

The Grizzly Bear Blat

IN DECEMBER LAST YEAR, we published a preview of what must rank as one of the most ambitious blats ever conceived. Terry Johns, one of only a handful of Caterham owners in all of Canada, came up with the concept of the 'Grizzly Bear Blat'. The idea? No less than to invite Seven drivers from around the world to come together to drive through the Canadian Rocky Mountains, traveling from Calgary to Vancouver. Many people doubted that this epic venture would ever get off the ground, but as can be clearly witnessed here, it went off in style—and the lucky adventurers who took part came back with some great stories.

Thirteen cars signed up for this event—and with most needing to be shipped vast distances just to reach the start, challenges were inevitable at each stage. The trip certainly seems to have left a lasting impression on all those who took part. Here, in their own words, are some of the memories from a few of these intrepid blatters...

Photographs by Mark Garnett,
Andrew Scott Green and Angus Denny.



The adventurers meet up—some of them for the first time—at Red Deer. Fittingly, since this is at the edge of a wheat-growing region as big as the UK, massed combine harvesters form the backdrop!

Angus Denny event organiser for UK attendees

It was one evening in November 2012 that I sat my wife Kate down and we discussed the proposed Grizzly Bear Blat. I had been monitoring the *BlatChat* thread since it had been started back in April 2011. There had been a lot of interest, but no one was stepping forward to be the UK organiser. Now, we really enjoy touring—it was the reason I built *R400DUO* (our second Caterham). Having enjoyed trips to the Alps and to Northern Spain, the idea of a blat through the Rockies really appealed. Everything was right about the trip for us, but it was obvious that nothing was going to happen without a UK organiser. So, after five minutes of discussion we both agreed that I would put myself forward for the role. And so began eight months of organisation and administration...

One of the first things I did was to talk with Steve Blair, one of the organisers of the USA 2005 trip. Amongst a wealth of tips, one thing he said really stuck out for me—"All things are possible, but do not underestimate the time and effort involved". Oh how true that turned out to be.

The problem is that no one really does this kind of trip—shipping cars to North America for a couple of weeks and then back again is not that common, apparently! It meant starting from first principles every time; for example, during my hunt for car insurance, one broker made the classic comment, "Wouldn't it be easier to hire a car when you get there?" Some people just don't get it. But in the end we got it all organised and booked: the packing, the shipping, the shipping insurance, the car insurance, the customs clearance, the unloading and unpacking in Calgary, the packing up in Vancouver, the return shipment and the final unloading back in the UK.

We were really very fortunate having Terry Johns, the Canada Area Representative and GBB originator, taking care of the Canada-side logistics, including the all-important route and hotels. Without Terry and his team the GBB would, quite simply, not have happened.

We left our cars at the packing company, near Heathrow, in the middle of June. It was a really strange feeling shutting the doors on the container and seeing the lorry drive away. You couldn't help but wonder whether we would ever see them again and whether they would survive the journey intact.

As a last minute decision, we had decided to bring the shipment date forward by a week. It was really lucky that we did, because Canadian customs decided they wanted to perform a 'soil inspection' on the cars in Vancouver. Fortunately, this proved not to be test of personal hygiene, rather a check for foreign matter such as dirt and earth around the underside and wheel arches of the cars—quite common with cars imported into Canada apparently. It all proved quite straightforward as our cars were spotless (with the requisite car-wash receipts taped to the windscreens), but frustratingly it added an extra week to the process, in one swoop using up all the contingency we had built into the schedule.

The next challenge was Canadian customs. Here I have to express our great thanks to Mark Mackenzie, as without the work he did on the ground with the Calgary customs office we would have missed the start. Again, we were starting from scratch as nobody seems to import cars into Canada, six to a container, for a two-week holiday. After several fruitless late-night telephone calls to the customs helpdesk, Mark visited the office several times and finally got all the right paperwork in place. It all worked perfectly because the container was cleared straight through to the unpackers.

It was a huge relief seeing that container sitting there when we arrived one Wednesday morning, and an even bigger one when we opened the doors to see our beloved cars sitting there just as they had been left when the doors were closed 5,000 miles and eight weeks ago.

