

0-60 in 18 Days London to Jerusalem

The 2008 Car Rally – 18 May to 4 June

Waterloo
Place
London

Chantilly

Dijon

Neuchâtel

Lago
di Como

Bolzano

Venice

Siena

Rome

Naples

Bari

Mount
Olympus

Mizpe
Ramon

Eilat

King David
Hotel
Jerusalem

When I had finished my interview with Gail, she invited me to see the Rally off from Pall Mall the following Sunday. The Israeli Ambassador was present, together with the Mayor of Westminster, to see the 25 classic and contemporary cars off on their eighteen-day journey across Europe and then on to Jerusalem. As they left, sixty balloons were released to mark celebration of Israel's 60th Anniversary. A jazz band in an open Morris Traveller accompanied the cars in convoy along Piccadilly, up Haymarket and around Trafalgar Square. ITN was on hand to report the departure and feature two boys making aliya in a 1948 Rolls Royce. Longstanding HGSS member, MICHAEL ZEITLIN, kept a daily log. Here is what he had to say about his 'journey of a lifetime'.

Photo:
Marc Morris



Above: The Start: Gail on the running board of the 1926 Buick which led the way. The Mayor of Westminster, Louise Hyams, started the Rally. The Israeli Ambassador, Ron Prozor is in the driving seat. Left: HGSS members, Louise and David Grunberg, cross the start line in their 1963 Austin Healy. Below: Michael Zeitlin at Dover with his Mercedes SL500.



Day 1 London – Dover – Calais – Chantilly
Rolls Royce 1948 and Buick 1926, broke down and took a later boat. The rest caught 12.40 boat and introduced ourselves on board. Drove to Chantilly stayed in Château de Montvillargenne. Buick and RR broke down again.

Day 2 Chantilly – Troyes – Dijon 240 miles
The scenery improved, weather sunny. Troyes is steeped in history; we even came across an old synagogue. Buick & RR broke down again.

Day 3 Dijon – Neuchâtel in Switzerland approx 160 miles
From Grottes scenery very mountainous with rolling countryside, typically Swiss. En route had to find an alternative way as electric pylon had collapsed into the road blocking access. As we approached Switzerland weather became cooler and more overcast. All cars made the journey in better time.

Day 4 Neuchâtel – Tremezzo, on Lake Como Italy approx. 230 miles.
Weather overcast and cool; scenery became much more beautiful. Over the Gothard Pass – weather misty, foggy, and grey. Before we reached the summit, an avalanche blocked the road just in front of us. Waited over an hour for the snowmobile to cut a path through. Quite an experience. Weather lifted as we came down and we reach Tremezzo at 19.30. Somewhat later than expected. Hotel beautifully situated, and whole area stunningly beautiful. Cadillac, Duesenberg Boattail Speedster and RR last to arrive and we lost our 1926 Buick which gave up after many repairs; driver continued in hired, modern car.

Day 5 Tremezzo – Bolzano near Austrian border approx 150 miles
Weather rainy, grey and dull, so a lot of the natural beauty not visible. Took car ferry across Lake Como. Ferry was old but ran perfectly; scenery beautiful. Mountainous not so high but more vegetation and lots of wine-growing fields. Arrived Bolzano at 17.30; the town has German as its second language having been part of Austria many years ago. Celebrating a ham fair, so town packed.

Day 6 Bolzano – Venice approx 150 miles, boat ferry to the Venice Lido and a day off.

Day 7 Leisure day in Venice looking at the sights, could not have been better.

Day 8 Venice to Siena approx 260 miles
First half of journey by motorway and we travelled south via Bologna, coming off at Forli from where we took the more scenic drive towards Siena. Lunch stop was in Rufina. Arrived Siena at 17.00. The Hotel Borgo La Bagnaia is set in vast grounds Drinks were served in a beautiful garden on a terrace overlooking miles of open countryside. After dinner talk by rally participant, Moshe Levy who lost an arm serving in the armoured division of the tank corps in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. One of only about fifteen officers in Israel's history to receive the Valor of Bravery award. A very modest man, he drives his Duesenberg with his one arm.

Day 9 Siena to Rome through the wonderful Tuscan landscape 160 miles
Spent morning in the amazing city of Siena. Visited the ancient Synagogue – what history, what beauty – wonderful chandeliers and inscriptions, a wooden Brit Mila chair and many niches in the wall for tzedaka – quite unique.

