

RIDERS



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Front cover:
Somewhere on the way to Vianden (Paul Aspinall)

REGULAR FEATURES:

- 4 Editorial
- 5 View from the Chair
- 5 Calendar of Events
- 7 Test Passes
- 30 IDCAM/Machine Control Day details
- 31 Contacts



The shortest place name in the world. See page 16

THIS EDITION INCLUDES...

NEW FEATURES:

- 8 Interview with Mike Quinton CEO of the IAM
- 10 ... and this place shall be called France
- 15 Reboot
- 16 The Dead Parrot Tour
- 23 Satnav insight
- 24 Michelin tyre test
- 26 Country, Jazz and Blues



Above the clouds on the Col d'Agnell. See page 10



Nick Farley, Editor

When sending articles for publishing in this magazine, please send images (with captions) as separate JPEG files.

Images should be in colour in as high a resolution as possible, preferably the original size in which they were captured. Please do not place images inside Word documents as this will significantly reduce the quality of the images.

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The Editor cannot guarantee sunshine on club runs.

Magazine design and layout by John Gardiner.

EDITORIAL

Rotten roads

Last week I made a short return journey of about 100 miles from home to Manston to have a session on the Spitfire simulator in the museum there. (Highly recommended.) It was a sunny day and I thought it would be a perfect ride, but I was really glad to get home. I didn't enjoy it at all and the reason was the poor roads – yes, here we go again. Having just returned from riding 2500 miles of good European roads it was brought home to me just how different it is riding here; just how much of our concentration we have to divert to the road surface when riding in Kent. It's not just the potholes either, it's those miles of old degrading trench edges when you don't know whether to ride to the left or to the right of the ridges or in the middle of the old trench line; it's those manhole covers which are a couple of inches below the road surface and it's the endless lumpy patchwork of repairs that can make riding here such a joyless thing. I know that in a couple of days I will get back into Kent mode, I will forget about the bliss of being able to take the road condition for granted and I will return to paying far too much attention to the road surface, I will forget Europe and accept the Kent rubbish as normal and as a result I will start enjoying riding again I suppose. But I wish it wasn't like that.

KAMG's first Christmas Dinner

As you know we don't have a club night in December because the last Thursday of the month falls on or around Christmas – this year it's Boxing Day. So, it has been decided for the first time to have a special KAMG Christmas Dinner on the last Thursday of November. This will be a slap-up three course do at the Kentagon and will cost £25 a head. Details have I none at the moment, but I assume there will be turkeys and stuffing and crackers and all the usual gubbins. This is an official function so Green Badges, Masters Medals and High Vis will be worn. Look out for further details on 'Social Media' or Tracker (whatever that is). And it will be a bumper night because the next edition of *Riders* (KAMG's award-winning magazine) will be available then too. You simply can't afford to miss it. Can you....?

Thank you

While basking in the glory of winning an award for the best IAM group magazine (just thought I'd mention it) I would like to thank everyone who has been kind enough to contribute over the last three years while I have been editor. Without those contributions there would be no (award-winning) magazine. There are one or two contributors like Dave Willson (page 15) and Geoff Curtis (page 16) who are always sending in interesting and varied stuff and others like Les Smith and Andy Stagg who used to send in interesting and varied stuff but who haven't been sending in interesting and varied stuff for some time (hint). Huge thanks to you all. I just hope I'm here to edit the report of Pork Pie XXIX and Vianden 2025 when they are submitted. And while on the subject of contributors, if anyone has sent something for the magazine to the editor@kamg.org.uk email address and not received a reply, I apologise. Apparently not all emails sent to that address are actually getting through. Don't know why. If you have tried that and you haven't had a response please try resending to another committee member (page 30) and they will forward it to me.

PS. Don't forget to drop me a line about your adventures. You just might inspire others to follow in your tyre tracks.

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR . . .

Is it my HRT or is it Hot Hot Hot ???

Wow! What fantastic weather we are having. I do hope you have been out and about on those bikes topping up your tans and keeping hydrated. There's been perfect riding conditions and I encourage all the Facebook posts showing your great ride-outs.

I have attended a few IAM skills days both at Thrupton and, a first time for me, at Mallory Park. These IAM days are brilliant and a great opportunity to test your machine's capabilities. There are a few dates still left this year so it would be great to see a few KAMG members there.

The KAMG BBQ was a great success again and it was lovely to see members' wives, partners and children joining in with evening. We even got a few of John England's grandchildren doing the raffle. Thankyou kids xx.

Lots of stuff is going on behind the scenes (as usual): Ian Burchell has been busy offering taster rides so if you have any friends or family that need a little more encouragement to take on advanced riding please contact him and arrange a session. IDCAMS have been run and well attended and our membership is a happy and healthy all time high.

On this note.....we all need to make a contribution to help to keep the group running smoothly; if you have any skills you can bring to the table we will give you as much help and encouragement as you need. We are looking for help with all aspects of group events – new routes for ride-outs, run leaders, tail-enders, meet and greeters, and help with all our existing events on tracker. Please step forward and make yourself known to a committee member and give us a hand so that we continue to have such a successful IAM Roadsmart group.

Tina Underwood

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

September

- Sun 1st Social and training ride to Loomies café, West Meon
- Sat 7th IDCAM (contact see below)
- Sun 8th First Aid course
- Mon 9th Committee meeting
- Wed 11th IAM skills day
- Thurs 12th Fish and chip run
- Sun 15th 'B' road bumble
- Mon 16th Area team meeting week
- Mon 16th KFRS skills day – ladies
- Tues 17th IAM skills day
- Sat 21st Peterborough training weekend depart
- Sun 22nd Peterborough training weekend return
- Thurs 26th Group night
- Sat 28th Machine control day (contact see below)
- Sun 29th Social and training ride to Pevensey Bay* start at 9am

October

- Thurs 3rd Training sub-committee meeting
- Sat 5th IDCAM (contact see below)
- Thurs 10th Observer meeting

- Sat 12th On road radio training
- Mon 14th Committee meeting
- Sat 19th On road radio training
- Thurs 24th Pork Pie IX depart
- Sun 27th Pork Pie IX return
- Thurs 31st Group night

November

- Sun 3rd Social and training ride to Birling Gap* Start at 9am
- Sat 9th IDCAM (contact see below)
- Sun 10th Remembrance service
- Mon 11th Committee meeting
- Thurs 25th CHRISTMAS DINNER

Contacts: IDCAM – Ian Burchell associates@kamg.org.uk
Machine Control Days – Jim Pullum mcd@kamg.org.uk

*Note that if the temperature is below 3°C the ride will be cancelled. All dates and times are subject to change but are correct at time of going to press. Please check on Tracker before attending any activity for up to date information. All Training and social rides that previously started at the Oakdene Café layby on the A20, now start 100 yards up the road in the car park of the Moat Hotel at 9am.



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ON AIR



Breakfast	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breakfast Toasties Burgers Sandwiches de Wahl Jacket Potatoes Hot Wings Kebabs Star Drinks Creams Smoothies & Soft Drinks Specialty Bread Dinners Sides Desserts 	
Breakfast	
The Best Breakfast in Kent	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classic Breakfast English Mince, Fried Egg, Bacon Beans & Hash Brown £4.50 Delicious Breakfast English Mince, Fries, Hash Brown, Bacon Beans, Toasted & Hash £5.50 The Public Breakfast English Mince, Fried Egg, Hash Brown, Bacon Beans, Toasted, Hash & Fries £6.50 Irish Breakfast 2 Eggs & Bacon, 2 Hash Browns, Bacon Beans, Hash Brown and Toast £5.50 The Full Breakfast English Mince, Fried Egg, Hash Brown, Bacon Beans, Toasted, Hash & Fries, Mashed Potatoes & Gravy £7.50 Just a Hashbrown Breakfast 2 Eggs, Toasted & Fries, Hash Brown, Bacon Beans, Hash & Toast £5.50 The Special Breakfast Bacon & Egg or Mince & Bacon, Hash Brown & Hash £5.50 	
*All items for the price of £4.50 or less *All items for the price of £5.50 or less	

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TEST PASSES

Since the last edition

A warm welcome to the Group's new members and existing ones



Kwok Chi Leung receiving his Advanced Rider qualification from Jim Pullum



Colin Billings receiving his Masters qualification from mentor Steve Riches



Sylvain Romand receiving his Advanced Rider qualification from Martin Brown

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MIKE QUINTON

CEO of the IAM

talks to *Riders*



Why are we members of the IAM? What does the IAM do for us? What do I get out of the IAM? We hear these and similar questions being asked all the time and they are all variations of the same basic question – what do we get for our money? Nick Farley went to see Mike Quinton, the CEO of the IAM, to ask him that question, and the short answer is that we get quite a lot, but it's probably not quite what we thought we were getting.

