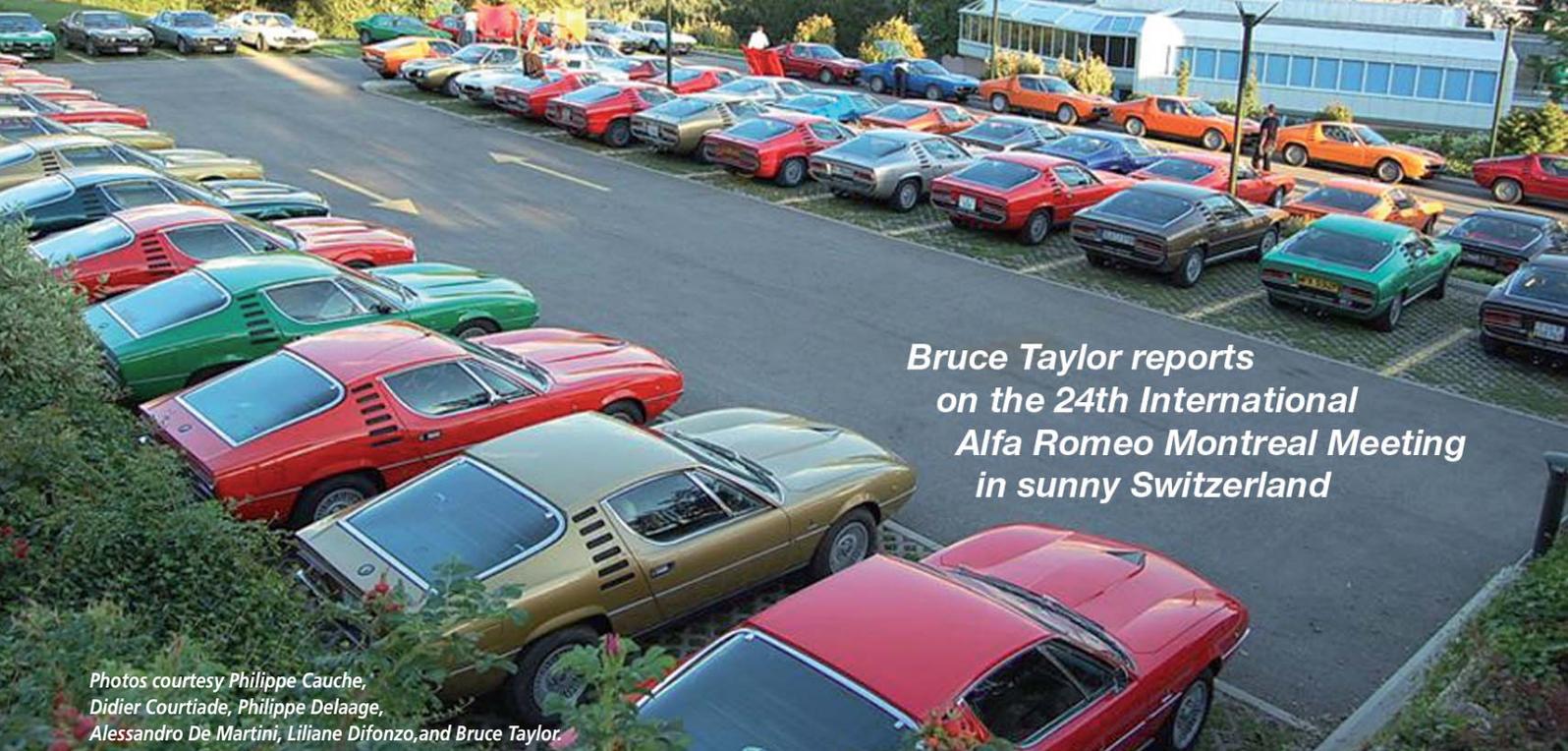


Riviera Rendezvous



**Bruce Taylor reports
on the 24th International
Alfa Romeo Montreal Meeting
in sunny Switzerland**

*Photos courtesy Philippe Cauche,
Didier Courtiade, Philippe Delaage,
Alessandro De Martini, Liliane Difonzo, and Bruce Taylor.*

Between 1970 and 1977, Alfa Romeo and Bertone built fewer than 4000 of their top-of-the-line 200hp V8 Montreal coupés. As a result, the enthusiasts who maintain and drive these interesting cars today form a small but closely knit community. Although they are geographically dispersed from Canada to Malaysia, from Brazil to New Zealand, and from South Africa to Finland, they are linked by a very active internet forum that counts over 1000 members, and that has handled 30,000 messages in the last 10 years.

