

MOG TRAVELS

GATEWAY TO THE NORWEGIAN FJORDS



An English and an Australian Morgan were just two of the cars that were part of a cosmopolitan group of classic cars that travelled to Norway in June to see the magnificent fjords and mountains of this truly stunning country. Sarah Dowding reports on the adventure.

CLASSIC TRAVELLING

Sarah Dowding is the director of Classic Travelling. For tour information and more photos from the trip, see www.classictravelling.com or call 0845 230 1678 for details.



Lyle Honess in his Morgan Plus 8.

We were part of the Norwegian Fjords Tour, a two-week driving holiday through some of the world's most beautiful scenery, organised by Classic Travelling. Our travel companions were mainly from the UK but also included car owners from the USA, France, Sweden, Belgium, Norway and another couple from Australia. Their wheels included Jaguar XKs and E-Types plus an SS100, a Lagonda, an Austin Healey, a Mercedes, a Porsche and a Ferrari.

Lyle Honess, from Victoria, Australia, was in his 1987 Plus 8, which he keeps in the UK. I was in my 1981 4/4, which is well travelled, having been in my ownership for over 15 years, and we have been to 30 countries on three continents together in that time.

We travelled via Denmark as there are no direct ferries to Norway from the UK anymore, but the journey really started from Kristiansand, our port of entry (and departure) in southern Norway. June is a fabulous time to visit as the weather is generally good and it's before the main tourist season.

There is still snow on the hills and next to some of the higher roads, which, in my opinion, adds to the beauty. However, the spring flowers are also out, due to the long sunlight hours, and it's often warm enough for shorts. I personally think it's the most consistently beautiful country I have ever visited, and it's perfect for a great driving holiday.



From Kristiansand we drove on some lovely, quiet roads alongside lakes and through small villages into Telemark, a region famed as the birthplace of skiing. Our first hotel, in Dalen, was constructed purely from wood, and was truly magical with its Gothic fairy-tale architecture. We were fortunate to be joined for the night by a local Morgan owner, Fred Ljone, with his Plus 4.

Leaving Dalen we scrambled up some steep hairpins to Eidsborg and its pretty stave church, before heading on towards Bergen. This was a superb drive, over some high mountains, and there was far more snow than the last time I visited in June 2009. This sadly meant some of the old roads, which avoid the occasional tunnel, were closed, but many drivers seemed to enjoy the noise of their cars in tunnels.



At Eidsborg's stave church.

The journey took us over moon-scape mountains and passed sensational waterfalls. We crossed the Hardangerfjord by ferry to take the corniche road that clings to the rock above the fjord – just one lane in places – squeezing through arches and small tunnels boring through the rock.

A welcome two-night stay in the centre of Bergen gave us the chance to enjoy a driving-free day, and explore the sights of this lovely, historic city. Our journey then headed north, towards Ålesund, with an overnight stop on the shores of Sognefjord, Norway's longest and deepest fjord. The driving here is again stupendous with views to die for and superb roads that are quiet and smooth.

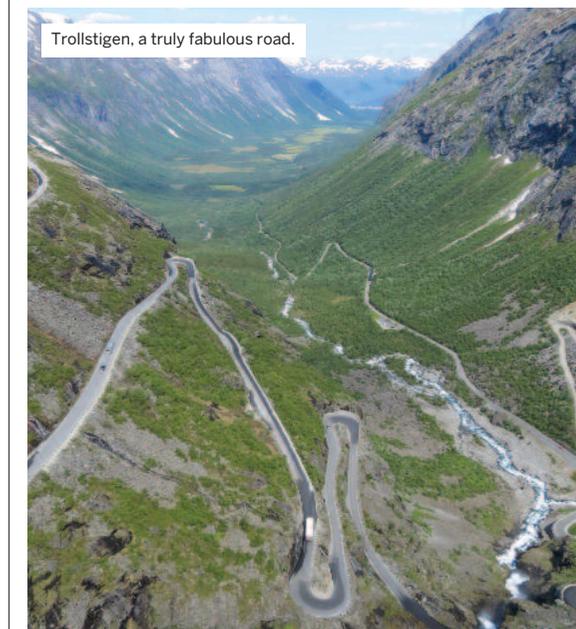


Overlooking Sognefjord.

From Sognefjord to Ålesund was our only 'roof-up' day in the two-week tour, as we succumbed to the torrential rain. Although others were not quite so hardy, the Lagonda braved it out, hood down for the entire trip! When we arrived in Ålesund in the evening the sun appeared and was a constant companion for the remaining nine days – bliss.

Midsummer's Day in Ålesund gave us the opportunity to relish an incredible, private boat trip down one of the small fjords to one of Norway's most historic hotels, Hotel Union Øye. We enjoyed an exquisite dinner before sailing back to Ålesund, watching the sunset from the boat at 11.20pm.

Even at midnight it was barely dusk, with the sun rising again at about 1.30am. Ålesund is 4 degrees below the Arctic Circle, so the sun just dips below the horizon for much of the summer.



