



NORTHUMBRIA ADVANCED MOTORCYCLISTS



Metropolitan Police Special Escort Group (SO14)

**2014 Issue 2
Newsletter**



**NAM is affiliated with the
Institute of Advanced Motorists**

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The views expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of Northumbria Advanced Motorcyclists or the Institute of Advanced Motorists and should not be interpreted as such.

Did you know NAM has a Costco card?

Costco is a membership warehouse club, where members can buy quality goods and services at low prices.

They also sell and fit standard car tyres as and winter tyres. Contact David Henderson, Treasurer for more information.



NAM is supported by Northumbria Fire & Rescue Service And Northumbria Police



A word from the Editor



Welcome, to the latest newsletter. I am Barry Bullas the editor and as always I would like to particularly welcome anyone reading our newsletter for the first time. Hopefully you have all had a wonderful summer of riding.

Inside this edition we have our chairmans tale of a trip to France with some other NAM members. Derek and Moira Proctor share their wisdom and experience gained touring on motorcycles. Journalist Antony Loveless has kindly allowed me to include a piece he wrote on the Metroopolin Police's Special Escort Group. I found this really interesting and i hope you do to.

This newsletter is only as good as the contributions from our members. If you have a story, idea or feedback please get in touch. Email any contributions to NamEditor@hotmail.co.uk or speak to me at the monthly meeting. You can also send in any photos of you and your bike on your travels.
Barry Bullas

Chairman's remarks

I need to start on a disappointing note by reporting that we have had a number of riding accidents and incidents in the group since the beginning of the season, much more than in previous years. Mick Goodwin and members of the Training Group are looking closely at the causes, some are down to individual error and other are more due to factors that come into play when riding in a group. We are already giving out more guidance at the briefing at the beginning of ride outs, in particular to give yourself more margin when approaching oncoming vehicles, especially on left hand bends. Don't pack into T junctions, stay more in line so that the bike at the front can have a good look left and right and also be seen more clearly as they emerge by other vehicles on the joining road. With the drop 'off system' there is really no need for riders to feel under pressure to keep up with the bike in front if this is travelling more quickly than you. The next roundabout or turn off will be marked by the 'drop off' rider who will wait for all other riders in the group to pass him/her before the

back marker comes up. 'Ride your own ride'. This is one of the reasons for developing the monthly Associate ride outs so that newer members of the group can gain confidence with the discipline of riding with other bikes in an organised group. We welcome experienced riders joining the Associate ride outs to show a good example of safe riding at a more relaxed pace. There will be two more Associate ride outs this season; Sunday September 7th and October 5th.

The Training Group are also looking at ways of encouraging experienced riders in the group to

maintain their standard of safe riding with ongoing training both at a practical and theoretical level. They are looking at developing the excellent morning classroom session presented by Mick Goodwin for Associates for more experienced riders. This helps riders to look at how they learn and think and acquire new learning together with making safe judgements while they are out on the road.

NAM positively encourages members to undertake further training through for example, ROSPA, Ride-Respect, Ride-Well, 'i to i' as well as retaking their IAM advanced test to gain the IAM all 'Firsts' certificate as has been achieved recently by Mel Leitch and Kevin Patterson. Driving a car or riding a bike involves a life time of self-assessment and continuous improvement in order to keep ourselves safe.

Our Chief Observer, Geoff Spencer now has the highest civilian motorcycling qualifications in the country including the IAM Masters qualification and the much

respected ROSPA Training Diploma which involves an intensive five day residential course. So there is plenty of advice available in the group for those of us wishing to furthering our training and to brush up our skills.

Long term studies show that the main attribute that stays with riders after they have undertaken IAM advanced training is a higher level of attentiveness and receptiveness to advice.

Moving on to the Committee we are pleased to welcome John McCormick who has taken up the vacant post of Social and Events Secretary. John has already been active

making plans for the catering for the AGM in November and Christmas party night in December. John will be making further announcements about these events at the September and October club nights.

While on the subject of the Committee both Mick Goodwin and I will have served our three year term of office come this November. David Henderson our current Treasurer and Vice Chair will be standing for election as the incoming Chair although we will need a new Secretary and Vice Chair to put themselves forward. More details will come out with the AGM notices at the end of October.

David Henderson and John McCormick are also taking the lead on handling the bookings for the perennially popular Scottish Highlands long weekend to the Pitlochry Hydro in May 2015. Room bookings and deposits are now being taken at the September and October club nights. Come early to get your first choice of room. This year we are only accepting deposits/final balances by cheque or bank transfer. No cash please.

With good wishes for safe and enjoyable riding for the rest of the season.

Michael Sutherland



NAM now has its own facebook page. It is a great place for sharing pictures of rideouts, details of upcoming events and attracting new members. It can be viewed by anyone, even if you don't have a facebook account, though it only takes a minute to set an account up if you do want one. If you currently have a facebook account please go to the NAM page and click the like button.

www.facebook.com/NorthumbriaAdvancedMotorcyclists



Do we have your correct info?

(Home address, email address and contact number)

If not you could be missing out on important communications. Contact Membership Secretary Roland McLeod by email: by email: rolly14@googlemail.com or speak to him at the next monthly meeting.

France – The anti-clockwise way round!

Michael Sutherland

The trip began with the four hour crossing from Newhaven to Dieppe at the beginning of June just in time to catch some of the 70th year commemorations for the 'D' Day landings. Many small towns and villages don't mark their liberation until the exact date that the allied forces arrived. Banners across the street proclaim 'D' Day plus four or 'D' day plus five for the date of parades and celebrations.

This ferry crossing was until recently operated by the French Transmanche company and was good value as it was subsidised by the French government to promote commerce. It is now run jointly with DFDS and is my preferred crossing to Normandy as it avoids all the busy terminals and motorway networks associated with the crossing to Calais or the Channel Tunnel.

Disembarking at Dieppe at 3pm 'CET' gives you plenty of time to find accommodation for the night and puts you straight into the beautiful Normandy countryside where the top of crops and fields of poppies are at eye level as you make your way west towards the 'Pont de Normandy', the dramatic



crossing over the River Seine at the historic town of Honfleur, famous for its part in the Norman invasion of Britain in 1066.

We covered 90 miles from the ferry to the seaside resort of Blonville sur Mer where it was easy to find a room in an inexpensive hotel although some hotels were still to open for the summer high season, something that we found throughout France during the month of June.