An hour later they were all unloaded and all engines started successfully. Let the Grizzly Bear Blat begin!

I will leave it to others to provide their account of the Blat itself, but for me the highlights of this once-in-a-lifetime trip were the hospitality of Mark and Lee and Terry and Chris, the wonderful roads, the space and openness, the lack of traffic, the lakes and mountains, the Canadian hospitality, close

encounters with glaciers (and bears), the sheer adventure of it all, the sense of accomplishment. And finally, the friendships formed though a shared passion for our little cars and the knowledge that we had 'done Canada in our Seven'.

And no, before you ask, I'm not organising another one... I'd wholeheartedly recommend the trip, but I'll leave the organisation to someone else next time. So, where to next? ➔

Caterham blat lures sports car owners from U.S., England

BY MURRAY CRAWFORD
ADVOCATE STAFF

Getting sports car owners to ship their pride and joy almost 7,000 km for a 10-day drive through some of Canada's most picturesque regions was not a tough sell.

Terry Johns, a race car driver and instructor at Fort Saskatchewan's Stratotech Park, is one of two Alberta owners of a Caterham, a sports car that is rare in Canada but is popular and beloved in Europe.

"When you look at cars like the Corvette or the Viper, the Caterham will eat these things for breakfast," said Johns, who moved from England to Red Deer in 2005.

Costing anywhere from \$50,000 to \$120,000, Caterhams were never officially imported to Canada by the manufacturer, leaving people who wanted the vehicle having to import them individually.

"Most of us English people think North Americans buy cars by the pound, the bigger they are the better value for money they are," said Johns. "The Caterham is a very small car, weighs just over 1,000 pounds (453 kg) and when you stand beside it, it comes up to the top of your knee."

But what the Caterham lacks in size and mass, it makes up for in performance.

He and 15 other owners of Caterhams are going on a blat, called a cruise in Canada, from Red Deer out to Vancouver Island, by way of Jasper.

Six of the owners and their wives have had their cars shipped from England. They arrived in Calgary with their cars on Tuesday and will spend two nights in Red Deer before they embark on their journey. People are also coming from Texas, California, Alaska, Florida and other parts of Canada to



Photo by ASHU BARRETT/Advocate staff
John McCallum shows off his Caterham 7 in the Red Deer Advocate Parking lot on Tuesday afternoon. The vehicle, which has only been on the road for a month, will be part of a rally featuring many foreign vehicles.

participate in the drive.

"It is going to be the biggest gathering of Caterhams ever in Canada," said Johns. "It is a very rare car here in Canada."

Caterhams were first made in 1957 and Johns calls them the performance yardstick for sports cars.

Johns bought his first Caterham in 1975 when he still lived in England. He had wanted one for a few years and sold his Jaguar to raise the money for his first Caterham. On top of racing, he helps people in North America who are trying to acquire Caterhams. They start their journey from the

iHotel in Red Deer, at 6500 67th St., on Thursday at about 10:30 a.m.

"Many of the people coming have never been to Canada before," said Johns. "We're driving amongst the wildlife and we're going to warn them about Canadian drivers and their observation skills."

Originally they had planned to start in Wetaskiwin and go through Edmonton to get to Jasper, but Johns changed his mind and decided it would be more scenic to start in Red Deer and head to Nordegg before going north to Jasper.

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Headline act: Sevens gathering in Alberta made a splash in the Red Deer Advocate.

The first, and possibly most uncertain, stage of the UK contingent's adventure is over. The cars are collected, in good shape, from the shipping agent after their long journey to Calgary.





A possible bear sighting was one of the special attractions of the trip – although one crew had too close an encounter...

THE ADVENTURE, DAY BY DAY

by Mark and Sharon Garnett

Robert Browne

UK participant

The overwhelming image that comes to my mind when thinking back on this great adventure is of driving on a seemingly endless road, watching the dips and rises, and seeing a bunch of Caterhams stretching both out before me and in my rear view mirror. All of us were swooping gracefully through the Canadian countryside, with not another car in sight. The sun was out, the sky was blue and there we all were, in our own cars, but thousands of miles from home for most of us. It seemed quite surreal!

