



Rotary

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THE ROTARY FELLOWSHIP FUELLED BY CLASSIC CARS

STORY BY GLYN MON HUGHES

There is something magical about taking to the open roads of Europe.

Think lakes, mountains, historic sites, sparking seascapes. Then consider taking to the road in a 1927 Alfa, still in its native Italy and in pristine running order, or a 1953 Rolls-Royce, built in the year of the late Queen's Coronation and still purring along perfectly. Then the adventure is much more than mere magic.

That, surely, must be the experience of members of the Antique, Classic and Historic Automobile World Fellowship of Rotarians.

Heading up this august body is Dr Matthijs van den Adel, Fellowship President and a member of the Rotary Club of Hilversum, the famous Netherlands 'media city'.

The Fellowship is a little shy of 40 years old. "It was established in 1988 in the city of Wagga Wagga, Australia," said Mattijs. "Various chapters, or national fellowships, developed in the UK, the Netherlands, France, Germany and Italy from the early 1990s. Nowadays, we are represented in 16 countries, and we have 700 members."

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Those members are scattered across Europe – there are 12 national chapters across the continent, including the Rotary Retro Automobile Fellowship in Great Britain and Ireland. They complement other chapters in Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada, Mexico, Japan and Uruguay.

National chapters arrange tours and rallies in their own countries, which are open to Fellowship members. While motoring is a major theme, other slightly more random activities crop up here and there. A tour of Emilia Romagna in 2023 included visits not only to the Maserati factory in Modena and a guided tour of the Ferrari Museum in Maranello but also a visit to the abbey in Montevoglio and a visit to a vinegar factory.

"Organising rallies is easier to do in Europe," observed Matthijs, "because we have all the old-timer cars available here. We do not take our dear old-timers across the sea, so if we have rallies in Australia, Japan, Mexico or the USA, for instance, we are either passengers or co-drivers of the cars they have there."



“One of the great advantages of the Fellowship is that we have all these members spread around the world. They are always happy to see other representatives and to invite them to join them for tours in their cars.”

The national chapter in Germany has a busy 2026 pencilled in, with the Münsterländer Castle Tour, the Husum Coast-to-Coast tour and the Oldtimer Grand Prix at the Nürburgring.

In the UK, there’s the Goodwood Revival and the Italians are busy motoring through Piemonte, Umbria, Sicily, Emilia Romagna, the Appennines and the Abruzzo as well as a special tour of Albania.

The Fellowship is run by a board and, once a year, a Europe tour is organised by one of the European chapters.

“Members of European chapters are invited to join the tour and we’ll be talking about 50 to 60 cars taking to the roads, with up to 120 people attending,” added Matthijs.

“It’s great fun seeing these friends once a year. We’ve become a real petrolhead family. That is such an important thing for us, especially nowadays with the growing threat of nationalism in Europe. It’s a bit worrying, really.”

“IT’S CERTAINLY A BUSY FELLOWSHIP AND, AS MATTHIJS LIKES SAYS: “WE KEEP ROTARY ROLLING”



This year's tour, in September, will take in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. The pre-tour will be based at a four-star hotel in Bruges, where participants will tour the picturesque town.

They will also visit the new Squadra Abarth and Rally Collection at Lier, which is owned by former rally-driver Guy Moerenhout. For the petrolheads making the visit, they may well think they have arrived in heaven, as Moerenhout has collected no fewer than 175 classic and rally cars.

The main tour will be based in Vaals and will include a chance to test out driving skills on the Spa-Francorchamps circuit prior – probably fortunately - to a visit to Val-Dieu Abbey and its famed brewery which produces dark and blond beers.



Naturally, these tours take a massive amount of planning and organising. “We have to work out the road tour and then we have to book hotels and restaurants,” said Matthijs. “It’s not always easy getting in touch with a hotel and asking for rooms for 120 people.”

The rallies are also major fund-raising opportunities, raising between 50,000 and 100,000 euros annually for Rotary charities.

“End Polio Now is our favourite charity,” said Matthijs. “In 2018, we organised tours in Italy, after the tremendous earthquake which hit the country in 2016. We collected money to help with reconstruction.

“We approached Bill Gates to support us and, with the money we raised ourselves and with Bill’s contribution we constructed a complete Rotary multifunctional centre where we offer rent-free offices and rooms to young Rotary professionals who are setting up new businesses.”

It’s certainly a busy Fellowship and, as Matthijs likes says: “We keep Rotary rolling.”

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