



- Left: Peter's 1968 Jaguar E-type Series II before restoration
- Below: waiting to board the Calais ferry at Dover, the E-type in pole position ahead of the DB6

European grand tour

Peter Bruce buys an E-type and takes it on a road trip to the Vernasca Hillclimb in Italy

When the reality of retirement sets in, it is great to dream of what could still be achieved, health permitting. In 2017, I was invited by a friend to accompany him through France, Switzerland and Italy in his 1966 Aston Martin DB6 and take part in the Vernasca Hillclimb in Italy – an enthusiast's 9.5km road experience, not a race – before driving back to Scotland through the wine-growing regions of France.

How could I refuse? Better still, we both had permission from our wives! The hillclimb started at the beautiful historic town of Castell'Arquato (in the Emilia Romagna region) and consisted of a flat section of road about 4km long with artificial chicanes, followed by a series of twists, hairpins and steep gradients as you ascend the hill, finishing in the lovely village of Vernasca. All the roads were closed off by the wonderful and helpful Italian Polizia.

The event normally takes place over three days and involves nearly 300 cars, from the 1920s up to the early 1970s and naturally, most of the cars are Italian. Each car can take part in one hillclimb per day, followed by a leisurely lunch with excellent local wines.



- Top: **Udi opta debitas nonecum laccum ese et accum fuga. Udi bla que cumquatesto et, simus inus, adis mo eius.**
- Above: the original engine after completion of restoration



So, in June 2017, with a special invite from the organisers, we made the trip – and I was smitten. Throughout the journey home, my friend and I discussed the possibility of buying a classic car for myself, as I was returning to the United Kingdom after 44 years in Dubai and needed to give myself a retirement present! It wasn't long before we decided that a Jaguar E-type would be the ideal classic car for me, and we both immediately set about searching for one on the internet. The great thing about retirement is that there are no time restrictions, so you can

peruse all the available sales websites with no pressure to make an impulse purchase. After about three months of searching, we had made a short-list of possible cars to see, and set about visiting each and every one. This was an eye opener – as what you see on the web is not always what you see in reality! We even had a guy trying to convince us that a 2+2 was actually a standard coupé, and the photos on the internet had been taken in such a way that it was not immediately obvious! All the cars we saw came up short, although we had limited

our search to Series I models, as we thought this would provide the best financial payback in the future.

This is where our knight in shining armour came to the rescue.

We had taken the prudent step of contacting Angus Moss of Moss Jaguar (e-Conic Cars) with a view to employing him to carry out a third-party inspection of any E-type that we were interested in, but as our search had not come up with any car that we thought was priced correctly, or in the condition that we hoped, his expert knowledge had not been required.

As luck would have it, the last E-type we saw was not far away from the Moss Jaguar workshop in Letchworth, so we decided to drive to see Angus in person and inform him of the outcome of our search. He was very obliging and spent time showing us around his workshop, where we could see the standard of E-type restoration that he and his team were achieving – it was absolutely stunning.

To cut a long story short, we eventually decided on a Jaguar Series II as our car of choice,

as we wanted a car that would be reliable, comfortable and safe. Angus sourced an ex-States example for us and he carried out a full nut-and-bolt restoration and converted the car to right-hand drive.

If you want to see the restoration, it was featured in the November 2018 edition of *Jaguar World* magazine, and maybe later we will write another article for this magazine showing the full restoration.

We picked up the restored E-type in August 2018 and drove it straight to Scotland as a ‘shake-down’ trip, then returned to London. No faults whatsoever, except for a minor problem with the windscreen-wiper motor, which Moss Jaguar fixed immediately.

We then contacted the organisers of the Vernasca Hillclimb to see if we could enter the newly acquired E-type the following year. This was not an easy task, as there were a lot of car owners applying to enter and, correctly, Italian cars took precedence. Luckily, after a series of phone calls from various English and Italian friends, our entry was accepted.

- Below left: Peter in the medieval town centre of Troyes – the location of the trip’s first stopover
- Below: an interesting roadside sculpture marking the highest point of the Grimsel Pass
- Bottom: taking a break for an E-type portrait with a scenic backdrop on the Furka Pass

- Right: the E-type and DB6 in good company, with an Austin Healey Sprite and Riley Big Four, awaiting the start of the hillclimb in Castell’Arquato
- Below: the Vernasca Hillclimb attracts a varied entry of classic racing and road cars
- Below right: single-seaters wait to begin their run up the hillclimb course



We planned to travel through France and into Switzerland and, if possible and weather permitting, we would traverse the Furka Pass, Grimsel Pass, Oberwald and then drive into Italy to Castell’Arquato.

It all finally came to fruition and we boarded the ferry at Dover on 23 June 2019, with both the Aston Martin DB6 and the Jaguar E-type. The channel crossing was smooth and punctual.

Once on dry land in Calais, we set off to our pre-booked Airbnb accommodation in Troyes, approximately 400km from Calais on the A26 and A2. Troyes is a super stopover, and features a medieval town centre with lots of interesting history and extremely good restaurants.