Next morning we made our way to the nearby Merville Gun battery where there is a re-enactment of the 9th Parachute Regiment taking this German battery which could have fired shells onto Sword Beach only 8 miles away. This gun battery was one of the first vital objectives of the Allied invasion with a planned force of 600 paratroopers and glider

borne troops being assigned to take the battery. In the event only 150 men reached the assembly point without much of their equipment including high explosives and Bangalore torpedoes to break through the battery's barbed wire defences. Volunteers laid over the barbed wire so that other men could get across the perimeter fences. At the end of the battle Lieutenant Colonel Otway had just 75 men left standing to go on to their next objective.

It is only a short distance from Merville to the famous 'Pegasus' Bridge and canal crossing which is ever popular with veterans, re-enactment enthusiasts and other visitors. Café Gondree was the first building in France to be liberated by British soldiers and is full of memorabilia and has been visited by most Heads of State since



the end of the War. Many people who have watched the film 'The Longest day' will remember the scene where the radio operator from the 'Ox and Bucks' Light Infantry repeatedly sends the code words 'Ham and Jam' to Bletchley Park to signify that both bridges have been taken intact giving the 'all clear' for the largest invasion fleet in history to head for the landing beaches.

To complete the WW2 part of the tour we called at the Delages German Radar Battery museum where the long distance Freya radar mast and the Wurzburg short range radar dish together with the underground bunkers and fortifications are intact. Geraldine has been pestering me to bring her here for about four years!

The exciting part of the story is the joint Commando raid at Bruneval known as 'Operation Biting' where several important parts of the radar installations were stripped out and brought back to Britain for the science boffins to examine. From this the Allies were able to deduce that

if they jammed the German radar on 'D' day it would not be possible for them to change to another frequency.

Flight Sgt Charles Cox who had never been in a plane or a boat before was selected to take the parts from the German radar as he had been a cinema projectionist before the war. He had to parachute with the other Commandos from just 600 feet (180 meters) behind enemy lines. Major John Frost of Operation Market Garden fame had orders to shoot Cox if it seemed likely that he was going to fall into enemy hands. The men in the landing craft were transferred to Motor Gun Boats then escorted back to Britain by four Destroyers and a flight of three Spitfires.

The significance of the scientific discovery was used on 'D' Day when several cwt. of aluminium foil (code name 'Windows') was dropped from Allied aircraft to jam the German radar systems and to look like a flotilla of battleships approaching Calais while the real invasion was of course taking place on the

beaches of Normandy, Utah, Omaha, Gold, Sword and Juno.

The same afternoon we travelled on another hundred miles to the City of Fougères which is famous for having the largest preserved mediaeval castle in Europe; we had never heard of it before staying overnight there once before three years ago. This time we weren't so lucky with finding accommodation as only expensive hotels seemed to have rooms available. The Tourist Office couldn't seem to help either but the Garmin directed us to a rather run down Formula One 'hotel' situated on an industrial estate on the outskirts. Geraldine was not impressed with having to share the bathroom and toilet facilities with the French equivalent of 'white van man', or should that be Homme Blanc de livraison! However we made up for it with a posh meal sitting out in one of the city centre plazas on a beautiful evening.

Next morning we made our way from Normandy into Brittany working our way along the small coastal roads



and pretty sea side villages from St Mont Michel crossing the River Rance barrage to Dinard where we saw the rest of our party arrive by ferry in St Malo early next morning (Mick and April, Jack and Anne, Bob and Pat, Malcolm and Joan, Ron, Eric and David Henderson).

Saturday, June 14th saw all the party from NAM arrive at Kevin and Louise's farmhouse (I won't call it a B&B!) at Le Clezio, near to the village of Neulliac which is near to the market town of Pontivy, only about 70 miles or so from the ferry.

To me it looked as though

Kevin and Louise must have won the Euro millions lottery as their three historic properties and extensive outbuildings and gardens are most impressive and luxurious.

Kevin and Louise are great hosts and helped us all to settle in straight away. Each of the two rented properties are self-contained and self-catering with their own patio area, outside seating and BBQ. Ron, Eric and David stayed with Kevin and Louise in their Manor House and as we say 'were all found for'.

The weather was 'wall to wall sunshine' all week and

Kevin and Louise busied themselves with arranging our programme which included a relaxing visit to a Sunday farmers' market, an evening meal by Lake de Guerf a Aan, Josselin Abbey at Timadeuc, the Port of Vannes and a pasta lunch in the market square. On the remaining days a small group of us one evening cycled to a bar alongside the canal then cycled into Pontivy for morning coffee and came back with the French bread like locals! On the Thursday evening, as some of our party were leaving on the Friday morning, Kevin and Louise arranged a farewell meal at a smart restaurant in Pontivy where I will say that they were

very well known!

On the Friday afternoon Ron, Malcolm and I were taken to a proper gun club in Pontivy where under professional instruction we had the opportunity to fire revolvers and an automatic pistol down a 50m target range then followed by WW2 Russian and Polish rifles on the 100m target range.

Now, Ron Patrick may be in his eightieth year but he hasn't lost any of the skills that earned him a place in the Army Rifle Team when he was doing his National Service. Ron consistently put all five rounds close together on the inside of the target where I took several rounds to get my eye in. Ron was overheard to say "I love guns me" and so it was that he earned the name of 'Whip Crack Away Patrick' at the gun club. It must also be pointed out for the record that Malcolm was the only one in our group of six on the ranges to get a perfect bull's-eye. As Malcolm boasted "I'll be on a promise tonight for that when I show Joan!"

This leg of the holiday was rounded off perfectly by a group BBQ in the late evening sunshine where we all mucked in with the preparation and clearing up. Pat's apple tart, or was that a 'tart de pomme' was the star desert of the evening.

Mick, April, Jack and Anne had already left to make their way down the Mediterranean coast and the ferry to Corsica, Ron and Eric also made their way down to the South of France near to Albi to check Eric's barn conversion while the other five members of our group made an early morning start to catch the ferry back to Portsmouth from St Malo.

Feeling rather low after everyone had left Geraldine and I said our final thank you and goodbyes to Kevin and Louise for a wonderful week and made our way due South into Spain and the Pyrenees.

The 17Euros to cross the wide River Gironde by ferry with the bike at Royan was well worth it as we could stay right up to the coastline in the Bordeaux region without having to go round Bordeaux itself and the motorway system. Mid-Summer's Day is celebrated throughout France and we landed on our feet by getting one of the last remaining hotel rooms in Soulac sur Mer where



a fantastic music festival was being held. We joined the crowds to watch the performers and singers quite late into the night, well, it was late for me!

Everything and everyone was very quiet in Soulac when we got up on the Sunday morning to press on down the coastline due south towards the Spanish border and the fortified city of Jaca (pronounced Haca) which is the recognised start for the N260, one of bikers' favourite routes for travelling along the full length of the Pyrenees.

To be continued.....



Touring - The Second Time Around

Derek & Moira Proctor

(Derek & Moira Proctor share their 'Born Again' journey.)

