



African Odyssey

By Roy Locock

Chris Vernon and Roy Locock in their Midgets outside Nuffield Place, the former home of William Morris. Photo: Colin Grant

When I completed my round the world trip in Bridget I was repeatedly asked "Where will your next adventure be?" After some reflection, I responded, "Probably north to south of Africa, having not touched that continent on the round the world drive." I have previously visited Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt as a normal tourist, but have never been down to sub-Saharan Africa.

Late in 2010 I was in conversation with a number of people at Kimber House discussing the official events for 2011, to celebrate the modern Midget's 50th birthday, when I heard a voice saying "Tell you what, I will lead a trip from Abingdon to Cape Town next year to mark the Midget's birthday." I then realised, with some foreboding, that the voice was mine and I had offered to shepherd other Midget drivers to the southern-most tip of South Africa.

The dye was cast, so Midget owners were asked to register their interest via the MGCC. I hoped that we might include at least one overseas entrant and fervently wanted at least one lady driver to bear the flag for the fairer sex. Initial interest was very encouraging and included an Australian and no less than three lone females. Over the coming months, and as the trip plans were firmed up, the numbers fluctuated between two and eight cars, but finally finished with just myself, driving Bridget, and Chris Vernon with Dorothy (a 1979-registered 1500 Midget).

The route identified, of around 13,000 miles, would take us from Abingdon across Europe to Istanbul where we would turn right, going down through Syria, Jordan and across the Sea of Aquaba into

Egypt. From there we would head south through Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Namibia and into South Africa. The one area of concern for me was Sudan which was immersed in civil war between the north and south. Eventually I decided we would divert from Khartoum, in northern Sudan, through Ethiopia and then into Kenya avoiding the troubled southern region of Sudan which has since become independent from the north.

However, starting in late 2010 in Tunisia, the 'Arab Spring' uprisings were to give me reason to reconsider the proposed route through the Middle East. In particular Syria, which was pivotal to my plan, was suffering considerable violent unrest and the alternatives I was forced to consider would take us via Libya, but only if the rebellion there was concluded, or through Iran and doubling back through Saudi Arabia. The latter choice would add 2,500 miles to our journey and, although I am not in any hurry, I have promised to get Chris to Cape Town in time for him to return home for Christmas. So, with just eight weeks before our departure date, I took the decision to go with my original choice and Syria it will be.

To be eligible for this event Chris had to buy an MG Midget. He was unlucky enough to have to replace the engine, which he did with the very able assistance of Debbie Evans of Priestess Race Engines, and has had to weld in a couple of plates to strengthen the rear spring anchor points. We have also added a sump guard identical to Bridget's.

Moss Europe has joined us as sponsors, supplying our spares needs, whilst Scorpion Signs have supplied the cars with route

maps on the bonnets and signage for our website (www.bridgetthemidget.co.uk), as well as logos for our chosen charity (CoCo) displayed on the sides. CoCo is a charity that addresses the educational and health needs of African children and was established 11 years ago by the world record runner, Steve Cram. We will be visiting two of their projects in Tanzania, en route, and delivering 100 model cars very kindly donated by Rob Gammage, another example of the generosity of MG enthusiasts.

Both Midgets are now pretty much ready, tourist visas have been obtained for most countries and, for the cars, we have carnets (Carnet de Passage, to give them their complete title, are similar to passports for humans. Possession of carnets removes the need to import and export the cars in each country). So everything is ready.

We will be departing from Abingdon's Market Square on September 11 2011. Coincidentally, the same day there are four MG runs converging on the town (Museum Appeal Run) and the local authority has a family fun day just 100 yards up the road from us. From 12:00 midday until 3:30pm we will be doing our best to raise money for CoCo before being waved off. So anyone wishing to have a Sunday out will be very welcome to come down and join in. For those that are not able to join us then, for Chris and I, please support us with a donation which you can do via the CoCo logo on our website.

PS. Don't forget, you can read of Bridget the Midget's exploits around the world in the book 'Not in that Car'. The MGCC have a small stock of signed copies available from the shop or online.