

THE E-type



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Bella Italia!

Club stalwart **Alex Holis** looks back at a memorable trip to Italy for a group of Greek Jaguar enthusiasts

The first International Greek-Italian Meeting was a 10-day tour that started from Athens at the end of April with one XK and six E-types aiming to reach Tuscany and Umbria and finish with a rally around Perugia. Before embarking on the ferry to Ancona, our seven enthusiastic crews toasted with chilled Greek white wine our first international adventure on the crystal-blue shore of Monodendri south of Patras on the Ionian Sea.

Once inside the ferry, while the gentlemen were relaxing at the bar with Italian liqueurs, the ladies gathered to learn how an Italian rally roadbook works and later be able to help their drivers to find the right way to the chequered flag. After our relaxing one-evening cruise, we arrived at the port of Ancona and drove south west to reach Alla Posta dei Donini – the prestigious 16th-century residence of Counts Donini in the heart of Umbria – where we had a sumptuous truffle pasta and Montefalco wine dinner at Restaurant Pantagruel.

The morning after, we stopped on the shore of the round volcanic Trasimeno Lake at Hotel Lido Restaurant, the best place in Passignano to enjoy sun and a good espresso. Pointing our bonnets north, we reached the beautiful medieval town of Arezzo. As our *Club* knows very well, the most difficult thing in organising trips for classic cars is



- Top: quiet, winding roads were perfect for the Jaguar convoy
- Above: lining up outside Alla Posta dei Donini



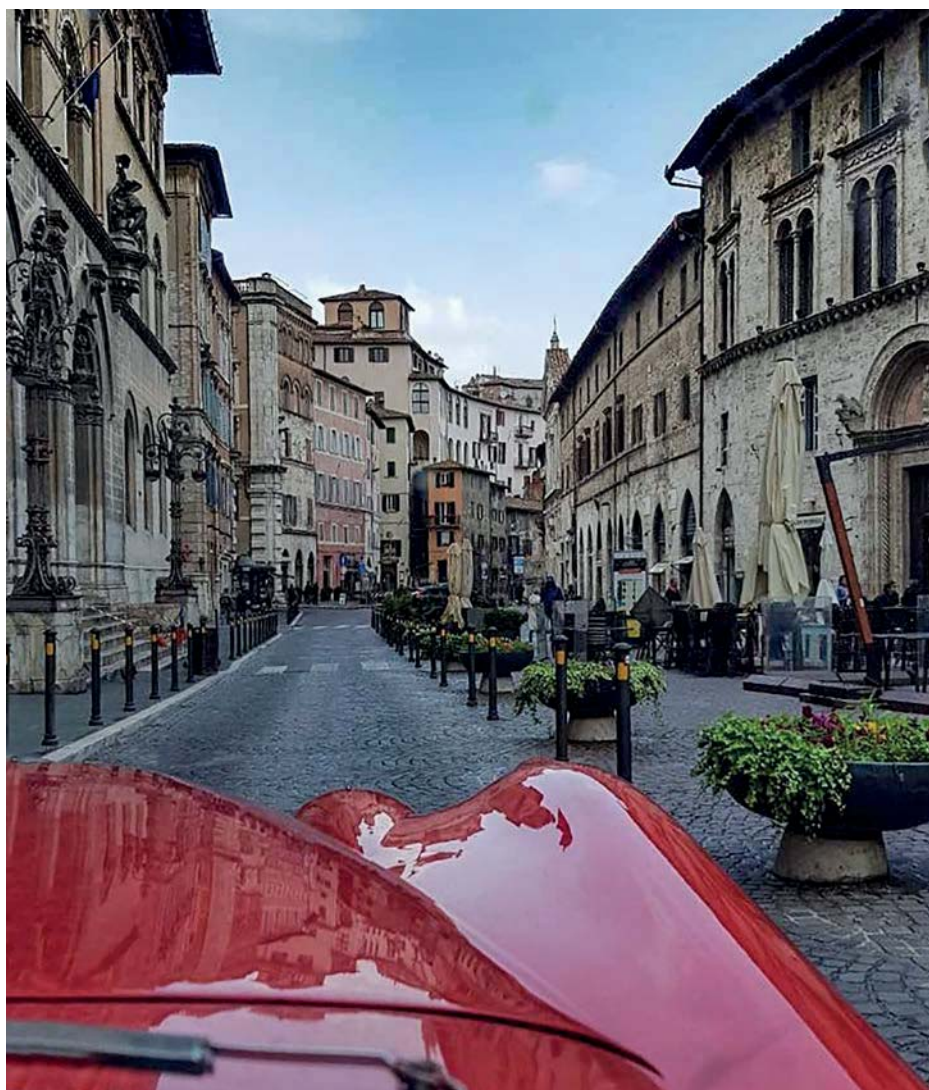
where to park them. In fact, we'd booked parking places months previously in private garages both in Arezzo and Siena, in order not to leave our cats vulnerable in an outdoor area.

