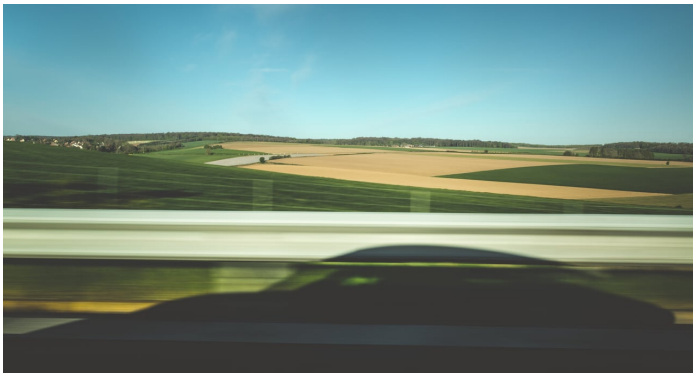


CLASSIC DRIVER

A Gentleman's Journey, Day 2 - Onwards to racing Reims

Lead

We're heading on a 'Gentleman's Journey' this week, travelling from London to Paris in a fabulous Aston Martin DB11, kindly supported by Hackett. Beginning at the history-steeped abandoned Circuit de Reims-Gueux, day 2 thrust us deep into the heart of France's Champagne region...



Forget crunching miles and blasts on country roads — if you really want to appreciate the intricacies of a car, give it a wash. I've now spent over 24 hours with the [Aston Martin DB11](#), and it's performed perfectly. It even doubled up as a mobile office while we were on the Eurotunnel (I am technically 'working', you know). Having driven a wide variety of cars — although predominately classics — I feared that I might soon stop looking back at the 600bhp bi-turbo brute once I'd parked it up. But how wrong I was...



As I stood jet-washing the grime off the Aston Martin, a bemused teenager cleaned his mountain bike in the booth next to me. His eyes were focused in on the DB11 almost as much as mine — just how good looking is this car? Coming from the classic car world, I'm easily pleased when it comes to the performance of modern cars, but form will always prevail over function in my primitive petrolhead mind. In fact, I've never driven a modern car that's captivated me from both the driver's seat and afar quite like this one.



With this in mind, I knew that visiting our first stop of the day — the historic Circuit de Reims-Gueux — would be a very special experience. Something of a motorsport pilgrimage for many, I'd so often seen photos of the abandoned grandstands and race control buildings either side of an unassuming French dual carriageway, and here I was

exploring it. In fact, about the only thing that distracted me from the patinated signage and deserted grandstands was a cherry-red Citroën 2CV rattling past with a ceremonious 'toot toot'. It truly made me smile.



Being in the heart of the Champagne region, it seemed only right to visit one of the numerous *maisons*, if only to broaden my cultural knowledge of the past beyond cars. I must say that nothing could have prepared me for what was hidden beneath the Domaine Pommery, not even the grandeur of the gated driveway and the fabulous towering entrance. Eighteen kilometres of interconnected cellars that have been dug into chalk quarries, complete with astonishing sculptures and carvings, all in the name of the great sparkling wine.



Lining the eerily lit tunnels were, quite literally, thousands of bottles of Champagne in myriad of shapes and sizes, resting beneath a finely formed layer of dust and waiting to eventually see the light of day. Each cellar is named after a major city in which Pommery has been sold, including London. Tomorrow, the DB11 and I will venture further from the British capital and conclude our journey in Paris.



While it certainly won't be as tranquil as the underground lair of Pommery, the promise of culture and fine company is just as tempting as any glass of Champagne.

Photos: Robert Cooper for Classic Driver © 2017

Gallery

