

Riding the Continent

By Derek Brown

My sister Margaret did me a huge favour in 1979 – she moved to Germany!

It's not what you think, honest, her husband had been posted to a USAF base in Bitburg, near Luxembourg; them being "over there" gave me the push that I needed to get on my bike and off to the continent, something that my wife Jackie and I have been doing ever since. Once you can get over the anxiety of riding on the wrong side of the road, with endless roads to travel, it is the most thrilling and enjoyable experience going.



After a considerable break whilst my daughters came into the world and took over events, like they do, I was able to persuade Jackie that she would be fine on a tour to Austria. I had been looking at a World of BMW brochure and this one had caught my eye. We would get thorough route information, travel at our own pace and have decent accommodation once at our destination. We learnt a lot on that tour. We didn't have a sat-nav then, we got one before the next trip! 250 plus miles might be easy on a motorway in a day but on A and B roads whilst navigating it can be hard work. And we learnt how to pack for regular hotel stops and how to use luggage

liners too, a real bonus when your hotel room feels like it's a bus ride from the entrance lobby. We have subsequently enjoyed many more continental trips together – to Alsace, Norway, the Czech Republic and Spain (all with BMW) to Croatia with Ride with us and to Slovenia with MSL tours

Last year I rode with OMC members on a Bike Normandy holiday based at owners John and Jen Eggleton's home from which they conduct ride outs on the superb local roads. Such a good time was had that Kirsty and Steve Eaton booked a trip to the Black forest with Bike Normandy this year and kindly invited me and other OMC members to join them.

I was slightly concerned before this trip because I didn't think it was likely that the same level of preparation could be achieved so far away from the Eggleton's base. Knowing your own roads is one thing, knowing the roads nearly 1000 miles away is quite another.

I needn't have worried; John and Jen's preparation for this trip was superb. Every step of the way appeared to be planned. They employ the drop off marking system to route mark the way from the hotel after breakfast, to the fuels stops, the coffee and lunch breaks and right up to the next hotel front door. Overtaking is permitted provided it is done with consideration and I don't think there were any issues on that front. It did mean that for the majority of the time you are able to make progress at your own speed. The system worked very well the whole week, not a single wrong turn as far as I am aware.

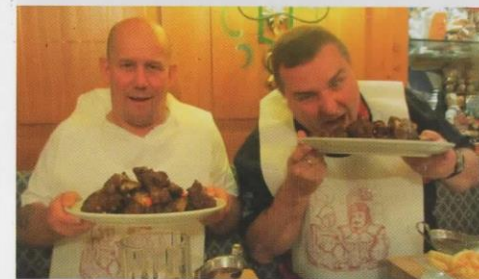
What wasn't planned was John falling off his garage roof and breaking both ankles at the beginning of the year! This meant that Jen led the whole tour (a serious amount of work and responsibility) whilst their

friends John and Rita took on the role of tail end Charlie leaving John to swan around in the back up van with driver Tim! I had been a bit anti back up van but having packed enough for a fortnight I weakened and stuck my excessive luggage in the van along with everyone else's...

Some of the hotels we stayed at were not quite as good as the riding, adequate rather than stunning but the price paid for the holiday reflected that too so that is an observation rather than a criticism. What stands out for me is that I don't think I have enjoyed a trip to the continent as much as I did this one. At every stop there was good company to enjoy and in the evening no shortage of people to socialise with over a beer and a meal.

John and Jen's route finding was superb; there was perhaps 150 miles of motorway the whole trip and there were rather a lot of villages at the end of day two but there were miles and miles and miles of glorious open roads, twisting mountain passes and empty rural roads to enjoy – excellent. To find yourself number 2 behind Jen as ten miles of curving country roads beckon is the stuff of dreams, fantastic. Being dropped off at the next junction though is crushing; it's like being put on the naughty step at play school!

I can highly recommend a holiday with Bike Normandy, it's about as stress free as any motorcycle event could possibly be; you'll love it.



Welcome drinks at Baden Baden.