What do we get for our money was the first question I asked Mike Quinton and I guess that one of the reasons that so many of us ask the question in the first place is because we have a fundamental misconception about what the IAM is and therefore what we are part of. We are asked to pay a membership subscription each year and the term 'membership' not surprisingly implies that we are 'members' of something, and you normally associate being a 'member' of something with meaning that you belong to a club or society, and that 'membership' will entitle you to some benefit or privilege. Mike Quinton, however, made the point that that is the wrong way to look at it: rather our annual subscription, or membership fee, should be seen as a charitable donation. I must say that I had never seen it in that light until he put it that way. The IAM is not a club in the accepted sense, it is a charity, a charity whose clearly stated aim and objective is to improve the safety of the roads in the UK. When we normally make a donation to a charity like, say, The Salvation Army, we don't consider that we become 'members' of the Salvation Army nor do we ask what we are getting for our money. We give them money which they use to do their good work. We don't expect anything back for ourselves. We understand the process and don't question it. In the same way our subscriptions (our membership fees cum charitable donations) fund the work that the IAM carries out. The fact that I hadn't looked at it in this way before is, I think, in part at least, the fault of the IAM: it could make that position clearer in the way that it presents itself to its 'members'. I do know of course that the IAM is a charity, but I don't actually think of it in that way nor see it in that light. Oxfam is a charity, I donate to it, I'm not a member of it, but I am a *member* of the IAM and that makes my perception of it different. There are club-type activities associated with membership, although they are actually provided by the KAMG – the excursions, tours,

ride-outs, talks, club functions and so on – yet remember that KAMG is a road safety charity in its own right, albeit one affiliated to the IAM. It's not surprising therefore, in my view, that there is confusion amongst some members and that there is an expectation that we should 'get' something for our subscription.

Mike Quinton was not fazed by my question – I suspect he has heard it a few times before – and he made it very clear to me that we do get something. For example, the IAM is our voice in the corridors of power and he is clear that the IAM has a powerful voice that is heard where it matters and where it counts. One very important benefit of the work which our subscriptions pay for is the lobbying which an organisation like the IAM can do and does do on such issues as allowing motorbikes to use bus lanes, for example; or its current campaign advocating graduated licences; or the call for pothole money to be ring-fenced, and the lobbying that it is currently doing to counter the strong pro-electric scooter lobby which is strongly pressing the government to allow electric scooters to be used freely and unlicensed in this country. Quinton believes these scooters are very dangerous, a feeling reinforced by his recent trip to Warsaw where he hired one and tried it first-hand. We may all feel that e-scooters are dangerous and that their use should be controlled but as individuals we stand no chance of our views ever being heard, whereas the IAM has already had coverage on BBC and Sky News on this subject. That's what we are paying for. Similarly, the IAM, being a long established and well respected organisation, sits alongside the AA, RAC and the Freight Haulage Association at regular meetings with the Department of Transport at which, in theory, the relevant minister should also be present, although to Quinton's obvious frustration he/she seldom actually turns up. Quinton wants the IAM to engage with and to challenge ministers, but he admits that, sadly, road safety is not top of the political agenda. However, it was

because of such meetings that the Treasury did make extra funds available to repair potholes and the IAM's survey of its members that showed that almost half had suffered damage as result of badly maintained roads probably played its part in achieving that. Quinton isn't a biker but he is an active cyclist and is therefore just as keen as we are to see an improvement in the roads. He says that this ability of the IAM to harness and gather the views of its members on important issues in a way which neither the AA nor the RAC can do is a valuable tool and separates it from those other organisations. All of this costs money. All of this is to our benefit and it's some of what 'we get for our money'.

Mike Quinton has questions of his own which he asks of himself and the IAM, not the least being finding out if the IAM's training and instruction is effective. Proving that what the IAM does is effective is difficult but he believes that it is very important to try to find ways to do this. To this end they are experimenting with devices being fitted to 200 observers' cars and tracking them for three or four months. Ideally he would like to fit them to associates' cars for a period before they begin their instruction but he feels that this would delay the associate's start and would be unacceptable. (There is already a problem in some areas of there being delays in new associates starting their courses because of a shortage of observers.) I disagreed with him about this. I think if it was made clear to the associate many would find being monitored *before* their instruction began quite acceptable, and if it gave the IAM some tangible evidence of the value of instruction that would be very useful in a number of ways.

Recruitment is another issue which concerns Quinton. He obviously wants to attract more members and he acknowledges that there is a difference between the car members and the bike members. The motivation for motorcyclists is more about their personal safety. They are vulnerable road users and they want to ride better in order to keep themselves safe. He recognises that riding a bike is more difficult than driving a car that has automatic everything, and he is also well aware that the motorcycle groups have a pronounced 'club' atmosphere which is less evident in the car groups. He thinks too that IAM coaching has a greater effect on motorcyclists than car drivers because everything is amplified on a motorbike. But he wants to grow the membership in both sectors and to reach new people as well as continuing to reach the kind of people the IAM currently attracts. He is particularly keen to reach a new kind of member. He believes that there is a whole raft of people who need and would greatly benefit from some kind of proper driving or riding instruction but who are nowhere near coming to the IAM or even aware of the existence of the IAM. He's not sure how to define them or how to reach them at the moment but he is clear that they exist and that the IAM could be and should be helping

them. He is thinking of nervous drivers who never drive on motorways, for example, or people with nine points on their licences, or drivers and riders who have been driving for years, probably decades, without ever having any assessment of their current skills but who are faintly aware that they would benefit from some advice but have no idea of where to get it. These people are never going to go the whole Green Badge/Red Badge route but Mike Quinton has in mind a sort of lesser membership for such people. He admits he cannot define it or them at the moment but he is sure that the IAM has a role to play here and he is working on it. As he put it, "The image of the IAM is still 'a load of old white blokes getting a badge on the front of their cars'. I want it to be more inclusive than that," he says. I was interested to know whether the IAM has any professional advertising or PR advisors helping its recruitment or promotional activity and apparently it doesn't, although it does have its own internal marketing department. Quinton admitted that historically marketing had taken a back seat but he says that that is now changing.

So you see, the IAM is doing quite a lot with your membership fee and I got the impression that under Mike Quinton it will be doing more – remember he's only been there for a relatively short while – however, I would be happier if there was some obvious way in which we could communicate our views up to the IAM hierarchy. For my money I would like the opportunity to have some input. Quinton says that they have thought about and even tried conferences in the past but they are expensive and necessarily held at some central venue which is convenient for a few but very inconvenient for most. But if the IAM is our voice at the top table and a campaigner for the issues which affect us, we must make sure that it hears our voice first and at the moment there is no means of it doing that. If we want the IAM to be working on our behalf and taking note of what we think is important we have to let it know what those issues are. As there is no formal machinery for getting our views to them perhaps we can use this magazine to do that. A copy is sent to Mike Quinton and to other people at the IAM every quarter. I hope they read the last issue, because we want them to make as much noise as possible about the rapidly increasing number of completely unqualified, uninsured and unregistered people who are allowed on the roads – something that cannot possibly make the roads safer; quite the opposite. If the IAM can do anything to get some control of that situation, I for one will feel that I am getting something for my annual charitable donation. If you have any views about aspects of road safety and driver or rider training let *Riders* know so that we can through the medium of this magazine make those views known to the IAM, which is a charity that we fund as 'members' and that makes it rather different from any other charity to which we might make a donation.

... AND THIS PLACE SHALL BE CALLED FRANCE

Billions of years ago he (okay, okay, possibly she) who was drawing up the blueprint for the World said to himself, "One day in about 1890-ish I shall probably invent motorbikes and I shall need a place for them to be ridden. This place will need good smooth roads, all sorts of spectacular scenery including high mountains, and it will need good food plus beautiful weather. I'd better get the mountains and the basic scenery stuff sorted out right now but I can worry about the roads and the food later on. And this place shall be called France, and it will be famous for arguing with its neighbours quite a lot, and it will make wonderful cheese and wine, but eventually in the 21st century the roads will be complete and my design will be finished and it will be ready to fulfil its destiny as *the* place for motorbikes." And so it came to pass. I know that there's Germany and Italy and Spain and Norway and stuff, all of which are quite good, but they were just his practice designs, he (or she)

finally got it completely right with the French model, which is why the Lady Pillion and I headed once again for a chalet in the small town of Guillestre in the French Alps for two weeks in June.

The High Mountains

Whichever direction we took from our chalet there were exciting rides. All around there were the famous high cols or passes such as the Col d'Iseran, Col de Vars, the awesome Galibier and the highest of them all, the Col de la Bonette. Riding the tortuous switchbacks to the top of these high and famous mountain passes is truly exciting. The rides up and down are often really testing too, and because you are so high the views are always mind-blowing. Also, let's face it, it is rather cool to tick the biggies off in the list of Cols that you have ridden, and whenever you get to the top of a pass to be one of that small knot of motorcyclists and cyclists standing around taking pictures of themselves and their mates 'at the summit', all looking pleased with themselves, as well they might. It goes without saying that to pedal a bicycle up a seven, eight or nine thousand foot pass is a hell of an achievement especially when it's as hot as hell, and although it is less physically demanding on a motorbike it's still an achievement requiring skill, technique, strength and sometimes a little nerve too. That's why at every summit there will be this little group of two-wheelers looking pretty pleased

with themselves. And car drivers? Not too many. This is because car drivers invest nothing of themselves in their drive to the top: they sit in their automatic, air-conditioned capsules, turning their power-assisted steering wheels and they arrive at the top without effort or skill. To get to the top means nothing to them. This year at the top of the Col d'Izoard a car stopped right beside me as I stood in the sweltering heat gawping at the view and mentally patting myself on the back, the window of this car was wound just halfway down, they wanted to preserve the air-conditioned coolness, an iPhone was stuck out, a picture of the obelisk at the summit was taken, the window was closed and the car drove off. The whole thing took 15 seconds at most. His Col d'Izoard box was ticked. Been there, done that. And I'm sure he went down as effortlessly and easily and as meaninglessly as he came up. For us it's not like that. I may actually be the umpteen thousandth biker to have reached the top of any

'Difficile and dangereux' descent of the Col de Noyer



The Lady Pillion picnics in the Hautes Alpes by the River Ubaye

The Gorges du Guil north west out of Guillestre

particular pass, but at the moment that I reach it, it feels as if I am the very first, the pioneer, the trailblazer, and it's a good feeling. It cost me something of myself to get there. It's not just a question of turning a few sharp bends. It takes, as I have said, some skill, technique and sometimes, some balls. If you have ridden several miles of tight hairpins on narrow mountain roads and got every corner – well at least some – 'right' you feel good, and that's why we two-wheelers stand about and relish life at the top. And it's why car drivers don't.

