



Image: Courtesy of John Cuthbert

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EVENTS in December

School Day Runs

Normally Friday morning from The Steading. Very much weather dependent and so please check the Facebook page for details.

Please refer to the EDAM Facebook page or website for the latest news about events:

<https://goo.gl/zyVD3q>
<http://www.edam.org.uk>

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Christmas is charging inexorably towards us again. As usual, EDAM and PMC teamed up to take gifts and good cheer to the children at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children (aka RHCYP). The ride was very well attended. To those who braved the cold—thank you!

Speaking of cold; even if Santa does bring you heated grips, jacket, boots and underwear I know the elves haven't yet perfected heated tyres so be careful out there! There's no reason not to ride your bike throughout winter provided you are sensible and read the conditions correctly.

With temperatures approaching zero you can expect that shaded roads and low-lying ground will be colder than the 'advertised' values and so treat these areas with caution. If the conditions deteriorate then stick to main roads and look out for slippery bits. As always, common sense should prevail.

Here's wishing all EDAMers a Merry Christmas and Happy 2018. May all your presents be bike-related.

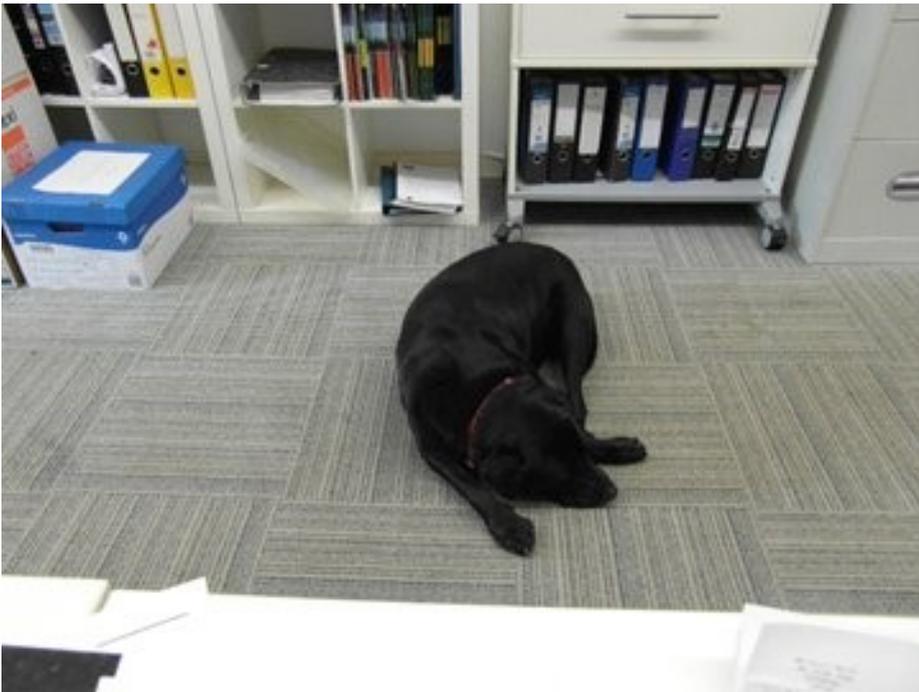
As usual, articles, photos or suggestions on almost any subject can be sent to be at the address below. Why not tell us about those lovely gift your distant relative or granny thought was so appropriate?!

Glynn Jones
 editor@edam.org.uk



Previous PDF issues of TG are available here: <https://goo.gl/y2FcoR>

A WORD FROM THE CHAIR: Frustration by Sandy Dickson



Those are my principles, and if you don't like them... well, I have others – Groucho Marx

If there was such a thing as bank and it was open, there would be no point in going in, they would lose whatever you gave them, several times. Happily, though, most banks have now closed, so it takes all day to find one that is open to allow them to lose the documents you took with you to satisfy their identification procedures. Why do they need to know who I am when it is clear that they do not want to know who I am – who knows & who cares. *I think, therefore I am* no longer applies... computer says no.

I can travel the world on a single form of identification, but I cannot give money to or take money from a bank without two forms of identification (in case I am using someone else's passport). It is possible that I pinched someone else's passport but let's face it, I would have chosen someone better looking. So, whether I will ever become a signatory to the EDAM account, as required, remains to be seen.

I like a bit of bah humbug at this time of year, so here is some more. The City of Edinburgh Council, in their wisdom (for wisdom - see the witness statements and examination of same published on the Trams Inquiry website) have stated that they intend to raise several hundred thousand pounds from us errant motorists who

have the audacity to exceed 20mph & use the odd bus lane (odd being the operative word). Yes, I know I should be using the bike but the Mrs does not like sharing the back of the bike with Mr Fido on the way to her work and it has got a bit icy recently. It is almost possible that I might have strayed into a bus lane outside the Western General. It is not at all clear that this is the case as the evidence points to there being no buses (ever) in said lane (at that time in the morning, at least). If buses do not actually use it, is it actually a bus lane? Similarly, if vehicles cannot use it, is the Queensferry crossing really a crossing or just Fat Eck's folly?