This is not an instruction manual, nor is it a ... "This is how it should be done" ... sermon. There is no intent here to try and teach my grannies how to suck eggs! If you were to ask a hundred bikers to name their ideal touring bike, and how they would set it up and identify the gear they would choose for continental touring - you would get a hundred different 'recipes' - and that's exactly how it should be. The next few pages describe our (that's mine and the 'boss's') ingredients for successful touring - and the processes that we went through to get to where we are today.

We all have dreams and aspirations, and of course a 'bucket list'. The tricky bit for us fellows (well at least for me) is making sure that our other half's dreams and

aspirations are the same as ours, and that we are both reading the same 'bucket list'. Over the years, Moira's appetite for getting close to nature and depriving herself of creature comforts has waned somewhat, and visiting places where sun-factor numbers are not a daily consideration are definitely no longer part of her dreams. So, with work and babysitting finally behind us, a lot of hard selling was required on my part to get the item of ... 'continental touring on a motorbike' ... that was on my 'bucket list', on to Moira's 'bucket list', and, more importantly, to keep it there! A lot of the decision making that follows below, over both the bike and the gear, was made with this agenda in mind.

To give readers a better insight to what makes us what we are, I think it is important that I tell you that I am comfortably on the right side

of 70 years old, and Moira is uncomfortably on the wrong side of 60 years old. That therefore makes us both products of the Second World War with our personas forged in the hedonistic biking heat of the Nineteen Sixties.

We have come back to biking after a long layoff, some thirty odd years to be precise. It's not that we lost interest in biking, it's just that kids and then grandkids (and work!) seemed to be always getting in the way. So it really was a case of starting from scratch as far as the gear was concerned - but I'm getting ahead of myself, let's start with ...

The Bike!

In the spring of 2009 I dug the black and silver R90S out of the back of the garage, where it had stood for the last thirty years, and I started on a two-month overhaul. I'd bought the bike new in 1976 for the exorbitant

price of £1700, and it had cost me very little in the way of maintenance until now. However, what with cleaning and washing out of carburettors, engine, gearbox, brake systems and tank; fitting electronic ignition, new cables, hoses, brake pads & shoes, mirrors, battery, tyres and tubes etc., etc., - I just about spent the same again over this two-month period. Now this is the incredible bit - I took the bike to the same garage where it had its last MOT some thirty years ago - and it passed! Not only that - it was examined by the same mechanic who tested it way back then! We were both amazed.

So tested, taxed and insured, off I went for a run up the Northumberland coast. Thirty-three years ago this bike had only just been superseded by the R100S, and was still at the 'cutting-edge' of bike sophistication. It was my pride and joy and, in my opinion, it was a better bike than the R100S, and definitely better looking.

The run north on that day up the coastal road from Newcastle was OK, and I suppose we were really just getting to know each other again. Reaching Bamburgh, I headed inland to pick up the A1, then turned south where I could let the engine 'breathe' a bit on the dual

carriageway sections. Now, I'm reasonably fit, but arriving back home in Newcastle that day I was worn out. I couldn't remember being buffeted and pulled about like that thirty-odd years ago on that same forty-minute run south back to Newcastle. The next three outings were no better. I was slowly coming to the conclusion that if there was no pleasure to be had from riding, then the coveted plans of continental touring with the wife were just not going to materialise. The second coming was looking less and less likely.

With a borrowed helmet for Moira we set off yet again - this time to York for the day - just to see what she felt about getting back in the saddle for extended periods. It was an unequivocal 'thumbs down'. Like me, Moira also couldn't remember being that uncomfortable thirty-odd years ago.

Now this next section is not for the squeamish, nor for those members of the Vintage Register or those with rose-tinted glasses - and I won't take kindly to receiving abusive letters or emails just because I no longer have a sensitive side to my nature.

As a 'last clutch at the straw' I went along to our 'local' BMW dealer and had a test ride on an R1200RT, just to see what the difference was

between old-and-new. And there was. The difference between sitting behind the RT screen and the R90S's 'bikini' fairing was as chalk is to cheese, and the boss agreed when I took her along for a second test run a few days later. That was it - touring was back on the agenda!

The new bike finally arrived at Barrie Robson's York showroom on the 17th October of the same year. Looking back I suppose that that was also the date of the rebirth of our passion for biking.

I opted for the LE model, simply because I wanted black, and that was the only way I could get black. The bonus was that the LE came with all the extras that BMW listed for the model, including the Garmin Navigator IV, so there was never going to be anything nagging away at me, wishing that I had specified this extra or that extra. That doesn't mean that bits and pieces of add-ons didn't start landing on the doormat almost immediately, and continue to do so up to the present moment - much to Moira's astonishment. She couldn't quite grasp the fact, and still hasn't, that a circa £14,000 bike could need more money spent on it. Silly girl!

It's funny the things you don't notice when you have the 'love goggles' on. It took a couple of



Here we are in Seahouses with the R90S in the late 70s or early 80s.



weeks for me to get around to trying the horn (what horn?), and then there's the oil-cooler. How do you clean the flies out of that after each run? It didn't take long for the internet to introduce me to Nippy Norman, and for a trading relationship to commence. Many of the 'accessories' described below were acquired from Norman. Other suppliers I use include Touratech, GetGeared and Motorworks.

The horn problem was solved with the purchase of a Magnum MSX horn twin-pack, and a Centech AP-1 auxiliary power fuse board. (Moira carries a couple of spare pairs of knickers around with her now - just in case I have a need to use the horn!)

The Wunderlich oil-cooler grill also works well, and does exactly what I had hoped it would do - keeping the oil-cooler free of flies. It's also easy to clean and, I suppose, keeps the radiator safe from flying stones. Talking of

which brings me nicely to the headlight glass. How expensive is a replacement? Very - is my guess. Also, how often is it likely that it will collect a stone large enough, or travelling fast enough, to break or crack

it? For circa £30, a Perspex headlight protector seemed to be a reasonable 'insurance' measure - which appears to be vindicated by the three or four 'dinks' that are now visible on its front face.

The next question to be addressed related to the pannier cases. Do you take them off the bike and lug them up to the room (or the cabin) at each stopover, when they will undoubtedly get scuffed and knocked? I don't think so. So it was back to Barrie Robson for the three inner bags, at BMW prices. (I still haven't told Moira how much they cost.)

After drawing up a list of what we thought we would need for a three-week tour, and assembling it altogether, we had a trial pack. At this point I should tell you that we are not camping, and a hairdryer and hair straighteners are not luxuries - they are essentials. We were woefully short of carrying capacity. ...