And it is not just the big famous passes that are worth exploring. In fact, often it's quite the opposite. The Alps, being by definition mountainous, have hundreds of passes to explore. Most, nearly all I guess, are unknown and are found on minor roads in the middle of nowhere and are used only by the local farmers. You need large scale maps to locate them. They may not climb to such great heights, these lesser known roads, though many do, but they are nonetheless every bit as worthwhile to seek out and ride as the their bigger more famous brothers. Our best ride this year, and perhaps one of the best rides we have ever had in the mountains was over the little known Col de Noyer north east of Gap. We left Gap one morning heading east towards Veynes and after about 20k we turned right on to the

D937 – and what a beautiful road that was! Silk-smooth, absolutely deserted with wonderful fast sweeping bends eventually taking us over the Col du Festre at 4700 feet with the Pic du Bure at almost 9000 feet towering above us on our right. No picture can help here. The feeling of swooping along that fast, deserted road with those huge mountains high above us had to be experienced to be understood. After the Col du Festre we turned right on to the minor D17 and then the fun really began as we headed up to the Col de Noyer at 5500 feet, not high by alpine standards but still 1000 feet higher than Ben Nevis, which is GB's highest peak. The road up to the Col was very narrow and very steep in places; the contrast between the wide, fast, sweeping bends of the D937 that we had just left and this narrow little road up to the Col de Noyer was marked, and soaring way above us this time were the Roc Roux and the Tête du Callier at 8400 feet. But if the road up to the Col on the west side was narrow and difficult the road down on the east side was, to use the Michelin map's description, "*difficile ou dangereux*" and that was right, it was quite tricky. As always though it was hugely enjoyable and it left us both with a feeling of accomplishment when we eventually sat at a shady pavement table at an excellent restaurant in Gap where a good lunch ended a truly great ride.

The Col d'Agnel is another lesser known pass the summit of which marks the border between France and Italy. The ride up from the French side is relatively easy but the descent into Italy will certainly keep you on your toes particularly at the weekend when the Italians are screaming up and down. They truly are mad and as I watched them with a mixture of fear and awe I couldn't help wishing it was 50 years ago when I had that same feeling of utter invincibility. Heigh Ho! Tempus fugit. After the descent, rather than return over the d'Agnel, we decided on a circular route that brought us back from Italy into France over the Col de Larche. The climb up from Italy has umpteen hairpins – twenty, I think – before you reach the summit but the last two are by far the most demanding with a ferocious, steeply-climbing right followed *immediately* by an equally vicious left. It's the 'immediately' bit that's the real killer. After heaving the BMW round there two-up I was glad to be able to cruise relatively calmly up the remaining metres to the top of the pass. From there the route home took us over the Col de Vars before descending on a twisty and spectacular road down to Guillestre and supper outside listening to the thunder and looking at the amazing lightning show as storms rolled around the Alps but fortunately missed us.

Route Barrée

For anyone who has ridden in France the dreaded 'Route Barrée' sign will be all too familiar. Sometimes it will be accompanied by a 'Déviation' sign but it quite often won't be and you are left to sort out your own alternative route. On encountering a 'Route Barrée' sign in the old town of Embrun, a picture of which I hope appears somewhere on this page, we were left to sort a déviation out on our own and we quickly found ourselves riding round and round in a maze of ancient narrow streets and even narrower alleys amidst a forest of 'No Entry' signs, or finding that every turn we wanted to make was forbidden either by a 'no right turn' or a 'no left turn' sign. We rode up one very narrow alley where two old ladies were sitting on their doorstep having a fag and a natter with their feet stretched out in front of them. As we approached they were totally unconcerned and made no attempt to move their feet or even to look up. We eased by with centimetres to spare. It was probably a daily occurrence for them. Then we rode through a group of tourists who



were dreamily wandering in the middle of a narrow street, and then we rode through them again on the way back. Finally we broke out into a small square but the only escape from that seemed to be between the outside tables of a café. It is difficult to be unobtrusive while riding a motorbike in the middle of a pavement café and I don't think we achieved it, but no one turned a hair. Ours was the only engine to be heard in the town. We were the only traffic on that baking hot afternoon. The whole thing was so typically French. It was like something from a film. Finally we made it out to the other side of the town and back on to a proper road and it all became a memory, just another French motorcycle incident that we'll never forget.

Petrol!

Petrol is always an issue on a motorbike because of our limited range compared to a car. My bike has quite a generous range of 240 – 250 miles, perhaps even 270 – 280 if you

Believe it or not there was a petrol pump about 100 yards from here.



The summit of the Col d'Agnel is the border between France and Italy



The roadsides in the Alps have flowers not litter. These are wild gentians at the top of the Col d'Isard

believe the fuel gauge. But I always abuse its generosity and gaily pass filling stations at which I really ought to fill up. In France, away from the motorways, you can travel for yonks in the countryside without coming across a petrol pump or indeed coming across any living, breathing thing, and this year, despite knowing this, I had two 'petrol moments', one of which was very serious and which I was incredibly lucky to survive alive.

The lesser incident happened on Sunday afternoon as I travelled home on the Macon to Troyes leg of my journey. I knew I was pushing the fuel limit but for mile after country mile no petrol station appeared, so eventually I asked the Great Garmin to direct me to the nearest pump. This, he said, was seven miles away as the crow flew. Crow miles might be 10 or 12 actual road miles and I was nervous but had no option other than to follow Garmin's terse instructions and pray. He sent me on remote little country roads where there was not a house or a shed let alone a village which might

have hidden a pump and I began to think that Garmin had lost his marbles. Eventually and unexpectedly he asked me to make a ridiculous switchback right turn off a fairly decent road into a very narrow, very, very steep little country lane. The fact that no traffic was ever expected to use this lane became obvious in the first hundred yards when just in the nick of time I noticed a black electric cable strung across the road at a height of about two feet. There was no warning; no marker or flag on the cable; nothing. Jeez! I just managed to stop in time and to push the cable down at one side and ride on, and almost immediately I was instructed to make another 180° switchback into an even narrower road. The Great Garmin, as you know, lives way out in deep space and looking down from his celestial seat he often finds it difficult to tell the difference between goat tracks and six lane motorways but he was confidently telling me that by riding down this particular goat track I would within a minute reach a petrol pump, and, blow me, he was right. This farty

little road which looked like someone's garden path led to a crossroads and 50 yards away, in a sleepy village, there was a solitary AVIA petrol pump. Hurrah! Of course, as it was Sunday, the little garage was closed, but fortunately the pump was an automatic job. These self-serve pumps are very common in rural France, but they are choosy blighters and won't accept all credit cards. This little bugger spat out two of mine before agreeing to take the third, thank God. I had been riding on fumes for the last few miles. I went on my way rejoicing, not knowing just how much more tense and exciting my next petrol stop would be.

The following morning I shot out of the blocks keen to get some early miles under the belt on the 250 mile home run to Calais. Normally, wild horses on bended knee, as Bernard Levin would say, wouldn't get me on an Autoroute on a motorbike. Autoroutes are for cars, but the need for speed was paramount and so I chose the A26, which is appropriately, and officially, called the Autoroute des Anglais. After a while bowling along the A26 I became aware of the need for petrol again, yet my petrol gauge, a notoriously unreliable instrument, wasn't worried and was confidently insisting that I had 40 miles in the tank. However, I decided to get off at the next exit and



An electricity cable was strung across the road between these two buildings!

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One of several very steep very tight hairpins on the descent from the Col de Noyer.

forage for petrol in the surrounding countryside, but, *quel disastre!*, the next exit was closed because of roadworks. This meant that all northbound traffic – that was me and several thousand bloody great lorries – were diverted into the right hand lane of the southbound carriageway. Now picture the scene: immediately on my right was the newly-built, solid concrete carriageway divider; on my left was an endless stream of southbound traffic hurtling towards me in the other direction, and behind me there was a long convoy of very big trucks. Happily my petrol gauge was telling me that there were still 37 miles in the tank so all was well.



However, 37, as it turns out, is BMW-speak for sweet bugger all, because at that very moment, with 37 mythical miles in the tank, I ran out of petrol.

