

## APRIL FOOLS, 5 & 6 April 2014

The weather forecasts had been suggesting for some days ahead that this year's April Fools weekend would not be rain-free, and so it proved. However, the Saturday was dry all day, and the rain came overnight and into early Sunday morning. By the time the Model Ts set out on Sunday morning the rain had stopped, and it only returned early on Sunday afternoon for a significant shower, and then on-and-off drizzle. The temperatures were pretty warm for the time of year, reaching as much as 16°C, and not dropping below 8° overnight. So, no complaints about the weather.

Some 40 Model Ts, including one bus, assembled at the Bell Hotel in Winslow on Saturday morning, and started out promptly at 10.00. Neil had been quite secretive about what we would be visiting on the Saturday, and it turned out to be quite a mystery tour – but one which had been carefully themed.

The first run of the day was about 20 miles, and took us past the site of the Great Train robbery and up Ivinghoe Beacon, one of the highest points in the county (760 feet above sea level), with some tremendous views. Ivinghoe Beacon is a popular spot for walkers, sightseers, and model aircraft enthusiasts, who use lift generated by the wind blowing up the hill. It is the starting point of the Icknield Way to the east, and the Ridgeway long-distance path to the west.

From the Beacon, you get a good view of the Whipsnade chalk lion on the Dunstable Downs, just to the south west of Whipsnade village. The Downs are a continuation of the range of chalk upland that also includes the Chiltern Hills and the Berkshire Downs. The Lion faces west on the slopes beneath Whipsnade Wild Animal Park and is 483 feet long. It was created in 1933 to indicate the position of the Wild Animal Park. During the war it was covered with turf and netting. Now it is occasionally illuminated.

The first stop of the day was at Wards Hurst Farm. This is not only a working farm, run by Mark Gent and his father Paul, it is also a base for Mark's business of supplying props and drinking water (by the bowser!) to the film and TV industry. In addition to a long line of bowsers, Mark has a very impressive collection of extremely large toys, of the agricultural and earth moving variety. One of the largest was a huge Volvo dump truck, in the process of receiving some servicing work - makes any Model T work seem easy-peasy by comparison.

Mark, not surprisingly, has some excellent workshop facilities, and there were a few envious glances in that direction as well. We were free to look around the collection, which has many items of interest, including several very nice combine harvesters from the 1960s: these now look tiny in comparison to the modern-day monsters.

Some items in the collection are very rare, either prototypes or experimental/evaluation models which never made it into production, or examples where very few have survived.

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Moving on from Wards Hurst Farm we travelled a further 14 miles, via a mainly scenic route, to the village of Hollingdon. Here we stopped at Barry Tracy's collection. Barry is a Model T owner, who used to own the franchise for Wolfrace wheels. During this time he developed the locking wheel nut, and he now produces in the region of 35,000 locking wheel nuts per week.

The focus of the visit was Barry's collection of Ferraris, from roughly the last 25 years of production. All six of them looked absolutely pristine, as did the garage in which they are kept – you literally could have eaten your lunch off them, or off the garage floor – but of course nobody dared. Our favourite was the F40, a mid-engined, two-door sports coupé, built from 1987 to 1992. It was designed to celebrate Ferrari's 40th anniversary and was the last Ferrari personally approved by Enzo Ferrari. At the time it was the fastest, most powerful, and most expensive car that Ferrari sold to the public.

The factory suggested retail price was approximately US\$400,000 in 1987. 1,315 F40s were manufactured in total. The F40 was the first road legal production car to break the 200 mph (320 km/h) barrier. Interestingly, it has almost exactly the same cubic capacity as a Model T.....

Special mention needs to be made of the lunch arrangements, which Barry and family very kindly provided for all, and which were very much appreciated. The numbers arriving at Barry's were considerably greater than expected, yet Barry and his family coped with this brilliantly. Very many thanks to all concerned.

Leaving Barry's collection after lunch, we travelled on some 7 miles for the final visit of the day, passing along what is claimed to be the longest high street in England (Stewkley, 1.7 miles) on the way. We stopped to visit what Neil had described as "a large garage with lots of small toys". This turned out to be the collection of Bill Hallam and the Three Counties Railway Society. Bill is a dairy farmer, but in his spare time, with a group of enthusiasts, he runs the Three Counties Railway Society. What we saw was a fantastic, very large "0" gauge model railway layout, which filled the entire garage. This has been built up over the last 4 years, with all the rolling stock, buildings and scenery being custom-built by the members of the Society. When we were there it was taking 4 members of the society to operate the layout. The realism of the layout is such that when carefully photographed or filmed it can appear completely true to life. Like a Model T, it looks like there is always something to do with this layout; there are certainly plans for further development and new features.

The 11 mile return journey to the Bell took us down the back roads, with some fine views of Aylesbury and the Chiltern Hills. Most Model T'ers arrived back at the Bell by 5pm.

Nigh-on 100 people sat down to the renowned carvery dinner at the Bell on Saturday evening, in our own private room. The dinner was as good as ever. During dinner, there was some brisk business for the Club shop, and strong sales of "The English Model T Ford", Volume 2, which was fresh from the

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printers and on sale for the first time. Since all 3 of the authors were present, many of us managed to get copies signed by all 3. This is another high quality production, full of interest, and it's well worth the money for the pictures alone. A worthy companion to Volume 1.

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> April being the day of the Grand National, each Model T entered for April Fools had been randomly allocated one of the horses, with the "owner" of the winning horse being awarded a prize of £50. The results were announced during dinner, the winning horse being Pineau De Re at 25/1, the winning Model T owners being Sue & Martin Waller, and John Darlow. (Because the Model Ts outnumbered the horses, some horses had been allocated to more than one T, so with two winners, £100 was paid out!).

