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A rush through
French country side :
17th Tour Auto
15 - 19 April 2008

Words and Photos Hans Burger

On Monday, April 14th 2008, the Grand Palais in Paris hosted the 230 cars that took part in the Tour Auto Lissac, in a tribute to the legendary race which dates back to 1899, the *Tour de France Automobile (TdF)*. One could admire the chrome and steel icons in the unique setting of one of Paris' landmarks the Grand Palais, whose history is intimately linked to that of the automobile. From 1901 to 1961 the Grand Palais, built for the World Expo in 1900, was the venue for the Paris Motor Show. In 2007 the automobile made a triumphant return to the renovated Grand Palais during last year's Tour Auto Lissac, an improvement to the Tour as cars and competitors are sheltered from European spring weather. In Paris we had quite some heavy rains on Saturday and Monday and if all the years before 2007 the event would have been started from the Place de Trocadéro everything would have been soaked through. Monday was the day for final checks and scrutineering.



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This years Tour led the competitors from Paris to the Old Harbour of Marseilles. Nothing is easier than a Paris-Marseilles journey: jump into a train, take an airplane or get into a car and 770 km further you have reached your destination. Most convenient! But, the Tour does not aim for a handy solution, only looking for a pleasant trip. Thus, this Paris-Marseille 2008 route took five days, from race track to race track and from timed road stage to another, covering over 1800 km mostly on secondary country roads and leading through some of France's most scenic regions like Burgundy, Auvergne with Volcanoes National Park and Dordogne river valley, the Cevennes Mountains with the Tarn river gorgeous and the Luberon Mountains close to the Mediterranean coast.

Each crew had the choice to enrol their car in either Competition or Regularity class. Along the road sections, it was obviously the French Driving Code which layed down the law, hidden speed traps were in operation. Regarding the timed sessions (race track or closed road stage), in the *Regularity* section the most precise was the winner; in the *Competition* "pedal to the metal" was the motto, the fastest gained the crown.

As each Tour Auto Lissac is themed, this year the Tour celebrated the 55th anniversary of the overall victory on TdF by OSCAs in 1953. Small engines, big achievements, the OSCAs shined on the TdF from 1952 to 1954. In 1953, an 1100cc MT4 spider won the event outright ahead of a 3-litre Gordini driven by Jean

01 Lunch at St. Saturnin Castle in the Auvergne 02 Route of Tour Auto Lissac 2008 - with courtesy by Peter Auto 03 OSCA MT4 Spider from 1953 in the Grand Palais of Paris



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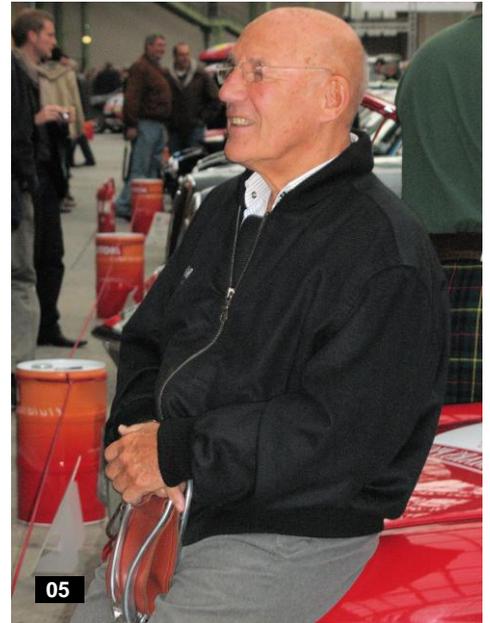
Behra! The OSCA MT4 can boast of having been driven by such racing luminaries as Alfonso de Portago and a regular on the Tour Auto Lissac Sir Sterling Moss, who drove an MT4 to victory in the 1954 12-Hours of Sebring.

