

BRITISH ICON MOVES TO FRANCE

by David Morrison

When a woman jumped into a taxi in London and asked to be taken to the Vendee, in France, you'd expect the driver to be surprised. With the urban myth that cabbies in London are notorious for not going south of the river, what chance would she have of going south of the Loire! Luckily for Florence Cauchon it was her husband Alain behind the wheel. They had just bought the cab and were about to take it all the way to their bar in St Vincent Sterlanges, north of Chantonnay. The anglophile couple had always dreamt of owning a London taxi, an icon of British life. So, they wasted no time when a 14-year-old vehicle appeared for sale on the internet. After the purchase, Alain and Florence then made a four day journey to its new home at their pub/hotel/restaurant 'Le St Vincent'.

ALL THINGS BRITISH



Alain with his wife Florence Cauchon

This is a popular spot for expats and UK tourists; the French couple have dedicated their bar to all things British. Regulars are in for treat too as they may soon be able to catch a ride in the Hackney Carriage to their home in the Vendee. Delighted Alain told French Entrée Loire: "This is a dream come true for us. We are very happy. The taxi is in good condition and was very comfortable to drive."

A black cab may be an unusual sight in the Vendee and not surprisingly, Alain attracted some attention as he and Florence started their journey south. "One person tried to stop me in London for a ride. But, of course, I could not stop," he said. Alain is now starting the process of the re-registering the vehicle to convert it to French number plates. This means the dreaded and often expensive exercise of changing headlights. However, Alain has already done his homework.

"Luckily, the taxi has the same headlights as an Austin Morris, so there shouldn't be a problem finding them here in France." That's just as well as the cab will be regularly on the move in the evenings as Alain is planning to take some of his customers home from Le St Vincent at the end of the night. "Yes, why not," said Alain, "it will be fun."

MAKE A DREAM COME TRUE

Now that one British dream has become a reality, the couple are hoping another will also come true. Alain explained: "I would like to organise an exchange with UK people for a week.

"We can organise a week here for them, probably between 12 and 15 persons, with visits around the Vendee every day as well as accommodation at our French friend's houses, or even at our hotel with free bedrooms." Alain added: "We'd also organise a good party every evening or maybe darts and pool games. Why not do it every year?"

CAN YOU HELP?

The problem, however, has been finding someone at the UK end to help organise the British side of the exchange. If you know someone who maybe interested, email Alain at aubergelestvincent@orange.fr or phone him on 02 51 40 23 15.

The Vendee area of France has been a popular destination for both tourists and house-hunters alike from the UK for decades. Around 250,000 visitors from Britain flock to the area's golden beaches every year and a large number of properties have been snapped up by homeowners from the English side of the Channel.

For comprehensive information on both
tourism and property in the Vendee, visit
www.frenchentree-loire.com.

