

From the flatlands of East Anglia, Carrotlanders headed south for a dramatic change of scenery. Geof Carlton Smith describes a splendid holiday.

FROM CARROTLAND TO SWITZERLAND



We went to Switzerland for the first time in our Sevens – it was a fabulous trip! We, being Steve & Christine, Dave & Linda, Nevil & Ann, Geof & Lois, took our time to get there and had some fantastic experiences on the way; we took our time to come back too and enjoyed it equally as much. Best of all, though, was the anniversary event itself.

We had decided from the start of our planning that we would enjoy being tourists as well as driving on as many Sevens roads as we could find. This strategy would create more interest for the 'non-drivers' as well as fun for those behind the wheel.

We set off on very early on Sunday 27th; well, early for a group of retired Seven fanatics, from Norfolk and Suffolk. My wife had finally agreed to forfeit Wimbledon, well the second week at least, to fulfil my ambition to attend the famous Swiss Meeting. She doesn't always admit it but I know that she likes to come on all the Seven trips and blats and we had an agreement that they would never be during the Wimbledon fortnight – until this year. It was to be special year after all – their 30th anniversary.

We arrived at Laon early evening, put the cars to bed after a long day and checked into the worst hotel of our trip. To make matters worse it

was Sunday evening and there was only one open 'restaurant' within walking distance – a McDonalds. What a start to our feast of French food! The following morning we walked the old city on the hill and this experience, including our first coffee in the street, nearly made up for the 'tired' hotel.

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The next day we similarly toured the ancient city of Troyes, including the opportunity to see the enormous vaulted cellars which are commonplace beneath the city centre.

On to Lons le Saunier and thence to Bern. Our 'navigator of the day' is not too hot with his French and when we arrived at the border, heading for Bern, he did not get the significance of the word *Douane* and did not stop. Needless to say, the Swiss police let him know of his error in no uncertain terms (with their siren – much to our amusement). Fortunately they were all 'well-mooded' and we did not get interned!

We left Bern early the next day and drove via Lake Thun, Interlaken, Grindewald and the Trummelbach Falls at Lauterbrunnen (what amazing scenery!) on our way to Fredy Kumchick's garage at Schötz for the start of the meeting. We arrived in good time to quaff some beer and check-in at our hotel before returning to Fredy's for the evening barbecue. It was a great start to the event with Sevens from all over western Europe, good company and wonderful cars to drool over in the garage.

The next day saw us hillclimbing in the wheel-tracks of Jim Clark and others in the morning (Yes, Clark drove a Lotus 38 on the St. Ursanne – Les Rangiers climb. Ed.), speeding round cones in a derelict builders yard (not me I hasten to say) in the afternoon and dancing the night away (after devouring another barbecue) to a live rock band in the evening. A superb day!

By the time we had tried every offering at the buffet breakfast the next morning we were a little later than planned heading off for St Moritz. Somebody had told us that it could take ten hours (I guess a 'fibber' or a very slow driver!) so we spent some time on the autoroute before heading over the mountains. An accident on the autoroute coaxed us into a service area where one of our party – who enjoys his



Right:
The customary gathering
for the end-of-event photograph
beside the lake in St. Moritz,
with a particularly good turnout
of British-based Sevens.



**Far left:**

Sevens packed into a surprisingly colourful underground carpark, beneath the hotel in St. Moritz.

Left:

Table for eight please! Carrotlanders taking lunch *au grand air*. In the foreground are Lois and (Suffolk AR) Geof Carlton Smith.



And three sleepy boys... on the ferry home, all the miles and the excitement has taken its toll and these travellers have clearly eschewed the Red Bull...

coffee with two spoonfuls of sugar in it – was heard muttering, under his breath, something about the wisdom of putting salt into ‘sugar dispenser look-alikes’ on the tables...

The road from Bad Ragaz, via Klosters, Davos, and the Fluelapass to St Moritz was ‘to die for’ (*Well, hopefully not! Ed.*) although the traffic, particularly bikers, was too heavy for maximum enjoyment. We arrived at St Moritz mid-afternoon and were jam-packed into a small under-hotel garage.

The shops were very attractive but we didn’t allow our wives to go further than the windows for fear of needing another mortgage! Expensive would be a gross understatement.

The dinner that evening was superb and after his speech Roger Savaré, principal organiser of the event, was given the acclamation that he so deserved. We went to bed knowing where to go the next morning and knowing that we all must ‘nose-to-tail’ on a parade around the town before leaving for lunch at Savognin.

Before we set off for the parade one of our company was heard telling his wife to follow the street map ultra-carefully. ‘Why?’ said she. ‘So that if we get lost, I know where we are!’ As it happened, this was good advice because

the principle of following the tail ahead was destroyed when a few decided to head for home and took the snake with them.

So we set off for the Julierpass and it was every bit as good as we had anticipated. Over many years of driving in Alpine regions in my tin-top with wife and four children I have frequently been annoyed and frustrated by the antics of local drivers overtaking me round hairpin bends. I have long held an ambition to get my own back and the Julierpass gave me the opportunity to do just that. Wow, here comes the adrenalin again. It was particularly satisfying going downhill, but would my old Seven slow me down enough, with its drums and discs, at the next bend?

We left Savognin after an excellent lunch and took the autoroute for a 150-mile sprint, accompanied by one Swiss Sevens, to Basel. There were quite a few showers on the way but when a really heavy one began we entered six-kilometre tunnel and missed the worst of it. There are a lot of tunnels in Switzerland and the necessity to change down a gear or two always seemed to arise!

From Basel we drove into the Vosges area – west of Colmar and east of Epinal – and enjoyed some really fantastic roads but now with virtually no

other traffic. We really ‘went for it’, but counted ourselves fortunate that, as we moved on after a coffee stop, the blue gendarmerie van with its customary three occupants drew up from the direction that we were headed. A coffee-break for them, a lucky break for us.

The return part of our trip continued via Bar le Duc (a few shops at more affordable prices for the girls), Noyon (for a few bits and pieces at Auchan to take home) and then our final French lunch in the old fishing village of Etaples before catching an early-evening ferry at Dunkirk. Finally a blast up the M2, M25 and A12, and home – tired but very satisfied.

Postscript:

We did have a feast of French (and Swiss) food; we improved our navigational skills; we enhanced our French and visited some wonderful places. The cars all behaved well (apart from my ignition light briefly sending misleading messages); we got on well and we had a lot of laughs. We also agreed that it was better than our Scotland trips, better than our Wales trips, better than our Yorkshire Moors trip and that **we must do it again.**

I would particularly like to publicly thank Roger Savaré and his team for their excellent organisation of the event.