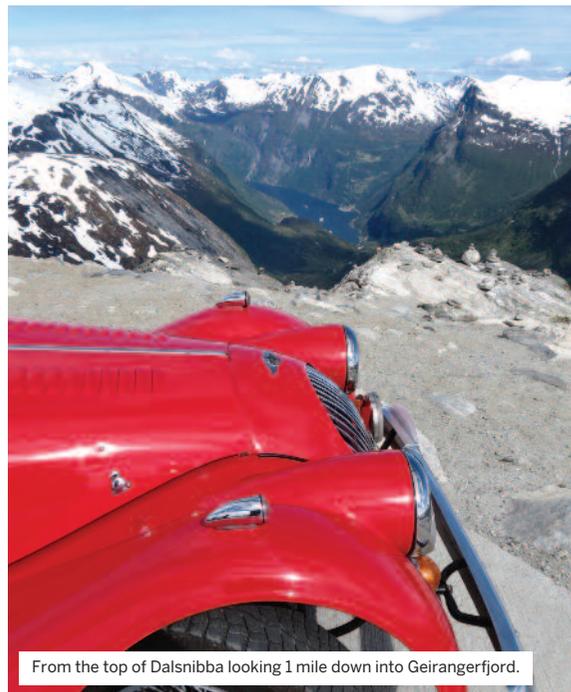
Trollstigen, a truly fabulous road.

The next day we conquered Trollstigen, Norway's answer to the Stelvio Pass (and, in my opinion, far superior too), on our journey to Geiranger. Everyone in the group was just astounded by the sheer climb up the near vertical rock face, passing a number of large waterfalls. There is a superb viewing platform at the top, which made a great spot to watch other classics in our group make their ascent.

Geiranger is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, at the head of Geirangerfjord, and one of the most famed spots in the country. We stayed for a couple of nights overlooking the beautiful fjord. Each morning huge ocean-going cruise ships came in for a day visit, and it's just incredible to see how dwarfed they are in the surroundings.



About half our group opted for a fast boat trip down the fjord, which was enormous fun and enabled us to get really close to the waterfalls and see some of the ancient, remote farms on the tiny plains, clinging to the cliffs. As it was St Hans Day (and when Norway celebrates midsummer – 23rd June) there were celebrations, bonfires and folk dancing to be enjoyed well into the evening.



From the top of Dalsnibba looking 1 mile down into Geirangerfjord.

Heading out of Geiranger involved a fabulous climb up 37 hairpin bends to Dalsnibba, nearly a mile above sea level, and the fjord below. It offered the most incredible view down into the fjord, and we were fortunate to have the most crystal clear day to enjoy it.

Our journey then took us down the wide river valley to Lom, famed for its stave church and, thanks to the Hairy Bikers cooking duo, the most delicious bakery, where we all stocked up on exquisite pastries and treats.

We refrained from indulging immediately as we had arranged lunch at Roisheim, a beautiful and ancient farm that is now a delightful restaurant, one of the best in the country. Everyone was thrilled to experience such a special place.

After lunch the climb over Boverdalen was spectacular, as we were up in the snow again, and we passed quite a few people skiing – in shorts! The roads really gave us the chance to open the cars up and enjoy some spirited driving. I was delighted to find out later that the 'Big' Healey 3000 was miffed that it couldn't shake us off, in our little 1.6l 4/4!

We descended down to Sognefjord again, and drove along the fjord edge to Urnes, home to one of the oldest and most beautiful of the stave churches, over 1,000 years old. These fabulous wooden structures really are special and a sight to behold.

From there it was a short ferry ride across the fjord to the Walaker Hotel, Norway's oldest hotel, still run by the 9th generation of the family, which is no surprise considering its charming location.

The following day involved a long boat cruise (to avoid the world's longest road tunnel at 24.3km) along the beautiful Sognefjord and into Nærøyfjord, the world's narrowest fjord. Being able to relax on deck in the sun was wonderful, and it was truly magical when we spotted seals and porpoises in the water.

After a night staying in a luxury hotel on the shore of Hardangerfjord it was south again, to our final destination in Norway, Kristiansand. The land starts to flatten noticeably in the last 100 miles, with broad river valleys and bucolic pastoral vistas.

We were ably accompanied on the tour by our two ace mechanics, Dan Monk of Winchester Classics (and ex-Morgan Motor Company) and Joe Colemand of Move My Motor. Both the Morgans on the tour behaved superbly for the entire tour, as did most of the cars. We were all fortunate that the holiday wasn't marred by any serious problems of 'failure to proceed'.



For anyone who considers a Morgan too small to travel in, you'd be surprised just how much you can fit in (my first trip with the car involved two months camping!), but made all the easier these days with the fitted luggage rack from Hillsalve – a worthwhile purchase!

I've toured a lot, driven to many, many wonderful places, and been really fortunate to see so much, but Norway really does hold a very special place in my heart as my favourite touring destination. If you can make the journey, you really should go. You won't be disappointed! **MOG**