In a pathetically futile gesture of warning I immediately put both wipers on but I was slowing fast and the thought of coming to a complete halt with 40 tonnes of French freight bearing down on me from behind at 80kph was terrifying, yet there was absolutely no escape: I couldn't pull over to the right because of the concrete wall, and to the left there were a few flimsy plastic lane dividers and an unbroken stream of fast oncoming traffic. There was no time to think, I went 'all in', I had no choice, and I freewheeled pathetically slowly across that stream of fast oncoming traffic in front of a red car. I don't know what make of car it was but I do remember it was red. I remember it quite well actually. I came very close to it. I suppose it could have been very much redder...

Huge relief. I made it. I was now safe on the hard shoulder of the southbound carriageway and I was about to phone the AA when a couple of roadworks men in a van stopped on the other side of the concrete wall; they leapt over it, fearlessly darted between the traffic and helped me move the bike to a safer position. They then phoned for help and with a cheery wave disappeared. After about 30 minutes a nice bloke turned up

with a huge rescue truck. He poured about a gallon of petrol into the tank, relieved me of 139 euros and with a smile and a "Bon voyage," he was gone. Panic over.

Reflection

France has got everything you need for the perfect motorcycle holiday, built-in and ready to go: wonderful scenery, beautiful weather, fantastic food and, best of all, great, great roads – cream-smooth, deserted, sinuous roads that curve through field and forest and sometimes vault 9000ft over the highest mountains. To ride for 2500 miles without ever having to worry about the road surface is such a liberating feeling. You rediscover what motorbikes are really meant to be about. You can forget everything other than enjoying the ride. I can't deny that in some towns the French roads are often little better than ours; it seems as if the town roads are sometimes allowed to decay over time and they let them go and let the damaged surfaces act as a form of natural, organic traffic calming. But outside the towns and villages all the roads are good, so good in fact that in the odd place where all is not quite perfect they warn you with a 'Chausée Déformée' sign (literally: roadway deformed). Imagine if we did that here: every inch of every road would have this sign. If you've ridden the French roads you will know what I mean; if you haven't, then I doubt that any words here can convey the feeling of riding in France. It is so, so different from riding here in the UK. Pictures are no help either. Looking at pretty pictures of mountains and mountain roads cannot begin to tell you what it's like actually to ride *in* those pictures. Pictures will remind you of what it was like when you were there, but if you have never been there they are just nice but ultimately meaningless pretty pictures.

NF

There's always bikers and cyclists at the top of every col. This is the Col d'Agnel

REBOOT

DAVE WILLSON UPDATES HIS BOOT REPORT

Some of you readers of this award-winning rag may remember that a year ago I reviewed a pair of XTRM Blade motorcycle boots that I bought from the land of the sleeping dragon (these days I think that dragon is wide awake). I paid the princely sum of £49.99 for the boots and those of you that remember will recall that I waxed lyrical about them. Well, just over a year and 8000 miles have passed, and I thought you might be interested to know how the boots have stood the test of time.

First, the negatives: despite the label saying they are 100% waterproof, they are not. Although to be fair the label actually said "waterproof" so maybe that's Chinese for "leaks like a sieve". Not a problem for me as I've a pair of Gore-Tex lined Altborg boots that I wear in poor weather, but on the couple of occasions last summer when I got caught out in a heavy downpour I did get wet socks. Don't wear socks - problem solved. Joking aside, this is a serious criticism: if an article of clothing is advertised as being waterproof, well, call me old-fashioned but waterproof it should be. Yet even if

they had advertised the boots as being for summer use and not waterproof I would still have bought them and still been happy with the value.

Second criticism: well there isn't really a second criticism. I have to say that the waterproofing issue is the only negative about them. In fact I'm amazed at just how good these boots are. What about wear and tear? First, the screws on the adjustable toe sliders – that's right I did say adjustable toe sliders – have gone rusty, although I have to say that the toe sliders work perfectly as I found out whilst doing some spirited riding around Brands Hatch at the last Kent Fire and Rescue biker skills day. Unfortunately I've nearly worn the right one away and a quick trawl of the Internet would suggest that you can't buy replacements. This wouldn't be an issue with a pair of Sidi or Alpinestars boots as ebay is littered with replacement sliders costing about a tenner. Something to bear in mind. The soles are showing a bit of wear, only to be expected after 18 months of walking, braking, morris dancing and gear changing. The zips all work well and have large leather tags on them to help pull them up, although they don't need them. I think the zips are plastic but they open and close smoother than weasel poo sliding



off a polished door knob. (??? Ed.) Lastly some of the white leather seems to be cracking up a bit, but I've only cleaned them once since I've owned them and that was with a bit of Mr Sheen furniture polish. The cracked leather probably says more about my lacklustre approach to cleaning than to the quality of the boots. I haven't crash tested them, but if there's any size nines out there that want to volunteer in the name of research... They are all leather, the stitching is good, and they have all the usual hard plastic armour so I've no reason to doubt that they'll do well.

In conclusion then: would I buy them again? As David Walliams likes to say on 'Britain clearly hasn't got any talent' "That's a big fat yes from me." I searched a popular internet auction site (although some strange things did come up when I typed in extreme leather) and you can still buy them, although the price has gone up to £62.99. They've also introduced a couple of new colours – lime green for all you Kawasaki riders, and bright yellow for all you riders of, well, bright yellow motorcycles I suppose.



THE DEAD PARROT TOUR

In which Geoff Curtis find himself 'pining for the fjords'

One or two of you may be aware that certain other members of KAMG preceded me to Norway not too long ago, so I'll try not to duplicate their excellent travelogue and blogging.

There is now no ferry from England across the North Sea to Northern Europe so on the 24th of June this year I took Le Shuttle across The Channel. My first overnight stop was in Osnabruck, Germany where my budget hotel did not serve dinner, so I was pleased to hear that there was a brew-pub in the city centre with a hot buffet to boot. The longish walk was well worth it. I find German beer is always good and the darker brew of the day was particularly pleasing.

The next overnight stop was northern Denmark within striking distance of the ferry to Norway. There was no chance of my missing it by oversleeping as the cockerel on a nearby farm was very loud at 5:15am. Having boarded the first of numerous ferries, I realised the one thing I'd left at home was travel sickness pills (I find I'm less resilient to rough seas now than when younger). As luck would have it the crossing was dead calm and during which I had a nice chat with a fellow biker - John from The Netherlands - I'm sure you all know him, rides a GS, very pleasant guy with, fortunately, fluent English. (*Yeh, I know him, he was everywhere in the Alps a few weeks ago too. Ed*)

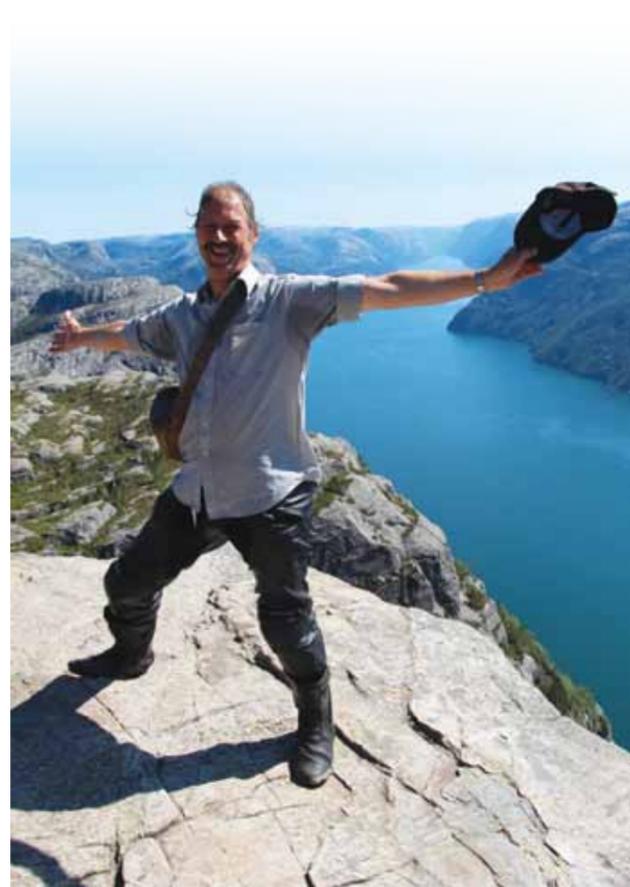
Arrival in Norway was in bright sunshine. Hurrah! So onward to the mountains and fjords. A budget hut on a campsite in Egersund was clean, warm and served me well, and from a few yards away there was a great view of

A room with a view and a view of a room



the river and mountains. The mile and a half walk beside a fjord into town served to sharpen my appetite for my first taste of Norwegian cuisine at a good hotel. Realising I was more than a casual drinker, the attentive staff provided an informative beer list, in English, with a good proportion of local offerings to titillate my palate. Another evening well spent.

