



Poetry *in* Motion

Penny Baddeley goes on a vintage tour of the Peak District

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Look! They are all waving at me and I don't even know them!' says the driver, Steven White.

The group of walkers have stopped in their tracks. They are smiling broadly and lift their arms in good-hearted greeting. It's a warm afternoon, full of the promise of summer and we've been motoring along through the pretty Peak District at a leisurely pace in Steven's open topped classic vintage car. Dog walkers stop to point their cameras at us and Steven rewards them with an 'Oogah, Oogah,' from the classic klaxon-sounding car horn.

'I just love the way this car always puts a smile on peoples' faces,' says Steven. He is wearing a costume fit for a country squire; resplendent in yellow waistcoat, topped with silk cravat, bottle-green moleskin,

shooting breeks, bright yellow knee socks, a tweed hunting jacket and matching tweed flat cap.

'It's part of the full experience,' he explains. 'I like to dress for the occasion.'

Sitting high on the road, on the comfortable, squashy bench seat of the 1929 Model A Ford Phaeton, we can peep over ancient English hedgerows and over dry stone walls to glimpse vistas of verdant green fields spotted with sheep. The engine burbles and growls obediently as we climb the steep limestone hills on tiny, unclassified roads. Then she purrs and chortles appreciatively as we meander down narrow sunlight-dappled county lanes, edged with ancient trees and wild flowers. 'Somehow this car just seems to suit these sort of roads,' said Steven, who is at home behind the giant steering wheel. 'After all, these were the

sorts of roads which existed when the car was first made.'

Certainly this is a unique and exciting road experience: a dash of Great Gatsby glamour interspersed with moments of Toad of Toad >



A perfect place for picnic



Through the ford at Tissington



Hill hilarity. The gentle pace - the car averages a speed of 20 to 30mph - means you can take in the detail of the lovely landscapes. The elevated seating - much higher than an average four by four - allows panoramic views of the Peak District. The open top helps connect you with the world around you as the wind blows through your hair and you inhale the sights, sounds and scents of the countryside. 'Somehow you feel much closer to it all,' said Steven.

'And the thing I love about it is that when this car was new in 1929 every trip taken must have felt like an adventure and going out in it today still feels like an adventure.

What fun you can have at 30mph!

Steven's passion for vintage vehicles began more than 40 years ago, when he bought his first car, a 1935 Austin Seven. Since then he's owned a whole range of them, but when he bought his current model, the Model A Ford (known as a 'Phaeton' in America but as a 'tourer' in the UK) he had a 'Eureka' moment - and thought up a unique business venture.

In April this year Vintage Adventure Tours was launched, combining Steve's passion for the Peak District with his obsession for vintage vehicles. It is currently the only vintage car tour operation in the UK,

according to its owner. Customers can opt for a bespoke outing, or can choose from a range of chauffeur-driven set tours, each with their own 'wow moments'. Tours last from 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 hours.

One of the shorter experiences is The Chatsworth Tour, which takes in the Duke of Devonshire's magnificent Estate, including a stop for tea at Edensor, before a leisurely journey back through the beautiful villages of Stanton in Peak and Birchover. Those opting for a longer adventure might choose the Longstone Edge Tour, which takes in the dramatic scenery at Monsal Head, tea at David Mellor's Design Museum, Country shop and café near Hathersage, and a spectacular sortie onto Longstone Edge.

There is a Goyt Valley tour, which starts out from Longnor and takes in isolated, rugged and spectacular scenery. Travellers can stop off at the Blaze Farm ice cream parlour and tea shop, set right at the edge of the Peak District, before crossing exposed moors to beautiful Goyt Valley. The extensive Dark Peak tour is one of the longest trips, and takes in some of the most iconic locations and scenery in the Peak. The tour goes through Castleton, home of the Blue John mines, moves on through spectacular Winnat's Pass, then to the tranquil vale of Edale at the foot of Kinder Scout before stopping for tea in Hope. The



Exploring the Manifold Valley



Driving past Tissington Hall

grand tour concludes with a visit to Ladybower Reservoir, followed by a climb to Stanage Edge, where Keira Knightley was filmed gazing over Derwent Valley in a recent film version of *Pride and Prejudice*.

But Steven's personal favourite is the Dovedale and Manifold tour in the White Peak, which encompasses a huge variety of sights from isolated country lanes to idyllic ruins, a stately home and a copper mine. Part of the route follows abandoned railway lines and there's a stop at a cheese shop and vintage sweet shop en-route.

Steven, who lives with his wife Julie at Winster, said: 'We have such beautiful countryside here and plenty of holiday visitors so this is just one more brilliant thing to do, in a brilliant place.'

Steven and Julie, who were both born and bred in Derbyshire, personally researched all the routes and the refreshment stops. Steven is also offering his services as a tour guide. The entrepreneurial pair has also invested in a custom built wicker picnic basket to accommodate customers who want to plan a perfect picnic, with vintage crockery and linen. They envisage that passengers might don period dress for the occasion, hire the Phaeton for a trip to the opera, or take a chauffeur-driven drive out to a scenic spot for a romantic marriage proposal.

'It's about buying a special experience for

somebody. I believe people love to do unusual things without having to take huge risks and we can offer them a gentle but exciting customised adventure.'

"It's all been quite an undertaking to get it off the ground. But it's great that this lovely old car has been put back into business."

Early reviews of Vintage Adventure Tours on sites such as tripadvisor, have been wholly positive. But it wasn't plain sailing to get the business off the ground. A major hurdle was acquiring a commercial Private Hire licence for the vintage vehicle. 'There were a number of technical reasons why it didn't comply with taxi regulations and the first was that a vehicle usually has to be less than three years old and my car missed that target by 83 years!' But after favourable inspections from engineers to Derbyshire Dales District Council, a report recommended the relaxation of this technical rule. Moreover most vintage cars have timber frames, which prevent them from getting through the licensing process,

but the Ford Model A is unusual in having a metal frame. 'This was the key that unlocked my business idea. It was my Eureka moment. It has all been very exciting and now I have the first and only vintage car to be licensed for Private Hire in the whole of the UK,' said Steven.

Other minor hurdles included having to tackle the 'knowledge test', to qualify for a taxi driver's licence to operate in areas such as Ashbourne, Matlock and Bakewell. 'It really was quite something!' said Steven. But finally, following further checks from the DVLA, a medical check and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) he also gained the operating licence for Vintage Adventure Tours. 'It's all been quite an undertaking to get it off the ground,' admitted Steven. 'But it's great that this lovely old car has been put back into business.'

Our taster tour is not yet over, the sun is out, Steven's face is beaming and the open road calls. As the motor car obsessed Toad comments in *The Wind and The Willows*: 'The poetry of motion! The real way to travel! The only way to travel.' ■

*For more information visit www.vintageadventuretours.co.uk or telephone 07886 021082.

Prices range from £150 for a 2.5 hour tour for two passengers to £300 for a 3.5 hour tour for four