

Take a nostalgic spin in a classic Triumph amid stunning scenery and historic gems along the peaceful new South West Coastal 300 route

FIONA RUSSELL

Hark the Herald

Opening the door of the 1969 Triumph Herald and lowering myself into the seat of the beautifully refurbished car, I was transported back 40 years.

I felt a wave of nostalgia as I smelled the old leather seats, ran my hand over the smooth wooden dashboard and clocked an array of ancient-looking dials and gauges.

My nan owned a dark green Herald and, with my two siblings, we enjoyed many wonderful holiday adventures to Essex beaches and attractions.

I knew immediately that Bluebelle, the hired classic car, and I would enjoy each other's company on our three-day drive of the new South West Coastal 300 route.

Once instructed by Paul, the owner of Kippford Classic Car Hire, I pulled out the choke, started the engine and drove off to join a coastal road that hugs the Solway Firth coast in Dumfries & Galloway.

The SWC300 is the third in a series of circular road routes to be established in Scotland, following on from the North Coast 500 and the North-East 250.

Based on a popular motorbike route but with several additional sections, the 300-mile driving loop heads through Dumfries & Galloway and dips into south and east Ayrshire.

It reaches the most southerly point in Scotland at Mull of Galloway and visits the county's highest village, Wanlockhead, nestled in the Lowther Hills at 1531ft above sea level.

The SWC300 features fabulous coastlines, including two peninsulas, and several traditional "Doon the Watter" seaside hotspots of Ayrshire.

Inland, the route winds through

green and pleasant countryside, edges atmospheric forests and crosses moorlands. It is seen by tourism businesses as a magnet to attract more visitors to a less-frequented area of Scotland.

Ian McAndrew, part of the SWC300 organising committee and owner of Blackaddie House Hotel in Sanquhar, said: "The route circles a huge area and we have many providers who will happily cater for tourists. It is a win-win for visitors and businesses."

It would be possible to whizz round the route in one day but that would be missing the point of the SWC300.

There are so many pretty villages, historic towns and fascinating attractions to visit that a week would be more suitable for the full loop.

In the Triumph, I travelled at a speed that at first felt old-fashioned yet turned out to be appropriate for a drive-and-see holiday.

No one seemed to mind me pottering along. They nodded and smiled at Bluebelle as we made our journey along a route that sticks as much as possible to quiet roads.

When I parked, people stopped to chat, recounting how their first car was a Herald or they recalled a parent or grandparent owning one. I felt like a minor celebrity.

Each day, I picked a selection of places to visit, such as the national book town of Wigtown, the "Isle" of Whithorn, Mull of Galloway lighthouse, Portpatrick, Culzean Castle, Alloway and the Robert Burns attractions, Wanlockhead, Lockerbie and Dumfries.

For a little more nostalgia, I added a stop at the town of Moffat to my destination list. I once took my nan there on a day trip when she moved to Scotland with my family in the 80s

and Moffat Toffee Shop is a childhood favourite of my daughter.

Yet, en route to each of these places, I was frequently diverted by signposts pointing the way to other tourism gems, including secluded bays and tiny harbour villages, castles, cairns, monuments, a gemstones museum, a smokehouse and a centre for mining.

A signpost in Ayrshire announced a section of road called Electric Brae, which is a "gravity hill", where a freewheeling vehicle will appear to be drawn uphill by a mysterious force.

If I'd had my mountain bike with me, a number of 7stanes trail centres, including Dalbeattie, Kirroughtree, Glentool, Ae and Mabie would beckon. There were more signposts, this time green rather than tourism brown, that pointed the way to a spider's web network of waymarked walks through a shapely landscape.

The 212-mile walking trail, the Southern Upland Way, cuts through the area from the coast at Portpatrick to Wanlockhead and on to Scotland's east shore at Cockburnspath.

Cyclists can also enjoy signposted ways just for them, such as the Machars Cycle Routes.

I also learned many brilliant facts in this region. Stranraer's North West Castle is the first hotel in the world to have an indoor curling rink. And Sweetheart Abbey, near New Abbey, was named Dulce Cor in memory of Lady Dervorgilla, who founded the building in tribute to her beloved husband, John Balliol.

At the end of my journey, having delivered Bluebelle back to her owner, I rejoined the real world on the M74 back to Glasgow in my modern car.

I wished I could have stayed longer in the region that must surely be one of Scotland's best-kept secrets.

Travel info

■ **The route:** South West Coastal 300 at www.visitsouthwestscotland.com/attractions/southwest-coastal-route/

■ **Triumph Herald hired from Kippford Classic Car Hire, south of Dalbeattie.** See www.kippfordclassiccarhire.co.uk

■ **First night:** All-mod-cons wooden Wigwam at Solway View Holidays, near Kirkcudbright. See www.solwayviewholidays.com

■ **Evening meal at Selkirk Arms Hotel, Kirkcudbright.** See www.selkirkarmshotel.co.uk

■ **Second night:** Four-star Rickwood House Hotel in Portpatrick. See www.portpatrick.me.uk

■ **Evening meal:** Fernhill Hotel, Portpatrick
 ■ **Third night:** Four-star Blackaddie House Hotel, Sanquhar (dinner, bed & breakfast). See www.blackaddiehotel.co.uk



STOP OFF In Dumfries and Galloway



MUCH TO SEA Harbour on the route



IN THE PINK Bluebelle has rest in village



VINTAGE Triumph Herald Bluebelle on the road. Above, Fiona with the roof down



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