



The Riley Motor Club Centenary Rally 2025

Sunday, 22nd June to early/mid-July 2025

Travel report – Outward journey and rally event

Travel Report

Foreword

For several years now, we had wanted to take part in an anniversary event in England with our own Riley. The plan had to be postponed several times, first because of work, then because of COVID-19, and later because of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The Riley Motor Club Centenary Rally 2025 now offered the perfect setting for this adventure.

The rally itself should not be the only goal, but also the journey to get there. The chosen daily stages of approximately 250 km offered the opportunity to explore routes far away from the motorway and also visit individual sights. The daily stages were each divided into four sub-stages. We had already had good experiences with this approach last September during our trip to the Mediterranean via the Route Napoléon. In the evening, before checking into the hotel, we would visit a petrol station to refuel, check the oil, change the spark plugs, etc. More on this in the following description of the individual daily stages.

Sunday, 22 June 2025 was the big day. In glorious sunshine and with temperatures forecast to exceed 30°C, a small group of 10 Riley enthusiasts set off for England in five Rileys: Friedlinde and Alfred Albiez in a Kestrel 22T Saloon (1935), Doris and Werner Forrer in an RMD (1950), Marianne and Werner Schröter with RMA (1952), Ella and Bruno Lüscher-Maibach with Two-Point-Six Saloon (1959), Beat Schütz with Chili (his dog) and Thomas Lenggenhager with Riley Elf MK III (1967). The starting point and meeting place for the trip was the Hotel Kuentz in Wittersdorf, Alsace, France. In Leamington Spa, Pascal Lüscher and Jonin Schütz joined the Swiss delegation, who had travelled by plane, train and Uber.

The rally event itself lasted from Thursday afternoon to Sunday evening. The joint events, such as the visit to Coventry and the main rally event on Sunday, provided an opportunity to see familiar faces again and also to meet many new people. We even got to take home a few prizes.

While the Kestrel and the two RMs took the regular route back, the Elf took a slightly more direct route home. Our 2.6 was quite happy to stay in England a little longer and took us first to the Isle of Wight and later along the south coast of England, before cruising leisurely through France back to Switzerland.

Overall, our Rileys covered a distance of 2500-3000 km each with flying colours and minimal incidents. The biggest event was probably a spark plug change or perhaps the one wheel change after a flat tyre.

The team spirit was particularly commendable, which was evident especially in the rare delicate moments, but also during the preparatory phase, in which several participants showed great commitment almost without being asked. For this, all participants deserve a big thank you.

We have had a wonderful trip with many great encounters. We will be able to draw on these memories for a long time to come.

P.S. Ella and Bruno Lüscher-Maibach have taken care of the reports on the outward journey and the event itself, while Marianne and Werner Schröter will take care of a separate report on the return journey.



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Stage 01: Wittersdorf – Chaumont

Sub-Stage 1: Journey to Wittersdorf

Friedlinde and Alfred Albiez, Doris and Werner Forrer, and Marianne and Werner Schröter had already arrived on Saturday. Beat Schütz with Chili and Thomas Lenggenhager, as well as Ella and Bruno Lüscher, arrived in Wittersdorf on Sunday morning. Everyone was there and the journey could begin on time.



Wittersdorf, Hotel Kuentz



(Photographs by Alfred and Friedlinde)

Sub-Stage 2: Wittersdorf – Ronchamp (60 km)

The first pit stop for vehicles and teams was in Ronchamp.

Everyone was happy to have a short break, have something to drink or eat, and buy drinks as needed. The intense heat affected not only the Rileys, but also the teams. After refreshments, we drove up the hill to Notre-Dame-du-Haut, Le Corbusier's World Heritage Site. The newly renovated church was the cultural highlight of the day. Lighting a candle in the church and asking the guardian angels for protection was very important to us.



Notre Dame du Haut (all Photographs by Ella and Bruno)



The bell tower with two bells of the old church



„The Morning Star“ / One of the church windows



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Church gate (photos by Werner and Doris)

Sub-Stage 3: Ronchamp – Bourbonne-les-Bains (90 km)

We continued our journey across the Plateau of the thousand lakes and along the Rhône-Rhine Canal to Luxeuil-les-Bains. We took a ride through the pretty old town. The usually bustling town was completely deserted on this Sunday. We were all thirsty when we found the casino in Bourbonne-les-Bains after 90 km. Finding restaurants open on a Sunday after the national music festival is very difficult. We searched for solutions for a long time. The creative suggestion to go to the casino in Bourbonne-les-Bains came from the tourist information office. But getting into the casino to have a drink at the bar was more difficult than we thought. It took a lot of charm and persuasion. We promised the bartender that we would leave the restaurant in the same immaculate condition as we found it. Finally, we were allowed to come in and rest a bit in the air-conditioned restaurant and quench our thirst.

