

River Cottage

Ford Corsair 1700 Deluxe (Crayford Convertible)

Ever wondered what came of the red convertible Corsair (reg no. KUV 933 D) on Channel 4's River Cottage with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall? Some chap in North Dorset won it, after it was 'raffled' at the end of the channel 4 series 'Escape to River Cottage'. In mid-March 2000 the car was delivered to the lucky recipient who promptly wheeled their MkII Capri out of the garage and onto the lawn to make way for the Corsair.

So what was it like because it looked quite good on TV? Well, there is a moment in the series that shows 4 burley blokes piled in to the back of the Corsair bumping their way across a field. Upon delivery, much of that field was found on the underside and in the wheel arches of the car. The boot was littered with straw bale remains and when the cooling system was later inspected it was thought that the river from River Cottage had flowed through the radiator at some point as there was quite a lot of debris and sediment present. The interior had suffered from the damp as the door panels were badly warped and just about clinging on, the window winding mechanisms jolted the glass down at six inch intervals, heater controls stuck on hot and the radio didn't work! Generally the car looked good.....from twenty foot!

On its first trip out in March 2000 (a round trip to Salisbury of forty miles) the car got many admiring glances especially when other motorists slowed down as they overtook on the dual carriageway (A303) to have a longer look. It was after this first trip that it was found the Corsair ran hot but seeing as the temperature gauge didn't work it didn't worry the driver too much, who just flicked on the electric fan! The car got back to its new home safely and then the overheating investigation began. After a tablespoon (literally) of grit was flushed from the cooling system it was thought the problem was cured.

The Corsair pottered around local to home, no major problems except still running on the hot side. June 2000; the next major journey was a fifty-mile trip to a car show near Bridgwater in Somerset. At eight in the morning when the weather was quite cool, the car just made it to the show site without boiling over. The trip home was slower with a stop half way for forty-five minutes to allow the Corsair to cool sufficiently to carry on, as it turned out to be a very hot day! Further investigation into the cooling system malfunction proved fruitless, however, another radiator and engine block back flush was done for piece of mind. It was around this

time that the window winding mechanisms were fixed, and would one believe Crayford used modified Triumph Sptifire items! Good second-hand parts were not cheap, from a Triumph specialist in Bournemouth, so care had to be exercised cutting and lengthening the Sptifire items.

The next trip was the Corsair Owners' Club rally at Billing and a long weekend treat for the Corsair. Saturday morning and seventy-eight miles into the trip, the engine was starting to hum (audibly). So a rest break at some services near Didcot (A34) allowed the Corsair to boil over properly in front of an inquisitive gathering of people. An hour later and topped up with water it was on the road again, this time for about forty miles before having another rest and giving the driver time to unwind. Only thirty-odd miles to go to the farmhouse B&B in Bugbrooke and the final leg was completed. Once at the bed and breakfast, the Corsair was allowed to snuggle in one of the B&B's agriculture machinery sheds for security, safety and dryness and just as well, because it bucketed down with rain that night.

Apart from arriving an hour before the show was due to start, the Sunday morning trip to Billing Aquadrome (Northampton) went without hitch. The Corsair was directed to park up in a line of about nine other Crayford convertibles of which nearly equalled the number of 2000Es on display. The previous-previous owner (Nick Hunt) soon made a be-line for the car and inspected the Corsair to see how it had fared in the hands of the TV Company and Hugh F-W. The show was found to be friendly and relaxing with the weather being kind to all in attendance. The Corsair enjoyed its celebrity status and went back to the B&B via the 'wrong turning & long x-country drive' route, thank goodness for impressive navigational skills from the driver's wife.

Homeward bound on the Monday began after the morning rush hour, so, the Corsair could enjoy a leisurely journey home. After a couple of planned stops to help the cooling system calm down the towel was finally thrown in when it reached the same services as on the way up. It was thought that the head gasket had blown as water was bubbling around all the nuts and bolts on the inlet manifold and gushing out of the radiator over flow. For the last 78 miles, the Corsair had a lift on the back of a rescue truck, it was surely the quickest way home.

The ensuing autumn months saw the 1700 V4 being dismantled for an investigation into the 'blown' head gaskets. Luckily, at the Rally in Northampton a head gasket set had been purchased among other items that would go towards the engine service. With the heads off,

no clues could be found to the serious over-heating problems and over the period of a year, the car was put back together with the owner being none the wiser.

Come March 2002 and the Corsair was being resurrected from its 18th month lay-up in the garage. A faulty battery delayed re-hab for a while until a local garage where called upon to solve the starting headache, at which point they were also given the task of getting the car through an MOT. Seized callipers and brake cylinders were the main failures, otherwise all was sound.

The first trip out, since being laid up, was in June to a local gathering only about five miles from home. The Corsair only just made it, the choke having to be pulled out to help ease the sudden lumpiness and backfire through the carburettor for the last half-mile. The trip home was similar but it was expected that time and also ran quite hot. The carburettor was soon 'ear' tuned and it revved a lot more smoothly once warm/hot, however, trips throughout the summer of 2002 never covered more than about six miles because since the engine 'service' it ran even hotter than before. It has been suggested there is an air lock in the system, probably around the heater matrix and a possible solution would be to bypass it. Suffice to say, lack of time had caused this problem to be left and a few local trips and joyrides were enjoyed throughout the rest of the summer before the Corsair was put away in September.

Since October 2002, the Corsair has been unused due to a new arrival in the family in the way of a baby boy called Daniel who, as one would hope, could one day inherit the Ford Corsair Crayford Convertible from that Channel four TV programme 'River Cottage'. Channel four

Dominic Coleman

Husband/Father/Owner/Driver