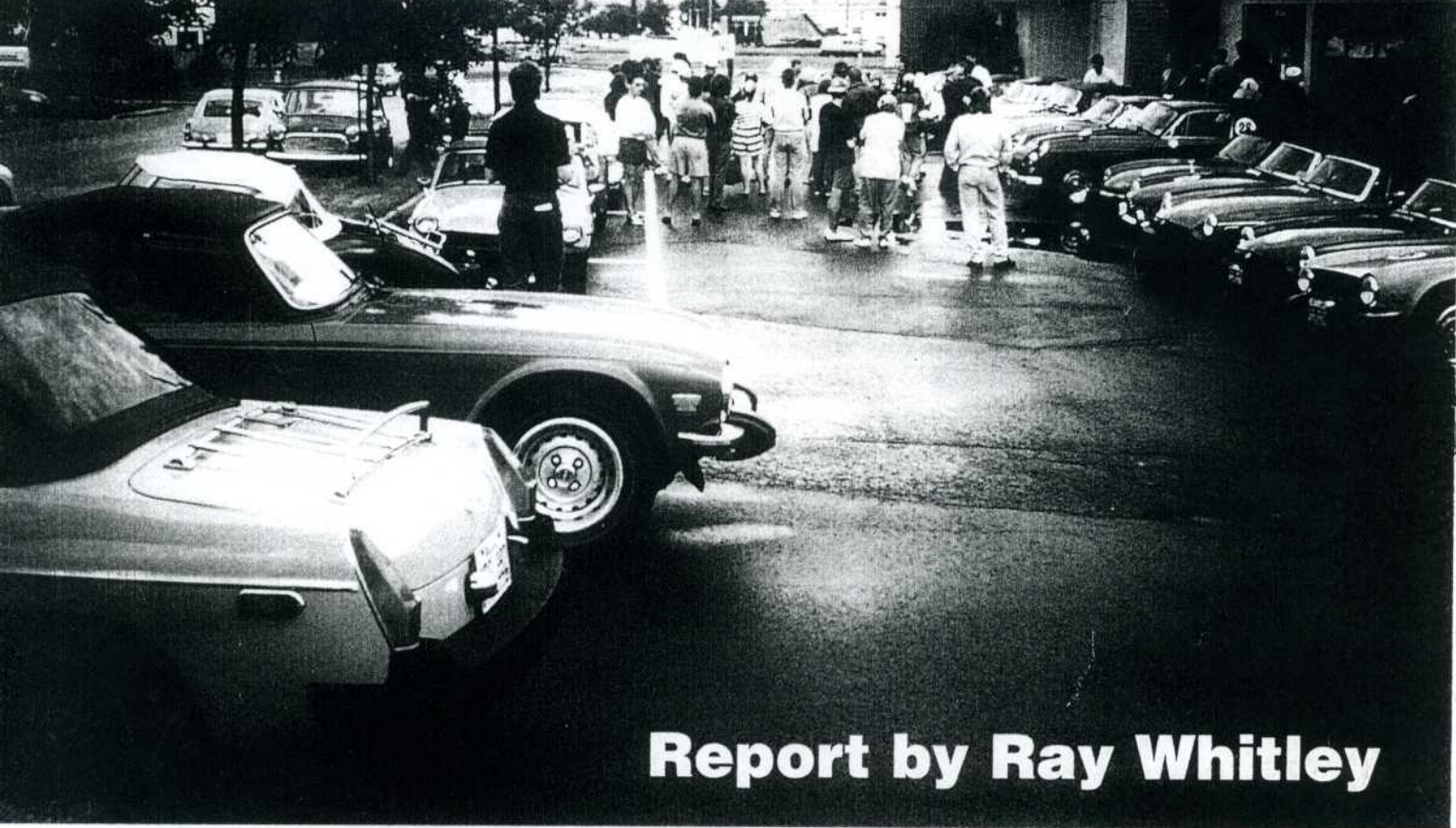


# BREAKFAST IN QUEBEC EXPERT SUPPER IN NOVA SCOTIA!



## Report by Ray Whitley

### The Saga of Siegfried and La Classique Import-Export Gaspésien

July 2, 1994, 12:45 PM Eastern Daylight Time, ascending the easternmost spur of the Appalachian chain, which separates the Quebecois tourist town of Percé from the rest of the Gaspé Peninsula: There is little passing room on Quebec's narrow Route 6. One in four grind upwards, hot & foggy all at once, and the Volkswagen Jetta ahead doesn't move over. We are in danger of being late for the next control & its attendant quiz (each one a triumph of ambiguity & dubious translation), more important, we risk missing lunch.