But back to 2008. On Tuesday, April 15th, the Tour official start was given from Fontainebleau 70km outside Paris by the end of the morning, avoiding the usual morning traffic jam inside Paris. The recent years many cars with the most fragile engines had problems (overheating, vapour locks in the carbs, ...) with the morning traffic hazards in Paris. The main court of the Château de Fontainebleau was just the right place to start such an event. All 230 cars, eligible models are those that entered in the original event between 1951 and 1973, got off on the right foot for today legs destination, Beaune. But the crews in their barchettas, exposed to the four winds anyway, also had to struggle with

winter temperatures and a rare sun, which didn't shined enough to dry up the particularly wet roads.

The Fast and the Furious

The first special road stage of the Tour is always longingly expected by the competitors, but care should be taken as all drivers, peppy and full of beans, have to get used to the road and weather conditions. After some rain and a hailstorm the mountain roads in the land of vineyards of Chablis were slippery like soft soap. The German Jürgen End on his extremely fast Alfa Romeo Giulia Super T1, en-route in the "pedal to the metal" group *Competition*, managed it very well and summed up: "The corners with gravel on the road should have been clearly marked but during a rally you can bargain for everything – and you have to have a way with it". Some did, others don't, they



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had an unexpected rendezvous with a ditch or found themselves somewhere in a vineyard. If there are some bottles of French Chablis less on sale next year, one can't only blame the weather for it.

The special road stage of Chablis also showed that this year the AC Cobras were candidates for the highest step on the winners' rostrum, two Cobras in front of a Porsche 911. AC Cobras also accomplished the best time on the circuit of Dijon Prenois in front a Porsche 904 GTS. The Lotus Elan, winning car of the last seven years, had to struggle with technical problems or with the French scenery as two of those cars did not survive the first day. In *Regularity* it was once again the Linwoods who showed their skills in synchronizing gas pedal and chronometers. The English couple, regularity winner of the last two years on Giulia Super T1 resp. Citroen SM, started this year on Porsche 911 RS 2.7L.



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Short history of O.S.C.A.

In 1937, the Maserati brothers sold their parts to the company of the Orsi family. Ettote continued his career at Maserati. Bindo and Ernesto founded OSCA (Officine Specializzate Costruzioni Automobili) to construct racing and sports cars. After their company had been

taken over by MV Augusta in 1962, it disappeared in 1967.

The MT4 (Maserati Tipo 4 cilindri) was constructed between 1948 and 1957. This car with a kerb weight of only 500 kg and an excellent weight to performance ratio was a real performer and gained many victories.

Its engine with double overhead camshaft and a high compression ratio of 9:1 was built in various versions from 1100 to 1500 cm³.

04 Ferrari 250 GT Berlinatta in the main court of Château de Fontainebleau 05 Sir Stirling Moss, driving a MG B in competition class 06 OSCA MT 4 Vignale Berlinatta (1953)

french connection



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- 07 Jaguar XK 140, OSCA MT4 and Porsche 904 GTS in one of the corners of the Circuit de Charade
- 08 One doesn't get stopped by small wounds – Jaguar KX 150 at the finish in Marseilles
- 09 Crimped Alfa Romeo TZ 1 at the special road stage of St. Leger
- 10 Ferrari 250 GT Lusso, Ferrari Dino 246 GT, De Tomaso Pantera and AC Aceca at the Circuit de Carade
- 11 Ferrari Dino on French back road

The little “Green Hell”

One of the highlights of the Tour was the well known Circuit de Charade close to the City of Clermont-Ferrand. According to Sir Stirling Moss the Circuit des Charade was in its original layout of 8.055 km a mixture of the “Nürburgring Nordschleife” and Spa Francorchamps and a real fun to drive on. In the 60s and 70s the circuit hosted four Formula One races until it was displaced by the circuit of Le Castellet-Paul Ricard. Due to security reasons the Circuit de Charade had to be shortened to 3.975 km in 1988 and it is still a great fun to drive on.