We used Airbnb for all our stays and can honestly say we did not have one complaint with any of our selections – and they were random selections. One tip we would pass on is that our filter for selection of accommodation included secure car parking. This narrowed the search and in some cases the houses were slightly away from the main town centre, but this did not stop us finding some fantastic restaurants, even if it did mean a good walk.

Next day we planned another long run to our base in Weggis, on Lake Lucerne, Switzerland – a distance of 500km

on the A5 and E35, but taking a scenic road to miss the traffic in Basle. A long run, but surprisingly the E-type proved very comfortable, thanks to the wonderful seats that Moss Jaguar had installed.

Both the E-type and the Aston Martin never missed a beat, although we had to stop regularly for petrol and the E-type lost a window-mounted mirror at 120kph on the A5.

The next few days were probably the best days of driving we had ever experienced and we were extremely lucky with clear skies throughout.

We drove the Furka Pass (unfortunate name!) which was used in the James Bond film *Goldfinger*. The Aston Martin DB6 received plenty of admirers on the journey, but I think they were disappointed that my friend did not look like Sean Connery!

On the second day we drove the Grimsel Pass, which is absolutely superb and should be a ‘must do’ on everyone’s list. There is a great restaurant at the top serving really good salads.

Next day we made an early start for our drive to Italy via the St. Gotthard pass and then joined the unglamorous E35 to our rendezvous with all our friends at Fiorenzuola D’Arda, near Parma, a distance of about 350km. A word of warning – the

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traffic around Milan is notoriously slow and we were pleased to have a cool beer (or two) when we arrived at our destination.

We stayed at Hotel Mathis in Fiorenzuola D'Arda, as the owner was also a classic car enthusiast and he was well connected with the Vernasca Hillclimb committee, so he organized everything for us, including excellent parking areas prior to the hillclimb. The owner is quite a character and has a fantastic collection of classic cars, included an original steam-powered car and lots of vintage Fiats, all stored in his beautiful farmhouse. He also has a collection of vintage motorcycles that he keeps in the basement of his hotel!

Our rest day naturally involved visiting the village restaurants in the vineyard areas, and true to their reputation the food and wine were extraordinarily superb.

Then to the hillclimbs.

The cars are called to the startline at 30-second intervals and introduced to a surprisingly large crowd, which is quite exciting when your name is called.

When the start flag dropped, the cars started on a level B-type road with plastic-cone chicanes to reduce speed, but this did not stop the E-type passing the magic 100mph between chicanes, before having to slow down on the ascent section due to the many hairpins. All the time the thought was going through my head that we still had to return by road to London! Other drivers must also have been worried, as some of them were driving very, very expensive classic Ferraris on a road with stone walls on either side.

The hillclimb finishes in the village of Vernasca, with a superb buffet and views over the local vineyards – life doesn't get much better.

Finally, everyone formed a snake formation back down the hill, in no particular order. Classic Fiats followed by vintage Bugatti's, followed by single-seater racing cars – an absolute joy for photographers.

In the evening, there was a sit-down dinner in the castle grounds of Castell'Arquato, where the banter and wine flowed freely.

The following day was more or less the same, but with many new friends that we had met during our stay. The Italians are so good at these events –

• Below: an excellent Airbnb find at the charming Château de Varambon

• Bottom: Peter and the E-type leave the startline for their first run up the hillclimb course



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so laid back and friendly, yet so knowledgeable when it comes to automobiles. Luckily, the Jaguar E-type and the Aston DB6 had survived the 'ordeal' and it was time to say goodbye to everyone and plan our trip back to the UK.

We had allowed seven days for our return trip, so that we could explore France. We planned to visit some of the ski areas that we have used in the past and our first stop was Courmayeur, near the border between Italy and France, on the south side of Mont Blanc. We then travelled to Tignes, Val d'Isère and Bonneval sur Arc. In summer, all looked totally different from when we had skied there in the past. Two days of glorious driving.

Our next night's stay was at Château de Varambon and yes, this was an Airbnb! We had found this gem by chance on our previous trip and were met again by the Count and Countess, who treated us as long-lost friends. I would recommend this Château to anyone looking for

accommodation in this area, although it must be said that it has obviously become more popular, as the price had doubled since our last visit!

Our slow trip back took in the lovely Beaune wine-growing region, including Château de Meursault, and I would highly recommend the Wine Route, which is well signposted.

Next stop Reims. What a beautiful and historic town, with a fantastic church – well worth taking a day to explore.

Finally, a tour of the Grand Cruz champagne region around Verzenay to round off a fabulous trip, before embarking again at Calais for our return journey to London.

The E-type covered just over 2,000 miles without a hitch and we estimated a fuel consumption of roughly 22mpg.

Hats off to Moss Jaguar for preparing the car to such perfection and also to our wives for allowing us to enjoy ourselves!

• Below left: there is no better driving experience than on French cobbled lanes looking over an E-type bonnet

• Below: the final stop, for a tour of the Verzenay Grand Cruz vineyards

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