of Arc at the stake!! We moved swiftly on our attentions drawn toward a very colourful carousel attraction in Orleans city centre. Old Orleans was alive with dozens of busy bars and open air cafe's lining the narrow streets. Yet again no shortage of places to eat seemed to make it harder to choose? We eventually elected for an Italian restaurant followed by cocktails in a couple of street bars. We all agreed that we should allocate time to return the next morning for sight seeing and to explore the old centre and in particular the cathedral.

*Journey back to cloudy skies*



*Tired cabs sleep on ferry home*

After spending longer than we should have exploring Orleans and enjoying the warm morning sun, we embarked on the last stretch of French road that would eventually lead to the ferry port of Le Havre. As we drove back through the flat countryside of northern France the blue skies began to cloud over and by the time we reached Le Havre it was pretty wet, miserable weather. Sadly it was now the end of what had been a fantastic trip – and the verdict on my first foreign meeting. Well It had quite literally been an International success!