The only problem I had during the trip was that my car didn't want to pull more than about 4,500 revs, and at high altitude (such as driving past the glaciers) it didn't want to pull above 3,000rpm. Some of the other guys reported that they were experiencing similar, but less extreme, issues. Apparently it was all down to the low octane fuel they have over there, combined with a lack of oxygen at high altitudes. Anyway, the addition of some octane enhancer, and a return towards sea level helped, but it was still slightly worrying. The good news is that when I picked up the car after it had been shipped back to the UK, the engine was, I'm happy to report, back on song: 7,000 revs and plenty of power – and still on Canadian fuel!

Nothing could detract from this unique, fantastic trip with great company from the UK, USA and Canada and absolutely superb scenery. Many thanks to all, and in particular to Angus and Terry for all their hard work in making it happen.

Day 1: Red Deer to Jasper

The Grizzly Bear Blat 2013 started from the car park of the iHotel in Red Deer and you could just feel the excitement in the air. Terry Johns said a few words, and then introduced us to a reporter who had come especially to record this grand event, having heard about these cars from as far away as the UK and USA which were about to embark on the road-trip of a lifetime.

Terry had told the reporter he was free to ask any question he liked, but he said he had only one – just “Why?” With this, he got into his stride: “Why ship your cars halfway around the world – couldn't you do the trip more easily in a rental car, or a camper or a motorcycle?” And more importantly (at least to him) “Why a Caterham rather than a Ferrari, or a McLaren? Our only possible answer: “Why not?”

And with that, we all got in our cars and set off for what can only be described as one of the greatest blats on earth.

The drive to Jasper was breathtaking, with scenery that did not disappoint. Sometimes we drove in formation and sometimes we split up but you just couldn't help getting excited seeing the cars against the mighty backdrops of mountains, glaciers, forests and lakes. After all, this is what we came for.

We arrived in Jasper that evening to drinks in the bar followed by dinner and a dissection of the day's driving. Talk turned to the cars, and then a bit more about the cars. The ladies retreated and the boys continued, until late, talking about... the cars.

Day 2: Jasper

A relaxing day of sightseeing had been planned and everyone split up for a day around Jasper National Park. The possible options included a visit to Maligne Lake, Jasper Tramway, Edith Lyle Glacier, and viewing the wildlife.

That evening, back at the hotel we caught up on everyone's day. The reports included bear sightings, amazing views from the Tramway as the cloud broke in the morning, a trip to some hot springs, and a good run up to the glacier by one member. I recall it being referred to as an 'Alpine road' and this immediately caught the attention of the drivers; I think that everyone went to bed that night planning a trip to the Edith Lyle Glacier for the morning...

Day 3: Jasper to Lake Louise

and overnight at the Emerald Lake Lodge

The day started with great enthusiasm – the Alpine road to Edith Lyle Glacier was all we had hoped it would be, and there were a lot of smiles by the time we'd reached the top. But unfortunately, one of our group members fell ill and required a trip to the hospital. We had no choice but to leave the couple behind and we feared that might be the end of their trip.

On a happier note, this was the day that I had my first bear sighting. I found myself genuinely shocked when some tourists asked if I minded if they took a photograph of our car. I could only point at the bear but obviously they found the Caterham far more interesting!



Left: the glacier bus in Jasper National Park.



We went on to Lake Louise that afternoon and then on to Emerald Lake Lodge. It had been a long day and we were met by an Australian bus driver who was to take us up to our lodgings, whilst our cars stayed in the car park. As we all squashed into the mini bus, he said “It's a shame about the couple who hit the Bear”

We hadn't heard this news. “Who?” “When?” “Where?” “Are they okay?” we asked simultaneously.

“Yeah” he said, “They're fine but the car is not good. It's definitely out of your trip, it's a wreck. The bear's ok though”, he added in his strong Aussie accent, “Got up and walked away...” He could see by the look on our faces that hitting a bear had not been considered amongst the many potential problems when driving through Canada in a Seven.

The lake and the lodgings were simply amazing, and despite the day's dramas it was heavenly to be there. Terry had booked two large tables for dinner and when we sat down we got the happy news that the group member who fell ill was feeling better and that the couple were going to rejoin the trip; we were mightily relieved.