Next day dawned clear and bright and I set my satnav to use a pre-planned route to the fjords! The scenery became



Pulpit Rock, after noticing camera

Pulpit Rock, before noticing camera



ever more impressive as I headed north. My tours are not all about rushing and covering mileage though, so time was allowed for sight-seeing and expeditions, such as the climb to Pulpit Rock, probably Norway's most photographed area. A guide I had read said to allow two hours, which I duly did but it turned out that it meant two hours up and another two down. Never mind. As I was securing my bike, who should turn up with the same idea but my mate John. Unlike him, I didn't bother to change out of my motorcycle boots and leather trousers (to minimise luggage I didn't take shorts anyway) so by the time I reached the top, in warm sunshine, I was somewhat sweaty but did earn the respect of younger people in Lycra with their back packs and water bottles, while all I carried was my camera. John had left me well behind in his wake by two thirds of the ascent but he was a few years younger and a keen cyclist. Two excuses should suffice.

Another stop on the way was a cultural visit to Roldal stave church, the oldest in Norway and very well preserved. The admission fees obviously help with this.

The following day brought more sunshine, putting a smile on my face as I anticipated the day's riding. A new experience was had after twenty miles or so when I entered a tunnel near Brimnes and was soon confronted by a roundabout, in the tunnel! With the circular lighting top and bottom it was reminiscent of a scene from Close Encounters. The tunnel opened on to a bridge over Hardangerfjord and at the end there was another tunnel with another roundabout. All good fun, and by the end of the day I had seen, among many others, Sognefjord, the longest and deepest in Norway and second in the world. The good weather continued and scenic overload was setting in by now, no complaints though, and the day's ride took me from the longest fjord to the highest mountain road I would use. The private toll road to the viewpoint atop Dalsnibba was well worth it: there is a 360-degree panorama and a fantastic view of the ribbon of road twisting away down the valley's hairpins to end my day near Geiranger at a campsite overlooking Geirangerfjord, funnily enough.

It was too good to last. Come morning the scene from my hut had changed dramatically to low cloud obscuring the view to the fjord and the mountain tops, accompanied by

Leaving Bodo



driving rain. Ho hum. Into waterproofs then and down the pass into town. I had planned to take the return ferry trip to Hellesylt, without bike, to see the splendours of the fjord, allegedly the world's most beautiful, but it was not looking the most enticing prospect; however, I had nothing else to do, so with perhaps misguided optimism that the weather would blow over, I paid my fare and boarded. Imagining it on a beautiful sunny day helped my appreciation of the majesty of my surroundings and as places of note came into view, a multilingual commentary added interesting details. On the return leg the weather did lift for a short period allowing some better pictures and a view of the famous Troll's Path with its eleven hairpin bends; more fun once back on the bike. It was still raining when I finished for the day near Eide ready to tackle the famous Atlantic Road in the morning. It was wet again on day eight, so the camera did not come out much, although during my cultural lunch break in Trondheim, I did take shots of the old dock, the cathedral and Stiftsgarden, the royal residence and Northern Europe's largest wooden building. The roads were dry again by the time I ended the day in Grong but my boots were still very damp - waterproof? Gore-Tex? Pah!

An early start was required next day, as I was taking the

Shortest placename in the world



Kvalvika, Lofoten Islands



coastal route to Mo i Rana which involved using four ferries. The sun was shining, my boots were drying and my spirits soared with every mile of more lovely scenery (I may have mentioned this aspect of Norway before). The most fjord-filled region was behind me now but there was still water almost everywhere I looked. This was day ten and heralded my assault on the Arctic Circle, not far north of my overnight stop in Mo i Rana. The landscape had changed to plateaus and mountains with a gentler profile. Vegetation was noticeably lessening with the higher latitude. Sharp corners were replaced by sweeping bends on well surfaced (and dry) roads, so good progress could be maintained. The obligatory photographs were taken at the Arctic Circle Centre but I was quite disappointed that reindeer burger no longer features on the menu; perhaps due to the misplaced sentimentality of some tourists.

Onward then along the E6 before taking the turn onto Rv80 to Bodo for the ferry to Moskenes in the Lofoten Islands. The views to the left of Rv80 of Skjerstad Fjord, with trees in the foreground and sweeping snow-covered mountain tops in the distance were pure picture postcard but the trouble was whenever there was a perfect view, there was nowhere to pull over and take a picture. There was Armco one side and a steep drop or very rough verge the other. The memory will live long though. The best part of four hours on the ferry encouraged people to get to know other travellers and a small party of French bikers (mainly GSs but also a Tiger and a Harley) provided good company, as did an American tree farmer from Oregon with whom, among other topics, I exchanged political views about his country and mine. He agreed that Trump is probably the worst ever president.

Upon disembarkation, I went south briefly to visit Å (pronounced 'or'), surely the place with the shortest name in the world. After taking up my accommodation a little north of Moskenes (the location made this quite an expensive stop) it was time for dinner and the restaurant a mere fifty yards away overlooks a bay where gulls kindly performed aerobatics on the evening breeze. Good local beer was available but not the dish I ordered. Instead I was offered something not appearing on the menu or my culinary experiences list – whale steak. It was delicious; something akin to a very tender fillet steak but with a much

larger grain and it simply melted in my mouth. I believe it came with a honey and mustard glaze. The sky was clear, so tonight was the night to stay up and photograph the midnight sun on the craggy mountains across another nearby stretch of water. However, clouds were threatening in the morning, so it was back into waterproofs to wend my merry way up the chain of islands to visit Svolvær Magic Ice Bar & Gallery. This looks to have been a warehouse for seafood storage and is maintained at minus six degrees Celsius. It is a truly unforgettable experience with its sculptures in clear and opaque ice artistically lit in various colours. Then it was onwards and upwards to Narvik, my most northerly overnight stop.

Day twelve meant that I had exhausted my preplanned routes and I was now taking the fastest way from place to place on the long way south to home. Leaving Narvik was an experience in itself. The main road across to Sweden was closed for roadworks with no diversion posted. When I tried back streets to get around the blockage I found that there was no way to get far enough to circumvent the roadworks. It seems in these isolated parts you have the main roads in and out of town and all others just go around housing estates. Not surprising then that no diversion was posted. I let the satnav decide where to take me, having told it to avoid the blockage. Proceeding southwest then, instead of east, after a while the fastest route took a turn off the main drag through some wonderful countryside (more photographs) then ended at a ferry crossing. Not too bad thought I, until I looked at the timetable and a local confirmed that the next ferry would arrive at noon. It was then a quarter to eleven; decision time. I did a 'U' turn and returned the twenty miles to the turning and carried on to the next ferry where I found that the service was only every hour, so I still had time to kill. By now it was late morning and I still had well over three hundred miles to cover to my destination Skellefteå, Sweden.

Following the E6 south then, I eventually came to a left turn for Sweden, the Rv13, which becomes the 95 when it

crosses the border. Soon after, a change in the quality of the road surface and the nature of roadworks became apparent. Passing through a lovely wooded region in a national park there were signs for roadworks ahead, for 11km for heaven's sake! The Norwegians leave surfaces adequate when there is a temporary halt to repairs but not so the Swedes it would seem. The road had been planed and part-prepared for the top surface and had reached the stage where small grade ballast is put down (about a third the size of that used for railway tracks). A lot of it had been rolled and packed down but no sweeping had been done to remove the loose stuff, so for all those 11km it was a case of staying in the cleaner lines of four wheelers at 20 – 25 mph and having to switch lines when a deep drift of the stuff was in my path. All went well, on my 'new when I started' Michelin PR5s for 10km then the dreaded warning symbol appeared on my display telling me the rear was losing pressure. '*<%>@^!' roadworks' was the expression which sprang to mind. Upon inspection in a layby, nothing was obviously penetrating the tyre and being wet, I found it impossible to detect the source of the leak. This meant I could not use my plug repair kit and had to trust that a can of sealant would do the trick. In it went and none oozed out, so I topped the pressure up with my trusty foot pump and jumped back on hoping to cover the last 170 miles to Skellefteå. For ten miles all was well but then the warning returned and I could see the pressure reading dropping. I was still miles from any signs of human habitation and didn't fancy waiting for a recovery vehicle with the vicious midges, as big as the Scottish ones, lurking and waiting to strike. The lovely rolling forestry plantation hills all around did not make me feel any better. Out with the foot pump again and in around two minutes I was mobile again, having stowed the pump in my top box for ease of access instead of a pannier. Another ten miles, another warning, another layby and at this point it would have made an amusing record if the whole thing had been filmed and speeded up. I got it down to about a two-minute procedure and so it went on every ten miles to my destination where the day ended well in an Irish theme pub