Sub-Stage 4: Bourbonne-les-Bains – Chaumont (60 km)

It was one of the few hot days this year when we reached Chaumont in the evening. We refuelled the cars and headed to the hotel. There was a parking garage for the Rileys and hotel rooms for the men and women. But something was still missing: the evening programme. We got ready to go out, showered, changed and headed out. Luckily, a bar near the hotel was open and serving aperitifs. There was no discussion about where to have dinner. The choices were McDonald's or Bouddha Zen. The organising committee had already reserved a table at Bouddha Zen in advance. This required some cunning, as dogs were not allowed in the restaurant. The creative solution: Chili became a guide dog for people with disabilities and was allowed into the restaurant as an exception. We all had room at a large round table with a rotating centre section. The study of the diverse Far Eastern menu was not yet complete when one of the participants' phones rang and someone informed them that a wallet had been found in the aperitif bar and the owner could come and collect it. Werner provided a distraction and quickly ordered various maki (sushi rolls), shifting the focus back to dinner. For some, it was familiar territory, for others, it was new ground. Everyone helped each other and encouraged each other to try new things. The table went round and round and everyone could try whatever their heart desired. It was very tasty. A long and eventful day was coming to an end and we made our way back to the hotel. Some via a detour to the bar again, others through the sleepy old town of Chaumont.



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Round table at the Bouddha Zen restaurant in Chaumont (photos by Bruno)



Indian dinner



Japanese dinner: a bento box



Chaumont above / the market hall on the right





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Monday, 23rd June 2025

Stage 02: Chaumont - Soissons

Sub-Stage 1: Chaumont - Saint-Dizier (72km)

We met punctually for breakfast, followed by a briefing. We didn't get off to a flying start that morning. Our Lady 2.6 wasn't ready to start the day. Chief mechanic Alfred was quickly on the spot and soon found the problem: a carburettor float had stuck. We pressed the accelerator pedal all the way down, pressed the start button, strained the battery, caressed the carburettor (with a screwdriver) and the problem was solved. It was the only breakdown our Riley had on this trip. Along the Marne and the parallel «Canal entre Champagne et Bourgogne», we headed for our first stop: Marie Blachère (boulangerie, sandwich shop, tart shop) in Saint-Dizier. Already running a little late, we wisely stocked up on delicious sandwiches for lunch.

Sub-Stage 2 and 3: Saint-Dizier - Epernay (103km)

We quickly continued on to the land of sparkling pearls. Due to a necessary candle change and a major construction site at the entrance to Epernay, we unfortunately had to forego lunch on the banks of the Marne. Fortunately, we were able to fall back on our sandwiches, because the highlight of the day was already calling: a visit to Champagne Charles Mignon.

As Bruno had booked a guided tour in advance and was in contact with the owner of the cellar, we were allowed to bring Chili with us as an exception.

After the tour, we were able to enjoy two of the fine wines. From a selection of champagnes, we personally liked the new, smooth Demi sec.





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Photos by Bruno

Sub-Stage 4: Epernay - Soissons (75km)

Despite the crowds of tourists, heavy traffic and roadworks, we enjoyed a relaxed and easy drive along the Avenue de Champagne. It was wonderful to see the ostentatious palaces of the prestigious champagne houses lining the road for us 😊.



Avenue de Champagne (Image source: Internet)





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We continued uphill towards Hautvillers, to a small car park in the middle of the vineyards. We posed the Rileys and took photos not only of them, but also of the famous vineyards and the view of the Marne Valley and Epernay. All the Rileys managed the steep climb to Hautvillers.



In the vineyard of Hautvillers (photo by Werner Schröter)



View of the Marne Valley and Epernay, Champagne
(Photo by Ella and Bruno)

The monk Dom Pérignon lived in the monastery of Hautvillers. He played a key role in developing the méthode champenoise, a method of bottle fermentation used to produce sparkling wine, and his name still adorns the label of a famous champagne today.