Anyway, we have a mile plus queue whilst everyone waits impatiently to get through the lights at Blackhall but, importantly, keeping the unused bus lane free at all times for imaginary buses.

As I have to cut across towards Colinton, I then pick a further assortment of unused bus lanes, some of which are about 40m long – quite exactly why anyone with an IQ above that of a potato thought these were a good idea escape me.

I suppose the underlying problem is that when I was 16 the Sex Pistols warped my young and impressionable mind with Anarchy in the UK. Additionally, it occurred to me a few years ago, that in the cold light of day, the law is, now all too often, simply some old twaddle that someone made up.

Now I know that is not a very PC view of the world and that to function we need rules and we need the rules enforced. The problem is, the more rules that you do have, the less chance there is of these being enforced. Further, the more bodies you have making up rules, the less sensible the rules become.

London has the wrath of Khan and T charges, congestion charges, parking charges and every other charge known to mankind. Has London become a safer, cleaner, greener place to live?

Electric vehicles are subsidised (by whom? – by the rest of us) they cost little to run (apparently) & the income to HM treasury will plummet if they ever take off (petrol/diesel = tax revenue, whereas electric vehicles = no VED & no fuel tax revenue). That is bound to remain the case – isn't it?

Now remember I said the law is some old twaddle that someone made up? Tax is paid because it is the law & tax law changes all of the time (at every budget) – who knew us old gits getting close to the end of our endowment policies are now expected to pay tax on these? – so much for a surplus and a holiday in the Bahamas) and it is made up by the chancellor – the same chancellor that is continually bleating about budget balancing.

So how is this for a balanced equation: we motorists (who spend a fortune on tax (VED/Fuel/VAT etc) are continually moaning about the poor state of our roads (with some justification). The solution it seems is to subsidise the electric vehicles (not sure where the subsidies are supposed to come from) & thereby reduce VED income to zero and fuel duty also to zero. I also noted that somewhere amongst the zero-carbon agenda is the aim to eliminate carbon fuels from domestic heating systems (apparently my gas boiler will be redundant).

Anyone else think that at some point, in the not too distant future, electricity is going to become awfully expensive (if there is any) with a new 'fuel' duty?

It seems to me that what is driving the lawmakers in this country is the opportunity to raise revenue, not the need to improve safety or the quality of life or even a

plan that has been half thought through. Perhaps I should just get a sidecar & then the Mrs & the Fido can share my biking experience of bus lane heaven free from fines and interference from jobsworths. Now some of you may think that I am very unfair in my criticism of my betters and authority in general. So, consider this, which is in my view a lesson on how very close to the edge things have got. I receive a daily update on current case law related to the various areas that I work in. A recent case caught my eye; it was a 'compensation' case. Before I start, we do need lawyers and we do need compensation but, for events that have happened, should not have happened and arise from a duty of care.

There are two parts to this story. Firstly, this week for four consecutive days every phone extension in our office rang one after the other. The callers were some 'you have had a car accident' wallahs. As a rule, I try not to be rude to people as they have to earn a living but, given the circumstances, I thought I could make an exception and did. It seems to have worked but I can fully appreciate that after a barrage of badgering some people would be tempted to make false and exaggerated claims.

The second part, in light of the first, is a case that has been reported. I am not suggesting this is a false or exaggerated claim, this is a reported and therefore examined and legally satisfied case. A person of a 'nervous disposition' (my description) was trapped in a lift for exactly 4 minutes and 35 seconds, according to the report. The case makes no mention of duty of care, failure to maintain the lift or any of the other expected issues that would arise in such a case. An award of about £25K was obtained.

We should all worry about such a case. Imagine the fear and alarm that the Santa ride-out to the Sick Kids causes to those who have a genuine fear of motorbikes. A fear of groups of motorcyclists is not that irrational given some of the antics of certain types of riders. But do we owe those of a nervous disposition a duty of care? And now, do we need to?

Whilst I am on my high horse, our chums at BRAKE are at it again. They have, with the help of TRL, produced an animated cartoon that identifies two areas of road

safety (in order to make us go slower and/or stick to the speed limits). Firstly, more speed equals greater kinetic energy and hence greater damage when you hit something or are hit by something – something that was explained to me when I was spotty schoolboy. The second revelation was that as a result of the first, there is no safe speed at which to hit anything/anyone. We should all stick to the speed limits as these of course make you safe. Apparently, the only safe speed is to be stationary. I think this concept will revolutionise both road safety and modern transport systems – they will not take you anywhere (absolute safety) you will use no fuel (absolutely green) you can never be at risk of prosecution and it will affect cyclists (and horse riders) equally (fairness personified). The savings to the treasury will be significant – none of the alleged millions arising from road accidents will be incurred – I commend this idea to the house.