A Web-based forum is a great way of exchanging technical information, and tips about parts sources, restoration and maintenance. But email, photos and video clips cannot match the lively exchanges and friendly atmosphere at an actual gathering of classic car owners. Every year since 1987, an International Alfa Romeo Montreal Meeting has been organised by the Montreal Register Europa, which now has members in 16 countries. In 1998 the meeting was held at Agno, in the Italian-speaking region of Switzerland. In 2003 the venue was Interlaken, in the German-speaking part. After successful events in Wales in 2004, Sweden in 2005, Italy in 2006, Spain in 2007, Luxembourg in 2008, and Portugal in 2009, it was decided to return to Switzerland in 2010 for a meeting in the French-speaking region of the country. I was very pleased to be asked to organise this 24th meeting in conjunction with Beat Trinkler, who had taken over the Register on the death of its founder, Bernhard Schalbetter, in 2001.

The location I chose for the meeting was Jongny; a tiny village just 1km from my Chardonne home, perched among the beautiful hillside vineyards above Vevey, on the Swiss Riviera. The main hotel (actually a special conference and training centre) has an idyllic situation in a private wooded park, with magnificent views over Lake

Geneva to the Dents du Midi in the Chablais Alps.

The meeting dates - from Thursday 9 to Sunday 12 September - were chosen to coincide with the annual Vevey-Retro classic car event, which this year featured the Alfa Romeo centenary, and was attended by over 650 vehicles. Because of the attractive location in central Europe, we expected an attendance of around 100 people and 50 Montreals. In fact, some 121 participants from 13 countries came to the meeting, with an all-time record of 61 Montreals and 7 other cars.

Arrival

While some of the Montreals from Luxembourg and Germany came to Switzerland a few days prior to the meeting, most of the cars began to arrive at Jongny on Thursday afternoon. Overflow hotels in nearby Chexbres and Montreux had to be used to

accommodate everyone, but shuttle buses were provided so that all the Montreals could be parked at the main hotel, and no-one needed to worry about drinking and driving.

Six Montreals made the trip from the UK by a variety of routes, such as via Eurotunnel and by ferries to Le Havre and to Dunkirk. The British cars included the 1972 LHD Montreal of Matt Bartleet, which had blown a head gasket just after he crossed the Channel on the way to last year's meeting in Portugal. This time, Matt's car performed faultlessly throughout.

Phil Robinson took his beautifully restored 1975 RHD Montreal to the continent for the first time, and drove nearly 3000km in a week. His car attracted much attention every time the bonnet was opened, revealing its quad dual-barrel Dell'Orto carburettors. The successful conversion was done by Blue's Autos in London, using Trentside Engineering manifolds and an adaptation of a linkage design by Ian Stronech.

Since Guy Monty (his real name!) lives in Cornwall, he crossed over to France from Portsmouth, and the three French Montreal owners



Montreal meeting venue

"Rien à déclarer"

One French participant returned to his home country with a huge box of Montreal parts and tools that he had collected from Bruce at the meeting. But he had no problem at the French customs. When he entered Switzerland, the customs officer had asked him, "Anything to declare?" He said, "No, just some spare parts in case there is a problem". He answered the same when going back to France...



Kamm Tails

that travelled to Jongny in convoy helped him avoid the heavy traffic around Paris. Guy has owned his splendid 1973 RHD Montreal for 25 years.

Vancouver Montreal owner Norman Thompson came by air, but the participants who drove the longest distance by Montreal to attend the meeting were Marjaliina and Håkan Bäck from the Finnish town of Jakobstad, almost 500km further north than Helsinki! The height record goes to Belgian Montreal owner Xavier Lemaire, who took the *Route des Grandes Alpes* to drive to Jongny from his house in the South of France, passing over the Col de l'Iseran at 2770m (9088ft). His Montreal ran perfectly at this altitude, the barometric compensator automatically adjusting the Spica injection system for the rarefied air.

The huge array of Montreals in a wide range of bright 1970s colours parked at Jongny was a stunning sight. The day had been bright and sunny, but in the early evening a perfectly timed cloudburst ensured that all the cars had a thorough wash after their long journeys to Switzerland. I can't claim that this downpour was foreseen by the organisers – it was pure coincidence that (in addition to Swiss truffles, a fine Chasselas, and an Alfa centenary mousepad) the participants' welcome packs contained a special chamois-covered sponge!