The obvious answer was a tank

bag. The BMW one just didn't put a dent in the capacity shortfall, so I went for the Wunderlich Xtreme tank bag which was great, but was still not big enough! I then found a rack manufactured by Louis, which fitted neatly on top of the rear box and would take the sixty-litre SW Motech 'drybag' that I spotted on the web.

It's probably worth mentioning here the unforeseen benefit of this drybag. As it transpired, when we finally packed everything for that first trip, the drybag was almost empty! So we used it to carry the very small number of items we would need for the first night on the boat (Portsmouth to Santander) - namely: one pair of knickers, one pair of 'underdogs', two tee-shirts, boat shoes, etc., etc. On the ferry, (any ferry), having secured the bike, the two helmets fit snugly into the drybag on top of the other bits and bobs, resulting in only two items, the drybag and the tank bag, to lug up to the cabin. (As 'essentials' - the hairdryer and the straighteners are in the tank bag.) Compared to what other bikers struggle with in the same situation, this is a great result!

We were now almost there, except for the fact that the BMW mounting for the

Navigator satnav was about as much use as the proverbial ashtray on a motorbike. The Xtreme tank bag masked the unit completely, but to be fair, the mount would probably not have worked even with the BMW tank bag. But regardless, I had never felt comfortable with the position of the Navigartor - so low down on the top of the fork yoke. So I fitted a Wunderlich high-level GPS mount - which I have to say is superb, giving an almost 'head-up display' feel to the instrument. My eyes now barely need to leave the road when referring to the screen.

We were now ready, and very nearly at the end of the winter. The only other small bit of kit that went on the bike at the last minute before that first spring tour in 2010 was a side-stand foot-enlarger. Whether or not this item has been of any use I'll never know, but the bike has never fallen over.



Here we are loaded up and ready for the off on the first tour in the spring of 2010.

Now this is worth mentioning, as it would be interesting to know how many other RT owners have experienced the same problem. ...

I bought a CTEK XS800 trickle-charger to keep the battery charged up over the winter months, but it wouldn't work with the bike's CAN-bus wiring system, or at least I couldn't get it to work. I had to solve the problem by fitting a third power outlet on the offside rear, mirroring the existing one on the nearside, and wiring it through the auxiliary fuse panel I had installed to wire-up the horns - and it works perfectly!

After returning from that first tour three issues needed to be addressed. The first was the comfort of the passenger. Moira was OK for the first hour-and-a-half of any journey, but then she was starting to get stiff and felt the need to stretch her legs. She didn't have to tell me, I

could feel her starting to fidget about, then lifting her feet off the pegs to straighten and flex her legs. The second and much bigger issue though, was her sliding up my back under braking, and not 'severe' braking either. The third issue was the amount of shelter the BMW screen was providing. It was certainly 100% better than the 'bikini' screen on the R90S, but having found a comfort zone I wanted more. In a leap of faith I ordered a 'High-and-Wide' replacement screen and was instantly rewarded with more shelter around the shoulders. More astonishingly, there was less helmet turbulence, at a lower screen height at comparable speeds. The significance of this is that the top edge of the screen no longer coincides with my forward line-of-sight. This is a big result! I'm no longer having to constantly crane my neck to get the edge of the screen low enough not to be irritating.

The issue of passenger comfort took a lot longer to resolve, probably because of the amount of money involved! It came down to a choice between two seat systems, and the Touratech Kahedo option won out. At the same time as the heated Kahedo seats were purchased I also fitted the Wunderlich pillion foot-peg lowering kit.

When searching for improved

comfort, a lot of choices are a bit of a 'leap-of-faith', as no matter how many reports you read, you can never be certain that what you opt to go with is going to suit you personally. Thankfully the Kahedo seats and the foot-peg lowering kit worked and have been a resounding success. They have completely eliminated the sliding forward problem, and Moira's comfort span can now reach three or even four hours before she starts to fidget.

There was also an incident during the first tour, when the rubber cover to the high tension spark lead on the nearside rocker cover came into contact with a low wall as I was getting the bike out of a garage. In a typical 'shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted' action, this prompted the purchase of the Touratech aluminium cylinder head guards as 'insurance' against future mishaps - and there have been a few.

Finally, like many tourists, we end up coming home with more baggage than we started with, and on a bike, as you all know, this can be a problem. We haven't succumbed to sombreros or stuffed donkeys yet, but we find the odd bottle of a particularly nice red, or a couple of sticks of chorizo and a block of that lovely cheese from the little farm just outside Zahara. Oh yes, and a flask of that particularly

yummy olive oil from Baena - hard to resist - and they just have to be carried home. All of them, for some reason, are very weighty items. And all this is after the inevitable stop at every 'Massimo Dutti' shop that we pass.

After the third tour things were starting to get out of hand. Despite moving these heavy items into the panniers, the displaced clothes and shoes still ended up in the drybag, which was getting fuller and heavier by the mile. It was starting to affect the bike's stability, not only when negotiating tight uphill hairpins or narrow streets - even just standing still demanded maximum concentration. I had to get the weight off that rack on the top box. The tops of the pannier cases were the only places I could see to transfer the weight to. Accordingly, a

couple of thirty-litre drysacks / 'tote' bags were ordered during the summer of 2011, but never made it into service until the autumn of 2012. In use, they lie on top of the panniers and are secured with a single webbing strap looped through the passenger grab handle. They work a treat - no more stability issues - at least not until Moira realises that she can double the quantities of wine and cheese or visits to 'Massimo Dutti'!

The latest bit of kit to be fitted to the bike is a MachineArt Avant 'Fender Extender', as featured in December's Journal. This is another case of 'shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted'. When giving the bike its final clean this year (2012) before the winter layup, I noticed that the balance-pipe was badly pitted right behind the front tyre. It required



The bike as it is today (December 2013)

some particularly vigorous 'elbow grease' to restore some semblance of decency. I know the damage cannot be undone, but perhaps any further deterioration can be prevented.

Bike Kit

In this section I'm only going to list the items that we carry - as opposed to those that are fitted on the bike - as permanent kit - i.e. they never come off the bike:

- First-aid kit.
- Tyre repair kit.
- Spare headlight bulb.
- Spare brake-light bulb.
- Toolkit.
- A Pacsafe seventy-litre waterproof rucksack cover - to protect the expensive Kahedo seats when the bike is left outside.
- Leatherman multi-tool.
- A 150 ml plastic bottle of engine oil - I've never needed more than this, even on the longest trip.
- An Abus disc lock and 'tell-tale' reminder.
- A Pacsafe eighty-litre Stuffsafe net. This is great for securing the helmets and tank bag on top of the rear box when the bike is fully loaded and left.