Next year they are going to rename their organisation NONEEDTOBRAKE.

Question: the emergency services are permitted to run around at high speed under blue light conditions – this is clearly a breach of HSE employment practices - putting employees lives unnecessarily at risk in carrying out their duties. The excuse is: they are trained; hence they are safe – is that not the point?

Have a great Christmas & New Year, well done to all the Observers and Associates for their good work this year. Stay tuned for more madness (clearly thought out policies) next year.

The Demise of MotoScotland

by Sandy Dickson

I was saddened to read that MotoScotland is coming to an end on 31st December. I have no idea why this is the case or what has gone on. It is a fact of life that businesses fail every day for a whole host of reasons (unfortunately Ian Murray motorcycles has also fallen by the wayside).

Many of our members have had the opportunity to have many excellent days training at Clive's off-road school and many of the

skills that he taught were a bit of a revelation to mere road riders. The school won many accolades for its contribution to motorcycle safety and these were well deserved.

It is a pity that Scotland has been unable to maintain such a facility, whether this was through personal choice, actions of landowners/insurers/banks and the like, we may never know.

My advice is, if you are thinking of doing something to improve your skills, get on and do it, as the opportunity may not be around forever.

I wish Clive his family & team the best of luck in whatever the future hold for them, it was privilege to see Dave McC try to climb a tree on a motorbike.

Cornering by Dave McCutcheon

At the first of the winter's classroom sessions we had an excellent turn out for the cornering session. Unfortunately, it was a long session. Our fault, but everyone could see there were lots of talking points. Something which could have run on into two sessions. I am first to admit I must work at corners. Some days I can be good and others not so. I often carry a pillion and am used to hearing in my ear, the occasional "that was not very good".

Sandy Dickson pointed out you must work at your technique and once you have worked hard then you can play. Another good point Sandy made was when the bike doesn't feel good, the road doesn't feel good and neither do you - then ease off. It happens. How many don't Sandy said and end up in the greenery.

I was pleased to hear from many people that they saw something on the videos or heard something from Sandy's talk which made them think. The 7 people who contacted me commented on different points which was excellent. It would appear they got something new from the session.

We had one of the examiners there and on que he made excellent points about what he saw and heard.



BLOOD BIKES SCOTLAND by John Baxter



bikes and sit very well with our other bikes as we grow the charity. The scooter is a very interesting and exciting addition. It does not make loud engine and exhaust noise, I know that, but as a vehicle for in and around the city of Edinburgh where we do most of our work, with zero emissions and low running costs it makes perfect sense. Also on the plus side, it can outpace pretty much anything else on 2 or 4 wheels to 60 mph where allowed and if required!

We have had an amazing year on many fronts and some of the highlights include in addition to the Morrisons grant include:

- The charity's valuable contribution to the local Lothian NHS has been recognised as one of three finalists in the NHS Celebrating Success Awards for Volunteer of the year.
- We have abseiled as a team of 15 with our NHS Flow Centre partners from the Forth Rail Bridge in October
- Direct donation from the CEO of NHS Lothian on hearing of the great work we do supporting the NHS
- Walked the new Queensferry Crossing by invite on the opening parades
- We have increased membership of riders, controllers and supporters by 50% to just under 60 volunteers and growing every week.

A little bit of an introduction and background to Blood Bikes Scotland. We are a Blood Bike Charity established in 2013 (Scottish Charity Number SC042970) and run under the National Association of Blood Bikes (NABB). We provide an out-of-hours, free, urgent courier service to Lothian and Borders NHS Hospitals and Trusts. We hope to expand the service into Fife region during 2018. The charity, which receives no funding from the NHS and is totally dependent on charitable donations, is staffed by unpaid volunteers who offer their time to provide a reliable and professional transportation service to the NHS.

man retiring from the role in March, I took over Chairmanship in April 2017. One of my first roles was to look at the fleet and the workload and, with the limited funds available, we purchased a wee Honda Deauville in April to supplement our ageing fleet. At that time, we had a team of around 25 volunteers between Borders and Lothian.

Fast forward to the end of 2017 and it's been an amazing year. Thanks to a Morrisons Foundation Grant and support from Joe Philipsz at Motorrad BMW Dalkeith, we also now own an BMW RT1200 and a CEVO Electric scooter. Both are fantastic

Outside of normal office hours, when the NHS internal courier service is not available, hospitals rely on taxis or couriers to transfer urgent medical supplies or test samples between hospitals and other sites. Blood Bike groups across the country seek to carry out this service free of charge, ensuring the limited resources of the NHS can be used where it best makes a difference.

