

The London – Jerusalem Diary by Andrew Sington

I was always told that a story should have a beginning, a middle and an end, so not to be too controversial, I suppose I will have to start at the beginning, which really is August 1964.

This was the fourth visit my father Reggie had made to Israel, and the third time he had sent the old Land Rover on ahead (by cargo ship from Liverpool to Haifa). We were driving up what was called 'The Burma Road' from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in the heat of the day and musing on what we may or may not do in the future. By this time, Dad had bought an old 20hp Rolls-Royce from Bev Watson-Smyth and, whilst it was a bit of a fun car, it was anything but reliable. Anyway, he said that it would be fun to bring the old Rolls to Israel.

Now this may seem a reasonable suggestion, but as my knowledge of the car was minimal, and his was, to say the least even less, the very idea of bringing the Rolls to Israel was, to put it bluntly, crazy. My reaction was brief and typically pragmatic: 'Don't be so daft, and anyway, the Arabs will pinch everything on it!' Not exactly politically correct, but we were having enough trouble keeping them off the Land Rover; what it would have been like with the Rolls was just unimaginable.

So there we were, all of 40 years before the idea resurfaced, thinking of taking the old Rolls to Israel. Remember: in 1964 the car was only 38 years old.

Now I can roll forward those 40 years to a vintage car show in Southport in 2004. I was by then the caretaker of the old Rolls as I had been for the past 17 years. It had been rebuilt in 1987 and then brought to Southport and it had become my pride and joy. To say that I was interested in its workings would be an understatement; I was fascinated by its mechanicals and had attended seminars at the RREC as well as worked on the car; learning 'on the job' so to speak. Parked next to me at this show was another 20hp RR, driven by a chap who responded favourably to my offer of chopped-liver sandwiches! The 'chap' turned out to be a Manchester solicitor called Mark Lewis, and after a few pleasantries, and being a little like me (he went straight for the nub) he said that UK-2 would be an ideal car to drive from London to Jerusalem on a Jewish National Fund rally.

Now I'm not afraid of a challenge, and before I had even thought of the consequences, my reply was simple and brief: 'OK, if you can supply the money, I'll supply the car'!

That was it, the deal had been struck. UK-2 was going to go to Jerusalem and fulfil that dream of 40 years ago; and in 2 years time it would be 80 years old!

Was it a folly? Was I to regret it? Would it all work out? Read on!

Over the next 20 months, I was to spend many hours preparing UK-2 for what I thought would be a bit of an ordeal, not knowing just how demanding it would be – on me AND the car!

I knew the brakes were a bit weak, so I got the necessary tools from the RREC and brought them up to the highest possible standard. The engine was generally OK, but I needed to do some work on the coil and the condenser. Both were rebuilt and worked fine in the UK. I still had the recurring problem of 'failing to proceed' for reasons I couldn't fathom out; however once I had started to think it through properly, I remembered that I had stretched the small spring in the autovac and this was holding the valve closed for too long which resulted in fuel starvation. A 50p replacement spring solved it and all was fine.

Tyres were OK, but I invested in a pair of new inner tubes to add to those I already had, and along with a spare head gasket and other spare bits and pieces, the car was ready for the trip.

Saturday 13th May 2006.

I was up pretty early, to be met by my brother Steve at the door. He and my wife Sally wanted to 'wave me off' which was a wonderful surprise.

I drove straight to the Cottons Hotel at Knutsford to meet Mark. The weather was pretty miserable so the roof was up, but we left at 10.00am being waved-off this time by Mark's wife Shelley. It was our objective not to have the roof up for the drive to Israel after reaching London - how did we do?



Needless to say, we had a problem in Stoke-on-Trent! The car seems to have taken a dislike to the place as this is its favourite failure town. The problem presented like fuel starvation, but it is with some satisfaction that this was the only time we had this particular failure. Five minutes after stopping we were back on the road for a trouble-free drive to London, stopping only for fuel in Dunstable.

I had arranged for Sally to travel to London with Zoe and Howie and to be joined by Jamie at The Sofitel Hotel in St James'. A super hotel. We all dined at The Avenue – also in St James' – along with Linda and Michael who had also come to London to see us off the following morning. It was lovely to have all the family together, though I missed having Emma and Ruby-Mae there.

Parked the car in the NCP across the road - cost a fortune for the night, but that's London for you!

Sunday, 14th May 2006.

Well, this was THE DAY. Fabulous morning. Collected UK-2 at 0630hrs and drove it round to the front of the hotel to clean the car, take the roof down and generally stow things away for the drive. Weather started to look a bit grim but the rain held off.



I was interviewed by an Israeli film crew which resulted in my first appearance on Israeli TV, and my statement that I wasn't looking forward to driving in Israel because of the mishugunah (Yiddish for "crazy") Israeli drivers was to be aired on their news programme! Mind you, it turned out that Israeli drivers, as bad as they can be, are ions better than thewell, I'll tell you about that later!



Guess who flagged us off!

