



MINOR MESSAGE no. 3

A Breakdown in France, 1987

by Chris Howard



Chris and Mary Hall, the MOT organisers back then, always managed to make us drive up a mountain to get the rally plaque and bottle of wine. The rally to St Rémy de Provence took us up Mont Ventoux (6263 ft). We got to the top, and going down had passed the memorial to Tom Simpson (Tour de France cyclist who died of a heart attack). Shortly after, using second gear braking, there was a bang and I lost drive. Was able to coast to the town of Bédoin, and the other MOT-ers rolled up. It was agreed a tow back to the campsite. In France a solid drawbar is compulsory. Two Scots lads said "we have found a bar" which drew some sarcastic comments. No, a towing bar! Which was in a yard with a dog which started barking. Mary Hall kept it going until an old lady came out. She said the wife of the drawbar owner was down the main street bundling asparagus. When told of the situation and that we had four small children she agreed to wake Monsieur, having a siesta. He readily agreed to loan us the bar and got his tool kit to help fix it to my car. Chris Hall did the tow and Nick Palmer drove "shotgun" to prevent any idiots interfering.

Back at the campsite we took the gearbox out (most work done by Bernie Tremain). The next day Chris and Mary found a small engineer. In that part of France the dialect is like Geordie in the UK. It took Mary a while to work out he was saying he could not put any teeth back on the damaged third motion shaft. He ground off the remains of second gear. I then had a three-gear Morris. Fortunately the majority of the return journey was on motorways and A-roads and I got back to Swindon. Post script: Mont and Barbara Giles returned the drawbar with a bottle of wine and a bouquet of flowers as a thank you.