Miraculously, just as Herr Volks slows to a toddle on the grade, one of two passing lanes on the entire route appears. flick into second hold, twitch the shoulders left, floor it; warp speed, Mr. Sulu. The cliffs are now streaming past. Jettas look slightly comical reversing downhill, don't they? Ah, the lurid war-cry of a 383 at full

chat...

'That must've scared the sh— out of them,' remarks my fearless co-driver. Before I can reply to this witticism, the road plunges acute right & down. Unexpected, that, onto the binders. Surely we're still making maybe 15mph too much for this turn! But *they've paved the verge..* Thank God for storm drainage; two wheels into the gutter & our line becomes plausible, at least. Composure returns. Press on. The Jetta has completely disappeared, but then, so have our fellow competitors. Where the Hell IS everybody?

Actually, they were all back in the town of Gaspé, eating the lunch we had overshot with our group. Luckily, there was no penalty in this event for finishing a stage **early**, so we ended up eating expensive, tourist sandwiches at Percé, in the first real sunshine all weekend. We had an extra half hour to stumble

over the quiz & reflect.

**Rendez-vous des Anglaises** is a French-Canadian club for classic British sports cars, a pleasant anomaly of which I've been a member since 1987. At first, I registered as a means of acquiring emergency support during forays *avec C-V8* to visit in-laws. Heretofore, the sheer distance has kept me from attending their events. However, when **Le Club** announced, this spring, **La Classique Import Export** (*Import Expert* are sponsors, God bless 'em) **Gaspésien**, a two-day, 640-mile event based on European retro rallies, I was finally tempted to meet fellow Anglaises I knew only from letters or the 'phone. The renowned scenery of the Gaspé was another incentive & the £25 entry fee (eat yer hearts out, Mille Miglia Retro entrants!) was an absolute gift.

Since my Latin is actually better than my French and neither much good, I prudently enlisted a car-smitten, bilingual friend, Peter Dolphin, to co-drive. Dolphin is a

Nissan 240SX herder, actually, but still a fundamentally sound lad with whom one can be comfortable entrusting the *Pride & Joy*.

Anyway, on the Wednesday afternoon, we set out on the 678-mile transit to the Friday start in Quebec City, so as to have plenty of time to find the start, fettle the car if necessary, & get settled on the Thursday.

For those of you with atlas's, we drove from Halifax to Woodstock, New Brunswick, that first day—about 350 miles in about six hours. C-V8 Mk II 104/2308 (alias 'Siegfried', alias 'Plastic Pig') remained in good form, and Peter took this opportunity to get comfortable behind the wheel as he'd only been a passenger before.

Day two, which began at ten, after a leisurely breakfast (this was a holiday, after all), took us to the start, with a small detour to Madawaska, Maine, to enjoy Yankee petrol prices (six quid saved!) while stocking up on lead substitute to keep the valve seats in at speed. Once in

the province of Quebec, where speed limits are more suggested practice than law, we made excellent time, arriving on the forecourt of Import Expert, a large imported car spares outfit in Quebec City, about 3pm. Hey, if we could find our way in Quebec traffic, maybe we wouldn't blow the route on the rally itself?

Import Expert really know how to do it right. It's the only car accessory shop we've ever seen with a bar *en suite* right off a showroom displaying all manner of things Recaro, Cibie, Ronal & Michelin. Oh my, oh my, poop, poop... On arrival, we were delighted to find that Louis-Philippe Le Bel, the rallymaster, had already left word of us. M. Pierre Tanguay & his colleagues on staff welcomed us most hospitably.