- Several bungee straps.
- A small bottle of screen & visor cleaner.
- A spare pair of glasses - I'm a 'four-eyes'.
- A few cloths and a sponge.
- A copy of my licence and insurance document in a bag, along with the handbook.
- A torch, and finally ...
- The spare plastic bike key securely taped to the bike frame - where only I know it is!

These are all stowed away in either the front 'glovebox' or the tail-box, or draped over the mudguard under the rear seat.

Rider and Passenger Gear

Now this for us was the most difficult bit of the decision making, and the bit we got most wrong! When the subject of bike touring was first discussed, I introduced the concept of new materials and new bike-wear to Moira. That is 'new' as compared with thirty-odd years ago! I was told that ... "If I have to be trussed up in all that gear, you can forget about the whole idea." ... So it was back to leather jackets and jeans, which is exactly what she had in mind all along, and it's exactly what we went around in thirty-odd years ago. ...

The first stop was the Lewis Leathers website to replicate what we had worn way back then. Moira's still recovering from the shock! I have to admit that the prices also raised my eyebrows. I've still got the Sportsman jacket that I bought from Lewis Leathers thirty-five years ago, and it's still in excellent condition. The problem is that it's two, or maybe even three, sizes too small! The road racing boots I had at that time disappeared under mysterious circumstances about 10 years ago. Moira's stuff disappeared long, long before that.

We started hunting through all the other leather gear on the internet, but finally picked up a couple of BKS jackets that we liked from M&S Motorcycles, one of our local dealers on Westgate Road in Newcastle. Whilst buying the jackets we also discovered Red Route jeans. I was made-up with the pair I tried on, as they were a size smaller in the waist than I usually take. Against all the odds, and much to my amazement, Moira also found a pair that she loved. She's usually very particular about how her backside looks in jeans, so this was a big result! The jackets and jeans have now 'worn-in' nicely and suit us down to the ground.

The only downside to leather jackets and jeans is that we

need to carry all-in-one lightweight rain suits with us all the time. The RT is a surprisingly 'dry' bike, and we can delay getting suited-up until it starts to rain 'properly'. However, for when it does really start to rain we have Frank Thomas one-piece rain suits for the purpose. When folded and rolled up really tight these are quite small, but they are fairly weighty items.



I have a pair of Halvarssons lightweight summer gloves, and Moira has a pair of Jofama summer gloves - which for some odd reason are her favourite bit of gear! For body warmth we have Berghaus microfleece and a set of thermal underwear each - which more or less completes the 'uniform'.

Boots have been the biggest bane of our lives. I started off by buying a pair of a high-end brand at £130, which were waterproof and as 'smart' as anything else I could find on the market - which actually

wasn't very 'smart' to be honest. However, no matter how much I wore them, and not just when out on the bike, they never softened up or got 'broke in'. They were heavy, numb, and looked at all times like bike boots. I ended up going on that first tour with those boots and a pair of dress shoes for evening wear. When we returned, cost or no cost, an order went off to Lewis

Leathers for a pair of their pattern No.177 Road Racer Boots, the same as I had bought thirty-five years ago - and it's the best £££! that I've ever spent. They

are light, flexible and look and feel just like a pair of dress shoes when the jeans are worn outside. The big bonus is that I can now feel the gear shift and the brake levers! The dress shoes now stay at home.

Moira is still looking, and still wearing her expensive high street knee boots. Boots are a problem with her. If they don't look smart - they ain't going on!

Helmets have been another disaster area for us. The first ones we bought lasted one tour before being thrown into the back of the garage. They

were flip-up and Bluetooth-ready - and that element worked fine. However, Moira found hers very heavy, and prone to wind noise and turbulence at higher speeds. After a longish journey she often had a headache and a stiff or sore neck. I didn't have quite the same problems, but mine did cost me a pair of glasses. I would blame the helmet of course - and I wasn't carrying a spare pair with me on that first trip. The problem was that I could not put this helmet on, or take it off, without first taking off my glasses, and the inevitable happened. I got distracted whilst putting the helmet on in Avila, and I rode off with the glasses perched on top of the drybag. It only took about ten kilometres for me to realise that I couldn't read any signs, or tell the difference between a donkey and a truck at a hundred paces, and then to understand the reason why. When we stopped there was no sign of the glasses. The rest of the holiday was done in 'Braille'.

We now have a pair of Nolan 43 Air helmets and we love them. Mine goes on and comes off with the glasses 'in-situ', and Moira has no side-effects, apart from the hair - but that would be a problem with any helmet! There is also now a spare pair of old glasses stowed away in the RT's tail compartment!

Now for a piece of kit that falls between two stools, but needs to be mentioned as it does have surprising benefits, and it makes me smile. Like many tourists, in addition to Moira's shoulder bag, we ended up buying in Leon on our first visit, a small fifteen-litre haversack. This has now become an indispensable bit of our kit/gear and is always worn by me, on-and-off the bike. Apart from its general use when walking and exploring, it doubles up as Moira's 'office' when we are on the move. Just under the top zip she has an organiser of sorts, permanently attached, where the passports are kept. There are also compartments for credit cards, bank notes and for road & tunnel toll tickets, and a purse for loose change.

Talk about obsessive! - She even has a couple of small carabiners clipped to each side of the sack to fasten her left and right gloves to, before taking them off to deal with 'business' at a booth. I now just ride up to the booth, as directed from behind, cash or card tariff option, and I just head off when she's done and I'm told to 'gee-up'. Very organised my wife - we now go through toll booths, passport controls, etc., etc., like the proverbial through a goose! The bit that makes me smile is when I can feel her tugging at the sack after



we've set off again. She puts the gloves back on before unclipping them. She likes those gloves and there is no way she is going to lose them!

The latest bits of gear, which haven't been tried or used yet, were acquired as a consequence of the run up through France, and then from the south coast of the UK to Newcastle, during the last week of September 2012. You may recall the dreadful weather that enveloped the whole of Europe that week, with flooding from as far afield as Malaga, where a bridge was washed away, to the northeast of England, where the A1 was closed for several days.

We were victims, like many others at that time, of the Brittany Ferries strike, and we had to make our own way home from the north coast of Spain. Moira suffered badly from the cold throughout the whole three days that it took us to get home. Her

immediate reaction on getting home was ... "Never again." ... and I had a real sweat on for a couple of months, thinking touring was off the agenda. That was until I suggested introducing some external heating equipment into the equation. ... So, for Christmas 2012, instead of a torque wrench, Moira got a Keis body warmer and a pair of heated inner gloves. I only got the body warmer, as the heated grips on the RT are the best things since sliced bread. In practice, the body warmers will probably lie under the top box inner bag when not needed, or in the bottom of the drybag.