Arezzo was founded during the Etruscan era around the fifth century BC, and had its most flourishing period during the Middle Ages and Renaissance; it was the birthplace of Michelangelo. We visited the impressive Duomo, the Leonardo da Vinci Museum, the medieval towers and churches in the central square – Piazza Grande – where we had lunch at La Lancia d'Oro restaurant under the Vasari Loggia. In the afternoon we drove to Radda in Chianti, the capital of the most famous wine region in Tuscany.

Our 'headquarters' was Relais Vignale. The first records of this manor house date back to the 1700s. Among the documents of Grand Duke Peter Leopold of Lorraine, there is a mention that Falconi, the owner of that time, '...trade and send Chianti wine to England.' Well, driving British cars and drinking Chianti, we are trying to continue that tradition in some way!

Once we arrived at their parking, our Swiss friend Kurt discovered that his XK 140 OTS boot lid was blocked with his two hard cases inside. We always suggest using soft luggage with a zip so that, in case of emergency, they can be 'squeezed and emptied' through the hinged panel between the interior and the boot.

- Top: enjoying a leisurely lunch at Lancia d'Oro
- Right: XK makes its way through the streets of Arezzo





- Left: manor-house hotel with the suitably car-related name of Relais Vignale
- Below left: Alex fixes the XK's boot trim after the battle to release the luggage within
- Bottom left: the 11th-century Badia di Caltibuono abbey



Unfortunately, this was not the case so we tried to release the boot by unfolding an iron coat-hanger in a shape of a hook to reach the boot-lock cables. To do this, we tried to unscrew the vinyl boot cover but it was impossible due to the luggage, so we decided to destroy one of the two cases. First, we tried to cut it with a Swiss knife, then used a wire-wheel hammer and a screwdriver, but without success. In the end, we decided to ask the Relais Vignale to send us their handyman with a circular electric saw to cut the luggage. We pulled out the clothes and then the luggage itself. Finally, using the unfolded iron coat-hanger, we passed it through the space in the boot lock system at the left and right end of the boot. We released the lock first from one side and then from the other. Hallelujah, the boot opened!

We also verified how the problem was caused: due to vibrations, the tensioned system of one of the two wire ropes of the boot-lock system got unscrewed. We opened the vinyl cover of the boot and fixed the problem. In Tuscany, people say that "there is always a good reason to celebrate with Chianti wine". Therefore, to celebrate a released boot lid we needed to open three bottles!

After a good breakfast, we were ready for our first Chianti wine-tasting at Badia di Caltibuono – a historic 11th-century stone abbey and farm. We visited the ageing cellars built 1000 years ago by the monks, the geometrical Italian garden, the courtyards and the cloister to stop in the frescoed room where our sommelier guided us through the bouquet and taste of Sangiovese variety that makes their organic wine so unforgettable.

We also learned the importance of the colmatore, or 'air lock' – the ingenious Leonardo da Vinci invention that is still in use in the best wineries all over the world. The colmatore is a glass feature positioned on top of the barrels that allows the wine to expand when the CO₂, resulting from the fermentation, needs to find a way out without increasing the pressure inside the





- Above: six E-types and a lone XK parked up outside the Fattoria dei Barbi winery – the tour made the most of the local produce!
- Right: the serious action begins – the group preparing for the off at La Coppa della Perugia

barrels (which would slow down the process of fermentation). Meanwhile, it avoids contact between wine and air that will transform wine into vinegar.

When the fermentation is finished, the 'Leonardo air lock' is able to maintain a zero oxygen level inside the barrel. Wine makers can also understand if the wine is expanding or reducing so they know when to add or extract some wine.

We then drove to Siena and had a walking tour in this fabulous Tuscan town. Piazza del Campo is something unique, the view coming from the narrow roads before arriving at the square leaves anyone breathless. After a pizza and Chianti pit-stop, we visited the impressive Museo Civico inside the 13th-century Palazzo Pubblico where each of its magnificent rooms is adorned by amazing frescoes.

The Duomo also filled our eyes with 'la Grande Bellezza' – the great beauty of Siena – and we felt it was difficult to leave without having something special to remind us of our visit forever. A normal souvenir was really not enough. That's why our team leader Aza had an unusual idea: a month previously, she'd asked the State Archives of Siena to prepare us the official Charta Peregrini Senensis (the Siena Pilgrim Certificate), and each couple found their names written on it.

From Siena, we started our last leg of the journey to reach the quiet and romantic Roman thermal village of Bagno Vignoni. When we arrived at Posta Marcucci Hotel, we were tired but happy. Sometimes having a room with parking view could be irritating but in our case was pleasant, especially because we could admire our seven different-coloured cats sleeping, surrounded by a peaceful green landscape. We needed to relax as well, so we decided to plunge into the pool.

After our reinvigoration, we were ready for another type of liquid. This time, we chose the Brunello di Montalcino, the famous local red wine. In fact, knowing that our friend Eleni had her birthday that evening, our maitre d' and the waiters helped



by their playful Tuscan spirit, came to the table singing and carrying a 'symbolic' dessert with a pink candle on it.