All our fellow travellers arrived in Waterloo Place for a huge send-off. Our official starter was Damon Hill and precisely at 0900hrs the flag dropped and we were off to the tuneful accompaniment of a jazz band in a Morris Cowley. Colly was there, and Sue along with Sally, Jamie, Zoe, Howie and Michael and Linda – what wonderful friends! I was a bit emotional as was Sally; she bravely kept her tears till later!



I was later to be told that there was some concern as to whether a 1926 Rolls-Royce 20hp could possibly keep to the demanding schedule of the rally; little were the organisers to know that, quite to the contrary, some of the more modern cars were problematical, and one had to be repatriated on a trailer!

The drive out of London was pretty boring, and as the oldest and slowest car, we were inevitably the last on the boat in Dover for the cruise to Calais – with no thanks to the Israeli film crew who insisted on a multiple-take for their news programme. We arrived with just 5 minutes to spare! By the time we had found the special dining room reserved for us, the rest of the group were well into their lunch.

Was this a taste of things to come?

Once off the ferry in Calais, we found we had another 200 miles to go – on top of the 80 from London to Dover. As the time was already after 1500hrs, we realised that this was going to be a late arrival. Mark drove from Calais, and the French motorway was superb! Plenty of tolls and even got stopped at one by the police; not for speeding but so they could take our picture! This happened a number of times over the next couple of weeks too.



I think we were not the last to arrive at the hotel, the Hostellerie La Briqueterie at Epernay, though we were pretty tired. Fabulous place in the country and the private dinner they put on for us was just what the doctor ordered. Rally plaques were handed out and we all tried to get to know each other a little. I retired earlyish, as the briefing in the morning was at 0800hrs and the drive was to take us to Vevey, in Switzerland; we were to be in our third country in just two days!

Monday 15th May 2006.

I was up early and cleaned the car, checked the oil and water (oiled the steering box) and put some air in the tyres. I had installed a cigar-lighter connection under the dash so that I could use a Michelin 12v tyre pump – thank goodness! One of my better ideas! I think I used the pump every morning to put in between 2 and 3 lbs/sq/inch pressure in most of the tyres. Perhaps I should say that the tyres were superb, Dunlops, and we had NO punctures during the whole trip. This also says a lot for the drivers who obviously took care where they were steering.

Today's drive should have been 325 miles, but as there was some questionable map-reading, we travelled 350 miles! We stopped in Basancon for cake and coffee. I had driven in the morning, but Mark took over after Basancon. He wasn't in top form and drove very slowly. As we had such a long drive ahead of us, he passed the driving over to me after 20 miles and soon the Swiss border was upon us. The scenery here was beginning to really pick up, and I felt quite lonely (even though I had Mark as company). I missed having Sally with me to do the map-reading (which she does so well) and to enjoy the experience.

Swiss driving was a little precarious; inclined to drive too close to cars in front which was a bit unnerving for us as our stopping distances were greater than those of modern cars. If there was a space, a car would fill it!

I was concerned that we were running a bit rich, so I checked the plugs and this was confirmed. A small adjustment to the high-speed jet sorted this out and from hereon we had no cause for concern in that quarter. I have always kept a log-book of all petrol oil and water fills etc, and after a few days I noticed that the mpg was between 18 and 20, as compared to less than 16 in the UK. It was suggested that this may be due to the long runs; I am doubtful of this as I do long runs in the UK. I suspect it is more to do with the engine running at much higher temperatures. To date we have been running at between 80°C and 85°C – this was to climb to well over 100°C later in the journey – but thank goodness for WaterWetter from Millers. Whilst we ran very hot the engine never showed signs of seizing due to boiling, even on the Simplon Pass where the climb was so demanding or down at the Dead Sea where the ambient temperature was over 40°C (109°F) in the shade – if you could find any!

Vevey, and the Hotel Trois de Cournelles, was just divine and Mark met me in the bar with a very welcome gin and tonic on the patio prior to dinner. My room overlooked Lac Lemane (aka Lake Lucerne) and this really made me miss Sally. The view from my private balcony was just superb, a postcard-perfect view of the Alps, never to be forgotten and one which I know Sally would have adored.



The group dinner was in the huge banqueting suite and regrettably we only half filled it. A smaller room would have been better but you can't have everything. Dinner was simply exquisite, as was everything about this hotel. Mind you they couldn't organise the weather as it poured down during the night, but thankfully I had fitted the tonneau covers to the car. We were parked right outside the main entrance to the hotel – a pride of place to be repeated at every hotel.

I retired with the mistaken view that the drive the following morning was a simple one of just 110 miles. Oh how wrong could I be! Maybe had I known what was in store for the following day I wouldn't have slept so soundly. Ignorance is bliss; well it can lead to a good night's sleep if nothing else!

Tuesday 16th May 2006.

The Briefing took place at 0800hrs, as was to happen every driving day, and we left the hotel at 0900hrs accompanied by the film crew for the first 7 miles along the lake and into the countryside. The 110 miles was a grave mistake; it turned out to be 284 difficult miles in terrain that would make demands on a modern motor car, let alone one 80 years old.

