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CHICORA
Medical Center

British bring Fab Five to visit Butler cousins

Austin owners touring nation

By Jeff Andrasovsky
Eagle Staff Writer

Five baby British Austin Sevens and their owners toured Butler Tuesday on their way to Chicago, where they will begin a cross-country adventure on Route 66.

The day started at the Butler County Heritage and Industrial Museum on West New Castle Street, where the tourists came to see the Butler-built American version of the world's first compact car, and its offspring, the Bantam and jeep.

The Fab Five Austin Sevens lined New Castle Street, along with American Austins brought by local car enthusiasts. Butler businessman Dick May trailered his 1929 prototype, with its British body and chassis and American motor, which once was an egg delivery vehicle.

Bob Brandon of Center Township, a member of the Austin Bantam Car Club, brought his 1933 Roadster. Dan Shaffer and his mother, Lucyann Shaffer of Manor, Westmoreland County, heard the British were coming and started for Butler in Dan's 1933 Austin Coupe. It broke down, though, so he drove his Volkswagen Jetta. The Old Stone House Antique Car Club brought its 1922 Standard and Butler's 1909 Huselton, which is in the club's care.

An impromptu car show developed with passers-by stopping to see the cars, and police blocking off the street. At noon the entourage gathered at Diamond Park on Main Street, where the cars were admired by a small lunchtime crowd, including Butler County Commissioner Scott Lowe and David Johnston, the county's planning director.

Ask one of the Britons what they're impressed with, and you'll hear:

"We can't get over how cheap the petro is," said Stan Price of Carlisle, Great Britain.

"The gas here is dirt cheap," said Marlies Bishop of Exeter.

They said in Britain, the cost is about a pound a liter, or about \$8 for an imperial gallon, which is slightly larger than an American gallon.

The Austins with their 4-cylinder, 7- to-12-horsepower engines get about 40 mpg.

Price and Chris Parkhurst of Aylesbury are driving a 1932 Austin Box Saloon on the Route 66 trip. Bishop and her husband, Richard Bishop, are driving their 1938 Austin Sports.

Others taking the trip are:

Ken and Eileen Cooke of Stevenage, Great Britain, in their 1930 Austin Tourer; Vince Leek of Warminster, Great Britain, and Diana Garside of North Carolina in Leek's 1929 Austin Tourer; George and Joy Mooney of Bournemouth, Great Britain, in their 1934 Austin Cambridge Special; and Veronica Garside and Wendy Hider of Swindon Wilts, Great Britain, and River Dukes of North Carolina in a support car.

The participants are members of the 750 Motor Club, which has about 1,000 Austin owners.

The Fab Five arrived in New Jersey recently and toured the Big Apple over the weekend before driving to Butler.

Brandon, and fellow Austin Bantam club members George and Karol Kalin will take turns driving Brandon's 1933 Austin, and tag along with the British travelers as far as the state of Indiana. Other Austin and Bantam fans from across the country also plan to drive parts of the route with them.

Diana Garside originally planned the trip as a present for her father, who had a collection of the cars as she was growing up in London. However, he died, and the group decided to make the trip in his memory.

"I'm going to drive Vince's car," she said in a telephone interview from North Carolina Monday night. "I haven't driven it since I was a child."

She said when she was 10 or 11 years old, they let her drive the car at rallies on private property.

"It was a big treat to do that," she said. "And now I get to drive the car as an adult on a real road, a real, real road, Route 66."

She and her mother, Veronica Garside, are flying to Chicago to meet up with the group.

On Tuesday, the British contingent in Butler toured other relevant places.

They headed up McKean Street and up the hill to Belmont Road, to re-enact old photographs that showed Austins parked in front of the former Wise home at 111 Belmont, and Elias Ritts home, at 216 Belmont. Ritts helped found the



Dick May, left, of Butler shows his 1929 prototype Austin to fellow Austin owner Vince Leek of Warminster, Great Britain, on Tuesday outside the Butler County Heritage and Industrial Museum on West New Castle Street. JACK NEELY/BUTLER EAGLE



JACK NEELY/BUTLER EAGLE Bob Shook of Butler looks over one of the five baby British Austin Sevens parked Tuesday outside the Butler County Heritage and Industrial Museum on West New Castle Street. The cars, British versions of the Austin built in Butler from 1930 to 1935, will be driven to Chicago along Route 66. The Austins with their 4-cylinder, 7- to-12-horsepower engines get about 40 mpg.

2006

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American Austin Car Co. The Wise family has owned the Butler Eagle for more than a century. They also went behind Kmart on Hansen Avenue to peer through a fence at the now vacant factory where the Austins were built from 1930 to 1935. So far, they like what they've seen of the United States. The gas and food are cheap, they say. "It's the first time I've been to America," Stan Price said. "I've wanted to come here a long time. The Route 66 trip, it's like a dream. "Everybody's so friendly, It's like being home," he said. Anyone who wants to can follow the trip's progress on the group's Web site: [a7route 66.typepad.com](http://a7route66.typepad.com)

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