

MARK PORTER

DON'T laugh, but the previous time I tested an electric car I had to get the train home. And I was in Leipzig. This time I am on the Devon coast midway between Plymouth and Dartmouth, having driven 140 miles to the splendid Burgh Island Hotel.

The battery of the Hyundai Kona is still almost half-charged when I purr to a gracious halt. But I plug it into one of the hotel's three charge points for peace of mind.

The whole bay is ablaze with summer and children skitter across the wrinkled sand. Kiteboarders make the most of the breeze and human seals wobble down the dunes for the boat that will take them out to see some old wrecks (and I'm not referring to the hotel's ballroom).

Today the normally grey seascape is every bit as dazzling as the French Riviera. A cheery fellow in a Range Rover takes me and my overnight bag the short hop to the jetty, where I climb some rusty steps to board a converted cattle truck for the ride across the tidal causeway to the island.

My fellow guests, with their Gucci two-suiters and immaculate clothes, look stirred but not shaken as the wheezing sea tractor coughs and splutters its way through the shallows to our destination, where another limo takes us 100 metres up the ramp to the stylishly imposing iron gates.

We pass the hotel annexe, a cosy looking cottage perched on the rocks, where Agatha Christie wrote *Evil Under the Sun* and *Then There Were None*. A feeling of time standing still envelops the tiny island, just as surely as the incoming tide. The hotel is an Art Deco time warp and 2019 suddenly becomes 1929. The telephones, the uniforms, the architecture and the music all speak of a bygone era of carefree fun, with a capital F.

"A glass of champagne, sir," says Gary the cocktail barman, even as my Tesco cabin case is being whisked up to my suite. Previous guests have included The Beatles, Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson, Winston Churchill and Noël Coward.

It would have been churlish to say no so I sit in the Palm Court cocktail lounge and gaze up at the stained glass cupola, the panorama windows and the sweep of the sleek chrome and ebony bar. It is like being on board the Queen Mary.



Road trip Plugged into the past

In the background Noël Coward sings, and then George Formby warbles something about a little stick of Blackpool rock. A Bakelite telephone rings and a man in gloves answers it.

I will now crunch the narrative syncromesh a little and go back to the journey, which started in Bath, where the car was delivered. I was there visiting dear friends, and on this occasion my favourite bookshop, Topping & Company, were hosting a book launch by former England and Bath fly-half Stuart Barnes. It was a predictably lively event and the Bath Barrel, as he is known locally, gives a literate and vivid account of a life immersed in rugby with *Sketches from Memory*.

I went back to No. 15 Great Pulteney, my favourite bolthole in this great city. This is a fairly new boutique hotel in a warren of

higgledy-piggledy Georgian rooms tucked behind a handsome stone exterior. Ana and the kids had stayed in to pack as they were heading back to Cannes in the morning, but now was time for dinner at the hotel's Dispensary restaurant (indeed it once was a dispensary and could now pass as a museum serving food). The building invited a quick session of hide-and-seek, discreetly conducted under the noses of cocktail drinkers and diners. We concurred the breakfast in this arty hotel was on a par with the toothsome dinner: jolly good.

The kids adored the stealth and speed of the Kona and after I'd put them on a plane at Bristol I took the back roads down to Devon, going via Bradford-on-Avon and stopping in the historic market town of Frome, in deepest Somerset, for a second breakfast (I am writing this from a fat farm in the Alps, but that story is for another day).

And the car? Pretty much love at first sight. Not for nothing is it car of the year in Spain and North America. For a start it will do nearly 300 miles on a full charge. The last EV I tested made bold claims but in practise struggled to manage 120 miles. The Hyundai does what it says on the tin, with the new bigger 125,000-mile 64kWh battery.

It's also pretty quick – 0-60 in 7.4 seconds – and packs 201bhp, the most powerful electric car until you reach the Jaguar I-Pace, for which you have to pay £22k more than the £38k for this top of the range Kona. I had previously been testing a Fiesta ST, the boy-racer's pocket rocket, and the Kona was almost as quick. Being electric there is no

DRIVE FACTS

MAKE: Hyundai
MODEL: Kona Electric Premium SE
HOW MUCH: £38,645
HOW FAST: 104mph
0-60MPH: 7.4 seconds
ECONOMY: 33.6-39.2mpg
EMISSIONS: Zero (indirect emissions 21g/km according to New Green Car guide)
CHARGING TIME: 75 minutes for rapid charge (80%); 6 hours 10 minutes with a home charging station.