Driving away from Vevey into the countryside was along a beautiful glaciated valley, but soon we were to come across the land better known in Switzerland – the Alps! As we had to pass from one valley to another, it was necessary to go over the 'Simplon'. This is a mammoth pass with a summit some 6500ft above sea level. We had a "failure to proceed" in this section due to what I suspected to be the coil. I fitted the spare coil and, to be on the safe side, a spare condenser. The engine re-started perfectly and continued to run smoothly for the rest of the day.



The climb seemed to go on for ever- and just when we needed a run at a huge incline, the authorities had some roadworks controlled by – you've guessed it – a set of traffic lights! My language was anything but politically correct in expressing my views. Regardless, UK-2 picked up her skirts after the lights and simply flew to the top of the pass. Here there was 6 feet of snow and it was appropriate for Mark and me to have a celebration – of an apple each!

The drive down the other side was equally difficult as there were again many roadworks and contraflows. Put quite a strain on the brakes but all was well and we drove on the Lake Maggiore for a magical drive along the lakeside to a border post where we coffee'd and used the loo, one of the old stand-up ones which caused some merriment.

Little were we to know what was to follow!

The maps told us we were to go through the San Bernadino Tunnel; this takes the road under the St Bernard Pass. There was a huge queue as this tunnel also has a contraflow system, so we decided to try to drive over the pass itself. Alas (or maybe thankfully!) the pass was locked and barred, so it was back to the main road. After a couple of miles this was also closed and we were diverted onto the old road that was a frightening switchback. By this time the weather had deteriorated and Mark and I had donned our hi-viz waterproof jackets, as it was now both very cold and pouring down again. (Note we didn't put the roof up!). The St Bernardino Tunnel was a mass of queues but we eventually got through to find many smaller tunnels afterwards. One of these created a major problem for us for as we passed a vent at 50mph. The windscreen on the car simply 'whited-out' with condensation on both sides. We couldn't see anything through it. As I was driving I immediately put my face to the right of the windscreen to try to get a view of what was in front, and Mark looked over the windscreen for the same reason. This was very frightening but we came out of it without further incident.

The weather didn't improve that afternoon and we eventually got to Bad Regaz and the Grand Hotels Bad Regaz. What can one say about this sumptuous palace? My room was about the same size as the floor space of our house in Southport. There was an underground car park for UK-2 and shops and boutiques of only the best. We dined with Lincoln and Honor in the Italian restaurant and I retired pretty early as I was, to put it mildly, knackered and aware that we had a long drive to Salzburg in the morning.



Wednesday 17th May 2006.

Today started well at 0800hrs with a briefing and away at 0900 for a super drive through lovely countryside and the State of Lichtenstein. If we'd blinked we'd have missed it! All very beautiful and typically Swiss countryside. We had the option of driving into Innbruck for a lunch break; this we took as we need a break.

The town is very clean and it appeared traffic-free. I was driving and ignored all the no-entry signs and eventually found ourselves in a pedestrian precinct with no cars around. We asked a couple of girls if they'd join us for lunch – to be told we couldn't afford them! Tut! Tut! Parked in a small pedestrian precinct and had a lovely spaghetti lunch. Mark decided we should make the locals pay for the privilege of seeing our beautiful Rolls-Royce, so put his hat on the ground in front of the car and dropped some coins into it. Would you believe it, some people actually dropped money in! I was horrified, but that's what comes of having friends from Prestwich!



Drove on to Salzburg and a lovely hotel – the Hotel Sacher. As we approached the outskirts of the town, it was Mark's turn to drive to the hotel so I started to pull into the side of the road, and at that very moment a police car pulled in behind us with his blue lights flashing! Oh bugger – what had I done wrong? Was this to be our first ticket? No way! The policeman said he had been waiting for us, knew all about our trip and where we were going, and to follow him – he would 'blue-light' us all the way to the hotel. This was treatment beyond the call of duty! He stopped all the traffic along the complicated route into the centre of Salzburg and along we sped without a care in the world. Oh to be famous! We parked right outside the hotel. Classic late Victorian/early Edwardian building with classic interior. Dinner was in the beautiful dining room and we were entertained by a fabulous quartet. One of the drivers was also a Hazan and sang some opera – this was just incredible!

After dinner I walked around the town with Sue Lawson and her daughter Olivia (cousin to Victoria and Jo Gray!) and visited the places where *The Sound of Music* was filmed. Such culture hey? Fabulous city and so full of Mozart and loads of tatty shops selling busts etc. Everywhere was incredibly clean though.

UK-2 gave us a little trouble today – electrics – but this didn't impede our progress; just made life a little more exciting.