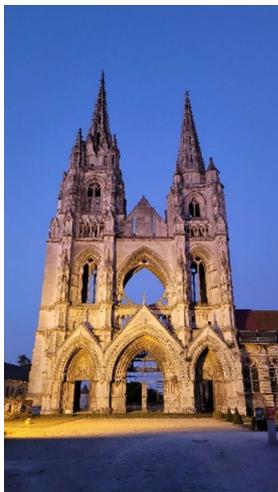
(Image Source: Internet)



(Photo by Bruno)

After a tour of Hautvillers, we continued on the D386 through the beautiful Parc Naturel Régional des Montagnes de Reims towards Soissons.

The usual evening ritual in Soissons: refuelling Rileys and checking into the hotel. And before dinner, a thirst-quencher on the terrace.



The ruins of Saint-Jean des Vignes.
Photo taken by Ella and Bruno during their evening walk.



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Tuesday, 24 June 2025

Stage 03: Soissons - Calais

Sub-stage 1: Soissons - Saint-Quentin (86km)

We set off punctually after breakfast. We had a long journey ahead of us to Calais.

We made our first short stop in the picturesque little town of Coucy-le-Château-Auffrique, which we 'entered' through one gate and left through another.



Left: Coucy-le-Château-Auffrique (above, behind the walls)

(Photo by Doris)

Centre: Needless to say (Photo by Bruno)

Right: La Mairie (Photo by Bruno)

On country roads, along the Oise and the Canal de la Sambre à l'Oise, which we also crossed at times, we drove to Saint-Quentin, where we took a break right by the pretty canal of the same name, sampled a few macarons and stretched our legs.



Canal Saint-Quentin. This canal is home to what is probably the only McDonald's that sells macarons.

(Photo by Ella and Bruno)



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Sub-stage 2: Saint-Quentin - Arras(70km)

The journey continued swiftly towards Arras, where we made a pit stop just outside the city. Then we ventured into the historic city centre. To our surprise, there were enough parking spaces for all of us, and we set off (on foot) for the Place des Héros. An unknown France revealed itself to us. The unique square with its distinctive building façades, numerous shops, restaurants and irresistible confectioners surprised us all. We would have liked to have stayed there a little longer.



Place des Héros towards the northwest...
(Photos by Bruno and Ella)



..and in the other direction



Exquisite vehicles on the Place des Héros
(Photos by Bruno and Alfred)



Sub-stage 3: Arras - Aire-sur-la-Lys (63km)

We continue along vast fields and through villages and small towns. We bypassed the largest ones so as not to lose too much time. A short stop to stretch our legs, once again at Marie Blachère, and then we continued towards Calais.



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Sub-stage 4: Aire-sur-la-Lys - Calais(62km)

The drive across the flat countryside seemed endless, and we were glad when we finally arrived in Calais. Space was tight in the hotel's underground car park, and the Rileys had to be parked with great skill. We enjoyed dinner at the Aquar'aile restaurant, a panoramic restaurant with sea views on Calais beach. The more athletic among us walked from the hotel to the beach, while the others ordered a taxi. The food and the view were wonderful. We took a taxi back to the hotel again. A long day had come to an end 🥳.



Dinner at the Aquar'aile restaurant...
(Photo by Alfred)



..with magnificent views of Calais and its beach
(Photo by Bruno and Ella)



Sunset on the beach at Calais
(Photo by Doris and Werner)



Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle
(Photo by Alfred and Friedlinde)



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Wednesday, 25 June 2025

Stage 04: Calais – Bicester

Sub-stage 1: From the hotel in Calais to the Eurotunnel check-in (7 km)

Sub-stage 2: Eurotunnel Boarding Calais - Folkstone

The new day began hectically. One team couldn't find their passports when gathering the documents for the crossing and entry into England. The empty passport holders did not bode well. A clarifying phone call to the base station at home brought clarity. The passports had been left at home. Now, once again, cunning was required. We drove to the checkpoint together. Maybe we would be lucky and the two of them would be able to enter with their ID. We took the unlucky pair to the middle of the convoy and tried everything we could. But the border control decided: no entry into the UK without passports. The two had no choice but to make a pit stop in Calais. Thankfully, someone at base camp was able to send the passports by express courier. The ferry company gave them a 27-hour window to obtain the passports and check in again. Any later reappearance would have required new tickets.