I started with the charity in December 2016 as a volunteer rider. The Borders service was already up and established due to the hard work and commitment of the groups founders Ron Spalding, Steve Quintus and Brian Fraser. In December 2016 the charity ran a Honda Pan European 1300 (Linda) in the Borders and another Honda Pan 1300 (Katie) and a Honda ST 1100 in Lothians. With the previous Chair-



- We performed marshalling duties at the Ken Laidlaw cycling event in the Border

We have also been very busy on the fundraising front. Every penny we raise goes into the running of the charity. We have had fantastic support from the team, business and the local communities. Some of the highlights here include:

- IKEA Straiton
- Tesco Galashiels, Bathgate and South Queensferry
- Dobbies Lasswade
- Virgin Money Lounge in St Andrews Square
- RAM Tracker donated 5 tracking devices to the group to allow planning and scheduling of bikes and riders.

We have also been amazed with support and donations from people doing Pedal for Scotland and the Edinburgh Kilt Walk on our behalf. And humbled when donations from funerals for Tom Smith and Carole Lister came to the group, even at the most painful times people were able to support Blood Bikes Scotland.

We are on target in Lothian to complete 1200 runs for the NHS with a projected substantial financial saving. This has been made possible due the great partnership with the NHS Lothian Flow Centre who are the central point for transport booking across Lothian. It's a great team to work with and they have also been very active and supportive in our activities this year like the Queensferry Crossing opening walk and the Forth Bridge abseil.

So, 2018 looks very exciting as we look to grow our service in the Borders, expand in Lothian and start a new service in Fife.

EDAM have been a great support to the Group as well with many of the riders in Blood Bikes coming through the IAM route to ride with us. We are always looking for new volunteer riders, phone controllers and fundraising support for the areas we currently operate in.

Volunteers must be over the age of 25, held a licence (6 points or less) for 3 years and no accidents for 5 years and hold an advanced rider qualification

We look for a couple of shifts (more if you can do it!) a month. Riders use hi-viz bikes provided by the charity whilst on shift

We also have volunteer Controllers who support us at weekends (8am – 6pm) taking calls from the NHS, dispatching the bikes and logging and tracking the calls to completion.

Currently we cover 8am - 6pm Saturday and Sunday and recently have started service 6pm - 8pm weekday evening.

If you would like to know more about joining Blood Bikes, then please email Info@bloodbikesscotland.co.uk or visit our website www.bloodbikesscotland.co.uk

Helite Airvest by Elliot Beattie



Peter Riley from Helite recently gave a presentation to EDAM members at The Steading. Here are Elliot's thoughts on airbag vests.

Well, we have had airbags in cars since the nineties. I read that Ford went with universal fitment of steering wheel airbags, rather than ABS at that stage, after a senior Ford executive tested his driver's airbag in a motorway shunt and emerged with only broken glasses. But car safety moves on and now we have multiple airbags, ABS and all sorts of electronic gizmos. Who remembers now the American concept of the full size airbag of the 80's where a king size duvet inflated from the dashboard, because the Yanks wouldn't wear seat belts?

But apart from mid 2000s Honda Gold Wings – airbags have not featured on bikes, as probably ABS is the better value safety feature.

Helite launched their rider Airvests in 2008, for bikers & horse riders and these are tether-operated. More recently, Dainese have introduced their air suits with

electronic operation and arm & leg protection, but aimed at the bike racing market and they will be compulsory for MotoGP next year. They also have D-Air jackets – at significant cost.

So, what's the difference? All the road versions will protect your neck, back & trunk. A tether system is simple, cheap, mechanically operated and can be recharged with a new CO2 cartridge at the roadside if necessary, but there could be occasional operation delay in low side type RTCs. Maintenance is negligible; but read their servicing recommendations and do not machine wash! An electronic system is expensive, though should work with every off, but recharging requires a factory return as operate with nitrogen.

Helite Airvest originally incorporated a back protector beneath the air bags, but recently have also offered their Turtle option of the back protector on the outside. They claim this arrangement gives 50 times greater protection than a conventional hard-shell back protector. Apart from the cushioning, the inflated vest holds your neck straight, preventing hyper-extension and rotation/ lateral flexion – the whip lash injuries.

Helite also do air vests incorporated into motorcycle jackets, but most Scottish bikers have more than 1 jacket. Their jackets are Cordura and vented, but not Goretex as the built in airvest prevents breathability.

Are they worth it? Well, I bought one 4 years ago but it has just hung in my wardrobe for the last 3 years, until this meeting gave me a timely reminder (scare!) of just why I bought it originally. I am now wearing it again.

Cost new will range from £400 to £550 depending on model & whether it is hi viz, but you could spend a similar amount on just a helmet.

Helite offer a 10% IAM discount, and they also have a limited number of pre-owned vests at significant savings.

Sizing is important – easiest way to check your size may be to try on another EDAM member's vest in the car park.