Later we listened attentively to the horror story of what happens when you hit a bear in a Caterham. Sadly, it seemed, Joan and Taber (from Florida) would most certainly not be out of the Blat; their car had been trailered to the hotel car park by John, our hero, in the support vehicle. It was indeed a mess, right down to having bear fur stuck to it and all hope of continuing seemed lost.

Day 4: to Revelstoke

Now let me just say, Seven owners come from all walks of life; some are tall, others short, they may be young or old, rich or poor but the one thing they have in common is a love of all things mechanical, engineering, and cars... So I can add, without ➔

Day one, on the long road to Jasper, and the first real taste of the open road and the spectacular landscapes.

Edward and Julie Watson

UK participants

A trip like this is not just about the joy and exhilaration of driving your Seven on some great roads, but about sharing the experience and incredible landscape with a great bunch of like-minded people. Some might say the roads were not as good as some you might find in Europe, but Europe cannot offer you the vast scale of somewhere like Canada. We drove for over 100 miles and saw maybe 20 other cars and one cyclist (I was envious). That feeling of being in surrounded by such fantastic scenery yet at the same time being so remote, I have only ever experienced in a car once before, and that was in a very slow camper van around Australia. Driving through this in a Caterham was simply out of this world.

The final point to make about a trip like this relates to the friendship and support you get from your fellow travellers. I would recommend everyone who can to try this type of trip because, in my experience, it really does exceed all expectations.

shame, that we had carried a radiator to Canada in one of our suitcases. When we had put it in the support vehicle on day one, the Canadians had mocked me – “Why would you need a radiator?”

Well, it turns out if your Caterham ever hits a bear, you’re gonna need a radiator; add in a copious amount of duct tape, a bunch of handy enthusiasts and you end up with a fixed car. Well, ‘fixed’ enough to continue on the trip anyway. What I saw was amazing, and pretty much summed up the essence of the event, the people, the common bond of love for the cars, and a whole lotta duct tape to stick it all together. After spending the morning in awe of Emerald Lake, of a fixed car, and having done some canoeing and some walking, we set off as an complete group once more to our next stop, Glacier House Resort, Revelstoke.

One final note on the bear story: assuming his car to be beyond immediate repair, Taber and John had left that morning to pick up his trailer from Red Deer. In the meantime, his wife Joan had given permission to the boys to have a go at fixing the car. She was so excited with the result that she decided to drive it on to Revelstoke with the rest of the group herself, leaving a voicemail for her husband to catch them up. We had spent the evening enjoying a nice swim, jacuzzi and sauna and were just tucking into a barbecue when Taber arrived; the look of disbelief on his face when he saw his car was a joy.

We then had a brilliant evening of talking cars and bears, which only came to an end when we had finished all the beer in the hotel, which signified it was time to go to bed.

Day 5: to Vernon, via Nakusp

Again a wonderfully scenic drive, only marred from lunchtime by rain, rain and then more rain. We had a good laugh and spirits were still high, but I can honestly say I have never before endured rain like that in a Seven.

Day 6: to Pemberton Valley Lodge

Another long drive – some of us split up to enjoy lots of mountain passes, this time with plenty of slow RVs to overtake. Accommodation that night was near the Whistler Mountain Resort, which was hosting the Crankworx mountain bike event. Some of us went into Whistler for dinner, where the atmosphere was amazing, with the mountain bikers on the ski runs doing the most outrageous stunts and downhill runs I have ever seen. It was ‘awesome’.

Day 7: brunch in Whistler, then to Horseshoe Bay ferry in West Vancouver

We had a free morning and strict instructions for a meeting point and time. We were “*Not to be late!*” The ferry crossing was under one booking and we all had to arrive together.

By now, we had had seven days at the wheel and, let’s just say, everyone had been developing a slightly heavy right foot and pushing boundaries ever so slightly... We were all running a bit late for the ferry, and driving in more of a trackday fashion than as a gentle blat. One of the group got pulled over and given a stern warning by the Police. After that, the entire group drove into Horseshoe Bay in perfect formation and at a perfect speed.

