



UK Owners Club

Newsletter



Issue 10
March 2003

2003 UK International Meeting announced

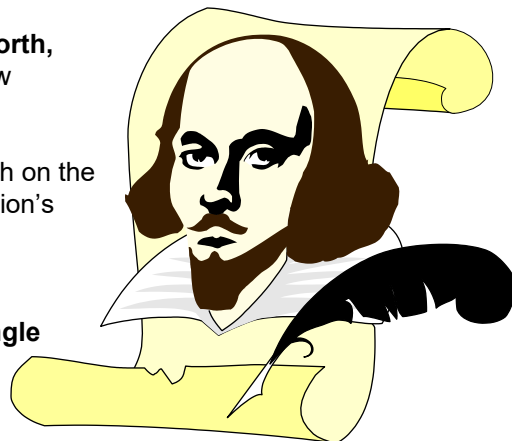
The annual UK International Meeting will be held from **Friday 13th to Sunday 15th June 2003**.

Our hotel base will be the **Woodside Conference Centre** in **Kenilworth, Warwickshire** (www.sundialgroup.com) and the weekend will follow themes relevant to "*Shakespeare Country*".

The programme will begin at 10 am on the Friday, finishing after lunch on the Sunday (approximately 3 pm), and will include visits to some of the region's attractions both historic (e.g. Warwick Castle) and modern.

The cost of the weekend, *including all meals and visits*, will be **£170 per person sharing a twin or double room, and £220 for a single room**. A full list of options and prices appears at the foot of this page.

For those arriving early we have an option on rooms at the hotel for Thursday night (12th June) at a cost of £42 per person twin or double, and £60 for a single room for Bed and Breakfast. No specific dinner arrangements have been made for Thursday evening, although those arriving early will be making their way into the local town for dinner.



Option 1

Arrive Friday morning by 10 am, full programme leaving Sunday after lunch.

£170 per person twin/double; £220 per person single.

Option 2

Arrive Friday evening (meeting at the hotel in time for dinner), leaving Sunday after lunch.

£155 per person twin/double; £205 per person single.

Option 3

Arrive Saturday morning by 10 am, leaving Sunday after lunch.

£105 per person twin/double; £130 single.

Option 4

If you wish to stay Thursday night, please **add £42 per person twin/double, or £60 single to Option 1 prices.**

Chairman's Chat Competition Time

Monday 23rd December 2002

This morning, I took the barchetta for a short drive through the Chilterns. I had been working overseas for quite some time, so this was the first time I'd driven the car since the summer.

The sun brought out the winter colours so that the Chiltern beeches glowed red and brown and my senses were heightened by the clear cold air nipping at my ears, the faint country smells from livestock and damp woodland, and the exhaust note echoing back from the hedges and walls as I accelerated through the gears. Even the patches of mud and damp leaves on the road emphasised that I was *driving* the car and not just steering a steel cage with half my mind on the driving and the other half listening to the stereo.

It's a road I know well, both driving and cycling, and it was satisfying to drive as smoothly as possible, trying to get the speed just right for each corner with only the lightest touch on the brakes to steady it. The only reminder of the 21st century was a glimpse of black-uniformed, heavily armed policemen as I drove past the Prime Minister's residence at Chequers.

The essence of the barchetta is this ability to have fun on any road, even at very modest speeds. We all know there are cars which are faster, more comfortable on motorways and more satisfying on a race track, but I can't think of any car that gives more pleasure when used for everyday driving on the bumpy, slippery, winding roads that are so typical of the British countryside.

For many people, "driving" is lugging the kids to school in a 4x4, blasting mindlessly along motorways, or queuing at a succession of traffic lights on the way to the shops or work. The barchetta reminds us that the UK is blessed with thousands of miles of delightful country roads that inspired British sports cars like the classic Austin Healeys, MGs and Triumphs.

Though we owners are usually the first to criticise it, the barchetta is faster, more reliable, more stylish and more practical than any of those cars - but just as much fun!

Spring is coming - it's time to get out into the country and re-discover driving, and the barchetta is just the car to do it in ...

Geoff Bowles



So to start us off, here's a picture of our Chairman, Geoff Bowles, wearing his Club fleece on the way up Mount Fuji in Japan. I have to say Geoff looks a little worried to me, or perhaps it's just that he's bloody cold - after all, the sign behind him shows that he is 3000 metres up a volcanic mountain!



