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Harken back to a time when driving was an experience, not just a means of transportation, with an old classic like this 1940 Alfa Romeo 6C 2500 SS

By: Matthew DeBord

Reacquaint yourself with the road on a leisurely drive through rolling colonial farm country

Driving is funny. It's not that most people intrinsically dislike it, it's just that, for many, the once invigorating experience of getting behind the wheel has been transformed into a means of getting from A to B while isolating the driver from the "tangibles": warm and cold, sunshine and clouds, wind and road noise, and so on. It doesn't matter what you do for a living, where you live, or what your ride: There are times when you need to be reminded of what driving is all about.

And for those kinds of outings, vintage is best. There are plenty of contemporary roadsters on the market, produced by the likes of Porsche, Mercedes, Audi, and Lexus, but in order to understand the spirit of the vehicle, you've got to go old school: MGB or Triumph from the 1950s, '60s, or '70s. (And it's possible to go back further, but the beauty of British roadsters from these eras is that enough were produced and sold in the U.S. that you can find well-preserved, mechanically sound, low-mileage examples through agents and collectors, or even on auction sites such as eBay

Motors.)

Once you've had the roadster experience, you begin to seek it out, and one of the best roadstering routes, particularly in springtime, is the area in and around Charlottesville, Virginia. This is old-school roadster country. A driver is confronted not with winding, twisting mountain roads, or with a dramatic ocean coastline, but instead with lots of undulating country back roads that wend past small towns, farms, and vineyards. Better still, this trip requires no advance planning. Sports Car Rentals in Batesville maintains a small fleet of impeccably preserved Alfa Romeos, Triumphs, and MGBs, each of which can be borrowed for \$210 per weekend.

Start in Charlottesville itself. Just a hundred miles south of Washington, D.C., and with a metro population of just under two hundred thousand, it is to many the ideal small city, and its chief attractions are the University of Virginia and Monticello. Today UNESCO World Heritage sites, both were based on the vision of one man: Thomas Jefferson, the third president and author of the Declaration of Independence. Charlottesville, which was founded in the mid-1700s, prior to the American Revolution, was named for Queen Charlotte, the wife of King George III, who would lock horns with Jefferson and his views on liberty by the end of the century. Perhaps fittingly, the city operates autonomously from the surrounding counties.



Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello, is the anchor of the Charlottesville historic area, which is filled with horse farms and wineries, making it perfect for a scenic drive

Jefferson's great works in Charlottesville define an agrarian-aristocratic strain in American culture. At the center of this is the university, founded by Jefferson in 1819. Like Jefferson's nearby residence, Monticello, the UVA campus is architecturally significant, a carefully planned example of the neoclassic style, with the requisite white columns, pediments, and Palladian windows set against reddish brown brick. Despite its youthful population, when it comes to fashion Charlottesville draws on its heritage: it's one of the last bastions of truly classic American dress, where the de facto uniform for men is khakis, loafers, a navy blue blazer—and on football weekends a UVA necktie.



Founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1819, the University of Virginia is the only college in the United States to be designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site

You can motor over to the campus and take in the founding father's architectural vision, or you can set your sights on Monticello, a short crosstown drive on the Jefferson Parkway, for a more focused example. Constructed in 1772, Monticello is perhaps the most famous private residence in the United States, today a monument and museum to the man and his times. Jefferson was what we refer to nowadays as a Renaissance man: In addition to statecraft and education, he was preoccupied with architecture, and Monticello was his laboratory, expanded and revised over his lifetime. Visitors can't actually stay at the manse, but they can relax a stone's throw away at Keswick Hall, a luxurious Orient Express hotel that also boasts a spa and golf course.



In close proximity to Monticello and the University of Virginia, Keswick Hall is an impressive mansion that makes for a good base for exploring the region

One of Jefferson's many passions was wine. He struggled to bring to the Piedmont plateau the style of viticulture he had seen in Europe as U.S. minister to France. Virginia isn't ideal winemaking country—it lacks the hot days and cool nights that distinguish California, and summer humidity can be a serious problem. But a thriving regional wine

industry has emerged in the past few decades in the commonwealth, centered around Barboursville Vineyards.

A short jaunt north on Route 20, Barboursville Vineyards is located on land that once belonged to Jefferson's friend James Barbour, who served as Virginia's governor (for Barbour, Jefferson designed a house whose ruins remain on the winery's grounds). Founded in the mid-1970s by the Italian wine company Zonin, it is today led by the vintner Luca Paschina. The talented winemaker may even show you around the vineyards and walk you through the cellars himself (just be sure to call ahead and ask, as Barboursville also offers regular tours).



Barboursville Vineyards' specialty is its Octagon red wine, named after the estate's original Jefferson-designed octagonal house

Barboursville also operates the 1804 Inn, a modest collection of cottages and suites that provide year-round accommodations (although busiest during the grape harvest season, between August and November). Before retiring to your room for the night, book a reservation at the winery's restaurant, Palladio, where the cuisine is customized to pair well with the cabernets, chardonnays, and viogniers that Paschina creates. Order the buckwheat gnocci with thyme cream, grated nutmeg, and crispy pancetta, and raise a class of the 2006 Barbera Reserve—the first time you've been happy not to drive in days.

Matthew DeBord is a writer based in Los Angeles. He covers the auto industry for Slate's Big Money and has contributed to the Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post, the Daily Beast, and the Huffington Post.