We drove onto the ferry and once again found that we were attracting much attention from the locals. Wherever we went, the welcome was fantastic – everyone was so friendly and so very interested in our cars.

That evening, we stayed at the Best Western in Duncan and finally managed to get some much-needed laundry done.



Emerald Lake, British Columbia.



On the road to Maligne Canyon, Alberta.

Day 8

Once again, a free day for sightseeing and the group split up: some visited Butchart Gardens, while others went whale watching in Victoria, which for me was a real highlight. Some felt the need for more car talk and headed to Chemainus where David Saville Peck of Caterham Cars Canada had organised a barbecue.

Day 9: Blat to Torfino

not a trip for the faint hearted

This was to be a ‘character building’ day. 480km in relentless pouring, rain. The highlight was the Schooner Restaurant in Tofino that was able to accommodate a bunch of wet and weary travellers with a fabulous lunch. Oh, and then, 480km back again...

Day 10: Vancouver Island to Delta Town

This was it, our last day; it had around come so quickly. After the months of preparation and anticipation, and an ocean voyage for our cars, this was it. The hotel arranged a private function for us that evening and we all scrubbed up really well.

That night, email addresses, Facebook friend requests and phone numbers were exchanged liberally amongst all participants. Everyone said a few words to the group and, as I sat there listening to everyone, I realised that I have never met a nicer bunch of people than those who drive Caterhams worldwide. I went to sleep that night with bits of our car hanging up to dry in our hotel room, so she could be readied to go back to the shippers in the morning. I knew that the trip could never have been the same in a Ferrari, McLaren, camper or motorcycle. You would never fix them in a car park after hitting a bear, and – more importantly – you would never meet a finer bunch of people, who would all say “Why not?” and ship their cars halfway around the world for a blat.

So, thanks to everyone who made it possible and please count me in for the next trip, wherever in the world it may be. ➔

Mark Mackenzie
participant from Canada

The Grizzly Bear Blat was an amazing experience for me. It was worth the effort right from the first day, when I helped the British chaps unload their cars from the container. We don't see 'real Sevens' in Canada very often, so to see six of them all lined up was spectacular. That was also what the rest of Canada seemed to feel, because the common theme was crowds around the cars everywhere we stopped. The hotel manager at our first hotel in Calgary came out and insisted on a photo.

My big motivation for attending was to experience travelling together as a group, all in a bunch of Sevens, and man was it fun. A very good friend, also a car guy, told me I'd make new life-long friends and have an experience I'd never forget. He was right. So many incidents, most all of the cars experienced some form of trouble at one stage or another, starting with my (1969 Series 2) generator (sorry, dynamo in English). From fuses, poor quality petrol, a rear axle bearing, the obligatory clutch cable, to the 'big bear incident'. However, the group all came together—even the bear-smashed car was back on the road again after a few hours. I couldn't believe the Brits had come with a spare radiator! (*I've toured France with a spare sump in the boot... Ed*).

Oh, and I also got to drive a 200 bhp K-series car and an R400, both with six speeds. Hmm, is it upgrade time?

One surprising thing for me, as a participating Canadian, was how interesting it was to become a tourist in my own back yard. I've never felt that I take my own mountains and scenery for granted, but I saw so many things I've never seen before. One of my best bear sightings ever, many new roads, new hotels, new places.

I can't wait to blat again, with my newfound British and American friends, this time on the other side of the pond!



Far left:
Mark's 'perfect parking spot' at the Best Western in Duncan and Day 4's evening barbecue at Revelstoke.

Left:
standing, from left
Mark Garnett, Terry Johns, Guy Foulger, Chris Johns, Ed Watson, Robert Browne, Terri Foulger, Julie Watson, Angus Denny, Joan Tompkins, Kate Denny, Taber Tompkins, Phil Anderson, John McCallum, Felicity Coffey, Curt Shepard, Helaine Shepard, Skip Cannon, David Ellis, Steve Coffey
seated, from left
Sharon Garnett, Mark Mackenzie, Lee Mackenzie, Rosanna Seals, Patti Anderson.
not present
Rosie and Gert Burkhardt

Philip L Anderson
participant from Texas, USA

Great people, great cars, great scenery, great roads: it just doesn't get any better. A trip of a lifetime. Patty and I have always agreed that Seven people always make the best of friends.