Sunday morning saw a relatively early (9.30) start. Before the off, packed lunches were distributed, on the basis that lunching arrangements in the centre of Daventry on a Sunday were a little uncertain. It seemed like the entire Tuckett family had been busy getting the lunches ready that morning – they were certainly very welcome. Also, the Bell had donated a bottle of champagne to the club to be used as a prize. On this occasion the manager of the Bell, Phillip Munday, was asked to pick the Model T he liked most out of those assembled in the car park of the Bell. He chose the Landalette owned by Jeff Huntback as the deserving winner, and duly presented the prize.

Although the roads were still damp on Sunday morning, the rain had passed by the time we set off for Daventry. The run there was fairly direct, to ensure timely arrival at our destination, and mainly along fairly quiet A roads. Reaching the centre of Daventry we parked up near the Market Square and the Church. We then visited Daventry Museum which is a small museum containing a wide range of items with a local connection. One example was a fascinating newspaper article on the first motor car in Northamptonshire (which correctly predicted that nothing would ever be the same again!).

There was a Model T connection as well, since we were given a talk by Rod Viveash, a member of MTRGB, and a retired BBC radio engineer, about the broadcasting station at Daventry. Some of the old valve equipment salvaged from Daventry and other radio stations is on display in the Museum. This included an example of a very large, water cooled valve – water cooling was necessary because of the very high power levels in the transmitters.

In 1925 the newly created BBC constructed a broadcasting station on Borough Hill just outside the town. Daventry was chosen because it was the point of maximum contact with the land mass of England and Wales. From 1932 the BBC Empire Service (now the BBC World Service) was broadcast from there. The masts and aerials on Borough Hill were a feature of the landscape for over 65 years, and Daventry continued to broadcast to the world until 1992, when the facility was transferred to other BBC World Service sites. Many Daventry people reminisce about programmes being picked up and transmitted through their electric kettles and toasters! Some of the Model T members also recalled the early electronic ignition systems in the 1970s being completely zapped by high-power radio signals from stations such as Daventry. This became such a problem that the manufacturers would deliberately drive by a powerful radio station to test whether their ignition systems were

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sufficiently robust. Of course, a Model T would never be affected in such a way – and it was observed that a Model T was more likely to be the cause of such a problem than be the victim of it!

In February 1935 the radio station at Daventry was used for the first-ever practical demonstration of radar, by its inventor Robert Watson-Watt and Arnold Frederic Wilkins. They used a radio receiver installed in a trailer to receive signals bounced off a metal-clad Handley Page Heyford bomber flying across the radio transmissions. The interference picked up from the aircraft allowed its approximate navigational position to be estimated.

The station closed in 1992 and only one of the radio masts now remains.

Outside the museum were a couple of vehicles of interest. Firstly, Rod Viveash had arrived in his very nice Ford Model Y pick-up. This is thought to be the only pick-up in existence, since Ford never made a pick-up version. Rod's Model Y was ordered new by the original customer from a Ford dealer as a 5 cwt van, and then sent straightaway by the dealer to a coachbuilder for the pick-up conversion, which had been done very professionally. The pick-up has been kept very much as original, including some of the paintwork and nearly all of the interior.

Secondly, there was what was reputed to be the longest serving Land Rover (a Series 2A) in the British Army. It finally retired in 2004, with only around 5,000 miles on the clock. Latterly it had been used for ceremonial duties, and so was kept very smart. It is certainly the only Land Rover we have ever seen that has chrome plated bumpers.

We returned from Daventry to Winslow via the scenic route, which took in some interesting single track roads, and some pretty villages. On the way out of Daventry we passed by the Ford Parts Distribution Centre. This was opened in 1968 and today employs over 500 people. The 130-acre building took a year to build at a cost of £2.25M and was for many years considered the largest building in the United Kingdom. It was located at Daventry primarily due to the proximity to the M1.

The Centre provides a parts delivery service to Ford sites and Ford dealer networks in the UK, Europe and many worldwide locations, including the Middle East and the Americas. It handles parts for the complete Ford range of vehicles marketed in Europe, and stocks 100,000 different parts for up to 10 years from the end of car production – (so nothing for Model Ts then).

In 2011 Ford moved its Customer Relationship Centre to a new facility adjacent to the Daventry Parts Distribution Centre. More than 100 service professionals are located at the new Centre, dedicated to answering customer enquiries. It is now one of the largest Ford customer contact centres in the world.

By the time most people arrived back in Winslow in mid-afternoon the weather had taken a turn for the worse, so there was some rapid trailering up, and then we all headed off in different directions.

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This was a very successful, well-supported event, with nearly 120 people attending, and a good mix of familiar and new faces. It offered something for everyone, and had the usual quota of single track roads, one ford, numerous signs warning of ice, various other traffic hazards, and the inevitable potholes. We also travelled down a road marked "closed", although in fact it wasn't. There were no major mechanical problems, just one or two cases of intermittent fuel supply, seemingly caused by dirt in the tank, supply line or carburettor, as well as a couple of hats blown off in gusts of wind. The approximate total distance covered over the two days was 120 miles (55 miles on Saturday, 65 miles on Sunday).

April Fools seems to get more popular every year. Credit for the success of this event must of course go to Neil, but also to the whole Tuckett family, all of whom have contributed in one way or another. A big thank you to all the Tucketts.

Geoff and Emma King