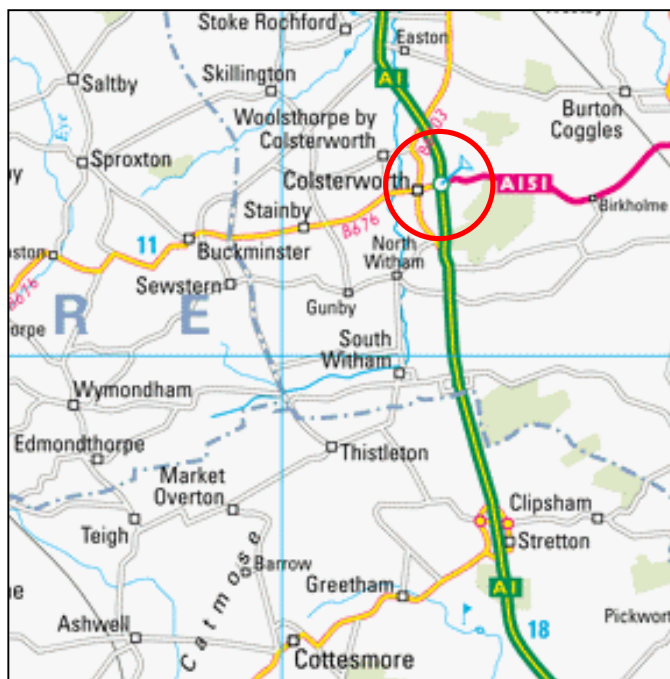
Regional Meetings

There will be a **Midlands Meeting** on **Sunday 13th April** (to which of course anyone from any other part of the country is very welcome to join in!).

Intended route is around the Vale of Belvoir ending at Rutland Water, with an optional walk mid to late afternoon.

The **start point** will be the **Little Chef Services at Colsterworth, Leicestershire, on the A1** at its junction with the B676 to the west and A151 to the East (see map, right). To access the Little Chef from the South, go round the roundabout and access it from the A1 southbound carriageway.

Meet at 10.45 am for an 11 am departure.



Me and my *barchetta*

Ever since I passed my driving test at the age of 18 in 1975 I had always wanted a two-seat convertible, but when I first started working I could never afford one and so ended up with "sensible" cars (Vauxhalls and Fords - spit). In 1988 I bought my first brand new car, a moderately sporty Volvo 480ES (built in Holland by Daf who had been acquired by Volvo), which although plagued by electrical problems was quite a fun car to drive. In 1992 I sold the Volvo and bought a (new) 2 litre VW Corrado 16V which I kept for a couple of years before trading it in for a (new again) VR6 Corrado. This was in turn traded in for a (new yet again) Corrado VR6 Storm at the end of 1995, the Storm being a limited edition to mark the end of the model. I still own this car, which in just over seven years of ownership has covered only 41,000 miles.

But still there was a hankering for what most people would call a "sports car" - a two-seat convertible. This was only made worse when my wife Chris hired a Porsche Boxster for the weekend to mark my 40th birthday towards the end of 1997. After I had finally paid for the Storm at the end of 1998, I started to seriously consider a "fun" car as a second vehicle, and began to look at the options. I rejected the MGF (too bulky, ugly and too many reliability problems particularly on the earlier cars) and the BMW Z3 (the base model was gutless, the higher spec ones too expensive), which only left two realistic choices - the Mazda MX5 and the barchetta. I had always liked the look of the barchetta, and its rarity due to it only being available in left hand drive was also an added bonus.

I test-drove a 1.8 MX5 from a local dealership and although it was easy to drive, I had some misgivings about the seats which seemed very narrow at the shoulders - might cause driver fatigue and discomfort on long journeys. Add to this the fact that MX5s are as common as muck and that the barchetta was significantly cheaper than an equivalent 1.8 MX5, and the b soon had its nose well in front. I arranged to test drive a barchetta (a silver 1998 LE, number 1018 - does this one now belong to you?) from a well-known Fiat/Alfa dealership in Cheshire, and found LHD wasn't as big a deal as I thought it might be. The choice was made - it was going to be a barchetta, and in yellow if possible! Furthermore it had to be one built after August 1998, as I had a cherished number on retention to assign to it - S4 UTY.