I think everybody encountered a car problem of some sort, but in the true Seven spirit, we fixed them all and kept going with a never-say-die attitude. I was probably the first to experience difficulties when the old Cosworth wouldn't start in the hotel parking lot. But thanks to a friendly push I was on the road. In spite of a new battery in Jasper the problem plagued me for the entire trip. Many thanks to everyone for the countless pushes that kept me in the game. I discovered that the Webers didn't like the changes in altitude and took some occasional adjusting to run even reasonably well. However my problems were more of an inconvenience and just part of the adventure.

One of my favourite memories was the drive to Tofino. It was ten hours in the rain and often slow going, but well worth the effort. Driving and walking through an Old Growth cedar forest with 800-year-old trees was priceless. I think the light rain only added to the overall image and feel of the place. Travel is about unique experiences, and this was one of them.

One of Patty's favourite memories was the whale watching. Here again the weather was cold and wet, but seeing pods of Killer Whales in their natural environment was unforgettable.

My favourite drive was the Sea to Sky Highway after Kamloops all the way to Vancouver: a sparsely travelled road with just enough twists and turns to make it a fun drive in a Seven, plus the added bonus of spectacular mountain scenery. When we arrived at our destination in Pemberton I wanted to turn around and do it again. A great road in every respect.

And then there was the bear incident.

After each of the reasonably long blats that I complete, I make an entry in my journal to record my personal account of the adventure. I do this for my own enjoyment and don't normally share the information with others. However, people keep asking me what happened with the bear, and since I was behind the incident as it happened, here is my account.

"The Ice Field Highway is a wide, smooth, mostly straight, and very scenic road. Taber and I were going at about 110km/h and really enjoying ourselves. We had just passed some motorcycles when I saw a black bear charge out of the right side ditch in front of Taber. He instinctively swerved left into the empty oncoming lane in an effort to get ahead and avoid the bear. Both Taber and the bear were traveling fast when he hit the bear square with the front of his car. The radiator exploded in a cloud of water and steam. The bear flew up in the air above the height of the car, crashed to the pavement, rolled a few times and ended up in the opposite ditch. Had it not been running

at full speed it could have come down on the car with potentially tragic results. Taber swerved back into his lane, pulled off the road, and stopped.

I pulled in behind him, and jumped out to help. I found Taber and Joan stunned, but unhurt; the harnesses held them firm.

While they were getting over their initial shock, I saw their grille in the middle of oncoming traffic. I went to recover it and noticed the bear was in the ditch not far away, laying down and bleeding from the mouth. Thinking it best not to get too close to a wounded bear I quickly returned to check on Taber and Joan. They were just getting out of the car so we inspected the damage: the radiator was caved in, the nose was broken into too many places to count, the bonnet was badly bent, and both headlights were destroyed. However all things considered it really looked pretty good.

I noticed that the bear was getting up: it shook its head and limped off to the woods, favouring its left rear leg. It was moving pretty well by the time it reached the tree line and

was soon out of sight. There was nothing to do but let nature take its course.

Taber was distraught and couldn't believe that his tour was over. I tried to console him by telling him he was extremely lucky and that things could have been far worse. I told him not to give up just yet; the damage didn't look too bad and Terry is a Caterham dealer with resources. Taber said thanks, but didn't think anything could be done.

We were out of cellphone range but a couple of motorcyclists pulled over to see if we needed help. They were headed to Lake Louise and agreed to call Terry, tell him what happened and hopefully arrange for a trailer to be sent out as soon as possible. After they left, Taber didn't think there was much else Patty and I could do. He encouraged us to continue on to Lake Louise...



Taber and Jean Tompkins had an alarming high-speed confrontation with a bear. This is the car before and after the encounter and after its impromptu repair.

Roadside rhinoplasty: the reconstructed nose is as much duct tape as fibreglass – with yellow insulation tape for the new stripe!

WEST COAST ADVENTURE

Andrew Scott-Green and his son left the group at Pemberton to head south and explore the US Pacific coastal region. Andrew tells their tale.

