

# An E type in France

By Robert Wallace

*Navigating the roads of Normandy and Brittany is always a driving experience, particularly in an E-type. The Grand Touring Club are clearly devotees of both and I was fortunate enough to be a part of it. I drove an E-type down through France to a destination of Utopian tranquillity, at Le Logis du Paradis, in the Charente. The philosophy is simple, to relax, chill out and enjoy.*



**O**ur intrepid travellers on this journey were made up of two E-type Series 1s and a magnificent E-type Series 3, affectionately nicknamed the "Red Lady". This car has taken us the width and breadth of France, Switzerland and Italy, over ten years of continental driving. This trip, however, incorporated a twist, with a difference.

The journey started in St. Malo where we were leaving the ferry finding breakfast within the walled ramparts of the attractive old town. Suitably refreshed after the overnight crossing from Portsmouth, the N137 took us south around Rennes and down to Nantes, nestling north of the famous River Loire. Part of the thrill of open top motoring in a classic British sports car, is the timeless feel of the experience on such fabulous roads.

After an 11 Euro lunch, somewhere in the vast pays de la Loire we turned west to the Ile de Noirmoutier, a curious island connected occasionally by a tidal causeway to the French mainland. This passage du gois, otherwise known as the D948, has sandy beaches on either side, a

*Ray Parrott's E-type Series 3 that Robert Wallace drove to France and called "The Red Lady".*

clear haven for both oyster pickers and seafood revellers alike.

Our first hotel is the Punta Lara, so surreal in its appearance that you have to stop a moment to take it all in. Located on the edge of a pine forest, it looks out across the Atlantic ocean at Le Gueriniere. Fifteen Mediterranean style villas, literally sit on the beach. The smell of the sea is an inspiration, an appetiser for dinner, in the capacious beamed restaurant.

The next part of our journey took us further south to the Charente maritime town of Royan, where we boarded the car ferry to the Pointe de Grave at the mouth of the River Gironde. Here you need the Michelin guide for satnav is definitely interdict in a classic sports. Further south, the Gironde divides into the Garonne and the Dordogne. We drive off the ferry thirty minutes later, time enough for a jambon baguette and iced tea on board. We continue south – our story only just beginning.

Driving on the N215 towards les Vignobles de Bordeaux we move west through a mosaic patchwork of beautifully kept vineyards, their names synonymous with the great wine lists of the world – Medoc, Saint Estephe, Pauillac, Saint Julien and Margaux. Our journey continues around the banks of the Gironde to Bordeaux itself and the Maison du Vin was well worth a visit. A magnificent 18th century chateau shaped like a ship's prow; majestic and sedate in appearance. Our final stop for lunch was at Blaye, now on the other side of the vast, fast flowing estuary of the Gironde.

At Bourg we passed the junction of both the Dordogne and Garonne, on the map looking an unusual configuration of waterways but on the road it is vast and impressive. The driving is nothing short of spectacular and this is really what the French driving experience is all about – great roads, wonderful food and wine and people who always make you feel welcome.

Another spectacular drive took us to the north east of Blaye on the D253, through Les Drouillards des Bois, leafy green woodland, through Montendre, then directly north to Jonzac. The tree lined road takes us through the tiny villages of Chartuzac and Villexaivier, to name but a few and sadly, our journey drew to a close. We followed the D699 close to Archiac and Lachaise and now was the time to pull over for a few moments, enjoying the scenery and to telephone Madame Brimblecombe to advise her of our arrival.

Not just bienvenue but welcome home. That is the sensation you feel, even if it's your first visit to this little spot of paradise in the heart of the Charente.