The Fiat salesman tried for weeks to persuade me to buy the car I'd test-driven, but it was way over-priced (and the wrong colour and registration year anyway) so I decided to buy from one of the barchetta specialists instead. Easter 1999 saw us visiting my in-laws in Essex, so I arranged visits to Autohaven in Lingfield, Surrey (where again I had a test drive), and Oakley International in Tunbridge Wells, Kent to see what they had in stock. I asked them both to keep me informed about any cars they received which fitted my criteria. In July 1999 Justin Floyd at Oakley called to give me details about a car which he had just got in which he thought I might be interested in. It sounded good, so that weekend we drove all the way down from Cheshire to Kent to have a look at it.

First impressions were very favourable – it was yellow (!), about 8 months old (so fitted the registration criterion), had just 9,500 km (5,900 miles) on the clock, alloys, full electric pack, factory-fitted alarm, leather seats and trim and even air-conditioning. It also had Abarth badging and a walnut effect centre console and instrument surround, which at first sight I wasn't sure about but which grew on me the more I saw it. It had also recently had the variator replaced. The first owners had ordered a fully loaded car in Italy, and had personally collected it from the dealer, Concessionaria AUTO 2 in Todi, Perugia. The car was then driven in this country for the next eight months on Italian plates (one of which I've now got while Justin kept the other) before being traded in with Oakley (for an Alfa GTV I believe).

A long test drive seemed to show nothing obviously wrong with the car, and after a bit of haggling over the price I gave Justin a deposit and arranged for an AA inspection the following week. That turned out to be OK, so I arranged to collect the car two weeks after I had first seen it.

Excited wasn't the word to describe me on the train journey to Kent on 24th July 1999! I couldn't wait to pick up the car, especially as the weather was glorious. Upon arriving at Oakley's office, all the usual paperwork was completed, filthy lucre was exchanged and eventually the keys were placed in my sticky little palm. Chris and I drove off with the top down and me with a stupid grin on my face which didn't disappear all the way back to the in-laws 60 odd miles away.

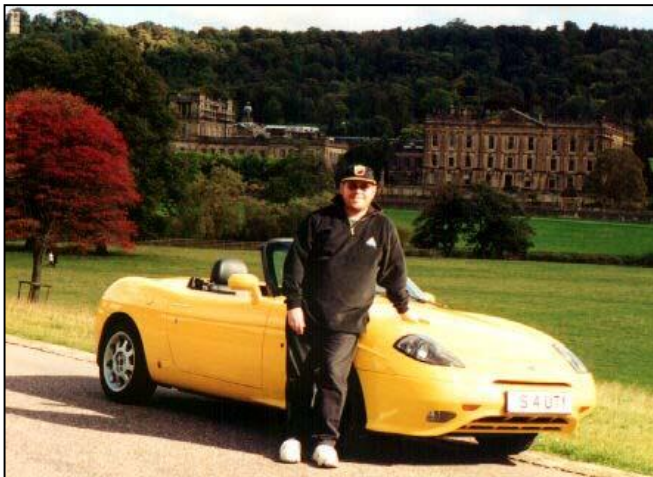
Three and a half years later and the "Yellow Peril" is now just over four years old and has 34,600 km (21,500 miles) on the clock. I've had no major problems with it (apart from the battery going dead over the winter when it's not being used much) and still love driving it, especially the looks you get from people who haven't the foggiest idea what it is! It regularly returns over 30 mpg even when doing the "urban cycle", and on longer runs is even better – the best ever was on one leg of the 2000 Dutch International Meeting, where I calculated the consumption as being 43.4 mpg!

At the moment I have no intention of getting rid of the barchetta (or the Storm for that matter), as it still gives both Chris and myself a great deal of pleasure, especially when meeting other owners in the UK and overseas.

Look out for the three of us at the UK International Meeting in June!

Highlights of ownership

- July 1999 – Picking the car up, and the fantastic top-down weather in the first couple of weeks of ownership. Oh, and joining the Club of course!
- October 1999 – UK barchetta Club meeting in the Peak District; first experience of barchetta convoying!
- May 2000 – UK International Meeting (again in the Peak District).
- August 2000 – Dutch International Meeting; driving around in a convoy of over 50 barchettas from all over Europe – amazing!
- June 2001 – A brief appearance on BBC's "Top Gear" in an item about cherished registrations.
- May 2002 – UK International Meeting in Portsmouth; being allowed to park in front of HMS Victory in the Historic Naval Dockyard.



Pictures taken at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, October 1999 during the UK barchetta Club Peak District Meeting

Steve Auty, Newsletter Editor

If you would like you and your barchetta to be featured in a future edition of the Newsletter, e-mail or write to Steve Auty at the addresses shown in the "Contacts" section, including photographs if possible.