Arrived Castle de Orsini on the outskirts of Rome 17.00. Room not that clean or comfortable but views spectacular. Rally member, Robert Brody, sings Israeli songs – lovely voice.

Day 10 Rome to Naples 200 miles
First stop Subiaco, birthplace of Gina Lollobrigida. On to Naples arriving 17.00.

Day 11 Naples to Bari and overnight Ferry to Greece 80 Miles
Day 12 Igoumenitsa to Olympia 250 miles along the coast
A very early morning call, 4.30, as we had to be off the boat when it docked at 5.30. A beautiful morning driving along the coast road on the way to the ancient city of Olympia where we were based for three nights. On the road passed many flocks of goats, cattle and even a family of wild boar.

Day 13 Olympia, Rally of the Gods and back to Olympia
A 100 mile drive to see the local area and the ancient Temple of Apollo after which we drove our cars to the village to be loaded on to transporters and then off to Athens airport for the journey to Israel while we have a day off. Traditional Friday night dinner

Gail Seal

The dynamic personality in a small frame

It was a visit to Israel in 1967 and the Six-Day War which sparked Gail Seal's love affair with Israel. This love has translated itself into nearly forty years of service to the Jewish National Fund, the last thirteen as national President.

Gail grew up in Southgate. However, her links with Hampstead Garden Suburb have always been strong as her father's brother was Dayan Lew – she comes from a family steeped in communal commitment.

She married Michael, an accountant, in 1970, they settled in the Suburb and started a JNF committee. She was asked to join the main board in 1985 and, in 1995, became the first woman President of the organisation in its 100-year history.

They have been thirteen exciting years. The highest point was hosting three dinners where the guest speaker was Bill Clinton. Not only is he charismatic and charming, he loves Israel and is an ardent admirer of the late Yitzhak Rabin – the three functions raised over a million pounds. Another notable guest was Colin Powell, also extremely charismatic, who delivered part of his speech in Yiddish.

Another significant highlight was to be invited to the inauguration of Shimon Peres as the new President of the State of Israel. She says, "I felt so privileged to have been invited, one of only a handful of people from the UK. I cried when six army Rabbis blew the Shofar – the Israeli next to me thought I was mad! It was just the most amazing event!"

It need hardly be said that the lowest point came last year with the dispute with KKL who were being less than transparent with the distribution of JNF funds in Israel. "As trustees, we must have the trust of our donors", says Gail. "They must know where their money is going. We stood up for what we thought was right and we won." Mercifully the matter has now been resolved and the court action, with the all the unwanted expense and publicity which it would have engendered, has been avoided.

There must be an enormous amount of inner strength packed into Gail's tiny frame – little she may be but she has stood up for what she believes is right and, during her presidency, giving to the JNF has increased tenfold – from £1,500,000 to £15,000,000, an achievement of which she is justifiably enormously proud.

Every other year, the highlight of the organisation's calendar is the London to Jerusalem Car Rally which, this year, left London on Sunday, 18 May, arriving at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem on Wednesday, 4 June. It was the biggest ever with six cars being flown in from America to take part. The event is limited to 35 participants and raises approximately £250,000 for Negev projects.

The JNF prides itself on valuing the small donor as much as the major benefactor. Huge amounts come in as a result of tree certificates and the annual diary as well as the two annual telethons, all of which fund the well known JNF projects in forestry, ecology, water conservation and much, much more.

Gail and Michael have three sons, all married, all living in the Suburb and all members of the Shul. They have four grandchildren. Her youngest son is following in his mother's communal footsteps by becoming the Joint Chairman of Young Jewish Care. Her youngest daughter-in-law is a fundraiser for Jewish Care. She has two sisters, one living in the Suburb, the other in Israel.

Gail is about to lay down her burden – the JNF one that is. She feels that after thirteen years, and with Israel reaching its 60th birthday, it is now time to hand over to a new team. Retirement from the JNF does not mean that she will be retiring from communal work. She has been asked to do several things, including trouble-shooting for the Israeli Embassy. She also wants to spend more time in her garden and at her home in Israel.

She hands to her successor an organisation in good order and long may it continue its excellent work. And long may Gail continue her contribution to the Jewish community both here and in Israel. It will be interesting to see what Gail does next.

outdoors.

Day 14 Olympia Day off relaxing around the pool.

