

FUEL FOR THOUGHT

WHAT LED THE CLUB TO SEND TWO OF ITS STAFF ON A TRIP AROUND EUROPE TOWING A FIVE-BERTH LUNAR BEHIND A FORD FOCUS 1.6 TDCI ECONETIC? GEORGE HINTON REVEALS ALL...



ABOVE: Swiss Touring Club Training Centre, Geneva, with the day's economy winners on the rostrum

ORGANISED ON behalf of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) by the Dutch Touring Club, ANWB, Ecotour 2008 aimed to demonstrate that by using simple eco-driving techniques, such as switching off the engine whenever the car is stationary and using a combination of gentle acceleration and good anticipation of traffic stops ahead of you, so that you don't lose momentum, you can easily save 20% of your 'average' fuel consumption and make a real contribution to both reducing global warming and your own fuel bills.

Ecotour used six categories of currently available new car – small, medium and family, petrol and diesel – all chosen for their low CO₂ footprint. Teams of drivers from across Europe chose a class of car and were then allocated a different car in that class to drive each day on a preset route through nine countries from Barcelona, Spain, to The Hague, Netherlands. The aim was simply to drive as

economically as possible, in order to demonstrate what eco-driving can achieve in real-world conditions, as opposed to on an indoor rolling road test rig.

The Caravan Club chose to shadow the event with a car of the same specification as one of the official Ecotour 2008 solo cars – a Ford Focus Econetic 1.6 TDCi DPF with a CO₂ rating of just 115g/km, towing a five-berth Zenith 5 lightweight family caravan supplied by Lunar of Preston. Our aim was to demonstrate that even caravanners can choose relatively 'green' cars and practise eco-driving techniques. Our team comprised Club Technical Manager, Martin Spencer, and myself.

DAY ZERO FRIDAY 12 SEPTEMBER

Our outfit had been shipped to Barcelona with all the others by transporter from The Hague. After a full day's preparation of the outfit on Friday 12 September, which included cleaning both vehicles (Miracle Dry Wash came into its own here, as no

water was available), adjusting tyre pressures, checking fluids, loading, ballasting to 85% and checking noseweight, we were ready to join the first part of the event, the Barcelona Prologue,

which involved driving from the fabulous new headquarters of the Royal Automobile Club of Catalonia (RACC) on Friday evening, visiting sponsor BP's local filling station to have the tank filled to the top by the independent fuelling team, then touring all the major sites of the city, including Gaudi's Sagrada Familia cathedral and the hilltop Olympic Stadium, before revisiting the BP filling station, to refuel and measure the amount used.

We are pleased to report we achieved 50.17mpg (5.63 litres/100km) for this exercise, despite getting seriously lost on three occasions and covering 33 miles! We were not alone in getting lost – all teams bar two apparently had navigation problems and two never rediscovered the BP station at all! It seemed to confirm that city driving





ABOVE: Ecotour 2008 overall winners at The Hague

can be made highly efficient by following the eco-driving techniques outlined previously.

DAY ONE

SATURDAY 13 SEPTEMBER

From the RACC headquarters, we traversed Barcelona once again before heading north-east on a mixture of motorways and A-class roads to reach Avignon, via a lunch stop in Narbonne. Both head and crosswinds made this quite a challenging drive at times, at least when trying to adopt economical driving techniques, as we also had a timetable to adhere to. Even so, a consumption of 27.20mpg (10.41ltr/100km) over 266 miles is something many 4x4 drivers will be quite envious of. The Ford Focus, with its slick five-speed gearbox, smooth clutch and superb low-speed torque peaking at 1750rpm, proved well up to the task of hauling a caravan with a MTPLM of 1217kg, and was a pleasure to drive. We avoided using the air conditioning, as the compressor absorbs quite a bit of power, and kept the windows closed except in towns. Milenco supplied our towing mirrors that fitted securely, giving an adequate view with minimal vibration and no wind noise. All teams were given a road book with route directions, updated daily from a driver going 24 hours ahead of us, and we had portable sat-navs as back-up. Our Ford had its own optional sat-nav, but this is of limited use when you switch the engine off at every stop and it shuts down!

DAY TWO

SUNDAY 14 SEPTEMBER

Today's drive was to Geneva via a lunch stop at a park in the centre of congested Lyon. The route was largely motorway but we still had our timetable to follow. However, despite



Maloja Pass, near St Moritz

showery weather, we improved on the previous day's result with a consumption figure of 31.8mpg (8.88ltr/100km) over 290 miles.

Geneva had a trick up its sleeve in the shape of major roadworks where a new flyover was being constructed. This led to us being given a motorcycle escort between our Geneva fuelling station and our final destination of the day at the Swiss Touring Club's training ground just opposite Cointrin airport. After an official welcome and presentation of awards for the day's most economical drives, we were returned to our city hotel by coaches.

DAY THREE

MONDAY 15 SEPTEMBER

Starting from opposite the airport, we had to drive back into Geneva, past our hotel, then pick up the motorway to Milan. Thanks to those roadworks, this was easier said than done, but we eventually reached the motorway, although not by the intended short route. After a good stretch of motorway we turned off onto scenic roads to our lunch stop under the Mont Blanc glacier, before proceeding through the 7¹/₄-mile Mont Blanc tunnel into Italy. Safety requirements there, following the 1999 lorry fire that killed 41 people, are now on a par with the Channel Tunnel: you are handed a safety card at the toll booth as you enter; vehicles must keep 150m apart, indicated by blue lights on the wall all through the tunnel; there are >>

radar-monitored speed limits and on-the-spot fines for transgressors.