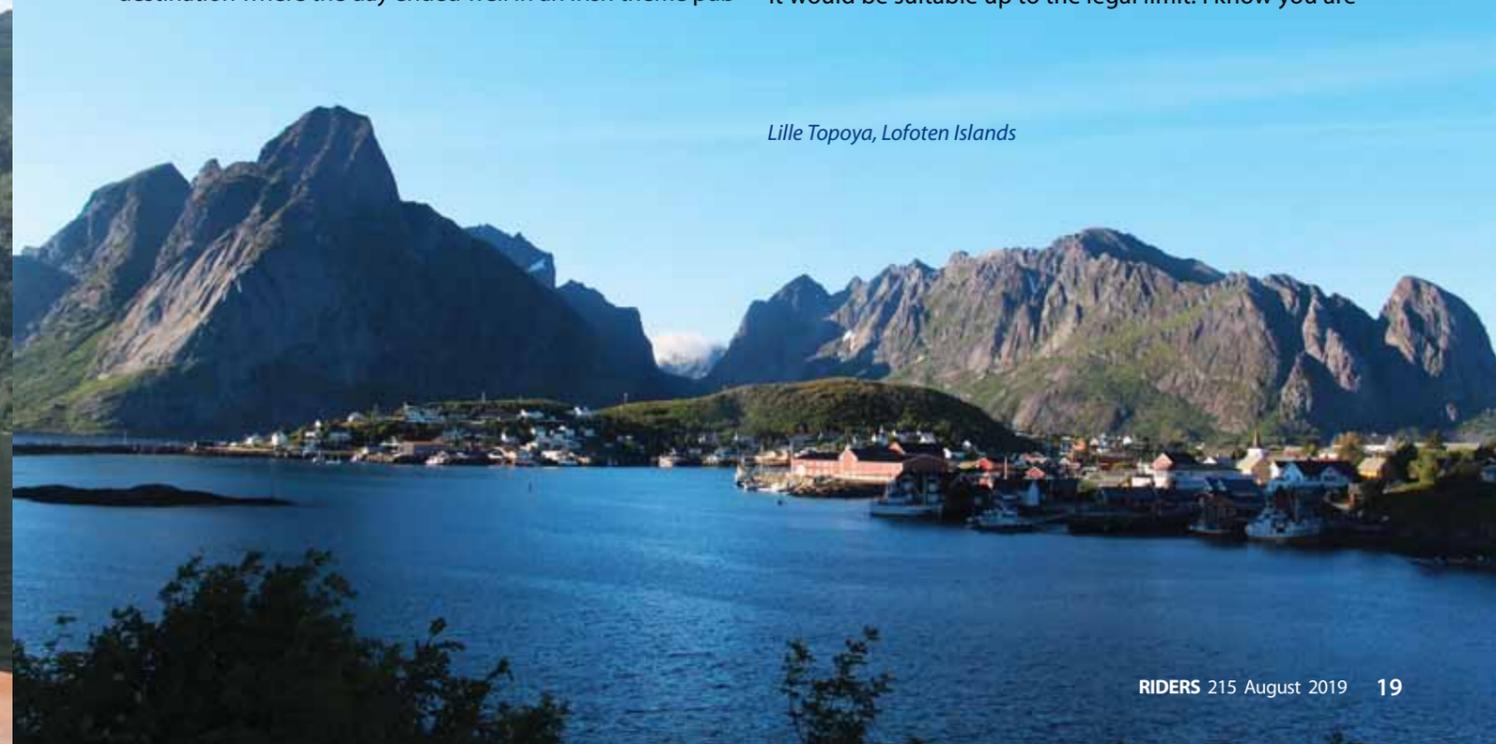


Approaching Moskenes, Lofoten Islands

fifty yards down the street with good beers and good food. After this and the trials and tribulations of the day, sleep came easily. Knowing it would be Saturday the next day and a town this size would be bound to have a motorcycle dealer or two put my mind at rest and I dropped off to dream of new tyres.

Morning came with only the threat of rain. My satnav told me there were two BMW sites together on the outskirts of town; that would be one for cars and one for bikes, surely? So off I went, only to find at 9am that they don't open until 11am and then only for customers to collect purchases and there was no sign of bikes anyway. The satnav told me the nearest bike dealer was 120 miles away but at least it was in the right direction. Not wanting to carry out 'the procedure' all that way I asked around for a tyre fitting company and was directed not far to a large place, which upon arrival I found was not open at weekends. My next source of help was the young assistant at a petrol station who advised me that most, if not all, workshops and garages operate only Monday to Friday. However, unlike most, this petrol station had a large area dedicated to motoring supplies, like a small Halfords, so a young lady found me another can of sealant and translated that it would be suitable up to the legal limit. I know you are

Another day, another fjord



Lille Topoya, Lofoten Islands

not supposed to mix products but I had nothing to lose, so in it went and promptly found my leak: a small cut in the middle of the thick tread was oozing foam and forming a little pile on the ground. I was pleased to see this didn't last long and having emptied the can, checked the tyre pressure. It was bang on, so off I went again heading for the bike dealership.

Svolvaer Magic Ice Bar and Gallery



As the first ten miles ticked off, I kept a close eye on the display for the worrying yellow triangle and the more worrying red one but ten miles came and went, so did twenty, thirty, forty, fifty and still no loss of pressure; whoopee! I arrived non-stop at the motorcycle dealership as bikes were being wheeled out of the showroom for display. The young man said yes, they supplied and fitted tyres, so I thought I should have a new one for peace of mind even though the repair was holding up. He then went on to say that they open on Saturdays for sales only and the workshop would reopen Monday. Harrumph! (or similar). I had a chat and a free coffee (rude not to) and used their customer facilities while I contemplated my position. I didn't fancy kicking my heels in Umea for two days so I decided to hell with it, I'd press on. So I did, all the way home over the course of four days, covering around 1,900 miles in all following the puncture.

On the way I dropped into Sigtuna, Sweden's oldest town but was disappointed not to see ancient wooden structures of all kinds. The only thing apparently older than seventy years was the crumbling remains of a castle. The Oresund bridge and tunnel combination linking Sweden with Denmark was a sight to behold but I didn't see anywhere safe to stop for photographs; a shame.

Epilogue

My bike's mysterious lack of tick over problem returned in heavy rush hour traffic near Osnabruck on day one and it was most unpleasant being stalled with an articulated lorry two feet behind me and Armco preventing me from pushing off the road to restart. I couldn't just abandon all my planning so I decided I could manage the problem and indeed got quite good at keeping a little throttle while braking to a halt. The bike is now booked in with an independent BMW expert for investigation and possible software upgrade.

Despite the numerous mountain ranges and my adventurous route planning using much received wisdom as to good biking roads, there were disappointingly few mountain passes with multiple hairpins. It appears the Norwegians have been spending their vast oil wealth on improving their infrastructure and wherever traffic flow was hindered by a steep climb, they've bored a tunnel through, so now the road is flat and fairly straight with no view at all. Unlike many routes in the French and Italian Alps, the old road over is no longer accessible. D'oh! During the 16-day trip I covered 4,735 miles, the last 1,000 being mainly motorway. Day after day on the major trunk route to reach home became quite tiring and tedious at times. Restricting my progress to 70mph along the sections of unrestricted autobahns to cater for the possible limitations of the tyre sealant made me feel quite slow as large Beemers,



Tick that box

Audis and Mercs streaked past at well into three figures. I recommend that all UK motorway lane two hoggers should be forced to drive on these two-lane unrestricted sections to learn use of mirrors and lane discipline. When you are gaining on an HGV in lane one, it is even more important than here to time your use of the overtaking lane to return to the near side in good time; that is, well before two tons of Teutonic steel is braking behind you flashing and hooting having closed the gap at twice your speed. I have to say that over all, lane discipline throughout my trip was very good with nothing like the above example occurring.

Back home and still the tyre pressure is holding, so I consider the repair permanent and will run the tyre down to the wear limit, or just prior to my trip to Spain in September, whichever comes first.



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SAT NAV

Paul Jessop's comments on Simon Forder from Vines Guildford BMW and his visit to May's Group night



KAMG's May group night saw Simon Forder, from Vines Guildford BMW Motorrad, give a presentation on the use of satnavs and route planning. Chatting to Simon beforehand it seems he has led an interesting life, having raced bikes and also spent a number of years working in Hong Kong before returning to the UK. The prospect of selling BMWs was obviously too strong to resist!

There is an old adage that you should never assume, but if you're like me that's just what you do on a regular basis and so I assumed that a projector would be on hand in the Kentagon for Simon to use. Not so. But Simon is a resourceful chap and said he could link to the Kentagon television screen by Bluetooth. This was a stroke of genius and worked well – until the connection failed. Undeterred, Simon continued and split his presentation into parts with each one aimed at particular interest group: one for TomTom users, one for Garmin BaseCamp users and one for the more user-friendly MyRoute app, which is the new incarnation of the popular Tyre app. In common with many apps these days, there is a free version of MyRoute and a subscription Gold version. There are also options which are designed for mobile phones. The recommendation from Simon was to go for the Gold version as the additional functionality is worth having, including the ability to select maps from different sources – Google, Garmin and TomTom. Routes are easy to plot and download into a GPS and they can also be shared with other users.

BaseCamp is Garmin's own route planning software and although it is not so easy to use, perseverance will pay dividends as it is a powerful tool. Personally, I have never used BaseCamp as I struggled on my first attempt and

then discovered Harley Ride Planner, which is similar to Tyre/ MyRoute and places a gpx file straight into the GPS. This fits in much better with my IT abilities. To get the most from BaseCamp the set-up is vital and there were a number of tips starting with the need to ensure that you have the latest version of software and maps installed, both on your computer and in your GPS. One point that I found slightly bizarre is that waypoints are reordered alphabetically and so it is essential that you use a naming convention that keeps them in the correct order. Your route could prove interesting if you don't. A tip that I do mean to try is to load your maps and routes on to an sd card rather than into the GPS itself. This frees up the unit's memory so that processing should be much faster.

I have to say, I thought that Simon's presentation was excellent, and a sign of how well it was received was that, for the first time that I can remember, we had to bring the talk to a close as the Kentagon staff needed to lock up and go home. Simon also runs similar events at the Vines premises from time to time, and you can book a place to attend them. For further details of these as well as tours, ride-outs and special offers from Vines contact Simon or one of the team at Vines Guildford BMW Motorrad and ask to be added to their mailing list.