Finally, and this really is heavy, obsessive stuff - and it's me this time. ... Harking back to the way we used to tour thirty-odd years ago, the Krauser panniers were always taken off the bike and lugged up to the room with us. I have this abiding memory of a nicely-packed

case being opened on arrival, and by the evening of the same day it being a jumbled mess - and staying that way for the rest of the holiday. This time around I couldn't believe that there wasn't a better way of organising things, and I was determined to find it. A search on the internet found a company called the Clever Baggers. They sell a range of cotton drawstring bags in all sizes – they're very lightweight and cheap. We pack our stuff into the drawstring bags first, before filling the pannier bags. All my socks go into one cotton bag; all Moira's knickers go into another. Tee shirts go into another, underdogs into another, etc., etc. They also do shoe bags - so my pair of sandals goes in one bag, and the other six (!) bags each have a pair of Moira's in them. Anyway, it's a small point but it works very well for us. Order now reigns where chaos once ruled.

Planning

We had a travel plan when we started all this, and still have, but it has been modified somewhat over the last three years. Like many other couples we have done the long-haul holidays and the lying-on-the-beach holidays, but neither of these appeals to us anymore. We seem to have developed this appetite to have a closer look at our European neighbours, and to see what

they have been up to over the last couple of thousand years. But more to the point, we wanted to do this under our own steam and through our own endeavours.

The initial plan was to start off in Spain for a couple of tours, then France for a couple tours, then the Benelux countries, followed by Germany and, if we were still 'on our perches' - Austria, Switzerland, Italy and whatever comes after that. Our blog site that we started at this time was even sub-titled 'Travels around Europe by motorbike' in anticipation, and still is for that matter. The problem is ... we cannot get out of Spain! Before each trip we say to ourselves that this will be the last Spanish tour for the time being - we'll head off to Germany next spring. But then we'll travel through a new area in Spain and realise that those bits that we have just missed this time, simply can't be left for a few years – they need to be visited as soon as possible!

We have done our fair share of the Spanish Mediterranean beaches and the Balearic Islands, but we had never visited the Atlantic or Biscay coasts - or the interior of mainland Spain. Over the winter of 2009 and 2010 we came up with a tour which consisted primarily of a circuit of the more obvious 'World Heritage' sites – including:

Salamanca, Toledo, Avila and Segovia, but also visiting Leon, Madrid, Burgos and of course, Santander. This first tour taught us two lessons. First, it's not only the 'Heritage' sites in Spain that are worth visiting. In fact we enjoyed Leon, Burgos and Madrid just as much as we enjoyed Toledo and Segovia - and more than we enjoyed Salamanca. It was obvious back then that there was a lot more to be done and to be seen in Spain than we first thought. The second lesson we learnt was not to stay too long in the same place. Even if we were riding out each day to look at different towns or sites, it was better to just move on after two or three days. I think we were starting to get hooked on riding over new horizons into new territory, and the excitement and anticipation of a new venue and a new hotel. I suppose that this is as close a definition of being 'Born Again' as you can get.

In hindsight, the first tour was planned very naively. We had scheduled everything - down to what we would do every day and the route we would take to do it. The hotels were booked months in advance, often selecting the cheapest option, with no cancellation clause. Even the restaurants we would eat at, and the bars we would drink at - based on advice gleaned from the dozens of

travel books we poured over during the winter months - were pencilled in for visiting. More than once on that first tour we wandered around the streets of some Spanish city for several hours, looking for a particular restaurant that some pretentious 'critic' had written glowingly about some five years earlier, only to find it wasn't where he said it was, or it had closed down. In other words - we made a lot of mistakes. However, in the process we learned a lot about ourselves, and about Spain and the Spanish people.

We still have elements of that first tour in our present-day planning, but gone is the rigid day-to-day schedule, the pre-booking of hotels months in advance, and the marking-up of restaurants and bars to visit.

We still have a list of venues planned to get us from and back to Santander, and the roads that we will take to get us around this route are also decided and programmed into the satnav way in advance. However, flexibility is now the key element to our planning. Now, we will even leave our departure date flexible, and the ferry booking as late as possible, in order to accommodate any last-minute emergency or crisis at home. These unfortunately seem to come around more and more frequently, as elderly relatives and friends start to fall ill or

'off their perches'. Hotels are no longer pre-booked way in advance. However, Moira will have done a lot of work before we leave home, whittling down a list of suitable hotels to three or four for each venue we intend to stay at.

We carry an Asus 'netbook' PC around with us, and use this to make bookings through www.booking.com, and for picking up our e-mails. We also use it for posting our daily blog, and Moira keeps in touch with the family and friends on Skype. The Wi-Fi in Spain is good, probably better than in the UK, and I cannot remember the last hotel we stayed in that didn't have it installed somewhere in the building, if not in every room, for free. We now tend to book hotels only two or three days in advance. However, a booking will be made, even if it is only that morning before we set off. Gone are the days of running around like headless chickens after arriving in a new town or city, looking for a hotel room. It's not worth the stress it causes and the time it wastes. This system allows us to spend extra days at a venue if we so wish, or even cut short a stay and move on, as happened in the spring of 2011 when we rescheduled the entire tour!

We have also learned that most restaurants, cafes and bars in Spain are good - in

fact, very good. You are likely to be unlucky with a choice of restaurant or bar at some time during any holiday, but we now have a strategy, that we are honing, designed to prevent this, and it goes like this. ... If a place is full of locals - it's good. If a place is full of locals and it's noisy - it's better. If a place is full of locals and it's noisy and they are singing and dancing - it's the best. The Spanish are very particular about the service they get and the quality of the food they eat and the wine they drink, and they will not patronise anywhere that doesn't deliver on these elements.

Don't be afraid to wander off into the 'rougher' parts of town to find these places - though not too far and not too rough! Heads will swivel when you walk in, and the place will go quiet for a second or two before normal service is resumed, but you will find that the barman and his regulars will push you to the front, make you welcome, and help you through the tapas or drinks menu. You're probably the first tourist to bother going 'off-piste' and visit their bar, and they will be genuinely pleased to have you there. We've spent some of our most memorable nights in Spain in places just like this. Just remember - if you have been well looked after, pay the bill with a reasonable (10%)

tip, and leave with a big smile, a ... “Gracias” ... and a wave. If you haven’t, don’t stay too long, settle your bill and leave quietly.

Choosing a route for us is fairly easy. It starts with having a target for the end of the ‘outbound’ leg. For us, our one overriding criteria, and our target, is to get to somewhere where there is a reasonable guarantee of sunshine and warmth. In other words we are heading for Andalucia - but how we get there-and-back is up for grabs each time. Next we decide on the travel times between venues that we feel comfortable with. Three or four hours travelling time at 90 km/h, with a coffee stop and a look around halfway, is comfortable for us. Our coffee stops are often, but not always, in town or village centres, as getting in and out of these easily is the great advantage of being on a bike. Also, in Spain parking should never be a problem. As long as you are sensible, any old bit of street or pavement is accepted practice.