AFTER YEARS OF preparation by the organisers and months of procrastination and anticipation by the blatters, the day had finally come. It was really happening. It seemed a little surreal—it should be a pipe dream, not what you have in your diary for Tuesday afternoon; but there we were on a rather damp day, assembling our cars in a warehouse at the end of a nondescript pot-holed lane just off the M25, in view of the still-new and gleaming Heathrow Terminal 5. The irony was not lost on me as I ride in the wife's Toyota for the journey home: we reflect upon how, just for once, the car is going on the inter-continental journey and the driver is staying home.

The game now becomes 'spot the ship carrying our container' across marine tracking websites, with double points for being able to share webcam picture from the docks of the channel coast and an extra bonus for an image from the locks of the Panama Canal. The hurricane season commences as 'our' ship skirts the Bermuda triangle, but detailed analysis of numerous weather sites shows that our container is unlikely to be dislodged from its unsecured and precarious location. Many a night is spent wondering how many containers go missing from their ship transfer in Columbia and what is the failure load for the wooden decking suspending the upper layer of cars. Will we open the doors in Calgary to find a collection of scrap metal and matchwood, or maybe mouldy, rusty wrecks?

August finally arrives and the blatters take various routes to the designated rendezvous in Calgary airport. This is the first time many of us have met and I ponder the advice I have given to my own teenage children about not sending money to people you have only met on the internet, and certainly not travelling to meet them. Anyway, we start to get to know each other and to disperse to a couple of the local hotels in anticipation of an early pickup to discover the fate of our precious cargo. The evening is spent by many sourcing Canadian SIM cards at one of the local malls – it proved a good distraction and helped us stay awake to try to beat the jet lag.

After hours of lying awake, it is time to wake my son and begin our day. Denny's (the North American version of Little Chef) is our choice for breakfast and we find that we have been beaten there by all the other crews from our hotel—I guess we all are quite similar then. The free re-fills of coffee will hopefully help to jump-start the day.



Amid the glorious scenery of the Rockies.

Terry and Mark, the Canadian organisers, round us up and we play seek out the unpacking company. Eventually, a Hamburg-Sud container is spotted and a horseshoe forms around it in eager anticipation as the security seal is broken and the doors swing open. All appears fine, exactly the same as when the doors had closed. Using a makeshift platform and a couple of forklifts, the cars are unloaded in well under an hour. They all fire up straight away and further inspection only reveals some very superficial mould on seats and belts, one cracked reversing light and a broken rear numberplate light.

Talk soon turns to octane levels and a debate on the different ways these are measured. We learn that Chevron and Husky usually have 94 on their pumps, so off we went like a row of ducklings to learn about the complexity of

pre-pay and credit card pump payment, that requires a 5-digit zip code. Eventually the cars are all full and we have answered all the questions from all the gas station users. This will become a regular feature of every stop, "What car is that?," "Has it a V8 under the hood?," "What's the top speed?" A novelty at first, but when you fill up three times a day I started to wish that we carried a flyer which answered the stock questions!

We have a hundred or so miles to cover to our next hotel and there are things we have to adjust to: driving on the wrong side, signs being in km and being able to turn right at a stop light. We'd decided to travel via the Badlands to visit a famous dinosaur museum; when we arrive and park, we realize the size of the average local car when the few Discoveries in the car park appear as small as our Sevens normally do. We make our own parking space on one of the access roads and the official lady in the golf buggy tells us that is ok as the cars are so 'awesome'. Soon, it is time for the two hour run to Red Deer where we would be joined by others from the USA and Canada and where the Blat would formally begin.

In the morning we are joined by a second local truck and trailer driven by John and three Sevens that have been trailered from Texas, Colorado and Florida. So they had already put the miles in! The local press conducted a few interviews and pictures were taken of all the cars against the backdrop of the local combine harvester dealer. We head out west again along the long straight road that is Highway 11. We begin to get views of the mountains and the roads develop some curves. We turn right up the 93 into Jasper National Park and stop at a glacier, where the cars pose for pictures next to the gigantic glacier bus, fittingly painted in the Canadian flag. We spend two nights in Jasper with every one dispersed to enjoy mountain views, twisty roads and lakes.