We will try to persuade Simon to come back for a follow up talk in 2020, but if in the meantime you have any questions Simon can be contacted at simon.forder@vinesgroup.net , 01483 207055. And the slides from his presentation can be viewed at https://prezi.com/aoopgkxnjgbf/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

A CRITIQUE OF MICHELIN'S PR5S

BY GEOFF CURTIS

On my Blackbird I ran PR4s and was very happy with them time after time, so much so that I saw no point in paying the extra for the new PR5s. Short notice after a previous puncture meant I had to take what was in stock at Fastlane Moto in Tonbridge, so I had my K1300S fitted with PR5s in readiness for my tour of Norway.

I was very pleased with their performance on all types of road surface dry or wet (apart from the exception in Sweden) but noticed a peculiar tendency the PR4s never had. Riding heavily laden on tour, following traffic at a constant speed anywhere

between 25 and 45mph in a straight line on a good surface, dry or wet, often resulted in a weaving motion maybe deviating 6in over a distance of 30yds before reciprocating. The tyre pressures were as advised by BMW's manual, i.e. the same as unladen (2.5 bar front, 2.9 bar rear). The suspension was set for normal with rider and luggage.

Can anyone explain this anomaly? Is this type of thing the reason this brand of tyre is not on BMW's recommended list? I will certainly be replacing with PR4s unless there is a very good reason not to adhere to BMW's recommendations.



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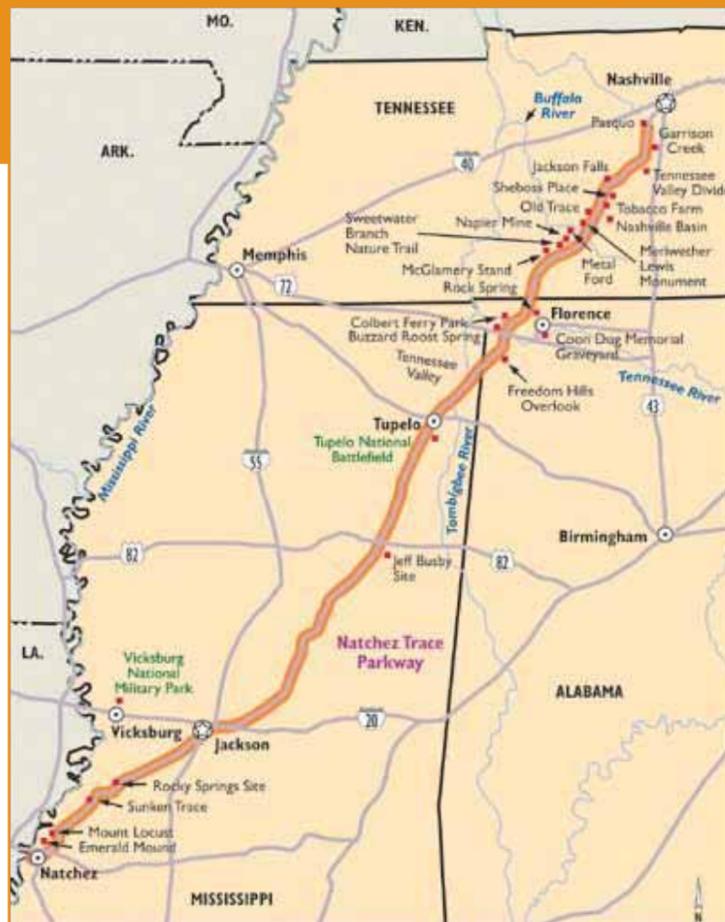
COUNTRY, JAZZ AND BLUES

Stephen Davis

An overland tour in the United States Deep South, passing through the music cities of Nashville, Memphis and New Orleans, has been on my travel bucket list for several years. So, last summer, when my wife Wendy declared, at the end of a two-week, six city, coast-to-coast trip on Amtrak, that she never again wanted to visit the USA, I decided to bring forward my planned trip and to consider renting a motorcycle to do it. Initially, I looked into joining a guided tour but couldn't find any organised groups running as early as Easter, and most trip itineraries ran over ten or more days. Instead, I set about planning my own tour centred on riding most of the Natchez Trace Parkway, which is a 444 mile recreational road running through the states of Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi following an historic route originally used by American Indians. And earlier this year I made that trip.

On the first day of my trip I was planning to ride 238 miles from Nashville in Tennessee to Tupelo in Mississippi, and after breakfast I took a taxi from my hotel to downtown Nashville where a Harley Davidson dealer was located near the international airport. The dealership was also the local agent for EagleRider Rentals from whom I had hired a Harley Davidson Road King for five days, paying the additional one-way charge so that I could leave it in New Orleans at the end of the week. I knew virtually nothing about Harley Davidson motorcycles other than the company is often cited in business school texts as having an exceptionally loyal customer base. Few Harley Davidson customers, apparently, have owned or even test ridden a motorcycle from another manufacturer. The Road King is described on the company's website as a classic Harley and is widely used as a police bike in the United States. It has a high windshield, which I thought would make riding long distances more comfortable, and an abundance of chrome.

The salesman at the dealership brought out a bike with a West Virginia state plate and proudly showed me that it had just six miles on the clock. Nevertheless, and in accordance with my KAMG training, I started to carry out a pre-ride POWDER check. This didn't exactly endear me to the salesman, especially when I pointed out that the fuel gauge showed that the tank was only two-thirds full. In response, he unscrewed the (non-lockable) fuel cap and peered downwards into the fuel tank before advising me that the tank was in fact full. He then explained that on many Harley



The Natchez Trace Parkway

models the gauge would only show a full tank after it had been ridden for several miles. Reassured by this, I split my hand luggage between the two rear hard panniers and set off for the start of the Natchez Trace Parkway avoiding the interstate highway during the morning rush hour. My route required me to take a series of back roads into Nashville that, like most urban streets in the US, lacked any meaningful signage and had multiple sets of traffic light junctions. It was here that I first noticed that the foot gear lever did not always easily slip into neutral.

2019 Road King. 362kg dry weight. 90HP power.



The Natchez Trace Parkway is a designated national scenic route and is therefore closed to commercial traffic. For the first few hours I only passed vehicles travelling in the opposite direction, on average about one every two minutes. One of the factors that I had not considered as part of my pre-trip planning and timeline was the 45 or 50 mph speed limit that applied along much of the route and which was, according to a local guidebook, a speed limit rigorously enforced by the park rangers. Nor had I taken into account that like most US rural roads, the Natchez Trace Parkway was mostly a wide, straight road with few bends or gradients and it passed through a landscape that pretty much remained the same visually for mile after mile.

As I rode further south and entered the state of Alabama about 140 miles from Nashville, a red low-fuel warning light came on and digital milometer automatically switched over to show the number of miles remaining – 40, 30 and then 20. I was beginning to plan how I might need to stop and flag down a passing car or RV (recreational vehicle), to ask whether they had a can of petrol I could buy, when, out of nowhere, the Parkway passed over another road (US Route 72) and I could see a rural petrol station in the distance. Reader, I know what you are thinking: "Full tank, empty bladder." And, yes, you're right. Eventually I rode into Tupelo less than an hour before one of the cultural highlights of my trip – Elvis Presley's birthplace and museum – was due to close at five pm.

Next day was to take me from Tupelo to Memphis, 173 miles. I knew that despite its twenty grand OTR price tag in the UK, the Road King does not come fitted with a satnav as standard and I had brought with me several fold-out paper maps to study over breakfast. I did my best to memorise the route for the day ahead but I should also declare that I did on a couple of occasions resort to the satnav on my mobile phone at the end of long ride to help me find my hotel. Again I wanted to

Airport style security at museum entrance. No gum. Guns permitted with a license



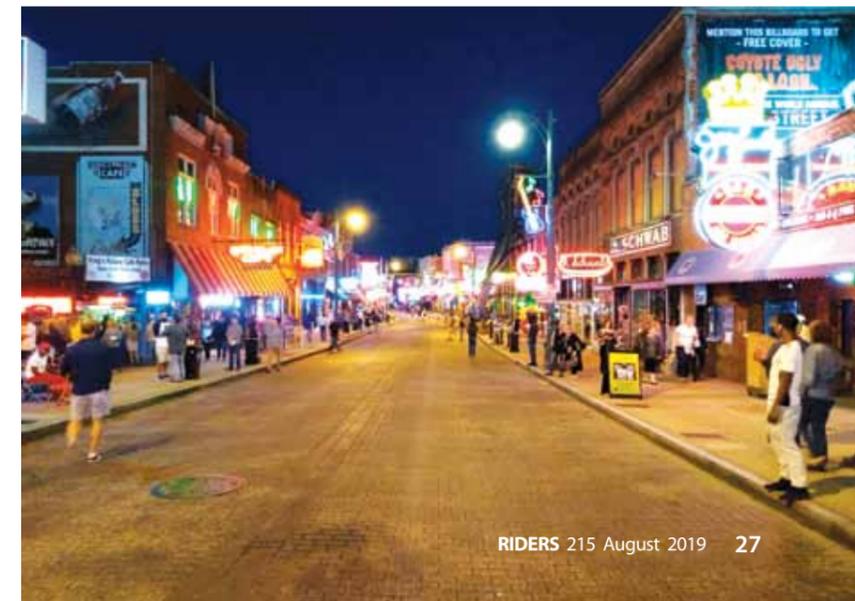
avoid the Interstate and instead took the Pontotoc Parkway – another straight road but this time a dual carriageway that ran parallel to Interstate 20 – for about 80 miles before joining Interstate 55 northbound to Memphis.