The morning after, super-relaxed by the healing effects of all those natural liquid therapies, we switched on our engines to reach Montalcino and a seven-centuries-old winery named Fattoria dei Barbi. Every wine connoisseur knows the famous Brunello di Montalcino made from the Sangiovese red grape variety. The Colombini family have owned land at Montalcino since 1352, and in the late 18th century they acquired the Fattoria dei Barbi to start producing Brunello. In their cellars, we admired some very rare bottles dating from 1870 to 1918, which they managed to hide from the Germans when they stole the entire collection during the Second World War. In fact, the owners have continued to store their best wines only after 1945.

After our gorgeous lunch at their Taverna, we drove again on beautiful winding roads to reach the Sant'Antimo Abbey, a Benedictine monastery built in the 12th century. We passed through Castiglione d'Orcia with its tower fortress to return to Bagno Vignoni. This fascinating village is different from all the others: what in traditional towns is a main square, in Bagno Vignoni is the Piazza delle Acque – a 49m-long and 29m-wide pool from the bottom of which bubble up a number of hot springs. The therapeutic quality of these healing waters has long been renowned.

The first destination of the following day was Montepulciano, the beautiful medieval town where you can experience two different emotions: the pleasure of tasting their unique red wine named VINO Nobile, and the horror of the Torture Museum! At the Gattavecchi Winery, they kindly reserved us parking and we visited the underground grottos and the Etruscan caves. Later, in the adjacent 1260 refectory vaults of the Santa Maria dei Servi church, we enjoyed our lunch and wine tasting. The elegant wine they produce is made by the Prugnolo Gentile variety and it was perfect to match with their delicious handmade pasta.

The second visit of the day was dedicated to the most important and ancient majolica ceramic factory in Deruta, owned by the Ubaldo Grazia family that, after 25 generations,



- Top: weather takes a turn for the worse as S3 leaves the start
- Middle: the rally included a test at the Autodromo dell'Umbria
- Above: passing the Basilica in the historic town of Assisi

still produces the magnificent masterpieces it has been since the year 1500. Museums and customers all over the world now have their creations, from the White House to George Clooney, who recently ordered their delicate Venice Carnival dish set.

La Grande Bellezza of this day needed a great end in another historical location: il Castello di Monterone, a fairytale castle transformed into a boutique hotel on the outskirts of Perugia. In the Middle Ages there were no cars, but at least our modern iron-knights felt like princes just for one night.

Leaving the castle the morning after, we reached Perugia to join the Coppa della Perugina, a classic-car rally organised by Ugo Amodeo, the *Club* Representative for Italy. La Coppa della Perugina started as a race in 1924 and now is a three-day regularity and tour. It that offers excellent experiences, such as a luxury hotel and a gala in an aristocratic villa, delicious food and wine, historical locations, and this year also a challenging run on the Magione circuit.

One hundred and thirty crews took part in this edition, two of them from Japan, one from Australia and one from Switzerland, but our group of seven Jaguar XKs and E-types from Greece was the biggest team. While Aza helped the ladies with the roadbook tricks, the drivers attended the briefing and attached the rally numbers to the doors of their cars.

In late afternoon, we went back to Perugia – an elegant town where history is still alive and you can feel the atmosphere of the centuries in every brick of its buildings. While the boys were talking to other drivers and admiring their cars, the ladies had some time for shopping.

- Right: a peaceful end to another busy day, with the rally itself yet to come...
- Below: receiving a kilogram of freshly prepared chocolate to take home was an unexpected bonus





- Left: Alex leaves the ramp at the finish of the Coppa della Perugina

During the second day of the rally, we passed through Assisi – the UNESCO city where St Francis was born and died, and where millions of pilgrims have arrived every day since 1228, when the Basilica was constructed over the crypt containing the relics of the saint. We also drove through the picturesque village of Spello, continuing south to reach the 165m Marmore Falls.

Before our arrival in Perugia, the entire city was enjoying a pedal-car rally for children, a vintage fashion show by the students of the Fashion Academy of Perugia then, at the end, our shining convoy of marvellously different cars passing through Corso Vannucci. La Coppa della Perugina took its name from the famous Italian chocolate company that in 1924 started the tradition of this race. Part of the challenge of our rally was to

wait until the Maitre Chocolatier had finished preparing mouth-watering creations in front of us. At the end of the lesson, luckily we could all taste the freshly prepared results and we received a kilo of sweet memories to be enjoyed on our way home!

Our six E-types and one XK formed the largest foreign team participating in the rally, so the organising committee gave a special gift to us so that we could toast in the typical Italian way: a magnum of fine Grappa. Onboard our ferry on the way back to Greece, we recalled the romantic but also exciting moments we lived together and thought how lucky the crews will be who will attend the *XK Club* Tuscany Tour in September. We really encourage our Jaguar friends all over the world to become part of a 'bellissima avventura Italiana'.

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