Participants

The meeting was attended by people with a very wide range of ages, experiences, nationalities and backgrounds. Although it had not been recommended for children, Laurent Schandeler and Jules Becker from Luxembourg brought their young sons, and they enjoyed themselves immensely. But then they have both attended previous Montreal meetings, and Laurent's 13 year-old has already driven his father's 8C Competizione!

Having worked at CERN (The European Organization for Nuclear Research in Geneva) for 35 years, I was very pleased that Alex Müller, the 1987 Nobel physics laureate, could join the meeting. Considering his age of 83, Alex drives his fine pale-blue Montreal in a remarkably sporty fashion.

As at previous meetings, Peter Barhan from Kiel brought his "Montreal Servizio" Giulia, well stocked with spare parts and ready to assist any Montreal owner who encountered a technical problem. Peter also made the beautifully machined V8 trophy that was presented to me at the end of the meeting. Apart from one capacitor discharge ignition unit failure and one flat battery, all the Montreals proved

completely reliable.

For many Montreal drivers, this annual get-together is their only opportunity to meet a large number of fellow owners directly to exchange news, stories and technical tips. Hence the programme allowed plenty of time for cocktail chat, before a delicious dinner of Swiss Valaisan raclette was served with local wines. My wife Jennifer was delighted that three of her original watercolour paintings of the Montreal were exhibited in the dining room, and that after the meeting the hotel manager asked if he could keep them there! In spite of the full programme planned for the following day, bar talk continued well into the wee hours.

All aboard

The first full day of the meeting started with brilliant sunshine, which happily continued throughout the

Stowaway!

A Montreal meeting participant discovered an impecunious but passionate Alfista sleeping overnight in his car in the hotel park at Jongny! He was so keen to join in the Montreal activities that he had come from Germany as a "secret attendee". The participant took him to his hotel room for a shave and a shower...



whole of the event. The sound of a Montreal V8 firing up is exhilarating. The sound of sixty of them bursting into life is sensational! After a brief warm-up on the A9 highway, the cavalcade of Montreals paraded through the main street of Montreux to a reserved parking area before the Château de Chillon, Switzerland's most-visited historic monument.

Everybody then boarded the old paddle ship Vevey for a short cruise across the lake, one of the last trips made by the vessel before it was retired after sailing over 3 million km in 103 years of service. Switzerland has the world's biggest fleet of operational paddle steamers with large diagonal engines, and the remaining seven Belle Epoque ships that cruise on Lake Geneva are being painstakingly restored and maintained by a dedicated team. Several of their original steam engines are still going strong, whereas in May 2010 one later ship (*Chablais*) had to be scrapped after its more modern diesel-electric power plant exploded following a cylinder liner rupture. It would have cost £3.2 million to repair!

Swiss Vapeur Parc

After a brief stop at Villeneuve, the group disembarked at Le Bouveret for a visit to *Swiss Vapeur Parc*, the largest and most complex miniature railway park in Europe. This unique attraction covers 17,000m², and has 2km of dual-gauge track with a turntable, rack railway section, 27 points and 62 signals. The eight steam trains and eight other locomotives run through a sumptuous decor that includes miniature replicas from Switzerland's rich heritage, such as the Château d'Aigle, Saanen Church, and the beautifully sculpted Halls of Neuchâtel. There is a waterwheel sawmill, a fire tower, a gothic-style bank, and exact 1:10 replicas of the revolving solar-powered Restaurant Kuklos above Leysin, and the Plein Roc on the summit of Rochers-de-Naye.

In addition to two stations, the huge layout includes railway buildings and constructions of every sort, such as bridges, viaducts, automatic level crossings, tunnels, water towers and coal depots, a signal box, and a maintenance workshop that would be the envy of any classic Alfa owner. In view of our visit, the staff had laid on some special working demonstrations at the main engine shed. These

Champex ascent



included a twin-cylinder engine built in England over 100 years ago, and still in perfect running order. Some of the more recent miniature locomotives that we were shown cost 10 times as much as a good Montreal!

Chillon Castle

After a snack lunch at the park, the Montreal group returned to Chillon by the *Ville-de-Genève* boat for a tour of the romantic castle. Four local guides were provided for us, and the one in my group was knowledgeable, humorous, and spoke fluent English, French, German and Russian. The legendary castle is an enthralling 12th-century edifice that contains charming courtyards, fine rooms, great halls, rare paintings and tapestries, and interesting historical artefacts (as well as a crypt, secret passage,

and torture and execution rooms!). It has a magnificent setting on a rocky island, framed by vineyards and mountains, and offers splendid lake views from its tall keep and watchtowers.