Thursday 18th May 2006

Well, after a light breakfast and the usual briefing, we were off out of Salzburg again with a private police escort. They liked UK-2! Car no probs and a beautiful day as we sped off towards Vienna and the Hotel Sacher Wein. The weather had still not really warmed up; this was to await us very soon and in earnest! Scenery was just wonderful, and we stopped at Gmunden, a lakeside town not unlike Windermere only larger, and much cleaner. We managed to get our second fill of 91 octane petrol; this burns much slower than 95 and is far better for UK-2's engine. We hoped this would be available for the rest of the trip but we were to be disappointed here. Wonderful drive with no problems and fabulous scenery and the last 100 miles were on autobahn; great if you have radial-ply tyres but with the cross-plyes on UK-2 the tram-line effect was very draining. This was also not going to improve as we progressed later into Eastern Europe.

Arrived at The Opera House in Vienna at 4.30pm and parked on the pavement outside this splendid building. Apparently this had never been allowed before! The hotel was just across the road! What a hotel – again a classic building with the most wonderful fitments. Mark and I, along with a few others, had a short walk and coffee'd at the most incredible coffee shop. The strudel was out-of-this-world.



The crowd apparently wanted to have dinner in the local kosher restaurant; not my bag so I asked the Concierge where I could get a good schnitzel – just 50 metres down the road! It was brill! The following morning I was regaled with stories of the dreadful cuisine at the kosher restaurant. I smiled and kept stumm.

Spoke to Sally to be advised that she was to have a nasty investigation at Renacres. This worried me and I really felt I should have been with her at this time. Missing her terribly by now and knowing she would have loved the hotels but probably hated the incessant driving, driving, driving..... and all at less than 50 mph! Each day takes us nearer to meeting Sally at the Carmel Spa Hotel – though the tensions of ‘will we/won’t we’ make it were certainly apparent in my mind. I couldn’t talk about them as it was imperative I remained positive, but all the time there is the nagging thought of what will fail, when, and can I fix it?

At this stage I was dreading driving in Israel – thinking about their lack of discipline. Little was I to know what was in store!!!!

Over 200 miles again today, and another 220 tomorrow, so a good night’s sleep is called-for – and with over 1600 miles behind us already – incredible!

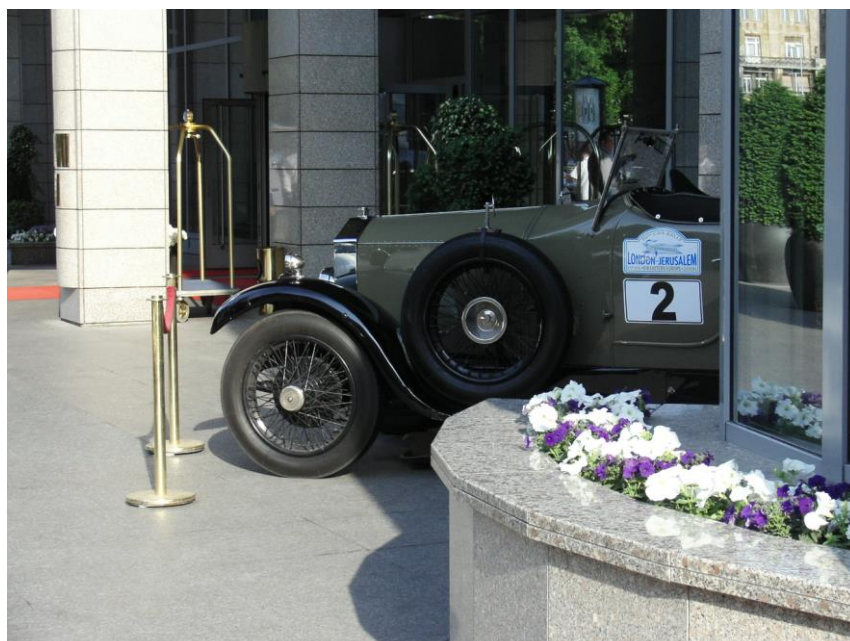
Friday 19th May 2006

Up early, again, for the briefing and on the road at 0900hrs for Hungary, Budapest and the Kempinski Hotel Corvinus. Wonderful weather, wonderful drive which was broken by a coffee break at 1100hrs where we collected Olivia who joined us until we stopped for lunch just inside Hungary. I just had to have the goulash for lunch – big mistake! Did I get indigestion! I was nearly in tears, but fortunately Mark was driving after lunch (maybe it was his driving that did it?), and as our luggage and consequently my indigestion tablets were in the luggage van, I had to suffer in silence.



Joined the Hungarian M1 and cruised at 45/50mph but didn't put the lights on. Apparently it is necessary for ALL cars to run on headlights in Austria and Hungary. This just isn't possible with UK-2 as the battery would soon flatten, so we simply left them off and kept our fingers crossed. It seemed to work until we were stopped by the police. Oh heck – here comes a fine! But no – the gods were being kind to us – after looking at our passports and holding on to Mark's (they were bored to tears) they asked 'Can we take your photo'. Well, I couldn't tell them to bugger-off, so we just smiled sweetly, cursed them under our breath, and eventually drove off. I suppose we'd done our bit for peace and diplomacy! When we were stopped, Gail and Simon pulled up as they thought we had a problem, and so the police were double-delighted as they were in a very sexy Corvette. More photos! Arrived in Budapest at 1640hrs after driving for an hour through a terrific rainstorm. We didn't put the roof up so we got pretty well soaked. Didn't have a chance to put on the hi-viz waterproof jackets as we were stuck in the rush-hour traffic – but it wasn't too bad.