A good source for finding out information on potential stopovers and visits are the Michelin Green Guide for Spain and the Michelin Green Guide for Andalucia. These are all we use now, and all we carry with us. There is a full shelf of travel books on

Spain at home. Some are good and some are not so good. However, none of them, in my opinion, are as clear, concise and informative as the two Michelin Guides.

Do your homework over the winter months. Look to see what each place has to offer and what there is to see in the surrounding locality. Spain is ‘busting at the seams’ with ancient monuments and areas of outstanding natural beauty. One of our first calls at any new venue is the Tourist Office. They are always very helpful and will provide local maps, a bit of local information, and tell you which are the popular bars and cafes. There are rides to ride, walks to walk, hills to climb and castles to explore, and for those of you who need forgiveness, cathedrals to pray in! Spain really is a treasure trove for those of us who like that sort of thing.

I normally choose the roads between our venues from the Michelin 500 series maps of Spain, of which there are eight. The roads lined with green on their maps are what they designate as ‘scenic’, roads and they usually are, but then there are some roads on their maps which look as if they are so featureless you wouldn’t look at them twice. Yet these roads might traverse the most barren of high ground or desert, which for

me makes them very alluring. As it’s often said - beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

There are not many ‘bad’ roads in Spain. If you were to draw a forty-kilometre radius circle around Madrid, you’d probably encompass about 95% of the ‘bad’ ones. It’s a maintenance issue. Outside of this ‘zone’, road maintenance is not a problem, and the quality of the road surfacing is generally excellent. You do need to keep an open mind about the condition of some of the mountain passes if you are riding them in early spring, as they are prone to frost damage, and it does take a while for the road gangs to catch up with this work as the snow recedes. However, by the time the summer comes around this maintenance work will usually all have been completed.

For a biker, Spanish roads are generally very ‘reliable’. What I mean by this is that when they put a speed limit on a road, the bend radius and the sight lines have been designed for that speed. If there is an anomaly, say a tight bend or a blind summit, it will be advised with a speed reduction sign. In my experience I cannot remember ever being caught out by a badly designed or wrongly-signed road in Spain. I’m not saying that they are not out there – it’s just that I haven’t found

one yet.

Anyone wanting more information on where we have been, and what we’ve done, can visit our blogsite at www.lonelybikers.blogspot.co.uk which we run for our family and friends when touring.

A Word or Two on Satnavs ...

I personally couldn’t live without one, but some people still do and are proud of it. But for me, after having identified our preferred route and programmed it into the satnav, just being ‘told’ to go this way or that, and having total confidence in the instruction, adds so much more to the riding enjoyment. Now you can laugh at this if you like, but the biggest bonus of touring with a satnav is ... there are no more arguments! ... and what’s more - I can swear at the machine using the choicest of language - and it never answers me back! And what’s more - it never goes off in a huff!

Before I decided to sell the R90S I had impulsively bought a TomTom Rider2, which I spent the summer of 2009 learning how to use. I liked it a lot, so much so in fact that we set off with two satnavs on that first tour of 2010, because I preferred the instruction format of the TomTom to that of the Garmin Navigator. However, for ease of inputting a route,

the Garmin is by far the better and most logical, and overall the easiest to use. Now that I’m familiar with the instruction format of the Navigator I use it in preference to the TomTom all the time. Compiling a route on my desktop PC at home is quick and easy. Downloading to the satnav takes only a matter of minutes. I could now almost do it in my sleep. Some of the routes I’ve taken Moira down she reckons that’s exactly what I have done!

If you are going down the detailed route-planning and inputting avenue, it’s worth spending several days during the winter months practising these skills. You need to learn how to use your satnav in order to get the best out of it. You never know when you will need to put this experience into practice ‘in-the-field’.

What’s Worked and What Hasn’t

Well, as you might expect - as I wouldn’t be writing this article otherwise – it’s the bike that is the ‘superstar’ of this show. The ‘love goggles’ are still well and truly on. Apart from the satnav, the bit of bike kit that I use more than anything else is the cruise control, and the bits that I would miss most after these two items would be the Kahedo seats, the heated grips and the electric screen.

When in ‘Spanish tour mode’ – 90kph or 3000rpm - the mpg must be in the mid to high sixties as we often exceed 62mpg overall during mid tour, only for it to fall back to the high fifties overall after the hard motorway grind home from Portsmouth to Newcastle. It really does drink the gas once 4000rpm is reached, and in France at 130kph or 4500rpm fully loaded you can almost see the fuel gauge moving! I’m not complaining at this, as there are very few bikes out there, if any, of comparable power output, that would better these figures, I’m just stating the facts. I regularly get 8,000 plus miles from a set of Metzeler tyres. The first set were Z6’s that the bike was delivered with, and then Z8’s. This last set of Z8’s were ruined after only 3,500 miles as a consequence of sitting at 130kph on French motorways for nine or ten hours.

Over the 21,000 miles run off since new, the only major non-service part to be replaced/repared has been the non-return valve in the engine oil-feed line. This never stopped progress - it just ruined a perfectly good pair of underpants on the first morning it happened in Polencia! The noise for five or ten seconds when the engine was first fired up was shocking. These symptoms persisted intermittently for the



rest of the tour, ranging from, some mornings very loud, and some, no noise at all. The part was replaced under warranty by Barry Robson when we got home, with, I am assured, no residual damage. They wouldn't replace the underpants as they were a non warranty item! The only other minor parts that have been replaced are two headlight lamps.

It's amazing the confidence that this degree of reliability gives you to just head off without any hesitation or anxiety.

I thought that I had damaged or worn the locking cams on the rear box as a consequence of the extra weight carried on the rack. However, when I voiced these concerns with the guys at Barrie Robson's, they demonstrated that all the rear boxes on the RTs in the showroom had more or less the same degree of 'slog' (or slack), old and new. I no longer have any 'slog', and if you are concerned about the

movement in your rear box mounting here's what to do. ...

Take four two-inch long strips of cotton-based insulating tape and wrap each around the four locking bars on the top-box base plate, to the top and underside of the bar equally. Then carefully offer up the box, without disturbing the tape, and lock the cams into position. You'll feel a little bit more resistance than normal when you do this, but the 'slog' will have disappeared. I don't like 'slog'.

The Touratech aluminium rocker cover guards have worked very well, and I guess, from the evidence, that there may even be a return on the 'insurance' premium paid for them!

