

With over a year to go before the first Blue Train Challenge steams out of Deauville, the organisers are well ahead with their planning, and can now reveal the draft route outline for the five day drive of discovery to the French Riviera.

Pre Start - Deauville

Sunday 17 September 2017

With its race course, marinas, fine villas, Grand Casino and sumptuous hotels, Deauville is regarded as the "*queen of the Norman beaches*" and one of the most exclusive seaside resorts in France. As the closest resort to Paris, the town has long been home to French high society and the *Côte Fleurie* is often referred to as the Parisian Riviera.

Our pre event base will be at the luxurious Hôtel du Golf, part of the prestigious Barrière Group. Overlooking the Norman countryside and the ocean, the Hotel is situated in the centre of its own famous golf course, and conveniently located a few minutes from the heart of Deauville.

Deauville to Fontevraud

Monday 18 September 2017

Heading south through the orchards of Calvados, your route uses quiet country roads to bypass the busy towns of Lisieux and Falaise. It is then on into the Alpes Mancelles, a beautiful area of quaint stone built villages more like the Cotswolds than the Alps!

No motoring journey through this part of France would be complete without a visit to Le Mans and its famous circuit, before fast roads speed you through the afternoon to the Loire Valley, and the end of the day at Fontevraud l'Abbaye.

After the excitement of the first day, a night at Fontevraud offers an incomparable experience. Not only was the abbey once the largest in France, but it was founded by Henry II, and his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine - Plantagenet King and Queen of England. A very special place...

Fontevraud to Vichy

Tuesday 19 September 2017

A longer day awaits as we follow the rivers Vienne and Creuse across the empty heart of France. However, fast roads allow high averages, so there should be time to enjoy some of the beautiful *chateaux* that pepper the landscape in this part of Anjou.

The planned lunch stop is at a private race circuit before we continue east into slightly more hilly terrain. This is the northern edge of the Massif Central, an area of dramatic volcanic peaks. The twisty roads here provide the first real driving challenge of the event before you slip into the spa town of Vichy, a welcome meal, and your bed for the night at the fine Hotel Celestins and Spa.



Vichy to Lyon

Wednesday 20 September 2017

It is not that far from Vichy to Lyon so today's run will be relatively relaxing. This gives us the chance to explore the wooded heights of the Monts de la Madeleine before we re-cross the Loire and head into the hills of the Beaujolais.

After a leisurely lunch, a pleasant afternoon will be spent exploring the delights of these vine clad hills before you roll into Lyon.

As the second city in France, Lyon can be a busy place, but the ERA hospitality team have found a unique and secluded hotel on a hilltop overlooking the confluence of the Saone and Rhône. This is one of the oldest parts of the city and within walking distance are the Roman Amphitheatre and the magnificent church of Notre Dame de Fourviere.

Lyon to L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue Thursday 21 September 2017

An early start may be necessary today to get on the long road to Provence. However, once clear of Lyon, your route climbs the flanks of Mont Pilat and then into the remote hills of the Ardèche.

After crossing the mighty Rhône south of Valence, you enter the Drôme, a landscape of sun-bleached hills, rocky outcrops, vineyards and your first lavender fields. Still undiscovered by many, the Drôme is how Provence used to be before mass tourism...

Looming ever large to the south is the brooding mass of Mont Ventoux, a fabled mountain revered by cyclists and motoring enthusiasts alike. The views from its 2000m high summit are staggering; the snow-capped Alps to the north and east, and the shimmering Mediterranean to the south. By the time you descend from Ventoux you will be ready for a relaxing drink on the terrace of your hotel overlooking the clear, babbling waters of the River Sorgue.

L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue to Cannes Friday 22 September

This is it, the final push to the *Cote d'Azur*.

East of L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, a string of pretty Provençal villages lie strung out along the southern edge of the Plateau de Vaucluse. Ancient stone walls divide sun baked fields of olive groves and apricot orchards, colours vivid in the clear bright light so beloved of artists past and present.

Once across the Durance, vast lavender fields stretch to a horizon edged with the jagged peaks of the Alps. Then, after skirting the impossibly blue waters of Lac St Croix, the route plunges into the Grand Canyon du Verdon, the second largest in the world.

A 30-km drive along its very edge and over the limestone plateau of the Plan de Canjeurs finally brings you to the more familiar landscape of the South of France; ancient perched villages, expensive villas, and the journey's end in Cannes - where Wolf Barnato's legendary race started 85 years ago.

Our French agents have already been busy making arrangements for the *Grande Arrivée* on the famous *Croisette*, with a Gala Prizegiving right on the beach in front of the Hotel Martinez where you finally lay your heads after a memorable weeks motoring.



All Aboard...

Booking Office staff at East Hendred report that a number of entrants have already reserved their tickets for the inaugural "Blue Train Challenge" in September 2017.

Given the event's close association with the legendary Blue Train Races made famous by Wolf Barnato, it wasn't long before the first Bentleys arrived, a 1928 4.5 litre Le Mans bodied tourer belonging to Swiss based Roland and Helen Frey, closely followed by the similar 4.5 Bentley of Bill and Julie Holroyd, the first UK based competitors.

The rapid but comfortable 1938 Jaguar of Philip Lunnon and Michael Draper could prove to be the ideal vehicle for a fast run across the byways of France, as could the 1933 Lagonda of Simon and Judy Skelding. However, once the event gets into the mountain roads, then maybe the nimble 1934 Aston Martin of Nigel Dowding and Mary Antcliff, or the 1935 Riley Sprite of Bernd and Christiane Dannenmaier might prove the cars to beat?

Leading the trans-Atlantic charge is ERA regular James Gately who will be bringing his 1937 Cadillac over to add Californian flair to this celebration of inter-war motoring. Of course, the dark horse might be the rare 1936 Aero 50 entered by Jan and Dana Hradecka, you don't see many of those outside the Czech Republic...