See <https://www.airvest.co.uk/> for details

IAM TEST PASSES

IAM tests are not carried out when the temperature dips below 3 degrees or the conditions are bad for other reasons. The lucky few below squeezed in before it got too cold.

Congratulations to the following associates:

Colin Tait on gaining a **F1rst** with assessor Alistair MacLean. Observer: Ian Gilchrist.

Ray Nimmo on passing his test with assessor Alistair MacLean. Observer: Peter Wright

Dougie Timmins on passing his test with Alistair MacLean. Observer: Elliot Beattie

Helen Brown on passing her test with assessor Ian Wightman. Observer: Dave McCutcheon.



Pat Lawlor receiving his certificate from Elliot Beattie



Ray Nimmo receiving his certificate from Peter Wright

OBSERVER NEWS

Congratulations to **Matt Davies** on becoming a Local Observer

EVENTS

School Day Runs

Various dates, as advised on Facebook.

RIDING TIPS by Elliot Beattie

The most important rule in cornering is always being able to stop in the distance you can see to be clear.

In this instance, there were no temporary warning signs ahead of white lining lorry hazard to assist road users.

The aim of my positioning behind the lorry was to keep myself as visible as possible to any other vehicle approaching from behind, leaving myself escape routes, and improve view for when overtake was possible.

<https://youtu.be/wCXXtgbXCe8>

DISCOUNTS!

We all love a bargain, and being a member of EDAM and the IAM can help you. If you have problems obtaining a discount (after carefully reading the T&Cs) please let us know. Also, be aware that the best bargains may not be from the vendors mentioned here so, as always, it can pay to shop around.

IAM Roadsmart offers discounts to all members and details are given on the IAM website. **You need to log in before the discount page will appear.** If you are logged in, follow this link: <https://goo.gl/meChie>

IAM discounts include savings on a range of goods and services. Of particular interest to motorcyclists would be: Helite Airvests (10%), Visorcat (20%), MotoScotland (10%), Bike-Seal (10%) & RiderVision (10%). There is also a 15% discount available at Bike Stop.

EDAM discounts include the following. Please note that not all purchases will receive the same level of discount. For example, most bike shops don't discount tyres. This can vary from time-to-time and dealer-to-dealer.

So, in strictly alphabetical order:

BikeSpeed UK in Broxburn: <http://www.bikespeeduk.com/> offer a 5% discount at their store.

Saltire Motorcycles, Edinburgh: <https://www.saltiremotorcycles.com/> offer 10% discount on parts.

Two Wheels Honda/Triumph: <http://www.twowheels.co.uk/> offers 10% discount on parts and clothing.

PRODUCT REVIEW

Gammatronix Ice Warning LED

by Glynn Jones

Many new bikes are fitted with an ambient temperature gauge to let you know the air temperature. For those that don't have these useful gadgets it is very hard to find a retrofittable thermometer with a remote sensor (there's no point measuring the temperature near the gauge as it can be influence by the sun or the engine temperature).

It was whilst searching for a suitable temperature gauge that I discovered the Gammatronix ice warning LED. It consists of a large multi-colour LED light and a remote sensor at the end of a long wire. The sensor can be mounted in a position away from the engine and other heat sources and, preferably, low down where the ambient air is coldest.

The LED glows orange when the temperature is between +3°C & 0°C and red when it reaches zero, giving you a warning of potential icy conditions. The LED is small enough to be mounted anywhere.

The unit costs less than £20 from here: <https://goo.gl/GHRTEC>



LED mounted under clocks. It's cold in my garage!

RIDE REPORT: The Dumfries & Galloway Toy Run by Peter Woolven



This takes place every year, with Andrew Bird of D&G Advanced Motorcyclists and friends organising it. A few EDAMers make it along most years and this year six members of EDAM and PMC (Gavin leading, with Lynn on the Pink Panther, Carolyn, John, Riz, and Peter) showed up. The morning was bright and clear at Dobbies, Loanhead as we set off down the A7 and over the Granites to Innerleithen. This road is a pleasure to ride, but had nasty patches of frost wherever the sun had not reached. At least the weather had been dry for days and there were no places where water had frozen under the frost. Some of the sheep were a bit suicidal too. After Innerleithen the run to post-fire-rebuilt Gordon Arms Hotel and along by St Mary's Loch was frost free and faster.

Lunch was at the Green Frog Café in the

Hammerlands Garden Centre and then we were off to The Ram in Moffat where part of the Ride was meeting (there were three other start points across D&G). We almost filled the street. And then away we all went, at varying paces and riding styles, to the Queen of the South car park in Dumfries which rapidly packed out. Apparently, there were about 145 bikes, and that figure cannot be far wrong. We might speculate that it was as big a crowd as Q of S get for some home games.