There were only four cars left that day to cross from Calais to England on the car ferry. The participants gathered in Folkstone and continued their journey.

Sub-stage 3: Folkstone - Sevenoaks (75km)

We drove in heavy left-hand traffic on the multi-lane motorway to Sevenoaks, where we stopped for lunch at a huge shopping centre and restaurant hub.

Sub-stage 4: Sevenoaks - Windsor (85km)

We continued on the motorway to Windsor, where we made another stop, took a look at the castle and the town, quenched our thirst once again and then quickly drove on. There was little time for cultural activities that day, but at least Windsor is a must-see.



Windsor (Photos by Ella and Bruno)



Sub-stage 5: Windsor - Bicester (80km)

The heavy traffic around London, with too many lorries blocking the view, demanded our full attention, and despite this, not everyone managed to take the right exits. At some point, no one was following us anymore and we were alone on the road to Bicester. Where everyone else went remains unclear. In any case, some were much closer to Oxford Street in London than to Oxford itself, which we wanted to pass through that day. Thankfully, modern means of communication exist, and so at least two other vehicles found each other again. Later that evening, everyone was in Bicester. The team stranded in Calais followed the journey of the passports through France and reported back regularly.



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Thursday, 26 June 2025

Stage 05: Bicester – Leamington Spa

Sub-stage 1: Hotel - Blue Diamond Riley Services Limited, Bicester (7km)

Alfred had arranged an appointment for us at Blue Diamond for the morning. Clinton and his team were waiting for us with coffee, tea and cake. The men disappeared straight into the workshop. Thomas, Ella and a few others explored the grounds of the former aircraft bomb factory and took a look at other workshops. Next to Blue Diamond was a manufacturer of exhaust systems. The waiting list was so long that it would take three years from order to delivery. Somewhat more discreetly located was a workshop that specialised in restoring historic Bentleys. The morning passed quickly. Good news arrived from Calais: the passports had arrived at the hotel and, later, that entry into the UK had gone smoothly and everyone was well on their way.



Blue Diamond Riley Services Limited (All photos by Bruno and Ella)



Bentley classic car specialist (Photos by Ella)

Sub-stage 2: British Motor Museum Gaydon or free time

The afternoon was free for us to spend as we wished. We were to meet up again in the evening at the Woodland Grange Hotel in Leamington Spa. While some attended the first event of the official first day of the rally and visited the car museum in Gaydon, we made a pilgrimage to Bicester Village. An outlet for luxury goods such as Gucci, Burberry, Montblanc, etc. A total of more than 150 retailers offered their wares for sale. It was an enjoyable afternoon. Towards evening, we also moved on to Leamington Spa. Our son Pascal Lüscher arrived in Leamington Spa by plane and train, followed later by Jonin Schütz. The meeting point before dinner was the hotel bar.



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Friday, 27 June 2025, official second day of the rally event

In the morning, a road run around rural Warwickshire was on the agenda. An extremely detailed road book was distributed, listing every turn. The start was at Woodland Grange and the drive was independent, i.e. not in a convoy.



Woodland Grange, Leamington Spa (Photo by Ella and Bruno)

Ella had compiled a list of sights we definitely wanted to visit, and Alfred used AI to plan a route with places of interest. The two lists matched perfectly, so we decided to visit the following sights first:

Stratford-upon-Avon: A town of 30,000 inhabitants with many historic buildings, which today lives mainly from tourism thanks to its famous citizen William Shakespeare. We took a stroll through the picturesque centre of the town and visited Shakespeare's presumed birthplace and school.



Shakespeare's birthplace (Photo by Alfred)



Building where Shakespeare attended school (Photo by Bruno and Ella)



Waterside (Photo by Bruno and Ella)



Sheep Street (Photo by Bruno and Ella)



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Chipping Campden: The town has a population of around 2,500 and is known for its main street lined with houses dating from between the 14th and 17th centuries, as well as its market hall, which was built in 1627.



Chipping Campden (Photos by Bruno)



Once again, it was unusually hot.

Broadway Tower: The tower is approximately 16 metres high and stands on one of the highest points in the Cotswolds countryside. Its construction in 1794 was financed by Lady Coventry, who wanted to know whether a lighthouse on this hill would be visible from her home 35 kilometres away, which proved to be the case after it was built. The tower has had a chequered history over the years and is now purely a tourist attraction.



