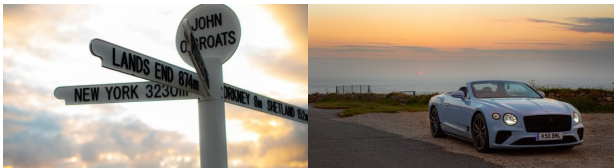


CLASSIC DRIVER

Racing the sun across Britain in a Bentley on the longest day of the year

Lead

On June 21st the sun rose in John O’Groats at 04.02 and set at 21.36 in Land’s End. It’s 837 miles from the UK’s most North Easterly point to the most South Westerly point, question is, could we make the drive across the British Isles before the sun set?

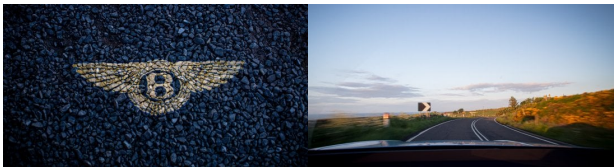


Our chosen car for the job would be a Bentley Continental GT V8 Convertible, with the British weather so wildly unpredictable it only made sense to throw extra jeopardy into the journey and try to drive as much as possible with the roof down. The first person to complete this now legendary journey took 72 days in 1879, we would have slightly less time, 17 hours and 32 minutes.



Google maps suggests a journey time of 14 hours and 29 minutes. Easy you say, but don’t forget we will be travelling through two rush hours, typical British summer roadworks and there will be a couple of fuel stops and some calls of nature for our crew!

Remarkably we aren’t the only people crazy enough to spend the longest day of the year travelling as far as possible across the UK. As we pull up to the John o’Groats sign there’s a couple of motorbikes also up for the challenge for no other reason than it’s a bit of fun.



Just 24 hours earlier we had seriously considered cancelling the drive due to the terrible weather forecast, so we are pleasantly surprised to see a golden sunrise. The expected storm has seemingly passed us by and after grabbing a few photos we are on our way south, first stop will be Inverness for breakfast, or more importantly, coffee!



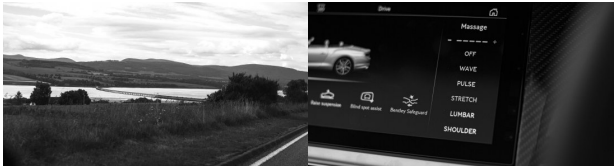
It's quite alarming how quickly your cushion of time can vanish, on paper we should arrive for breakfast at 06.30, in reality, it's 07.30. Rather unexpectedly we have already lost an hour. While 'on the go' food has certainly improved a lot, if you're travelling at anti-social times the pickings are slim and begrudgingly, we settle for a fast-food breakfast, exactly the opposite you need for keeping your body and mind in good shape for the remaining 717 miles.



Our next scheduled stop is Teabay services, highly regarded by many, with its farm shop and home-made food offering far healthier options than typical motorway service stations. This next leg is 290 miles and just over five hours of drive time. The Bentley is more than up for the challenge, the impressive range of a full tank combined with a real-world MPG of 25 means that over 500 miles is possible between stops. Unfortunately, the human body is not quite so good and a comfort break is required. No matter how quick you are these stops are still at least 20 minutes and to add to the mix our support vehicle needs to stop for fuel having not topped up with us the night before!



By the time we leave lunch it's 14.30, our ETA has slipped to 21.30, six minutes to sunset. Between our end goal is 433 miles, as long as the traffic is kind to us we should still be ok. I should add, so far we have completed the drive with the roof down. The heated massage seats and air scarf really do their job to make convertible driving even pleasurable on the motorway.



As we reach the outskirts of Birmingham we should be getting on the M6 but the traffic is at a standstill, so we make the decision to take the longer route along the fast flowing M6 toll road. It adds a further five minutes to the ETA but we are confident we will make that up and the standstill traffic would have made our goal almost impossible.



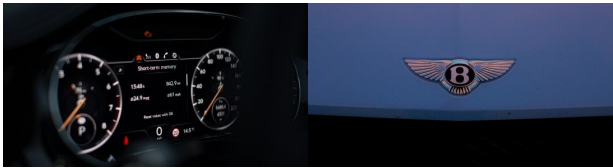
After another toilet break north of Bristol, it should be a straight-forward dash to Cornwall, but we have an issue. While making up some lost time our fuel economy has dropped. There's 190 miles of range and 202 miles to go! There's two options, slow down and try to conserve fuel, or drop the hammer and make up enough time to 'splash and dash'. It's a pretty easy decision, we drop the hammer.



Reports from friends in Cornwall suggest we may even get a sunset, and as the sky starts to clear – after a few hundred miles of rain – we dive in to the last petrol station for a F1 style fuel stop. Five minutes later we are back on the road and tackling the last few miles of the A30.



Unlike its Scottish relative, Land's End is a bit of a tacky affair with a paid car park and some unrelated attractions to draw in the crowds. Getting to the signpost is also now out of bounds, so with the sun starting to kiss the edge of the cloud we quickly pull up as close as possible and stop the clock. It's 21.15, 17 hours and 11 minutes to drive 837 miles, an average speed of around 50mph including our stops.



Not bad, but maybe next year with some more extreme planning we can achieve the optimum 'legal' journey time! The Bentley really was the perfect car for the job. We outperformed the official fuel economy figures and arrived to Land's End feeling surprisingly fresh considering we had just spent over 17 hours in the car. The 4-litre twin turbo V8 is a glorious engine, silky smooth when cruising and a bit of an animal when the roads get fun. If we were in any other two-tonne convertible it may have been dark by the time we got to Land's End, but in the Continental we made it and we did it in style!

Photos: Tim Hutton / Richard Fullbrook © 2021

Gallery

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