As always, there was much of interest; three trikes, including a CANAM front-twin, an immaculate Hinckley Bonnie with sidecar, and several Blood Bikes. A lot of scooters were present, generally quite smartly turned out. The bikes varied from immaculate through workaday grubby to one gloriously clarty Japanese four (it was

impossible to tell its make and model). See photo. The owner said he had come from Ayr (60 miles). Had he come across ploughed fields all the way? The Curvy Bikes were well represented, sporting their slogans "Ride, eat cake, Ride" and "I ride like a girl, try to keep up". There was a certain amount of fancy dress, Santa, a reindeer and a green frog were prominent. We had a police escort van, D&G Division no longer has a bike section. It took four vans to carry away all the donated toys.

We then all set off, noisily, into Dumfries, through cheering crowds and excited small boys. Getting into the centre was a squeeze and getting a coffee at Costa was a challenge, all the inside seats were tak-



en and so were most of the outside ones. It did not bother John who nicked a table and chairs from Subway next door and was not too keen to hand them back.

And then it was back North, via Moffat and the A701 to Leadburn. It was getting colder now, but the roads had been salted (white stains on the bikes). The Leadburn was also rebuilt after a fire (Does this happen to biker meets? Lochearnhead Watersports has not been restored yet. Let's hope the Steading doesn't go up). After a final coffee we all scattered.

It was a grand ride, good company, and good weather for November. The EDAM Sick Kids run on December 3rd (probably the last to Sciennes, before the move to Little France) should be good too.





EUROPEAN DETOURS: Or, how I got from Munich to Portsmouth without touching

Zeebrugge by Ian Astley



Won't be needing these for a while!

As I rode up the ramp disembarking from the ferry in Portsmouth in early September, I realised what I had been missing for two and a half months: drizzly grey skies, rotten roads and short-bottomed gits in hi-viz jackets. When I changed the speedo back to miles the clock was showing 4,193km, the distance from Munich to Santander – and before you look at the map, that is the distance via France, Spain, and Lisbon (where I had to attend a conference) using A- and B-roads and including more than the odd detour (intentional and otherwise). It had taken me six days to get from Munich to Lisbon, and after that a further three to the ferry in Santander. Horrendously inefficient and I loved pretty much every minute of it.

Having seen a decent selection of the back roads around Munich in the course of the summer, I decided to make the most of the Autobahn as far as Ulm, getting there in a time that would have earned me a speeding fine or two in this country. I picked up the Bundesstraße 311 and headed for the French border via more nicely asphalted twisties and hairpins than you can shake a throttle cable at. I had anonymous company from a German biker (well, I couldn't see his plate but it was a decent guess) who followed me for a goodly portion of the way. But as I emerged from a particularly technical stretch of road with a wacking great grin on my face, I had a sobering moment or two waiting for him to emerge. I slowed right down, looking in my mirrors, and was about to turn round to check on him when he appeared, nodding in response to my thumbs-up query. He looked a bit sheepish, which is another

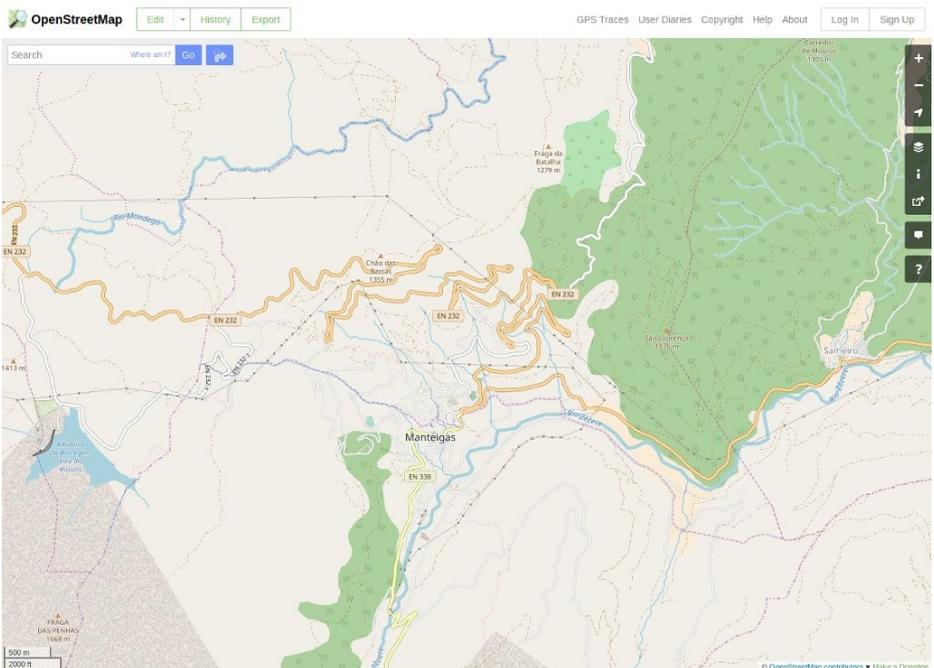
example of why riding a bike is not about speed: I had noticed that he was not getting near enough to the outside of bends and was consistently turning in too early. I didn't see his "moment" but he had probably been at a speed that was by no means excessive for the bend but became so when he found himself in the wrong position.