Down in the dungeons, we visited the prison in which the 16th-century Swiss patriot François Bonivard was held in chains by the Duke of Savoy, and which was rendered famous by the English poet Lord Byron in 1816. Bonivard was married several times, and was perpetually in debt. Sound familiar?

Back at Jongny, the participants just had time to park their Montreals and pose for a group photo before the sun set on a splendid day. At dinner that evening we were joined by Patrick de Bondeli, a notable Alfista who possesses an extraordinary collection of hundreds of rare models, a fleet of classic cars, and an Alfa Romeo 8C Competizione. Patrick

has an encyclopaedic knowledge of almost every aspect of the classic car world. He can relate when, by whom and for whom each car was made, what are its characteristics and special features, who raced it in which events, what the results were, where the car is now, and much, much more. As I would be riding as passenger in his 8C as pace car for the Vevey-Retro *balade* the following day, we spent much of the evening puzzling over maps, trying to resolve contradictory instructions about where the organisers expected us to go. Since four or five hundred classic cars would be following us in procession, there would be mayhem if we made a mistake on the narrow country roads and had to U-turn!

Champex-Lac

Saturday was quite unforgettable. At 9am, all the Montreals set off in convoy for a trip to Champex-Lac, a charming little alpine village nestling in a high valley in the Mont Blanc Massif. I had fallen in love with Champex when I first stayed in a chalet there in the winter of 1969, and it has scarcely changed since then. It turned out that Alex Müller also knew the village in different circumstances, for he had been stationed at the military fort there for many months in the 1940s. When I asked if life at the fort had been gloomy in those dark days, he replied that the soldiers were not unhappy because the Swiss Army wine issue had been of excellent quality!

The 80km drive from Jongny took barely an hour, and led us up the Drance river valley on the route to the Great St. Bernard Pass, until we branched off at Orsières for the steep climb to Champex at 1466m (4810ft). Since parking space in the picturesque village was limited, half the convoy split off at the old fort to avoid congestion. Lunch was served in glorious sunshine on the terrace of a lakeside restaurant, after which some participants visited the renowned alpine garden, while others took a stroll around the tiny lake to enjoy and

Champex descent



photograph the beautiful scenery.

For the descent to the Rhone valley, I led the Montreal cavalcade by the more spectacular route via Les Grangettes and Les Valettes. This narrow scenic road has gradients of up to 13% and 22 hairpin bends, each of which opened up a new vista of sunlit mountains, streams and waterfalls. 40 years ago, the steep sinuous descent had tested the limits of the primitive suspension and undersized brakes of my Triumph GT6. But the Montreals took it in their stride, and after a faster sprint along the highway in the valley we all arrived at the Vevey-Retro classic car show right on schedule.

Vevey-Retro

Although Switzerland hosts a number of special classic motoring events, such as the Arosa and Ollon-Villars historic hillclimb competitions and the St. Gallen trade fair, there are few large classic car meetings at which enthusiasts can share their passion with the general public. To fill this gap, a dedicated group of volunteers created Vevey-Retro in 2006, and this event has grown in popularity every year since then. The meeting is held on the huge lakeside market square, a rare one of its kind in Switzerland, which can accommodate a large crowd of visitors and over 600 cars.

For the 2010 event, Vevey-Retro featured the Alfa Romeo centenary, and there was a big attendance of classic Alfa Romeos, including some rare models from private collections. These included the only 2000 Sportiva outside the Arese museum, which is owned by Gérald Bugnon of Martigny. (The sleek Sportiva coupé was a precursor of the Montreal, but only two prototypes were built).

A special area had been reserved for the Montreals, so that they could all be exhibited in a spectacular line-up. After everyone had parked, registered their car, and collected their souvenir gift (a handy little flashlamp key fob), a welcome aperitif was served in honour of the Montreal visitors in the marquee of a local Alfa club, the *Registre Suisse Alfa Romeo*.

The balade

At 4pm, it was time for all the classic cars to start their engines for a short balade through the surrounding countryside. The Vevey-Retro stewards held back all the other cars, so that the Montreals could lead the cavalcade in an unbroken procession behind the 8C Competizione. Patrick and I need not have fretted over the maps! A fleet of Harley-Davidson riders from a local club preceded us, opening the route and blocking other traffic to give the parade unhindered passage at every road crossing. Our tattooed, leather-clad rebel biker escorts just loved playing at being policemen.

