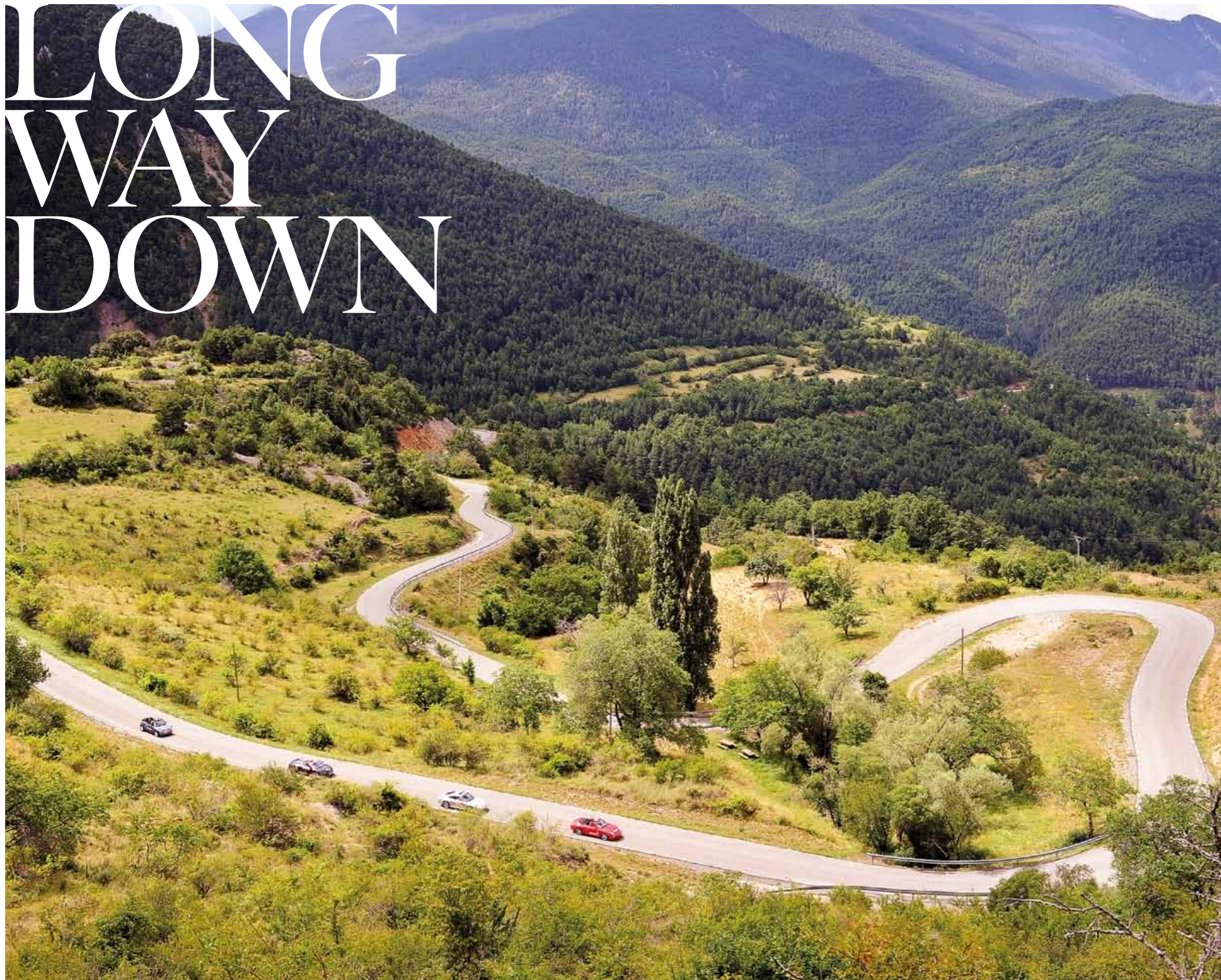


# LONG WAY DOWN

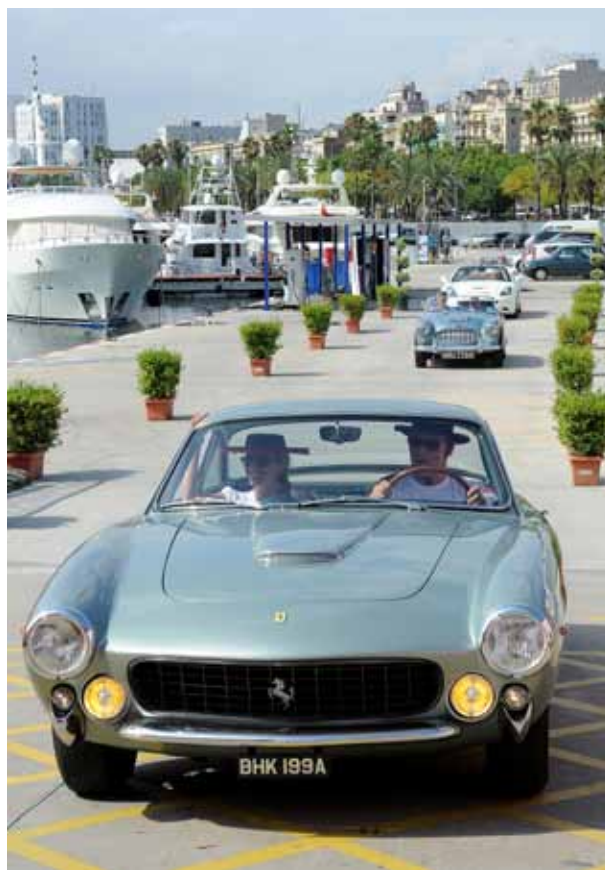


*Octane* abandons the jet set in favour of the right crowd, for a tour to Barcelona via the grand scenery and exciting roads of the Pyrenees