I just couldn't leave UK-2 outside such a wonderful hotel looking as dirty and neglected as it appeared, so I gave the bodywork a good leathering and polished the radiator. She really sparkled and I felt she deserved it. Again, pride of place outside the main entrance to this wonderful hotel where we were to stay for 3 nights – a much needed weekend off. The car was greatly admired and that thrilled me; so many smiling faces and lots of the usual questions. They're the same the whole world over.....



We could tell we were in now in Eastern Europe; today we had travelled mostly on small back roads and whilst they were OK, they certainly weren't up to much. Modernisation is in the wind, but they have a long way to go.

Saturday 20th May 2006

Marvelous dinner last night at which Mark and I had a terrible fit of the giggles – otherwise little to report as today was a rest day. Met Dov Kellerman in the hotel lobby. He was an Israeli IT man. Also had a long discussion with Martin Hone who advised me that UK-2 was to lead the procession tomorrow from the hotel to and from the Hungoring Motor Racing Track. Had a swim in the pool and a walk around the city centre. Dinner in the evening was initially on my own in a café in a nearby square; Eva, Rafi, Suzanne and Rene joined me later. I left early as I was pretty tired. It is interesting to realise that at this stage of the rally, even though there was a lot of appreciation from fellow rallyers, Mark and I got the distinct impression that we were not thought to be Jewish. Apparently Jews don't do oily things and mess about with old cars!

Sunday 21st May 2006

Great day – good weather and an early start for the Hungoring. The drive out of Belgrade was accompanied by police on motorbikes and they stopped all the traffic and we didn't stop at red lights. What a fuss they made of us! And UK-2 at the front too.



The race track was interesting; we visited the 'holy-of-holies', the control room, and then had the opportunity to drive round the track. I don't know why, but we were allowed 4 circuits (2 for me and 2 for Mark) whereas all the other cars only got 2 circuits. Mind you – we were the slowest regardless of Mark's attempt to break the track record and frighten me almost to death!

In the afternoon I went around the old Jewish Quarter, visited a vacant schule (synagogue) recently purchased by Yoko Ono and then given to the community, and then on to the beautiful main schule. Too emotional for words! There is a wonderful memorial paid-for by Tony Curtis that commemorates the 6,000 who died there in 1945 – their graves are next to the synagogue on the land that was previously the birth-place of Theodore Herzl. Some went on to the Jewish Museum – I couldn't face it!



Early to bed again as the drive tomorrow is at least 220 miles – probably more.

Monday 22nd May 2006

Got a little lost getting out of Budapest, though we did manage another fill of 91 octane petrol. The drive to the Serb border was pretty boring and we had a FTP again – same problem. Roads began to deteriorate in direct proportion to the rise in temperature, and we were now well into the 90's. Our objective was the Hyatt Hotel in Belgrade where I had a lovely swim and then dinner at which the Israeli Ambassadors spoke – for far too long. I was with Rafi and Eva and both he and I fell asleep during the speech – a good use of the time I was advised.

Eight car enthusiasts from Novi Grad joined us for dinner. They were in for a lovely surprise! They were to be given a Lancia Beta by one of the group, and Charlie Sherling was to pay for all shipping costs etc. You should have seen their faces, they just couldn't believe it. Eventually they did and there were smiles all round. I think their best car was a 1960 Skoda!!

Tuesday 23rd May 2006

This was to be a tough drive today: 148 miles in the morning and 152 in the afternoon. Very hot – 96°F, and the car went beautifully all day. Obviously loves the heat. Scenery incredible with broad valleys and narrow gorges. Also went 'off piste' and drove through what was supposed to be peasant country. We were in procession as the risk of bandits was considerable. I thought the people were probably better off than those living in the cities – well their quality of life was certainly better even if work wasn't so readily available. Whilst the main roads were reasonable, all the other roads reminded me of the Isbyty Ifan Moors 40 years ago. Pretty dreadful. We were congratulated by the Border Police going into Macedonia as we were the only car with complete documentation. Got stopped again by the police in the middle of nowhere, bored I suppose and just wanted to take our photo. Bit of a nerve really, but better than being ignored I suppose. If this happened in the UK, there would be a outcry, an expensive investigation and goodness knows what else.

There were also two very long tunnels that weren't lit. These were terribly dangerous as the lights on UK-2 are anything but adequate to compensate for sudden changes from bright sunlight to complete darkness. Frightening!