AGM Weekend in Derbyshire (29/11/2002 to 01/12/2002)

As Nick and I arrived on Friday evening at the Alison Park Hotel in Buxton, Derbyshire for the Club's AGM weekend, we were greeted by the sight of six barchettas already neatly parked in the small car park.

Eleven of us gathered in the hotel ready for dinner, and after a short walk into Buxton the decision was made to eat, appropriately enough, at an Italian restaurant. After a (huge) delicious three course meal, we all headed back to the hotel for drinks in the bar, where Sarah and Mark informed us that the fire exit was through their room(!), and we were given strict instructions to wake them up if the alarm sounded as they would probably be asleep.

Having retired to bed late, we were unexpectedly awoken at 2:00 am by a loud bell. Wondering what on earth was going on, we suddenly realised it was the fire bell, so we jumped out of bed, got half dressed - and then the bell stopped ringing. Silence. So quiet, in fact strangely quiet - no one was out on our floor and the hotel seemed absolutely dead. This either meant that everyone had gone and left us or they had slept through the alarm. The only person around was the hotelier, who informed me it was just a false alarm!

What a night. After finally returning to sleep, it was soon morning and of course the topic of conversation at Saturday's breakfast was the fire bell. To my surprise and concern some members did actually sleep through the alarm (*yes, Chris and I were two of them!* - Ed.), but I was pleased to know that Vicki, Dave and Bernadette did make it to Reception fully dressed and ready to assemble in the car park.

Following a hearty breakfast it was time to rally round for our drive through the Peak District to Chatsworth House. The weather was cold but dry, so it was tops down and off we drove. The drive down to the House was great, and we arrived just as it started to rain. We all managed to park together and were greeted by some friendly chickens just wandering around the grounds who came to check out the stylish group of cars on their grass - or were they just trying to keep out of the rain?

Chatsworth House was beautifully decorated for Christmas, and some members spent an hour or so looking round the house, while others spent the time either Christmas shopping or enjoying tea and cakes in the cafeteria in the stable block. Then it was time for lunch, which was taken at the estate Farm Shop and tea-room a short drive from Chatsworth House. Unfortunately, the tea-room is only small and it was very busy. Those members who were patient enough to wait managed to get a fantastic large estate-produced meal. Others who were not so lucky in the tea-room enjoyed just as good estate-produced picnics in their cars, which were attracting lots of attention in the car park from other visitors.



After everyone had spent up in the Farm Shop, it was time for the convoy to head back to the hotel ready for the AGM. Having taken a wrong turn at a traffic island once back in Buxton, not even the GPS could help, so it was time for an educated guess, which thankfully was right. The convoy embarked on a short mystery tour around the town centre, which involved driving past the Opera House and up a very steep narrow hill which looked like a dead end when we reached the top. I didn't fancy trying to get eleven barchettas to reverse down the hill all at the same time, but luck was on my side as there was a small gap just wide enough for a barchetta to fit through, which led to the market square. There were some odd looks from the people shopping in the market as eleven barchettas followed one another around the stalls - very reminiscent of that scene from "The Italian Job"!

Back at the hotel, the first AGM of the UK barchetta Owners Club passed off very smoothly with attendance by 21 members (see *AGM Minutes in December 2002 Newsletter*). Following an excellent evening meal in the hotel we all retired to the lounge, and after plenty of drinks all round we finally went to bed late again. Fortunately, there was no repeat episode of the fire bell!



L to R : Vicki Gwilliam, Rosemary Kind, Bernadette Bowles



On Sunday, we woke to a great day's weather ... rain. After another good breakfast, we set off on the drive to Denby Pottery, again through the Peak District, but unfortunately the weather put a bit of a damper on the drive as it rained heavily all the way and you couldn't see the glorious panoramic views of the countryside. Typically, just as we arrived at Denby the sun broke through the clouds. Once there it was time for Nick to collect the specially commissioned barchetta Club mugs and present one to everyone in attendance. Judging by the looks on people's faces when they saw the design they were all delighted with the result!



There are several shops at Denby Pottery plus a very good restaurant, and after people had done some Christmas shopping and had a spot of lunch (yet more food!) we all began to head off in our different directions. So finished what we feel was a great AGM weekend, despite the weather.

Rachel Cole & Nick Anderson