WORDS Robert Coucher // PHOTOGRAPHY Tim Scott

**H**AVING RUN FOR 25 years, the Grand Tour is regarded as one of the most enjoyable motoring adventures going. But it's not simply a jolly for wealthy motoring enthusiasts. The GT was devised by advertising creative Jeremy Jackson Sytner and scriptwriter Chris Bucknall as an amusing way to raise money for charity (Cancer Research UK) by spending five days motoring through France and on to Monte Carlo. This year the destination was Barcelona, which meant five days of driving through France and Spain in suitably sporting cars on carefully selected roads. And the event is neither a race nor a rally but, in fact, a treasure hunt in which the teams have to decipher cryptic clues en route to earn points to win the Grand Tour Challenge plate and a matched set of Frederique Constant Vintage Racing Chronograph wristwatches.

The GT kicked off at the Royal Hospital Chelsea with 29 cars, including an Austin-Healey 3000, Morgan roadster, Audi R8 V10, Bentley Continental GTC, Ferrari 288GTO and a Ferrari 250GT Lusso. As it was 7.45am drivers did their best to keep the noise down but gentle throttle application could not really mask the nervous pitch of the Ferraris nor the deep rumble of the Shelby Mustang 350GT driven by Shelby Myers and Petroula Tsirimbis. →



## ‘We headed to Preignac through the Charente, with a stop in the foothills of the Massif Central’

The teams were handed their first route map to the Channel Tunnel and, as the drivers headed foot-down down to the coast, the navigators were furiously trying to work out the brain-teasing questions on the back. Furious cheating immediately began as the more competitive entrants dialled up Google search and called friends on their mobile phones.

With the channel effortlessly dispatched, the cars roared into France towards the first lunch stop at Samer where tables were reserved at a couple of small restaurants around the village square. Now the big straight-six, V8, V10 and V12 engines were given full voice, much to the amusement of the locals. Myself and Capetian friend Charles Arton took part in my own, rather subdued artillery green Jaguar XK140, the oldest car on the event. Frustratingly, I wasn't allowed to drive, having fractured my wrist falling off my bicycle a week before the start. Fortunately Arton is a better driver than me (he races a proper 500bhp Mustang and other classics in South Africa) so all I had to ensure was that he understood the speed signs in Europe were 130km/h not mph! With Arton in willing action behind the wheel, I could enjoy all the lunch stops to the full and then try to keep us on course following the navigation notes.

The teams got to enjoy northern France, including the battlefields of Crécy and Agincourt, where the first cryptic clue had to be solved. Many of the teams did not know each other at this point, so the organisers helped first-timers along. Into Normandy and through the Calvados apple orchards, the GT made for the overnight stop at the imposing Chateau de Rosay at the edge of Forêt de Lyons for the first sumptuous evening dinner.

The next day saw rain, welcomed by those taking part in older cars as it kept under-bonnet temperatures well down. Damian and Marla Perl set the pace in his yowling Ferrari 250GT Lusso, and Tim Scott and Anna Morser

**Above**  
The winning E-type (top left); Ferrari Lusso leads procession along Barcelona seafront (centre); exclusive W Hotel (bottom right); Petroula Tsirimibis in the Shelby 350GT.

were giving the Ferrari 355 the beans into the Valle de la Loire. After a long day on great roads the teams pulled into the Chateau du Breuil in Cheverny, where those with good figures had a cooling swim and a drink under the trees. Unfortunately the 288GTO being enjoyed by Jamie Orton and Jo Simonds had gone off-song so he had it replaced overnight with his equally sonorous 458.

The third day's driving headed to Preignac through the Charente, with a fabulous picnic stop in the foothills of the enduringly beautiful Massif Central mountain range. The party at that evening's Chateau de Suduiraut (next to Chateau d'Yquem) was a riot after the delicious supper where bottles of Armagnac were liberally available in the games room. By now everyone had become good friends and most were helping each other with the cryptic clues. The highlight of the fourth day was the lunch stop at the magnificent Chateau de Sauveterre, the stunning home of *Octane* reader Chris and Tania Howse with a fine collection of Ferraris in the stables.

The final day's run through the Cadi-Moixero National Park was incredible (Spanish roads are much smoother than French ones), and Arton had great sport galloping the old Jaguar along at speed. The Grand Tour finished at Port Vell in Barcelona and that evening saw the grand gala dinner and prizegiving at the W Hotel. Overall winners were Mark and Kirsten Greenside in the fast Eagle E-type lightweight.

With good friends made, superb driving enjoyed and overnight stays at beautiful chateaux with delicious food all the way, this really is grand touring in the proper sense. **Out**

**THANKS TO** the Grand Tour. Next year's event is from London to Cannes, in June; [www.grand-tour.co.uk](http://www.grand-tour.co.uk).