TRAVEL FACTS

ACCOMMODATION:
 Burgh Island hotel, Bigbury-on-Sea, Kingsbridge TQ7 4BG, Devon.
 Tel: 01548 810514. www.burghisland.com.
 From £165. D, B&B from £265 for two.
 No 15 Great Pulteney, 15 Great Pulteney Street, Bath BA2 4BR. Tel: 01225 800822. www.no15greatpulteney.co.uk. From £125.
SHOPPING: Royal Marines Shop, The Hollington Centre, Royal Marines Barracks, Durnford St, Plymouth PL1 3QS. Tel: 01752 267249. Online shop: royalmarinestop.com



Clockwise from above: The tide recedes, revealing the sandy causeway to Burgh Island; guests relax in the hotel's Palm Court; the hotel's natural pool (unheated); the 50-year-old sea tractor gets ready for action

gear change and maximum torque is instant.

Also, when you take your foot off the accelerator it slows quickly so that the regenerative breaks can garner maximum energy to pump back into the battery. It's a bit like driving a fairground dodgem, though you can't really get away with using just one pedal, as with the Nissan Leaf. Not on West Country lanes.

Some claim to have done 300 miles on a charge though I was getting closer to 250. But this is enough for one to be able to tackle serious journeys. I downloaded a couple of Apps and found myself able to keep well ahead of the game (and how helpful folk can be when you're making a hash of the recharge). At least three charge points refused to take any payment, owing to technical faults (thank you ecotricity) so I was able to drive the car for 1000 miles at zero cost.

Back at Burgh Island it is the black tie dinner in the Grand Ballroom. The hotel has found me a jacket and has sent out for trousers which we turn up with a couple

of safety pins, but the trousers fail to hide the brown shoes. Pre-dinner drinks in Palm Court are enlivened by Gary's hilarious banter. He looks like a moonlighting particle physicist, but he mixes a suave Martini. Pan-fried scallops and Dover sole, all locally sourced by chef Tim Hall, are first rate.

The following morning I drive onto Dartmoor to have coffee with Lee Spencer, who earlier this year smashed the world record for rowing singlehanded across the Atlantic, despite only having one leg. I had interviewed the retired Royal Marine by phone and was curious to meet him since I was in the area. What's your next adventure, I ask. "Probably going to kayak the Amazon," he replies nonchalantly.

On my way back to the island I stop in Plymouth, at the Royal Marines gift shop, to buy some presents for Pierre-Marie and Alexandra and get a RM cycle top for myself. Profits go to the regiment and anything to help the likes of Lee is fine by me. And I plead not guilty to Walter Mitty accusations: no one could mistake me for

a retired Commando. As I recross the tidal sands I notice that the hotel is shaped like a cruise ship. It could have been built by Cunard. I stop and have a pint in the Pichard Inn, the hotel's ancient pub, before dining in the Captain's Cabin (no black tie tonight). This is literally the captain's cabin from HMS Ganges, an 84-gun second-rate ship of the line. The Ganges was the Royal Navy's last flagship and was built from teak at the Bombay dockyard in 1821.

There are worse places to be I muse, as the sommelier tops up my glass.



New hybrid versions for getting from A to B

MERCEDES has unveiled plug-in hybrid versions of its A and B Class models. Badged A250e and B250e, the pair use the same 1.3-litre four-cylinder petrol engine linked to a 75kW electric motor and 15.6kWh lithium-ion battery pack. Driven through an eight-speed automatic transmission, the powertrain develops 215bhp. Despite the compact engine, the A250e will reach 60mph in 6.4 seconds, topping out at 146mph.

In terms of all-electric range, Mercedes

The Mercedes A Class and B Class now come as plug-in hybrids



claims the A Class will cover between 37 and 42 miles before all of the charge is depleted. It also claims the A250e will return up to 188.3mpg combined, with CO2 emissions between 33-34g/km. A saloon version will also be available.

The B Class has a 0-60mph of 6.6 seconds and all-electric range of between 35 and 42 miles. Economy-wise, the B Class should return 176.5mpg and emit 32-36g/km CO2.

Prices for the A250e start at £32,500 and £33,700 for the B250e.