Although the Road King has an enormous 1,745cc engine, the bike seemed to lack any real acceleration. I know very little about engines (and even less about how to maintain them), but each time I started the Road King from cold the engine spluttered with a deep rhythmic sound that reminded me of my old Mountfield petrol mower and, like the Mountfield, when changing gears there was the same pronounced mechanical clunking sound. Anyway, each to their own.

I rode into Memphis at about midday and continued across the Mississippi river taking Interstate 40 into Arkansas to have lunch in a small township called Marion for no other reason than wanting to add Arkansas to my list of US states visited. Afterwards I returned to Memphis for an afternoon of sightseeing and an evening of blues music on Beale Street.

Another early start on Wednesday for the 257 mile ride to Jackson. My original plan had been to retrace my route back to Tupelo and then continue south down the Natchez Trace Parkway towards Jackson, Mississippi. However, I realised that this would take up too much of the day, and so I reluctantly decided to take the more direct route on Interstate 55 South. After riding for about 150 miles, I left the Interstate to take a series of local roads that eventually connected up with the Natchez Trace Parkway 20 miles before it runs alongside a large reservoir north of Jackson. These back roads, which ran through several small towns and rural communities, provided some of the most interesting and varied riding of the trip, but apart from two world-class museums that both opened in 2017 (the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum and the Museum of Mississippi History), there's little to recommend in Jackson

Blues - Beale Street, Memphis TN



itself. It's an example of an American city usually found in the mid-west that has few signs of outdoor human life. I can't even recall seeing the ubiquitous Starbucks fascia anywhere in the downtown area.

Every morning since I had arrived on Saturday, I had switched on the television in my hotel room to be presented with a weather forecaster on a local news station talking excitedly about a severe weather warning for Thursday – today – the day I was to ride 188 miles to New Orleans. The forecast from lunchtime onwards was for storm force winds moving eastwards from Texas possibly resulting in localised tornadoes and accompanied by thunderstorms with upwards of four inches of rain. The forecast weather caused me to abandon my original planned route of re-joining and following the Natchez Trace Parkway to its starting point in Natchez, an historic town situated on the banks of the Mississippi. Instead, I decided that it might be more sensible to continue on Interstate 55 southbound all the way to New Orleans. If I were to get caught up in any severe weather, I could at least come off the highway at the next junction and take temporary refuge in a service station or even book into a roadside hotel until the storm passed. I was first down to breakfast that morning and was on the road by 7.30am. For the final stage of my 800 mile journey, I only stopped to refuel, or to take a short rest break after every 60 or so miles. Fortunately, I must have been in the 'calm before the storm', as it was only as I reached the final



Street musicians, New Orleans LA

few miles of Interstate 55 that I saw the first droplets of rain on my helmet visor. Even then it was not much more than a light drizzle. The final section was a 23 mile long twin concrete trestle bridge built above the Manchac Swamp north of New Orleans, offering road users no weather protection.

By now, the problem with the gear shift lever had worsened to the point that I could not engage neutral. At traffic lights I needed to hold the clutch lever in and remain in first gear. At petrol stations I had to turn the engine off while it was still in first gear, lower the side stand (which did not

automatically cut the engine) and get off. Then, kneeling beside the parked bike, I was able to manipulate the gear lever into neutral delicately using my fingers. Was this a sign that the clutch had gone after only 800 miles? It made me appreciate my faithful Honda back home even more, and I was glad to return the Road King a day early.

When asked by the rental location manager what I liked about the Road King, all I could think of to say was that it had a comfortable seat and a loud, car-like road horn. Notwithstanding my faint praise, he kindly ordered a taxi to take me into the centre of New Orleans, and as the taxi passed under the road gantries above the highway into the city centre, I could see that they were now displaying a message stating that "No RVs, motorcycles or high sided vehicles were permitted on the Manchac Swamp Bridge". What opportune timing. Had I left Jackson an hour later or taken a less direct route, I might well have had to wait until the bridge was reopened to traffic in the late afternoon after the storm had passed through and after a multi vehicle pile-up, including several 18 wheeler trucks, had been cleared. After checking into my hotel in the French Quarter, I took a 45 minute tram ride in the torrential rain, out to the New Orleans Museum of Art only to find that, like all state government buildings, it had closed at noon due to the adverse weather conditions. Fortunately, the rain didn't seem to dampen the spirits of the street buskers or cause the jazz clubs and bars to close, and so in the evening I was able to go as planned to Preservation Hall.



The Preservation Hall Jazz band

My experience of driving in North America (outside of the New York boroughs) is that virtually all road users are courteous and keep a good distance from the vehicle in front of them. Perhaps the biggest danger to motorcyclists is the high proportion of drivers, including eighteen-wheeler lorry drivers, who drive one-handed while speaking on their mobile phones. A practice not yet prohibited in most US states. From reading this, you may have concluded that I won't be buying a Harley any time soon. That said, however, the bike did deliver me safely to my destination, even though the journey times were longer than I had planned, but it was uninspiring and plain dull to ride.

The self-proclaimed home of country music. Broadway, Nashville TN



The only motorcyclist in north America wearing a hi-vis jacket. Outside Graceland, Memphis TN



IDCAM

INTRODUCTORY DAY COURSE IN ADVANCED MOTORCYCLING



The revised style IDCAM has been running for some months now. Attendees book in at 8.45am and have their documents and bikes checked over. A short classroom presentation about KAMG and Advanced Motorcycling commences at about 9.00am. An assessed ride follows with a short debrief before a coffee break. A classroom session about the System of Motorcycle Control takes us to lunch time. We also fit in a Highway Code quiz and the POWDDERSS check of a motorcycle, so it's quite a busy morning. After lunch, attendees go out for a second assessed ride with an Observer, finishing at a mutually agreed location.



If you would like to attend as an Associate contact associates@kamg.org.uk. Observers should confirm their willingness to help by registering on Tracker and they will be kept informed about the needs for any particular session.

MACHINE CONTROL DAY

Our machine control days are organised by Jim Pullum. If you have not yet signed up then do it now – simply log on to Tracker and register your participation.

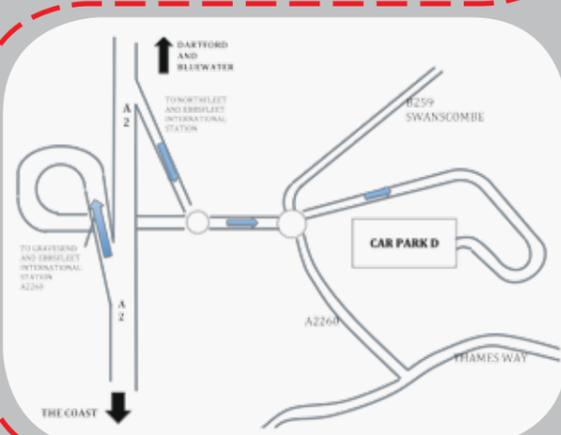
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Saturday September 28th 2019



CONTACT PAGE

President: **Terry Friday**
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PRESIDENT
Terry Friday
0844 585 7786



CHAIRWOMAN
Tina Underwood
0844 585 7798
chairman@kamg.org.uk



DEPUTY CHAIR & VICE PRESIDENT
Dave Murphy
0844 585 7781
vicepresident@kamg.org.uk
0844 802 7091
vicechairman@kamg.org.uk



GROUP SECRETARY
Joe Mair
0844 585 7789
group-secretary@kamg.org.uk



CHIEF OBSERVER
Colin Underwood
0844 585 7791
chiefobserver@kamg.org.uk



DEPUTY CHIEF OBSERVER
Tony Young
0844 585 7796
dco@kamg.org.uk



TREASURER
Paul Jessop
0844 802 7093
paul.jessop@fil.com



MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY
David Howard
0844 585 7792
membership@kamg.org.uk



MAGAZINE EDITOR
Nick Farley
0844 585 7794
editor@kamg.org.uk



MACHINE CONTROL DAY
Jim Pullum
0844 585 7783
mcd@kamg.org.uk



IDCAM & ASSOCIATE CO-ORDINATOR
Ian Burchell
0844 585 7797
associates@kamg.org.uk



RUN CO-ORDINATOR
Neville Smith
0844 585 7782
runleader@kamg.org.uk
webmaster@kamg.org.uk



GROUP NIGHTS
Steve Riches
0844 585 7793
groupnights@kamg.org.uk



REGALIA MANAGER
John England
0844 585 7795
regalia@kamg.org.uk



PUBLICITY OFFICER
Niels Reynolds
0844 585 7785
publicity@kamg.org.uk



COMMITTEE MEMBER
John Gardiner
0844 802 7092
sujon.mg@virgin.net



COMMITTEE MEMBER
Paul Aspinall
0844 802 7094
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