I negotiated Mulhouse via the odd stretch of motorway and without any fuss at all found myself riding past French road signs, the imperceptible border being really just a continuation of a summer of hearing friends and colleagues shaking their heads and asking bemusedly what that Brexit nonsense is all about. I had a ride of a couple of hours to my friends' village before me, and picked up the roads through Belfort, Vesoul and Gray, then wound my way through the routes départementales north of Dijon. I arrived

stalled the engine at about 10km/h in a desperate attempt to get away before anyone saw my licence plate.

The next day saw me with the task of getting within striking distance of the Pyrenees and I got as far as the historic town of Montauban on the western edge of the Causses de Quercy, with another 500km+ day under my belt and the prospect of traversing the mountains into Spain the following day. My target was Pamplona, of bull-running fame, though the major obstacle to getting there was to be arguably worse than rampant animals: white van men in the mountains ...

Lourdes for lunch had a certain poetic ring to it and that was certainly borne out as I approached the historic pilgrimage centre. The first indication that I was approaching a place of miracles and sanctity was a pink edifice, the Hôtel le Virginia



The hairpins at Manteigas

there in the late afternoon with 671km on the clock and fresh as a daisy – that's biking for you.

I departed in the middle of the following afternoon for Moulins, a mere 309km away. The place I had booked was well out of town, so I had an amusing time pottering through the town centre in search of food. Well, amusing for the locals because I rode past a bar called Le Glasgow and whilst negotiating cobbles

(the sign-writer had had a field day designing the "Virginia" bit) closely followed by the Disco Le My Lord. The waitress who served me wasn't exactly a nun on secondment either.

The approach to Lourdes was also replete with fuel stations, so I decided to fill up on the way out of town, belly being more important. Unfortunately, I found myself on the dual carriageway without finding one on the south side of town, but I was-



atmospheric and picturesque until you miss the hotel you were looking for and need to go right round the town's one-way system. The hotel was fine, they even gave me a place in their underground garage and the fellow who ran the small restaurant where I had dinner was really friendly, too. This was typical of the reception I met wherever I went and – along with sitting on a bike all day – is one of the most rewarding parts of long-distance riding.

The official distance to Lisbon, my westernmost destination, is probably somewhat less than the 651km I put on the clock from Ciudad Rodrigo, but surely a lot less worthwhile. I rode through the Parque Natural da Serra da Estrela, which is wonderful for the scenery and for the riding. Thanks to some creative non-signage I found myself doing a bit of near-offroad riding, including a dead-end in a village without much of a road. Two of the locals came out to help me and it probably made their year to be able to talk and gesticulate to a mad Englishman who couldn't read a map properly. The bloke indicated that the direct way out of the village was through a steep embankment of sand. I said no, thanks, not on a sports-bike laden with two months of stuff and took the long way round – which of course meant barrelling through a narrow sandy track with wacking great ruts. Thank you, MotoScotland.

I came out on a narrow but asphalted road that was being cleared of debris by a couple of workers who were rather bemused if not slightly annoyed at my presence. When I got to the main-ish road, I discovered that the road I had been on was in fact closed, partly to do with the

n't worried because there were a couple of sizeable towns before I would be entering the passes over the Pyrenees. You can guess what's coming: sizeable towns, yes ... fuel stations, no. Still, I had just about enough range to get through and by that time I didn't fancy turning back and putting myself so far behind schedule that I wouldn't make Pamplona at any decent time.

The Pyrenees were stunning: the weather was sunny with unlimited visibility, the only dampener was not being able to take full-throttle advantage of the twisties up and down the cols. There were no motorized bikers to speak of but many of the push-bike kind. We are used to seeing Tour de France athletes hammering up those passes: seeing those amateurs brought home to me (i) just how incredible professional cyclists are and (ii) just how dedicated to the sport the amateur base is, just for the sake of it. They all got a wave from me, that's for sure.