This pleasant little excursion followed the meridional lakeside route westwards to Cully and returned to Vevey at a leisurely speed through the remarkable Lavaux terraced vineyards, a UNESCO world heritage site. The steep rocky slopes here were transformed into productive ground by centuries of hard work and perseverance, transporting fertile earth up from the lakeshore and building row upon row of stone walls to hold it in place. The route



offered grandiose views over the rich blue waters of Lake Geneva, glistening under the radiant sunshine. An enjoyable step backwards in time from a world that seems to go ever faster.

Back at the market square, the participants could chat with the members of other Alfa clubs, try their hands at a wheel-changing competition, browse the vendor stalls (a mint original Montreal owner manual sold for £50), or try the police car rollover attraction. There were also activities for children, including a car drawing competition, but I did notice an over-enthusiastic dad giving more than just a helping hand to the little girl that was later awarded first prize! The cup for the best Alfa at Vevey-Retro was won by a beautifully restored 1940 6C 2500 Turismo, while a cup was also awarded to a fine 1966 Giulia 1300 TI in *Carabinieri* livery.

Gala dinner

Around 6pm, the Montreals returned to Jongny for the main events of the evening. In view of the beautiful weather, sumptuous appetizers were set up outside for a cocktail reception in the hotel grounds, and this was followed by a splendid gala dinner in the main restaurant. Speeches were kept to a minimum, but many gifts were exchanged and Timo Jaatinen and Håkan Bäck outlined their plans to organise next year's Montreal meeting in Finland. This will be a special event, to be held near Helsinki at an earlier period (30 June to 3 July 2011), in order to experience the light midsummer nights at that latitude. To round off a joyful evening, the six talented musicians of the local award-winning Cosa Nostra band entertained us with some lively New Orleans jazz.

Internet

Alfa Romeo Montreal Website: <http://www.alfamontreal.info>

Alfa Romeo Montreal Forum: <http://autos.groups.yahoo.com/group/alfamontreal>

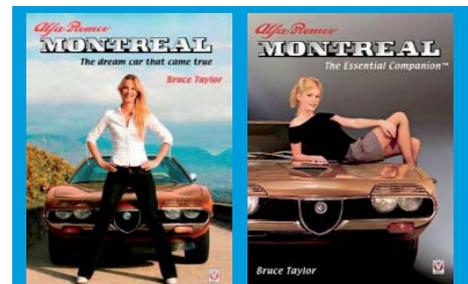
Homeward bound

After a copious breakfast, more technical talk and final farewells, most of the Montreal owners started out on their homeward journeys on Sunday morning. Some of those driving north departed quite early, in order to make a stop in Mulhouse to visit the prestigious Schlumpf Collection. Others found time to visit local attractions such as the Swiss Camera Museum, which offered free admission during the meeting.

A few participants extended their holiday on the Swiss Riviera. Arnold Baume and Peter Schweiss stayed on to make a second visit to Vevey-Retro, which continued on Sunday, in order to see the presentation by the Fondation Hervé and show their cars to more visitors and local Alfisti. Since he bought it new in 1976, Peter's Montreal has covered 325,000km, with only normal regular maintenance and no rebuild of the engine or its Spica injection pump.

Once again, the annual International Alfa Romeo Montreal Meeting has shown that a shared passion for classic cars and an interest in different cultures can bridge gaps between people, and foster friendships across national boundaries. With its varied programme, wonderful weather and record attendance, the 2010 meeting on the Swiss Riviera was an unqualified success. As a result, many owners of these interesting cars are already looking forward to the 25th meeting in Helsinki in the summer of 2011.

Bruce Taylor



Books

Bruce Taylor has written two books about the Montreal:

Alfa Romeo Montreal: The Dream Car That Came True. (Hardcover, 208 pages, ISBN 1845842189) This is an introductory pictorial tribute to the Montreal with over 575 illustrations.

Alfa Romeo Montreal: The Essential Companion. (Hardcover, 320 pages, ISBN 1845841581) This is a comprehensive technical bible for Montreal owners or potential owners. Voted "Best Book of 2008" by *Classic & Sports Car Magazine*.

Both books are published in the UK by Veloce, and can be ordered through the AROC Online Shop, Amazon, AbeBooks, or booksellers such as Blackwell, Waterstones, or Pooks.