Eventually got to the Alexander Palace Hotel in Skopje. Very good by local standards (Tony Blair stayed there a few days earlier) but certainly nothing like what we had experienced in the previous few days. Dinner was very ethnic and I had met two local singers who agreed to sing in the local dialect and accompanied by the duet in our dining room. Certainly not a sound that is familiar to western ears but I found it fascinating. One of the girls (well, a woman really) had represented Serbia in the Eurovision Contest – but she didn't say how long ago. I suspect it was quite a few years. Her name was Blagi Cesparlovsa. The other girl was Pepi Dimoska and looked more Russian than anything else.



Went to bed at 9.30 (on my own!), very tired.

Wednesday 24th May 2006

We left Skopje at 0830 and had decided not to take the official drive through the countryside as we were beginning to suffer from tiredness. These long drives were also taking their toll on UK-2 and another 300+ miles was something we should avoid. As it was, we drove 140 miles down the most wonderful 'old road' (the new one was the other carriageway that went north) towards the Greek border and the car went like a bird all day. Mind you, we arrived at Thessaloniki in Greece at 1420hrs and almost felt guilty as we were anything but tired. In fact we were refreshed even though the weather was phenomenally hot.

Thessaloniki is a bustling city which we managed to avoid, and arrived at the Hyatt Regency on the east of the city and near the airport. A very modern 'business' hotel but that's not a complaint. Had a wonderful swim in the pool and then a delightful dinner on the veranda with Mark and Howard Stean. Interesting fellow!



During the afternoon I saw a report on the TV that there was a huge fire at Ataturk Airport Cargo Centre, where I suspected we were due to depart for Israel in a couple of days. I called Audrey on her mobil and gave her the news so that she could make new arrangements should it be necessary. Thankfully she managed to re-route the plane, but it meant a much longer drive on the Friday to an airport on the Asian side of the Bosphorus.

We lost an hour when we entered France – we lost another hour at the Greek border. Bed at 1145hrs and very tired.

Thursday 25th May 2006

What a fabulous driving day this was to be. Started with a drive through vineyards followed by olive groves and then into the hills for a drive through the most beautiful forests. We even saw wild tortoises!



Car performed superbly and we arrived at Kavala at 1430hrs. On the way we passed the first beach we'd seen, but this one was on the Adriatic, so I parked the car beside the sea and took a few photos. This was a time for a celebration as we were as far south as we were to go on the European mainland – it was all eastwards to Istanbul from here and we were feeling pretty elated at the prospect of getting there. We drove on a little and stopped at the next small town and had a cold drink, then made our way to Kavala.

I walked into town and lunched by myself on sardines, salad and a beer. Bliss!

The hotel was Imaret Hotel Kavala – a fabulous 'ancient hotel of Greece' and one which Sally would have loved. At least 500 years old and my room was just so restful. Certainly not like the other hotels we'd been to, but as far as an atmosphere was concerned – it was one of the best.



Poured down later that evening and a whole group of us met in a café opposite the hotel and had fish, taramasalata, bread etc.

Great news – Sally rang – very distraught at the airport but had at least arrived in Israel.

Friday 26th May 2006

Great sleep; up and away at 0815hrs for Istanbul. All details changed as Ataturk Cargo Depot was no more so we had to drive to another airport in Asia, a further 45 miles. The crossing into Turkey at the Greek border was a bit frustrating as there seemed to be little organisation; ‘go here for this’, ‘go there for that’! Police, army – you name it they were there. Got it all in the end and it cost only 15 Euro each. If we thought the Macedonian or Serb roads were bad, we were in for a shock. Whilst the Turkish roads (in the country) were very straight, the surface was dreadful, especially for cross-ply tyres. The driving was really demanding and it was terribly hot. Turks simply have no driving standards. Mark drove for the first 100 miles and he did very well under seriously difficult conditions. I wouldn’t recommend this to anyone, and certainly not in an 80-year-old car! I have to admit that in the end I insisted I took over the driving as I was just too nervous a passenger. I suspect Mark may have been quite happy with this, particularly as we were approaching Istanbul the standards got even worse. We saw stray dog, cats, sheep, goats. You name it, we saw it.

The drive across the Bosphorous Bridge was just terrifying! Traffic was unbelievably heavy – 14 toll-booths running into three lanes of traffic. These three should have been 5 or 6; two cars had broken down and the passengers just got out and left them in the middle of the road!

Anyway, we eventually got to the new airport and drove UK-2 straight onto the huge wooden pallet that had been made specially for UK-2 in Israel and shipped out a few day earlier – of course to Ataturk Airport. It had to be moved by truck to the new airport after the fire. How the JNF managed to reschedule the flight I shall never know, but they did and they deserve medals for their efforts.



I was very emotional at this stage as it was now certain that we would get to Israel. Prior to now there had always been a nagging thought at the back of my mind that something would go wrong, but it hadn't and we were here. The next drive would be from Ben Gurion Airport to Tiberias. I had difficulty keeping tears back, but I managed to in the end.

So we 'coached' to the Kenpinski Hotel in Istanbul, a short journey that took almost 2 hours. You just can't imagine the traffic – and I mean you just CAN'T IMAGINE IT!

