

# VENICE SOS

Saving a city's treasures from the sea





# Mobee trick

Making use of eco-friendly interactive car-sharing scheme Mobee, **Tristan Rutherford** enjoys a silent, emissions-free jaunt along the Cote d'Azur from Nice to Monaco



The coast road from Nice to Monaco is one of the world's most glamorous drives

A wealth of eco-chic vehicle options greets arrivals at Nice airport. There's Auto Bleue, the city's electric car-share scheme, which is centred around a silent fleet of Peugeot iOns. Or Vélo Bleu, bikes bookable by smartphone, which can then be pedalled on a dedicated cycleway all the way to Cannes.

But my own steed is far more newsworthy. Last summer the Principality of Monaco launched Mobee, an interactive car-share scheme based around the Renault Twizy. Thanks to a relationship with the Fairmont Hotel, these silent two-person 'cars' can be reserved by casual visitors, then picked up from anywhere on the Cote d'Azur – including Nice airport.

On the coast road to Monte Carlo I turn more heads than a Ferrari. Top marques are two a penny on the Côte d'Azur, but my Twizy elicits waves of genuine interest along Nice's seaside Promenade des Anglais. If it was summer I would be able to smell the Ambre Solaire from the 5km public beach below as the car is totally open. And as it's 100% silent I hold two conversations with scooter drivers as the traffic bumbles through Nice's historic port towards the yacht-dotted gulf of Villefranche.

With a top speed of 80km/h – the de facto limit on this seaside strip – my Twizy is also speedier than a supercar. This I prove by edging past an Aston Martin at Cap Ferrat – the world's most expensive piece of land, some would say. And yes, I gestured to its driver with a wink and a wave. He was not best pleased.

My last stop before Monaco is the beach the Monegasques like to keep to themselves. In summer Mala Beach on Cap d'Ail boasts two beach clubs, one mineral water source that turns the sea into Evian, and almost zero bikini tops. But it's reached by a winding one-way road with a turning circle suitable for scooters only. Blinged-up locals tend to arrive by boat. Problem solved as I park – like a Smart car – bumper-in between two giant SUVs. Glad I'm not paying for petrol for those two.

I meet Mobee boss Nicolas Buteau outside the Fairmont Monte Carlo hotel to get the inside track on my electric dream. "There are two

aspects to our electric car-share scheme," he explains. "First is for visitors to Monaco who can book a Twizy via the Fairmont. Second is for those who live or work in the Principality."

He pulls out his iPhone to demonstrate the latter. Drivers are guided to available cars parked within walking distance via an

interactive map. Uniquely, users purchase monthly pay-as-you-go minutes to use on Monaco's electric fleet. All price brackets work out cheaper than servicing a car or filling it with petrol. Or, heaven forbid, paying for a parking space where real estate prices average €40,000 per square metre.

For a true taste of Monaco, Buteau suggests I follow the Grand Prix circuit. I turn right onto Avenue de Spélugues with its famed Fairmont hairpin corner. This corkscrew descent forms the narrowest section of the Formula One track. Then it's right again into the infamous tunnel that

**"On the coast road to Monte Carlo I turn more heads than a Ferrari"**



burrows beneath the Fairmont Monte Carlo. The fastest part of the circuit has befuddled drivers for decades as they emerge into the sunlit Port of Monaco.

Italian ace Alberto Ascari drove straight into the drink here in 1955. Ayrton Senna skidded off in 1988. In May this same street circuit will host the inaugural Monaco Formula E Grand Prix. These all-electric racing cars driven by the likes of Bruno Senna (son of Ayrton) and Katherine Legge will reach speeds of 225km/h on this very stretch of road.

Other eco transport projects ring the port. The stand of electric shared bikes was unveiled in 2013. (Residents of the world's richest nation evidently prefer an electric push while they pedal). I hit the reverse button and park the Twizy under Norman Foster's spectacular new Yacht Club de Monaco, a ship-shaped edifice that opened last September. Here the solar powered Bateau-Bus ferries passengers to the palace quay for €2 a ride. The superyachts bobbing in the port cost more like €2m per metre. Here you can glimpse Chelsea owner/Russian oligarch Roman



**//SPEC**

Renault Twizy

**Performance**

Nippy in traffic and the inner city. Not built for the open road

**Engine**

Electric motor, power ranges from 4kW (5hp) to 13kW (17hp)

**Top speed/acceleration**

80km/h; 0-45 km/h: 6 seconds

**Price**

From €7,000

Abramovich's pleasure cruiser *Eclipse*, an incredible 163m long.

But for the finest panorama – the hanging gardens of the Jardin Botanique – I must deviate from the F1 circuit. I wait patiently for a cluster of tourists to move out of my way en route. Silence is arguably the Twizy's one disadvantage, but I have an electric beep horn to alert pedestrians to my presence. Then I promptly get lost. An occupational hazard in this city-state of 2km<sup>2</sup>. Tempers would usually be frayed as I finally rollercoaster uphill but the calm demeanour of the Twizy keeps me cool.

There's no parking stress either. While other vehicles queue for tickets at the Jardin Botanique parking lot, the barriers recognise my car registration plate and it's open sesame. I then park at a dedicated Mobee booth and, using the cord under the bonnet, plug my car in like an iPhone. The Twizy's range is 100km. That's enough mileage for a non-stop to St Tropez or a sojourn in San Remo. My journey isn't over yet.

