



# hello, old bean! are you off to Morges?

Classic British cars (and owners) will be on display at the 22nd annual Swiss Classic British Car Meeting.



One of the rarest automobiles at this year's Swiss Classic British Car Meeting in Morges will be the Bean Car, which is not named after a certain very quiet English TV and film character, because he wasn't even born when the first Bean Cars were made in Dudley, Worcestershire and Coseley, Staffordshire between 1919 and 1929.

On October 5th, two of these old Beans will be among about 1500 gleaming, historic British automobiles parked side-by-side along Morges's lake-side quay. Some makes -- Bentley, Aston Martin, Jaguar -- are well-known; others, like the Bean, Piper, HRG and Lagonda are now nearly forgotten. On this day, British motor manufacturers of the past 100 years will be represented in all their glory.

For the past 20 years, on the first Saturday of October, Morges has been the destination of choice for the owners of some of the most well-maintained and collectible classic British cars in Europe.

It all began in 1992, when Keith Wynn was a member of a classic car club in Geneva called La Bielle Epoque, which is a terrible pun in French (a bielle is the connecting rod from the crankshaft to the piston).

"We were just 12 members in the club," recalls Wynn. "We felt that, to thrive, we needed to attract more members. So we decide to organize an event to attract other enthusiasts. As nearly all of us owned a British car, we figured a British Car Meeting would be safest -- at least we would have a dozen or so cars present! I put an ad in a French classic car weekly newspaper."

Despite some very authentic British weather of fog, rain and cold, the first gathering managed to attract nearly 200 cars from all around Lake Geneva and neighbouring France to the Signal de Bougy car park above Rolle (selected for its parking space and restaurant that could handle large numbers unannounced).

"Everyone who attended was most enthusiastic," says Wynn, "so what was supposed to be a one-off turned into an annual event."

Although the Bielle Epoque club very soon foundered, Wynn – who was then working in the Publishing unit of the World Health Organisation when he wasn't polishing his 1936 Austin 12 or 1956 Triumph TR3 – decided to make the British Car Meeting an annual event. The 2nd edition, held at the same venue, attracted 400 cars.

"I could see that the event was becoming popular," says Wynn, "but also that we needed sponsorship to cover the increasing costs of staging the Meeting. Unfortunately, however, the rules at Signal de Bougy did not allow sponsoring". Wynn's wife Mary,



suggested Morges, because it has three roads leading through it, so Wynn wrote – not very hopefully – to the Morges Chief of Police. The municipality eventually agreed to welcome the meeting, and offered the lake-side quays to display the cars. The Swiss Classic British Car Meeting has been held there ever since, and has now expanded to the adjacent Parc de l'Independence and pedestrian promenade. It is the largest gathering of its kind in Europe.

The formula for the vintage British car gathering remains simple: entrance is free to participants and visitors. On Meeting day, owners simply turn up when they want to and stay as long as they like. All British cars at least 20 years old are welcome. Every year, two or three makes or models are invited as the autos of honour. The spotlight this year will be on Aston Martin and Morris; both of these makes – representing the opposite ends of the motoring spectrum – are celebrating their 100th anniversary in 2013.

The Morges municipality and police continue to be extremely helpful – not surprising, as the event brings some 20,000 visitors to town each year.

For vintage car lovers, it's an opportunity to experience a living museum of beautifully preserved vintage British automobiles – and their remarkable owners.

As one new participant, Michel from Vosges, France wrote in 2011, "Dear organizers, I spent an excellent day on the quays of Morges with my Lotus Elan. This was my first visit. A friendly welcome with no formalities, a great relaxed atmosphere, beautiful cars, in fact everything to make me want to come back."

The Swiss Classic British Car Meeting has no events or distractions, no rallies or drives, no competitions, no best-car-of-show. But that doesn't deter owners from driving hundreds or even thousands of kilometres for the pleasure of parking their car in Morges this special day.

One intrepid owner, "Curly" Goodwin regularly leaves the Isle of Man in his little Austin Seven (a 1920's baby Austin with a miniscule 700cc engine), drives up to Scotland to pick up his mate, then down to Dover and on to Morges. "Curly reckons that driving to Morges in this tiny car is a doddle, says Wynn. "As he once drove it from New York to California, and then decided to continue down to Argentina, he is probably correct. Once in Morges, he drives around the lake on the Friday before the Meeting."

The Meeting is about more than the romance between cars and humans. A few years ago a young man parked his Triumph Spitfire next to a Morris Mini driven by a young woman; they got chatting and by the next Meeting they'd gotten married and come to Morges in their new classic car. More recently they have attended with two young future participants.

Many classic British car clubs make a visit to Morges their end-of-year road trip. The Belgian Triumph Club is one of the keenest, attending every year with at least 20 Triumphs, but there are also Club Jaguar d'Alsace, Triumphs from TR Register Italie, and this year, a contingent of vintage Aston Martins are due from the UK.

As can be imagined, organizing the event requires massive planning. Keith Wynn spends months in preparation. And none of it would happen without the contributions of numerous volunteers and hired help, not to mention all the sponsors, including WRS, Lake Geneva's English language radio station.

"The real hope is that the event will encourage young enthusiasts into the classic car movement", says Wynn, "because, considering the quality of the restoration and maintenance that goes into these old cars, in the end, the present drivers are not the owners, they are only the current guardians of these vehicles. These cars will still exist long after the present keepers have gone, and who will be there to cherish them if it is not the young people of today?"



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