By the second day we exchange notes and visit highlights that others had seen on the previous day.

We head back through the park and we see a Seven at the side of the road. It is Taber and Joan and they have a tale of woe: three hours earlier they had hit a bear, which had gone clean over the car. It had broken the radiator, nose, steering arm, bonnet and we later discover that the top chassis rail has been pushed back. The Rangers had stopped to help, and also went looking for the bear. They report that they could not find the bear and it would probably be ok. As we chat, John arrives with his trailer and we help to load the car. Another bear runs across the road; everyone was glad that help had arrived before it got dark!



Once they'd left the main group the trouble started... here running repairs are undertaken in Battle Ground, WA.

We press on to Lake Louise—one of the really famous sights of Canada. It certainly has a very large car park and hundreds of people swarming around the best vantage points, so we decide to press on as it was getting late. We arrived at our hotel at the Emerald lake which had the best lake and mountain views you can imagine: a place of true tranquillity.

The next morning, the great team spirit is put to use fixing the broken car. That left everyone with a 'can do' feeling which is what this style of touring blat should be all about.

The next three days were spent either on

Highway 1 or on some good B-type roads allowing some good fast, fun, driving and making short work of all the RVs. Generally the roads were very empty with some interesting bridges which only allowed traffic flow in one direction at a time. Road surfaces were exceptional, with only a few pot holes in one road, and even there we came across a team fixing them. Navigation was also easy with generally few junctions in the mountains. One day also included two free ferry rides.

After Pemberton, the blat headed on to Vancouver Island, but we decided to head south. We spent three hours getting into the USA, then that evening the rear caliper failed at the hand brake actuator, and that night, the system totally emptied such that we had no brakes. Caterham USA luckily had a spare in stock, which was sent overnight to us so we only lost around a day-and-a-half on the road. We headed down the 15 which was a surprisingly fast road with many people doing 90. When we got to San Francisco, we crossed the Golden Gate Bridge and then headed north on the 101, a.k.a. the Pacific Coast Highway or Highway 1, for some great views and roads. On the final leg, we met up with Mark and Sharon who had rented a car for a few days in the States. We had a final day in Vancouver then it was off to the packers for the car to start its trip home.

Thanks to Terry for having the idea, to Mark and John for their support and companionship on the trip—and to Angus for organising the UK side. So, where to next...? ■

Skip Cannon participant from the USA

It was a fantastic adventure, I enjoyed every minute of it, even the rain and the breakdowns. A few anecdotes which particularly sick in my mind include:

Brushes with the law. We had been advised many times not to speed as the Mounties were vigilant and the consequences drastic. It appeared to me that the locals didn't seem worried about it as they were mostly well above the posted limits themselves. I drove in my normal fashion, as fast as conditions would allow, and managed to get my daily run to 100mph every day but one (*Don't try this at home, folks...! Ed*). I got 'radared' and lasered a number of times but never stopped. That is, until the Caterham was safely back in the trailer and I was headed South

to the US border. On the ring road around Calgary I missed the first warning sign that the speed was dropping from 110kph to 50km/h. As I was decelerating, a Mountie stepped into the lane and waved me over; I almost hit him as it was dark and he was in a dark uniform, no cop car flashing lights visible and no light in his hand. He informed me the fine would be \$350 and that I should wait while he finished with the other cars he'd pulled over.

After twenty minutes of stewing over the size of the fine and the delay he came back to my window and informed me that since I was from out of the country he was giving me a pass on the ticket. I thanked him profusely and went on my way.

Breakdowns. We each had at least one issue to contend with during the trip. My car suffered a seeping gas line. Luckily, I was about six blocks from the NAPA parts store in Jasper so I picked up a new piece of fuel injection line and spent fifteen minutes at the hotel replacing it.

I was part of the crew that did the repairs on the 'bear slayer'. It was amazing how six people jumped on that task and had it roadworthy in just a few hours; that included straightening the front upper frame tube, sway bar and left tie rod. A whole roll or two of duct tape was used to put the nose back into shape and a hammer and block of wood used to reshape the bonnet. The crowning touch was the addition of a teddy bear's head in the vacant headlight shell.