Day 15 Olympia to Athens airport, Ben Gurion to Sderot 60 miles
then on to Mitzpe Ramon 90 miles

Too early morning call, 04.30, bus leaves for Athens 05.00. Specially chartered flight takes off at 10.45 bang on time. Very special to fly in a group with no passengers other than security guards. Arrived Ben Gurion Airport on time and coach took us to the other side of the airport to be reunited with our cars which were all kitted out with a full set of flags and in sequence. Greeted with a fanfare from the army corps and a wonderful reception. Light refreshments then off to Sderot on border with the Gaza Strip, a town under day and night rocket attack – no one is ever safe there. Gathered on the outskirts of town and joined by many youngsters who enjoyed rides in the cars. The Mayor told us that it was the first occasion to bring so many people out onto the normally deserted streets. Spent the night at Mitzpe Ramon.

Day 16 Sderot to Eilat 100 miles
Visited the school in Mitzpe Ramon, wonderful reception – the kids rush to sit in the cars and take photos. On to Eilat, a long drive in the extreme heat through open desert – absolutely nothing for miles in all directions, wonderful contours of light reflecting from the different sand and hill types, quite beautiful and very stark, what an experience! All agreed to drive into Eilat in convoy. Greeted by the Mayor who offered us liquid refreshment and fresh bread which came from Moshe Levy's own bakery in Eilat.

Day 17 Eilat to Sansana, Herzlia 225 miles

Off to visit a JNF project – drove into the village of Sansanna, a village for young married couples with children. Greeted by a very large gathering of young children and their teachers, who sang to us as we drove in, a very moving experience. This is one of the habitation projects for the Negev, intended to build and support new communities for people who no longer wish to live in large towns. We were addressed by one of the founders who is committed to this programme and needs support from groups like ourselves. Visited the headquarters of the army corps, tank division at Latrun, Continued on page 9



Photo: Yossi Zeliger

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where Moshe Levy had been based. We were asked to park between the tanks – quite awesome, these huge tanks next to our small cars. Moshe told us that he had agreed to finance a new museum to tell the stories of all the major Israeli wars so that future generations could learn what had happened. Now on to Herzlia and a night's rest at the Accadia.

Day 18 Herzlia to Jerusalem 90 miles

Today will be the climax of our 4000 mile trip to Jerusalem. We set out early so as not to be late for our arrival in the Knesset. The traffic is heavy as it is rush hour. We had a very special feeling entering the city of Jerusalem; it felt wonderful to arrive at our destination all intact and only one car missing.

The trip had taken us across Europe, via many special cities, through mountains, over seas and through wonderful country-side, meeting interesting people and learning about new places along the way.

We drove into the Knesset grounds in convoy and parked in front of the Knesset building in a circular formation. The Knesset displayed a huge welcome sign, a very special and unique honour for all of us. We were welcomed by the Speaker of the Knesset, Dalia Itzak who presented two

young men who had driven all the way in the 1948 RR Silver Wraith to come on Aliya with their new Israeli passports. We were all invited into the Knesset where the leader halted the business to hand and welcomed us all to Jerusalem and thanked us for making this very special journey in order to help celebrate Israel's very special birthday.

We then drove to Jerusalem Square where we parked cars in formation so that photographs could be taken from a high building – first a figure 40 for the 40 years of Jerusalem being a united city, then a 60 for the anniversary. The final destination was the King David Hotel where we all passed the Finishing Flag. There were flags and balloons and a reception to welcome us, we felt absolutely wonderful, a very special and unique sensation.

At 19.30 we met for a special final dinner where the room was filled with happiness and joy.

We watched film and a slideshow of the highlights of our epic journey. The film was absolutely wonderful as it captured most of the treasured moments during our trip. The address and Appeal was given by the President of the JNF London, Gail Seal, and I believe with the auction which followed over £100,000 was raised. Among the items auctioned were a coloured copy of the 1948 Declaration of the State of Israel in Hebrew, a commemorative plate and other documents to do with the creation of the State. I bought the finishing flag with the signatures of all the drivers and partners on the rally which will be a wonderful souvenir, for me and my family, of this special journey to Jerusalem.

For me it was a trip of a life time which I will always remember with joy and happiness for the rest of my life.

Michael Zeitlin



Ali Singer and Yaniv Cohen receive their Israeli ID cards from Dalia Itzik at the Knesset
Inset: the 1948 Rolls Royce Silver Wraith