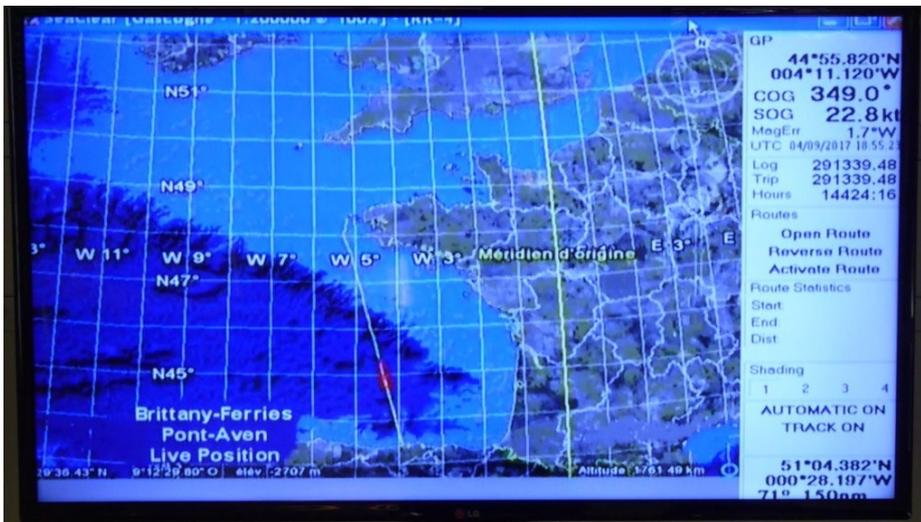
Less inspiring was the realization that white van men are very often just that, wherever they are. I know that there's plenty of good drivers in amongst them but the three I met coming the other way on the slightly wider than single-track roads with breathtaking drops just the other side of token walls, were not of that ilk. My side of the road, mate, even if you didn't see me.

I found a fuel station in Laruns, still on the French side, and managed to squeeze in

16.4l, which was very disappointing: at least half a litre left, no panic at all. With a full tank of fuel and a bellyful of Mars bar I headed for the border on the D934, stopping briefly at the top of the pass where there is a motley collection of semi-rubbish shops and cafés. The road down into Spain was a tad boring after the excitement of the French cols and the scenery became every more expansive. I passed a sign that indicated that we were on the Camino de Santiago, the distance to that pilgrimage centre being 800km. They used to walk it, too.

The following day saw quite a number of motorway miles on the way to Ciudad Rodrigo, a small town just over a hundred kilometres from the Portuguese border and one of the traditional stops on the Santiago pilgrimage. It is one of those medieval Spanish towns that are really





forest fires that had ravaged the country earlier. In fact, the charred remains of forest and scrubland – along with the poignant, lingering smell of burnt-out land and lives – is something that hit me again and again as I rode across this part of Portugal.

Riding out of the national park via Mantegais was a delight: the road is hairpin heaven, with very fast stretches and spectacular rock formations to add to the mix. The trunk roads to Coimbra were something of an anti-climax after that, but very pleasant in their own right. I heard quite a few moans about the wild driving habits of the Portuguese (mainly from ex-pats who presumably emigrated because their moaning voices were not being heard in this country) but I found them to be fine and (like pretty much everyone on the continent) much more considerate towards motorcyclists. I did think that I had come across one exception on the motorway: he wound his window down as I was overtaking him and stuck out his hand in a vigorous V-sign. I was about to pull up alongside and biff him on the nose when I realized that he was probably a biker himself and was giving me the ubiquitous V-for-peace sign you see over there; he had just not bothered to turn his wrist round.

The problem with detours and 400-mile days is that arriving in a major city like Lisbon usually means hitting the rush hour. Added to that, the signs for the part of Lisbon that I was heading for disappeared from the ring road. I went too far and spent far longer than I care to think about, pottering around weird parts of the city, finally circling the hotel without realising it. As a consequence, I was in a pretty foul mood, not least because I had

missed free wine and food at the conference reception. Still, I had spent six days traversing a large swathe of western Europe, over 3,000km of it, in fact, and the satisfaction of having done that was much greater than a passing mood. And there were more kilometres to come.

I left the conference on the Saturday: while more dedicated scholars than me were getting to grips with an AGM, I was on my way to Porto. By happy coincidence, the Red Bull Air Races were on there that weekend and I managed to catch the practice sessions and the qualifying. Impressive stuff: the course is on the estuary of the Rio Douro, which winds its way a mind-boggling 897km from the province of Soria just west of Zaragoza. Seeing those pilots nailing their turns and their speeds to the narrowest of margins



Just whack open the throttle!

is quite something. The whole event was made even more memorable by the general atmosphere of relaxed good-will among the people.

The sessions ended in mid-afternoon, plenty of time for me to make Chaves by the evening, which in turn put me in a good position to make Riaño on the fourth. With my sailing being on the afternoon of the fifth, I didn't want to have to rush, so the 165km to the ferry from Riaño were perfect, not least because the roads in that part of the world go through a variety of scenery, from empty straights to steep-sided valleys. Riaño claims to have the bench with the best view in Europe, and though I don't like to waste time ranking wonderful vistas against each other, if you are thinking of starting or ending a tour of Spain in Santander, you could do much worse than diverting through there.

There are easier ways of discharging one's professional travel obligations than packing your stuff onto a motorbike, but if you can avoid them, please do. I am not going to claim that every moment was wonderful, it's never like that. But the trip keeps coming back to me in recollections of moments on the road, not necessarily the ones with the great views, either. And that is why I came back to biking: it's how you move.