Checked in and had a shower and within a hour, Stephen and Jonathan arrived at the hotel for a 2-night stay. It was lovely seeing them and I really appreciated them coming all this way. We all three joined the JNF dinner (at which both Steve and Johnny were welcomed by Simon Winters) in one of the suites which we entered through the old palace – wow! what a spectacle that is. We had a lovely night together and I slept like a baby.

Saturday 27th May 2006

Good sleep in what is rated the best hotel in Europe, overlooking The Bosphorus and Asia where we left UK-2 yesterday due to the fire at Ataturk Airport. Jonathan, Stephen and I breakfasted together and then took a taxi to the Blue Mosque. Obviously impressive if you like Mosques – the smell of sweaty feet was all-pervasive as one must remove ones shoes on entry! We then went on to The Bazaar which is just incredible. Crazy place and managed NOT to buy anything though Steve bought five carpets and a ton of Turkish delight.



I left the boys after we had lunched in a little street café as I had to be up very early in the morning, so had a rest at the hotel.

Dinner with Jonathan and Steve in the hotel and retired at 2200hrs.

Sunday 28th May 2006

Up at 0500hrs to catch the coach to Ataturk Airport and Turkish Airlines flight to Tel Aviv. Though there were complaints about the flight, I was at the front of the economy class with some Israelis and had a great flight. The lady beside my told me another passenger came from Beit Hashita, so we had a chat and she promised to tell Carmella that I was going to visit her (which she did).

Taken to collect UK-2 immediately after arrival to find her in fine fettle and raring to go – as was I. But first we had to ‘do the paperwork’ which took ages, or at least it seemed so as it was terribly hot with little or no shade.

Anyway, we got going at about 1100hrs and then got lost driving into Ra-nana. We got petrol and a lovely blond lady then said that she was driving North so we should follow her. Thank goodness – we’d have missed the crucial turn as it was poorly signposted.

Anyway – we got to Atlit Junction and followed the map and the rough instructions I had been given to find the Carmel Spa Hotel where Sally was. What a drive up a narrow road – worse than N Wales – and eventually got there to find Sally in tears of emotion (as was I).

Lovely to see her again.



The manager had kept a garage space for UK-2 which was great (I had sent him an e-mail but I’d forgotten!). We three then lunched on a feast and a half and we didn’t have to pay – what luxury!

Off we the went to try to find Michael Shafir; got lost again but eventually got back on track and we met-up at a road junction for a few minutes. Then off direct to Tiberias – Mark driving and we flew there though it was very hot, and we arrived at 1640hrs with a big dinner for 1930hrs.

Once in the hotel (Galli Kinneret), we showered and went down to the pool for a rest, to be met by Steffie and all her entourage. We had a lovely chat over drinks and then we had to get ready for the coach to take up into Tiberias itself for dinner at ‘Decs’ on the waterfront. Some BBQ – just too much food!

Sally and I left early and walked back very tired.

Monday 29th July 2006

Good night’s sleep – breakfasted with Danny Tempkin. What an interesting man and it was great seeing him again after so many years. He’s 67 now and mostly working in London.

We decided NOT to go via the Golan – both the car and all of us were just too tired – so we didn't attend the Briefing but left and drove south to Degania and then turned right to the Dead Sea. However, I wanted to visit Beit Hashita so a hour later we were driving up the main entrance to the kibbutz. It's changed hugely! Carmella arrived at the shop where we were waiting and we took UK-2 to where Ruti lived. Had a lovely cool drink and some biscuits and was told that the factory had been sold to Osem and the land sold to someone else – the kibbutz was really just a group of homes. All very sad.



Next stop was the Dead Sea in temperatures above 40°C. Sally was in the back and wisely suggested that it would make sense to have a little shade, so we reluctantly put the hood up, a great improvement. Stopped for water (us) and petrol (car) and wee-wee (Sally) and arrived at La Meridian with Dad waiting at the front door in a straw boater and very thrilled to see us all – particularly Sally whom (he said) he thought wasn't coming. It was now incredibly hot and I was really concerned for the drive up to Arad and Jerusalem in the morning.



The hotel was full – what with 5 groups of tourists making about 3500 guests. What a crowd!

Once we had sorted out our room (we ended up in a suite as Dad had inadvertently taken our room), we had a group dinner preceeded by the handing over of a new fire engine to the local fire department, gifted by Eva in memory of her late husband.



Lovely dinner outside with Dad and the Chief Israeli Fire Officer, but the temperature had dropped to 95°F!

Well shattered so retired at 1000hrs and fearing for the drive tomorrow with 4 adults, Dad's luggage, all the spares and of course the heat!

Tuesday 30th May 2006

Though I didn't say anything, I was feeling pretty rough this morning. Had a very light breakfast. I had decided to leave as early as possible to get the drive to Arad over before the heat of the day. I really shouldn't have bothered – the car ran beautifully all the way from the Dead Sea to Arad – an

incredible drive from 1300ft BELOW sea level to 650ft ABOVE sea level. What a relief! Mind you, I should have relied more on the genius of Sir Henry Royce.