From there, we headed first towards Milan then north to Como, where the Italian Motoring Club had laid on a reception for the Ecotour right beside the lake, with hospitality in a hangar of the Como Aero Club. You didn't know Como had an airport? Well, it is called Lake Como – all the Club's planes are float-planes, which take off from and land on the lake itself!

Our outfit improved on its previous performance with a brim-to-brim consumption of 34.6mpg (8.16ltr/100km) over a distance of 235 miles, probably due to our technique improving. Next leg was to Seefeld in Austria, where we were told it had begun snowing at the weekend.

DAY FOUR
TUESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER

From Como, our route took us all the way up the beautiful western shore of the lake before we started climbing into the Alps. Our route lay over the Maloja Pass, which led up to St Moritz in Switzerland, a most scenic route that neither of us had driven before. By now we had total confidence in our towcar, whose reserves of power and torque had only been used sparingly in the interest of economy. It took to the hairpins of the 1815m (5955ft) pass as though it was built for them. Mostly we only needed third gear with the occasional drop to second and just one brief 50-yard spell in first gear to negotiate the very steepest hairpin bend. Drivers of the smallest petrol cars, some of which struggled up largely in first and second gear, were envious of our progress.

This really was the ultimate proof that with modern, green, economical diesel cars, you really can have your cake and eat it: superb day-to-day economy in the high-50s in the working week, but the capability to attach a family-sized caravan and take off for your holiday or a long weekend whenever the fancy takes you.

After lunch at the top of the pass, we headed along the Inn valley towards Innsbruck, before turning north to beautiful Seefeld. Our result for this day in the Alps: 35.44mpg (7.97ltr/100km).

OUR THANKS TO...

All the official event sponsors, including PHH-Arval vehicle leasing who supplied all the cars bar ours, BP who sponsored its Ultimate fuel for the event, Ibis Hotels and the ANWB staff and volunteers, without whom the event would not have been possible. Also, a special thank you to Ford of Britain, who pulled out all the stops to find us a Focus Econetic at short notice and fitted it with a towbar, and to Lunar Caravans who provided its excellent Zenith 5 at even shorter notice after our original Avondale became unavailable. The Zenith, which was not fitted with a stabiliser, towed impeccably throughout. For further details of the event, see ecotour2008.eu



The end: the Club team at Scheveningen, The Hague

There was no sign of snow when we arrived, but there had been some the previous weekend when the temperature suddenly dropped by 20degC! It was still fresh and around 8degC when we arrived, and it was only 1.5degC the following, misty morning.

DAY FIVE
WEDNESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER

Today's target was Stuttgart, Germany, but only after we had made a lunch stop at Munich, where we were met by the German Minister for Environment. This followed another scenic drive through mountains and forests, with a fair share of hairpin bends and a lot of climbing and descent. We visited Munich's Deutsches Museum at the Vehrkerszentrum, which has an interesting collection of transport from a replica early steam locomotive to a stainless steel Porsche 911 and, yes, a caravan. Made by a sailplane maker from painted canvas, it was very light, yet fitted out with proper furniture and a very comfortable-looking sofa-bed.

Our journey continued to our daily prize-giving event for the solo car drivers, held in the central square in Stuttgart, after refuelling on the outskirts. Then we had another drive of 60-plus km to the town of Reutlingen, for our overnight stay. Consumption for the day was better again at 38.07mpg (7.42ltr/100km).

DAY SIX
THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER

This was a relatively easy day with a drive more or less due west through undulating, mainly wooded countryside, to Strasbourg, where we lunched quickly in the city congress and music hall. On to Luxembourg by motorway and our biggest welcome yet, again in the town's main square, outside the Rathaus or Town Hall.



Preparing for the final fuel stop

Daily presentations were made to the teams who had achieved closest to their car's published average fuel consumption figure as well as to those driving the cars with the best outright fuel

performance in each class. There was also a driving simulator on which members of the public could try their hand at eco-driving. The presentation stage and the exhibition/viewing trailer and simulator followed the event all the way from Barcelona, but not necessarily by the same route. It was another excellent day for us – 36.08mpg (7.83ltr/100km).

DAY SEVEN
FRIDAY 19 SEPTEMBER

Our final day was another long motorway haul with a lunch stop in Brussels that gave us a brief opportunity to visit its Autoworld motor museum, where a buffet lunch had been provided. With no more mountains to climb, just urban motorway traffic to deal with, we expected to get our best consumption figure on this day, which is just what happened: 39.07mpg (7.23ltr/100km) is truly creditable and would delight any family on its annual holiday. We were fittingly blessed with warm sunshine as we rolled over the finishing line at the Kurhaus on the seafront at Scheveningen, The Hague's seaside resort. ■

Our solo Focus running mate had performed steadily throughout the week no matter who was driving it, averaging an excellent 63.9mpg (4.42ltr/100km) each day. So with eco cars we think we've proved a point: you really can have your gâteau and gorge it!