

# Berlin Top Gear Challenge

## Andy Bebbington takes up a Top Gear style challenge



Andy Bebbington with Mark Older on the Challenge to Berlin and back.

**A**s I am the International officer of Dereham & District Round Table I was delighted to be invited by our twin club (Berlin Mitte) for the weekend in June when the Berlin Round Tables were hosting their National Conference. Only four weeks earlier I had purchased from Jackie Ridge her immaculate 2004 XJ8 3.5 litre V8 Sport and so decided that I would drive over to Berlin for the pleasure of getting to know the car a bit better.

The weekend before the trip I was bet, by one of my fellow Tablers, that I couldn't drive my XJ8 from my home in Shipdham, Norfolk to Berlin, on one tank of petrol, then fill up once and repeat it on the return leg of the journey – a la 'Top Gear' style challenge. After some consideration I accepted the challenge on the condition that they sponsored me as an incentive. Our Round Table Club Chairman Mark Older

was accompanying me on the trip and so would be the scrutineer for the challenge.

On the Wednesday evening with the XJ tank filled to the brim with 78 litres of unleaded and trip computer set to zero, we headed off to catch the overnight ferry from Harwich to the Hook of Holland. Whilst waiting to disembark we set the XJ's sat nav for Berlin and followed it out of the port and eventually onto the E30 autobahn. It was raining, with spray and heavy traffic until we got past Hanover but generally I was driving normally and set the cruise control at 70mph. When traffic and weather allowed we even ran up to 130mph on a couple of occasions to stretch the V8's legs and catch up with some native Porsches.

At the outskirts of Berlin the fuel range still showed 117 miles and an average of 35mpg but on entering Berlin the traffic was crawling due to a corporate relay run in the park and it took almost two hours to do the last 8 miles to our host's apartment via the Brandenburg Gate. This caused the fuel range indicator to drop to 15 miles and a 30.7mpg overall average.

We enjoyed an excellent weekend but all too soon, it was Sunday afternoon and time to leave.

Upon returning to the XJ, which had been parked on the next street for the weekend we found that it had been visited by some local graffiti 'artists'. Fortunately the offending "artwork" cleaned off with a rag moistened with petrol and no harm was done to the car's finish. We then visited the nearest garage and filled up with 78.7 litres of petrol and set off on the return journey, West through Spandau, past the BMW motorcycle factory and Brandenburg

to join the E30. An overnight stop at Osnabruck, then on to catch the afternoon ferry from the Hook back to Harwich and finally back home to Shipdham with 34 miles of fuel to spare. The XJ proved itself to be an supremely comfortable car and a delight to drive over such a distance. For interest the stats are as follows:

Outward leg: 528.7 Miles, 78 Litres, = 30.7 mpg (range left on trip computer indicated 15 miles)

Return leg: 538.8 Miles, 78.7 Litres = 31.1 mpg (range left on trip computer indicated 34 miles).

The Trip computer showed a total mileage for the whole journey of 1067.5 miles

at 33.1mpg with an average speed of 45mph. However doing the maths the old fashioned way gives an overall of 31mpg which I think is superb economy for a XJ8 V8. The Challenge also raised around £200 for one of our Round Table Charities 'The Antony Nolan Trust' taking lives back from leukaemia. ■



Inclement weather as they reached the Brandenburg Gate.



An unfortunate incident which didn't create permanent damage to the car.