



# Holiday Disaster

What's the worst thing that can happen to you on holiday? To fall sick, to lose your money, or to be assaulted? Resident of Fortis Green, Tony Tuck's recent holiday in France ended in a disaster equal to, if not worse than any of these - his car burst into flames near Angers...

## Vieille saucisse

The 1978 Renault 16L, "ancien voiture" (French for 'old banger') enjoys and esteemed reputation in France. Mine, an ex-demonstration car in excellent condition bought for 6,000F in 1993 had never let me down.

French people in London espousing 80 11 QL 16 number-plate assuming I was a fellow countryman, would eagerly accost me to extol the car's "bon engine" and tell me how on the autoroute it pleaded to go like a rocket.

A respector of the car's venerable age, I never tried it out, preferring the relative sedateness of the D and N roads. Even so, I can attest to its power and durability. It grumbled worst than a back seat driver on our uneven, potholed Capitol streets, but on an open good road - especially in its native land! - it became a fiery stallion chafing at the bit and demanding to be given its head.

## Pneu tyres

In fact, the only problem I'd had was in Springcroft Avenue when some unkind soul, obviously disliking the French or, as the police suggested, not liking me parking in his or her spot, punctured all four of my tyres. So much for the 'entente cordial.'

On Saturday morning 19<sup>th</sup> August, our "vacance" at an end, my wife, Barbara, and I drove away from our home in the Charente and set off confidently for Angleterre et East Finchley.

We started out early to break the back of the journey before the full intense heat of the day. Keeping to a steady 80-100 kms the car purred smoothly as ever. We paused at the Poitiers tollgate to give her a rest, and then again at Loudun.

## Avrille fuel

At 1:50pm at Avrille, 10 kms from Angers, I drove into the local Intermarche pour essence.

The blazing sun was, as the French say, an "inferno". To let the car cool down before I topped up, I drove across the vast car park to the only shady spot, a tall hedgerow to the petrol station.

Getting out to see our legs, Barbara and I became aware of a strong smell of petrol all around the car. I checked under the bonnet. Ca va! I looked underneath the car. No leakage. There was a drain right beside my door. Could fumes be coming from there?

## Flambé

Deeming it wise to move, we got back in the car. I switched on the ignition. The next second there was an al-

mighty bang, followed by flames and a cloud of black smoke.

Scrambling out, we saw that the concrete underneath the car was on fire. Flames billowed out from under the bonnet.

I hastily hauled my briefcase and our luggage off the back seat as the petrol attendants rushed across with fire extinguishers and with great alacrity doused the flames. Opening the bonnet, I saw to my dismay that the electrics were completely burned out.

In something of a state of shock, wondering what could possibly have caused the explosion and how the devil we were going to complete our journey - Barbara had to be back at work on Monday morning! - I telephoned our insurers, Mutuelle de Poitiers.

## Down the panne

Within a quarter of an hour they had organised a breakdown truck. The mechanic examined the car, shook his head and declared it "Kaput" - les reparations auraient coute plus de la valeur de la voiture."

He listened as I explained what had happened the, examining the concrete he sniffed the air like a veritable bloodhound and with Gallic

certainty proffered an authoritative explanation.

Because of the intense heat (45c!) the lack of any breeze, petrol fumes instead of evaporating into the air had built up into a pocket on the ground level precisely where I had the bad luck to park. When I switched on the ignition a spark ignited the fumes. He gestured to the heavens, and shrugged philosophically.

## Look, back in Angers

At the garage, regrettably, I signed the certificat de cession d'un voiture to declare the car scrapped, handed over my certificat d'immatriculation, and was paid 200F.

Our insurers had organised a taxi to take us to our mountainous luggage to the Europcar office at Angers. By 5:30pm, we were back on the road and arrived at Cherbourg at 10:00pm on time to catch our ferry.

We arrived back at our flat on Fortis Green at 8:30am mourning the loss of our faithful ancient Renault 16L, but marvelling at our incredible fortunate escape from awful death or serious injury.

We cannot praise too highly the well co-ordinated efficiency of Mutuelle de Poitiers. British insurers kindly take note!

## KALASHNIKOV KULTUR

# A good year for the roses?

by Ricky Savage  
Voice of social irresponsibility

Cor, what a scorcher! Yes, it's welcome to the globally warmed-up Britain that sweltered through a long hot summer of temperatures in the high 80s, hosepipe bans, fatties oozing out of shorts and mindless panics about the affect the hot weather had on the lawn. There was something else as well, the distant whine of tour operators praying for rain because no-one wanted to jet off to the Costa del Livin' to spend two food-poisoned weeks in some half-built concrete hell-hole when they could get sun, sea, sand and bloody-minded landladies in downtown Blackpool. What a shame.

I wish I knew what it was about us Brits that causes us to whinge on about the first decent summer since 1976. Maybe we aren't easily satisfied, maybe we just like a good old-fashioned moan, maybe we resent not being able to turn ourselves the colour of wrinkled prunes in our own back gardens or maybe we all secretly want skin cancer. I don't know.

What I do know is that we moan like crazy if there isn't enough sun and whinge on and on and on if there is a decent summer with insanely high temperatures. Why, oh why

can't we just sit back in the shade, open another ice-cool lager and just enjoy it, like the French, the Italians, the Germans and just about everyone else?

I guess the answer lies in this weird tradition of working solidly through the day from 9 to 5 with only an hour for lunch. That's fine in the usual British rainy season that lasts from May to October, but not so cool if the temperatures are high, the sun is out and what passes for an England Cricket team might actually win a test series.

At times like that we need long lunches under shady trees with cool lagers, iced wines and jugs of Pimms. What we don't need is sweaty offices, dodgy air-conditioning and morons with attitude telling us that we should be grateful that we do have a job. In fact why have unemployment statistics gone up this summer? Because lounging in the sun is better than working. Besides, how many of our wonderful politicians work during the summer? None of them. Well, none of the human ones at any rate. John Major watches cricket, Tony Blair goes on his hols and only the mad Vulcan, that is John Redwood, sticks around ignoring the sun.

So, let's quit whinging, let's turn up the air-con, cool the wine/beer/Pimms and get seriously chilled-out ready to moan about the rain when it arrives in October.



Photo: London Borough of Barnet Local History

## The Way it Was

The grounds of the Five Bells in East End Road have altered, but the pub itself is instantly recognisable in this c1905 postcard.

The building is 19<sup>th</sup> Century but there was a predecessor, in existence by 1751 and pulled down in 1811, which stood on the next block of land to the right.

He present inn was in op-

eration by 1814. Like other inns of that period it was used for a variety of purposes including a post receiving station and a venue for bare-knuckle fighting matches.

Another of these we find recorded in 1825: "A coroner's inquest was held at the Five Bells on the body of David Rayner, Esq., which was found in a pond near East End."

by Paul Savill

A more appropriate name for the pub today should be the Four Bells. For some time now the pub's road sign has been short of a bell!

The Archer thanks Barnet Local Studies and Archives for this picture. If any reader has any interesting pictures of East Finchley as it was, please contact us or Dr. Taylor of the Archives on 359 2628.

## Photo call

If any reader of The Archer has a photograph of Sims Motor Units, who used to be in New Oak Road, would they kindly contact Len Willcocks on 0181-444 8289.