After buying a couple of spare front suspension bushes (I believe in insurance), we departed for a quiet hotel nearby, hence to a cold one in the bar and a Vietnamese (really) dinner *alfresco* in Quebec's historic, 18th-century downtown. In the warm haze of that fine summer evening, we noticed several fellow competitors (we all got rally plates, you see) burbling along the boulevard before us; evidently we'd chosen a street on which to see and be seen. In the warm glow of *un petit digestif*, everything seemed just about perfect for the event itself.

Dear old Mother Nature does so like a joke. Just as we went to step out of the hotel next day, en route to the start, the heavens opened in a torrential shower. Have you ever noticed how, in a downpour, the boot lid of a C-V8, when opened to hustle luggage in, sheds water neatly into the boot itself? NOT good for early morning temper.

Actually, the rain only lasted until we arrived at Import Expert, but then it kept coming back throughout the event. There at the start, all thirty-four entrants enjoyed a damp briefing from our rallymaster and partook of a sumptuous continental breakfast laid out in that showroom by our generous sponsors. We were delighted



**Co-driver Peter Dolphin with 104/2308 on arrival at Quebec City before the start. We modestly entered as: "Ecurie Nouvelle Ecosse"!**

by the varied entry, which included an MGTC, several TR3s and an MGB-GT Costello V-8 conversion, amongst others. We answered a lot of questions between English & broken French, then it was a wave to the helicopter video crew & depart, in groups of about ten, for Rivière du Loup & points East.

**La Classique Import-Expert Gaspésie** is not a heavily competitive event. The route is known, there are no hidden controls, and one scores points principally by answering the quizzes at the end of each leg. However, everyone presses on at a mighty clip — most enjoyable, if a little naughty.

We were not altogether surprised, then, to come upon a very rare, aerial speed trap laid for us all on a secondary road just before lunch. Luckily, the timing aircraft was flying such a peculiar pattern to get a view of us on the road that everyone had plenty of warning, so the Quebec Provincial Police had to settle for a few less wary locals.

Onwards, onwards, to finish stage 1 at Trois Pistoles & stage 2 at Métis-sur-mer, with maddening little quizzes at a motor museum and a botanical garden.

The first day's course fin-

ished in the Chic-Choc mountains, at Mont-Albert, after a spirited climb through clouds & rain to our inn, C-V8 bellowing along in the wake of the rally master on the fairly safe assumption he knew where he was going! Gite Mont-Albert (No bilingual puns, please!) sports a bar in the very lobby, not to mention astonishing cuisine for such a remote spot.

The second half of the rally took us right around the Gaspé peninsula to Carleton. En route, we enjoyed the magnificent scenery and wildlife (whales 30 metres off the road in the Gulf of St. Lawrence). The entire field took coffee together at Mont St. Pierre, under the curious & watchful eye of the lone local copper. Later, after the minor debacle of Gaspé/Percé, drat missing a good lunch, but at least we weren't alone, we helped Art & Corin Topham change a fan belt on their TR-3, and diced long and decorously with a purple GT6, before Mother Nature started the slapstick comedy again.

Somebody poked a Beta-cam into the car as we arrived. Peter apologised to the reporter, in French, that after two days and six hundred miles, it looked a bit like a bordello on the morning after. (How useful to have crew with a colourful facility

in the language!) Somebody else treated us to a cold beer. Everybody laughed a lot.

After all, we did finish seventeenth, I think. No shame, anyway. At the awards banquet, the organisers presented us with a Michelin emergency tool kit for our assistance to the Topham crew, and Peter won a bottle of booze in a raffle. So to bed, tired but happy.

On the way home, a Honda CRX tried to see off the funny, old RHD car. We undecieved him. As a matter of fact, we found the C-V8 immensely capable in modern traffic — but you *do* use fuel (possibly half the daily production of Qatar) keeping the hordes of Nissans, Toyotas, etc, permanently in your rearview mirrors.

A total of 1,772 miles in the four days. Siegfried returned an average of 17.5 mpg, showed no measurable consumption of 5-50 synthetic, and went through a pint of tranny fluid (time to change that pan gasket). All we had to replace was a worn-out throttle return spring. And all this in a chassis with, as Tony Clarke has tentatively calculated, in excess of 300,000 miles on it. So, don't take any guff — C-V8s can still take it after thirty years. **Merçi, mes amis Québécois!**