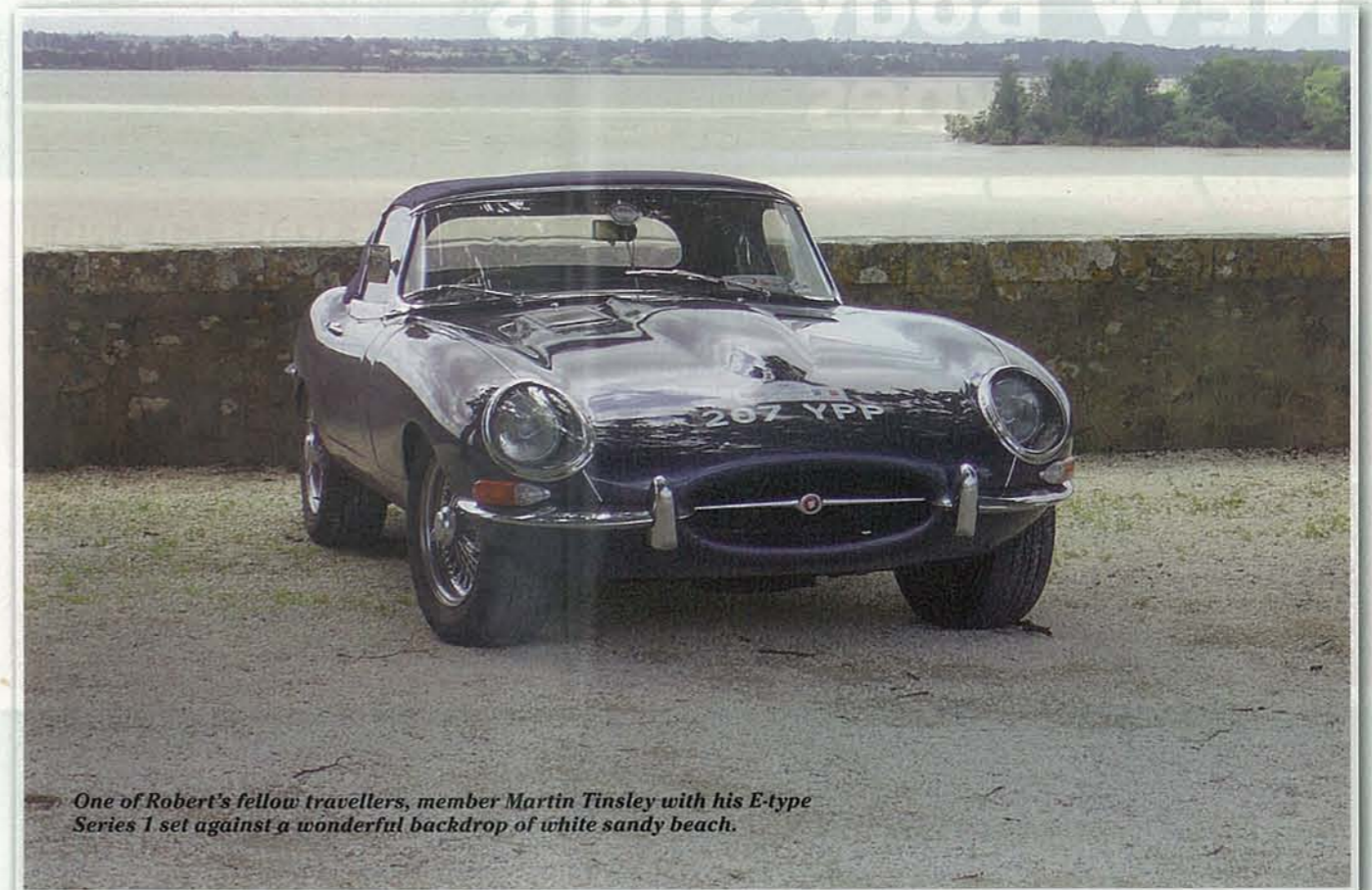
Le Logis du Paradis is a lovely old complex of buildings dating from 1712, including its former cognac distillery, build around a large, enclosed, classic Charentais courtyard. It is set in a charming, tiny hamlet on the banks of the river Ne in the midst of the vines of the Grand Cru Grande Champagne Cognac region. The whole property is surrounded by mellow stone walls and mature hornbeam and lime trees, the scene peaceful and tranquil, awash with sounds of subtle birdsong.

Sally and Nicholas Brimblecombe bought this historic property and have sympathetically renovated and refurbished some of the former cognac chais and 18th century wing. Sally has furnished the interiors with elegant linen and family antiques with a charming blend of cultures. Bedrooms are spacious and overlook the south-facing courtyard.

The following day, after settling in, our story really begins. Outside in the courtyard, the Red Lady or perhaps it should be "la dame rouge" awaits us. She gleams in the soft morning sunlight. And so, with Michelin guide at the ready, we prepare for the concluding journey heading off for deeper exploration into South West France – A great journey.



*Typical of the small towns and villages they passed through on their way south in France.*



*One of Robert's fellow travellers, member Martin Tinsley with his E-type Series 1 set against a wonderful backdrop of white sandy beach.*

*Final destination Le Logis du Paradis. Well worth a stay and if you want to know more visit their website at [www.logisduparadis.fr](http://www.logisduparadis.fr)*