Usually it's a cloudy day when the Tour Auto stops at the Circuit de Charade. But not this year, we even had some sun until the last laps of the last group of cars as finally the rain set in. There had been some great fights between the Alfas and the Jaguars, especially as the German Jürgen End on his innocent looking Giulia Super TI surprised the other competitors with

his driving skills and the abilities of his car.

French country roads

Driving on French country roads is almost like driving in New Zealand. Beautiful scenery alternates with dozy little villages and the best thing of all: almost no or less traffic. Besides admiring the scenery you have to be careful as well. These roads my surprise you with bumpy sections especially at railway crossings where your cars exhaust is endangered, unexpected gravel on the road, very narrow sections and even wandering stock on the road. Despite all obstacles flying over these roads with a bunch of old but still fast going cars is almost like being in the lap of luxury.

The weather

During this years Tour we had all sorts of weather, starting from sunny



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but cold to freezing and wet during the days. Beaune for instance saw an utterly cold night with freezing temperatures still in the early morning. After getting the engines running the most sought after tool was an ice scraper to clear the windows. As not every team was equipped with such a special high tech utility, some credit cards did not survive this morning.

While crossing the Cevennes Mountains on Friday, this day saw the most terrible weather of the tour. We had rain and cold winds almost the whole day, snow at the mountain and torrential rainfall at the days finish in Avignon. Most people felt really sorry for the crews driving in their barchettas and being exposed to the four winds.

Saturday reconciled all competitors with the French weather, a bright and warm sunny day. And it even doesn't bothered the competitors that the days first special road stage up the legendary Mont Ventoux had to be cancelled due to show and ice on the roads. Safety goes first.

Talking to competitors who attended the Tour-Auto for many years the 2008 Tour had the most "terrible and interesting" weather ever since.



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Snake Pit

This year saw not only the revenge of the AC Cobras ending a long-lived series of victories of the Lotus Elan, it also saw a particularly thrilling battle of three AC Cobras. After last years triple triumph this year none of the Lotus Elan could reach the winners' rostrum.

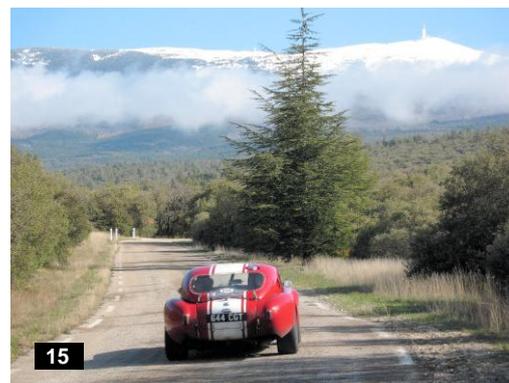
After four days on special road stages and race tracks the three leading Cobras of the top ranking had to battle out the outright win on the circuit of Le Castellet. Ludovic Caron in his black Cobra was the lucky one. The other two had to struggle with technical problems or with driver mistakes and therefore lost their place on the rostrum.

Jean Rédélé

This year also paid a special tribute to the late Jean Rédélé, the Alpine's father, who died in August 2007 at the age of 85. More than 10 Alpine A110 put the Tour under their wheels and in Group H two of them found their way on the winners' rostrum, ending in first and second place. Jean Rédélé and his Alpine cars will remain favourite in all motor racing enthusiast's hearts.



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- 12 AC Cobra on misty country road
- 13 Father and son Barthélémy soaked through but still with a smile in their faces, in their OSCA MT4 Barchetta
- 14 Lotus Elan in snow covered Cevennes Mountains country side
- 15 AC Cobra with snowy Mont Ventoux in the back ground
- 16 Two AC Cobras fighting their way down the home straight on the circuit of Le Castellet
- 17 That's about how winners look alike. The French team Caron, winner of the competition class, in their 1963 AC Cobra at the finish in Marseille.



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