Broadway Tower (Photos by Pascal)



View from the hill

Bourton-on-the-Water: The town has fewer than 3,000 inhabitants and is best known for its picturesque High Street and the knee-deep River Windrush, which flows through the town and is spanned by several arched bridges. In addition to various tourist attractions, the town also has a car museum, the Cotswold Motor Museum.



River Windrush (Photo by Ella and Bruno)



(Photo by Ella and Bruno)

Albiezens, Forrers and Schröters visited Bourton on the Water on Monday after the rally, as part of the first leg of their return journey.



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Saturday, 28 June 2025, official third day of the rally event

In the morning, we visited the site of the former Riley factory buildings on Durbar Avenue in Coventry, where Rileys were built between 1919 and 1948 and where the automotive parts supplier Unipart is now located. A long-standing Unipart employee told us lots of interesting facts about the site. After the presentation, we were able to visit the factory buildings, which, apart from the industrial laser mentioned several times, were somewhat underutilised at the moment.



Car park at Unipart (Photo by Ella or Bruno)



Presentation (Photo by Ella or Bruno)



Factory hall with industrial laser (Photo by Ella or Bruno)



Lively conversations (Photo by Ella or Bruno)

We then continued on to Coventry city centre, where the Riley Cars Archive Heritage Trust is located in an idyllic setting on the Coventry Canal Basin.



Riley Cars Archive Heritage Trust at John Sinclair House, Coventry (Photo by Ella or Bruno)



One of the Riley bicycles (Photo by Ella or Bruno)



Houseboats on the Coventry Canal (Photo by Alfred)



(Photo by Ella or Bruno)



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Following the visit to the Riley Cars Archive Heritage Trust, there was some free time, which the Lüschers used to take a detour to Warwick Castle, while the others went to wash their cars.



Warwick Castle (Photos by Ella or Bruno)



Exhibition brought to life by wax figures

And finally, in the evening, the gala dinner with fine food and a supporting programme (speeches, raffle, etc.).



Lucy Gilchrist (presenter)
(Photo by Alfred)



Gerry Parker (member of the project to build an engine based on historical documents for the 1898 Riley).
(Photo by Bruno)



Member of the RCS board with his wife and the new president of the RMC, Samantha Anderton-Brown (daughter of Victor Riley) (Photo by Bruno)



View of the hall (Photo by Alfred)



Thirsty people in front of the closed bar at 11:02 p.m. 😞 (Photo by Bruno)

Not acceptable at all > Reopening achieved by Werner Schröter.



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Sunday, 29 June 2025, official fourth day of the rally event

The following was planned for Sunday morning: 'Main rally event with concours, displays of appropriate cars, spares, regalia with trade and auto jumble stands'.

The field below the hotel gradually filled with Rileys and other brands associated with Riley:



Slowly, the rows are filling up (Photo by Alfred)



Swiss delegation (Photo by Doris or Werner)



Autovia with 2x 4-cylinder Riley engines (Photo by Alfred)



Healys with Riley engines (Photo by Ella or Bruno)



Ready for a picnic (Photo by Bruno)



More attractive and superior than factory-made (Photo by Bruno)



A rare sight: 4 x 2.6 (Photo by Bruno)



Replica of a 1898 Riley (Photo by Bruno)



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In the afternoon, the new president of the RMC presented awards for the best-preserved and best-restored vehicles, as well as for the longest journey, including diplomas for the Swiss delegation:



Best in Class RMA to Werner and Marianne Schröter. It was obviously worth washing the car the day before after all



Beat Schütz had the longest journey. Austria seems to be closer to England than Switzerland!?



Runner-up for the longest journey to Alfred and Friedlind Albiez from Austria

The event ended after the award ceremony, as so many such events do: for most people, it was time to say goodbye and head home. Only a small group of participants stayed another night at the Woodland Grange Hotel. The latter group naturally included the Swiss delegation, which, as already mentioned in the foreword, set off for home or continued their journey in three separate groups the following day.

We had a wonderful journey to and a lovely stay in the county of Warwickshire with many great encounters. We will be able to draw on these memories for a long time to come.

A big thank you goes to the RMC for the invitation and to the organisers of the event.

P.S. A return journey report is still waiting to be written 😊