

Bike Normandy

Ian Kerr discovers Normandy isn't flat and boring after all with great roads, great foods and fascinating WW2 history and . . . it isn't far away

I am the first to confess that Normandy in France has always just been an area of France that I blast through without stopping. Flat and boring has been my assessment.

Thanks to John and Jeanette Eggleton I have discovered some of the local history and some of the best motorcycling roads anywhere.

The British couple started Bike Normandy after searching for good motorcycling roads with few cameras. Bike Normandy was formed.

Le Champ Massé, just two hours from most ports, offers stunning views from the side of "Hill 262" part of the Falaise Gap, which was the scene of World War II battles.

The old farmhouse offers five double en-suite rooms. John added a games room, gym, drying room and somewhere to brew his own cider. A large cow shed provides secure and dry bike parking outside, separate to the bike workshop!

Bike Normandy has teamed up with national standard guides to offer off-road weekends in the Pays d'Auge and Suisse Normande areas close by as well.

Riders get themselves to one of the ferry ports where they are picked up and start the first day's ride, ending back at their base with a four course meal.

Day two is out and about after

breakfast ending up back at base for yet another massive meal (all meals include drinks!) before the final day ends back at the port. They now run some long excursions to other areas of Europe also.

I booked a night sailing from Portsmouth to Caen on Brittany Ferries, arranged with a fast crossing back from Cherbourg to maximise my time in France.

I booked a Suzuki 1250 GT Bandit complete with luggage as value for money the GT at £7149.00 including VAT.

John and Jeanette introduced me to a side of Normandy I had never met before,

John and Jeanette introduced me to a side of Normandy I had never met before, that of hills, valleys and sweeping constant radius bends



that of hills, valleys and sweeping constant radius bends. The pace was swift and enjoyable as John quickly gauged my abilities based on his time as an IAM observer, but after an hour and half we stopped for lunch in a small café they use regularly.

Having eaten and looked around the historic town we headed off for more smooth empty roads. A drop-off riding system is used with large groups so that nobody is put under pressure to ride faster than they feel comfortable. However, they do try as far as possible to get groups of similar riding ability beforehand and the pace is adjusted accordingly.

Likewise on the safety front, stops come around every hour to hour and a half to combat tiredness as the routes are all chosen to make sure the tyres get even wear all around the carcass and not just down the centre!

Certainly the Bandit was proving to be well up to the task, even with fully loaded panniers and top box and John commented that the former were often quite close to the tarmac at times.

Despite such open flowing roads, speed limits are rigidly adhered to in villages and towns so as not to upset the locals and attract attention and people with loud pipes are always asked to ride accordingly.

The last stop of day one for me after looking at the stunning Chateau d'O was a small chateau that was the site of the first French erotic movie and one regularly leased by film star Johnny Depp, before being introduced to "Le Champ Massé". John had previously shown me pictures of the views from the house, but good though they were, they had not done their home justice, neither had his description of the accommodation and facilities, which are excellent to say the least.

I have also to say the standard of food was well on a par with a Michelin rated restaurant and it is even more amazing given that both John and Jeanette had been out all day riding!

After a restful night the next day saw us

The ROAD July/Aug 37



head out for a tour of the beaches and some of the historical sites. The Bandit was now devoid of panniers, but the reality was that apart from the lack of width, it made little difference to the grumpy 1255cc motor, the bike's handling, or its petrol consumption despite being regularly run up and down its razor sharp, six-speed gearbox.

As a result of running these trips for eight years John is now a highly accomplished tour guide and his knowledge of the important sites is excellent. So, we started at Pegasus Bridge which crosses the Caen Canal at Benouville, this being the only bridge that the allies kept open to allow troops to cross on D-Day in 1944.

The original bridge is preserved in a museum next to the point where the new bridge carries traffic and this includes full scale mock-up of one of the Horsa gliders that made capture possible.

From here we continued to the seaside town of Arromanches to see the remains of the floating harbour that was towed from Blyth to give our brave boys a fighting chance as they came up the beaches. There is a 360 degree museum here which gives a true insight into the horrors of war.

After lunch we went back up to the cliffs to inspect some of the remaining guns that formed part of the coastal defences, before heading down to the American Cemetery behind the Omaha beach where the American landings took place.

Despite there being plenty of tourist signs directing you, I was grateful for

John's routes that avoided the delays caused by normal tourists. The Bandit was definitely proving to be the ideal choice even in the odd pockets of traffic we came across where its well-balanced nature made even filtering a pleasure.

The US cemetery with its perfect lines (in any direction) of 10,000 white crosses, along with the historical explanation of what went on has got to be one of the most sobering sights anywhere in the world. The sound of the single bugle was poignant to say the very least and maybe places like this should be compulsory viewing for every school child in Europe to

prevent it ever happening again!

As we sat in a quiet coffee shop discussing what we had seen, John was at pains to point out that on this three day trip there is no set agenda or locations and routes can be varied according to client's wishes, port of arrival and even weather.

From there it was back to base and after a hot shower in the well appointed accommodation, it was yet another four course meal.

The last day saw a slight improvement in the weather as we used a short stretch of motorway (the only time we did) to reach the very picturesque port of



38 July/Aug The ROAD



Hornfleur where John often meets riders who have used the Le Harve crossing.

This was obviously very popular as the docksides cafes were packed so after a quick coffee in a small backstreet we headed out to follow the river Seine to Vieux Port. Along the winding road could be seen many thatched cottages of the type used to illustrate Normandy architecture in all the tourist brochures.

More excellent roads brought us to a leisurely lunch stop before an afternoon spent on some of the finest biking roads you could wish to find anywhere. After a coffee we parted company leaving me to ponder on the whole positive experience, which I must say is hard to fault.

The Suzuki 1250 GT is also hard to fault as a good all-rounder with a specification that will suit all but those who insist on gadgets and complex technology. Riding back up the motorway from Portsmouth, the only failings I could think off is a lack of an adjustable screen and heated grips, but given the purchase price there would be lots of cash left to have these added for all year round use.

As for Bike Normandy, yes I could have found my way to the various locations we visited after a lot of research, but I doubt that I would have found the best biking roads to get there. I did not have to think about the route at any time I just had to enjoy the ride.

I had a fluent French speaking guide who with historic knowledge to enhance my understanding of what I saw while making fuel and food stops easy.

I enjoyed excellent accommodation and good company and made the maximum use of my time away.

One Bike Normandy customer has been twelve times, just for the ride and I can now appreciate why www.bikenormandy.com



UK & European Cover from just £50

Benefits Include:

- Home Assistance
- Roadside Assistance
- Recovery
- Alternative Travel/Accommodation
- Caravan/Trailers and Sidecars

MAG
the heart & soul of biking

UK & European Breakdown Cover Call 0845 609 0051

join MAG at www.mag-uk.org

Underwritten by Equity Red Star and administered by Equity Red Star Services Limited (an appointed representative of Equity Syndicate Management Limited, which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority) for Equity Direct Broking Limited who are also authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority.
Registered Office: Library House, New Road, Brentwood, Essex CM14 4DD Registered in England No. 2681753 (Equity Red Star Services Ltd) and No. 6710272 (Equity Direct Broking Ltd). Equity Red Star is a member of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme.

are you passionate enough?

The ROAD July/Aug 39