Huge reception at Arad and whilst I looked after the car, Sally went into the presentation and met Amos Oz, the writer. We then all went off 'en-convoy' to the main school where all the children were out on the road to welcome us. What a reception they gave us! They were obviously very thrilled to see us and we them.



We then followed the route as per our itinerary – little knowing that it had been changed! The original plan was to visit a small settlement on the border and on the top of a hill, but apparently this was cancelled but we didn't know! So we eventually found this little group of converted containers behind a reinforced fence and electric gate with an armed sentry who promptly let us in without a question. We drove round to find no-one there so drove out, much to the confusion of the sentry!

Next stop was the Tank Museum, but we were to get lost again and we arrived just as the presentations were ending – but we got there.



We then all went off together but due to the senior member of our little group wanting a comfort stop, we lost the group and had to proceed to Jerusalem on our own. Mark drove this last sector and though the traffic into Jerusalem was very heavy, we arrived at The King David to what can only be described as an incredibly emotional reception. Lots of cheering and the waving of flags, a small Klezmer group, a TV and radio crew (we were filmed and interviewed) and cool drinks. Sally and Dad were in the back of the car and I suspect they got as much from it as did Mark and I.



A proud Dad - Anyone would have thought he'd done all the driving!

To have completed this journey was an amazing achievement and we were both very moved by it all – and there was more to come in the morning when we were to drive to The Kotel, but for the moment, we just swam in the pleasure of what we had achieved.

3500 miles in just 14 days driving in an 80-year old car with very few problems. What really surprised me was that we didn't have a single puncture! This I suppose is down to the fact that we were driving quite slowly and could see the pot-holes and detritus on the roads and take avoiding actions – a credit to Mark and I suppose me too!

Were there tears of joy? I'm proud to say there were and I reckon they were well-earned.

We still had visitors to entertain. Steffi's son and his two daughters arrived which was lovely. Then later in the evening we all met Artu and Lisa hecht for pre-dinner drinks in the King David Hotel, followed by dinner just up the road with Dad and the Hechts. Bed by 2300hrs which was very welcome.

Wednesday 31st May 2006

Up early – but this was to be a pivotal day emotionally. After a light breakfast and the inevitable briefing(!), Sally, Mark and I left at 0830hrs in a procession of cars, we were 2nd behind the Sherling Bentley, to drive to The Kotel. I video'd the whole trip – I have become quite adept at driving and videoing at the same time after my experiences in Italy – and parked on The Kotel after driving through The Allenby Gate into The Old City of Jerusalem. The streets were very winding and narrow; what a thrill and I'm sure I will never be able to repeat such an experience.



We then had the pleasure of visiting the new History of the Generations museum – inside the old walls of Jerusalem.



Very moving – both Sally and I had moist eyes when we eventually returned to ground level immediately next to The Western Wall.



We then left The Kotel and dropped Mark off near The King David as Sally and I had to take UK-2 to Ashdod to be containerised ...



...prior to being shipped back to Felixstowe, UK. We had a good drive with absolutely no problems; Sally's map-reading was perfect. Waited ages in the port for the inevitable paperwork to be completed, but eventually all was done and we were brought back to Jerusalem in a coach. Sally and I then walked to Ben Yahuda Street for a coffee etc and returned to the King David to prepare for the Special Last Dinner of the Rally.

Dad joined us at 1930hrs and then had cocktails in the garden followed by dinner by the pool. This was a very sumptuous affair that went on till well past midnight. There was a film show that showed the promo video of the just-completed rally followed by an auction of 14 sketches by Martin Hone that raised over £20,000 – a wonderful result.

Fabulous evening with many congratulating Mark and me on our achievement.

Mark made a very good and amusing speech, and also made a very kind remark to me afterwards that moved me, particularly as we could have fought for over 2 weeks but managed to get on well notwithstanding the generation difference. I should also point out that when we started the drive, I wasn't aware that Mark only had half the use of his right hand, the one he had to change gear with. I was aware that there were times when he refused to change gear, much to my annoyance, and it was only towards the end of the drive that he explained that he found changing gear quite difficult. I'm rather pleased he kept that detail to himself for so long!

The following morning the majority of the participants were to get up at 0530hrs and take a coach to Ben Gurion Airport for their flight back to London, however Sally and I did have another 3 nights at The Accadia Hotel in Herzlia, ostensibly for me to wind-down. We were greatly amused when, sitting in a beach café, we heard some people say: 'Oh look – there's the Rolls-Royce man from the TV!'



What can I say – fame at last?

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UK-2 arrived safely at Felixstowe and Sally and I flew to Norwich to be collected by Jamie and then I took a train to collect the car. The drive back was entirely uneventful – in fact it was an absolute pleasure that finished-off the trip in first-class fashion.

Overall, the car covered 3740 miles at 19.75mpg, used 9.5 pints of oil and a similar quantity of water. I put plenty of air in the tyres and NO PARTS replaced. What an accomplishment for an 80-year old vintage 20hp Rolls-Royce!

Andrew M Singleton
Southport July 2006