Other than that, I'm struggling to find anything negative to say about this bike, it is just a joy to ride under all conditions. Similarly, the kit that I've put on the bike has all fulfilled the purpose it was chosen for. Likewise with the gear we wear, apart from the

two false starts with the boots and the helmets, it has all, touch wood, done everything we expected of it, and in some cases more.

Well that's about it. Looking back at our first tentative and stumbling steps back into motorcycle touring in the spring of 2010, it's amusing to recall that on returning home after those three weeks we were thinking ... "That was a long trip." ... By contrast, our last tour was four weeks, and if it hadn't been for impending bad weather we would quite happily have turned around and repeated it 'in reverse', converting it into an eight-week tour - and we would still have thought it too short.

I suppose this begs the question - where do BABs - Born Again Bikers - draw the line? I think I can answer that - when the money runs out - or when they fall off their perches!

Derek & Moira Proctor

Rideouts and events

21 September - Senior Ride Out

- Micheal Sutherland
- Grassington and Malham Tarn - Wharfedale and Ribblesdale.
- The route can be found on the website: [September route](#)

05 October - Associates Ride Out

- Roland McCleod
- This is open to all members.
- The route can be found on the website: [Associates October route](#)

14 October - Monthly Meeting

- Britannia Hotel
- Scott Leathers will be giving a talk

19 October - Senior Ride Out

- Ian Du Rose
- To be confirmed, check out the [rideouts page](#) on the website for the latest information.

11 November - AGM

- Britannia Hotel

13 December - Christmas Party

- Britannia Hotel
- Details will be announced at Octoberes monthly meeting and will also be available on the website.

INCONSPICUOUS INGENUITY

SO14 (2) - THE SPECIAL ESCORT GROUP

Written by Antony Loveless

Antony Loveless was recently granted exclusive access to the SEG, a media shy group about whom little is known. The Special Escort Group takes VIPs through rush hour London, and they don't stop. For anyone

If you subscribe to the maxim that 'less is more' then you may know a little about the Special Escort Group; it's a metaphor that describes their modus operandi perfectly. If you've ever been halted at a junction by a police motorcyclist as a motorcade swept past, then you've more than likely encountered the SEG at work. This small, elite group of highly trained riders and drivers – a division of Scotland Yard's Royalty Protection Department (SO14) - is charged with the onerous duty of providing motorised escorts for 'security risks' - the Royal Family, visiting Heads of State, government ministers, etc.

One of the biggest potential threats to the safety of VIPs comes when they are stationary. A motorcade carrying a visiting head of state, immobile on the Cromwell Road in the usual afternoon gridlock is a security risk. Protocol and the vagaries



Image by Bill Scott

of democracy demand that we look after the well-being of our own - and visiting - VIPs. It is the SEG's job to keep them moving through the endless jam of London's traffic whilst allowing the capital's 7.5million inhabitants to go about their business and I was granted unprecedented access to see this at first hand.

On a beautiful August day, I accompanied the group for a 24 hours, riding in a 'back up car', one of those anonymous unmarked Vauxhall Omegas bristling with hidden blue lights and electronic ephemera, so loved by forces nationwide. One of our assignments was to provide an escort for someone (I can't say who) and their entourage from Heathrow Airport, through rush hour

traffic to a meeting with the PM in Downing Street. The allotted journey time was 25 minutes, with an armoured limousine, several cars and a 'gunship' to escort and only three motorcycles to achieve the seemingly impossible.

I accompanied PC Peter Skerritt, a 10-year SEG officer who was my host for the day. I have to admit to a certain sense of anticipation as we set off from Heathrow in a motorcade led by one bike - designated the 'Easy Rider' - and flanked by two others. These two 'Working Bikes' soon set off, racing ahead of us to 'take control' of junctions, holding the traffic to ensure our progress. It was an awe-inspiring display to witness, let alone be a part of.

The SEG's ethos of 'dignity'



Image by Antony Loveless

and 'safety' proffers a glimpse of the way in which the group works. Dispensing with the garish, red, yellow and blue markings of the standard police bike with its Tri-Sound sirens, moving in a cacophony of wails and whoops, the group's workhorse is a unique BMW R1100 RS/RT hybrid, understated in its livery with no more than a few discreet 'Police' stickers and a plain white reflective strip on the mudguard. The fairing carries two blue lights, the rear a blue strobe and alternate flashing red lamps. The bikes are not equipped with sirens, the teams working instead with whistles. Peter Skerritt explains,

"We aim to move the principal in a dignified manner, allowing them perhaps to work during a journey with the absolute minimum of fuss. With the symphony of noise that most people are exposed to in London, the majority

have 'filtered out' sirens, so common is their sound. Consequently, they are of little use - people just don't 'hear' them anymore".

Whistles on the other hand, are remarkably effective, principally because their sound is so alien. In the maelstrom of city noise, their sound stands out and people actually look for the source.



Image by Bill Scott

Likewise, the speed of the convoy whilst low is constant, rarely deviating from 20mph through central London. The effect on anyone travelling within the sterile cocoon of safety created by the escort is remarkable, a little akin to travelling within the eye of a raging storm.

As we travelled along the A30 London-bound at a shade over the speed limit, the Easy Rider never deviated. His profile is a constant sight on the journey for whichever VIPs are in the lead vehicle, his task to set the pace for the convoy, based on information passed back to him over the SEG's dedicated radio channel from the working bikes that have raced ahead. This radio channel - with a range of approximately 1.5 miles - is often listened in to by the VIP's under escort,

so communication tends to be professional, constant but relevant.

As we join the M4, the working bikes are ahead of us, taking control and slowing the motorway traffic to a pace sufficient to ease us into the nearside lane. Once done, they move aside and race ahead, ensuring the traffic flows. It is this principle that ensures that any inconvenience to other road users is minimised. After all, in a democratic society, the population has as much right to travel unimpeded as the VIPs and all the SEG are concerned with is ensuring their principal's progress and safety whilst minimising disruption.

According to Peter Skerritt,

“The most inconvenience that anyone should experience is perhaps waiting for an extra phase at a set of traffic lights, or a few seconds delay on their journey. It doesn't do to ruffle people's feathers or hold them up for longer than we have to. That's why we always acknowledge other road users

and thank them for allowing us through”.

In practice, this means smooth, seamless teamwork, guiding us through red lights and contra to the flow of traffic almost unnoticed and away before the drivers of waiting cars have even had a chance to consider what the cause of their momentary delay was, let alone who was



Image by Bill Scott

in the car.

It's as we approach the end of the elevated section of the M4 and the beginning of the A4/Cromwell Road that I begin to wonder how we can maintain our progress in the face of such appalling traffic. A constant communication has been maintained over the radio on the journey between

the working bikes and easy rider, allowing the easy rider to adjust the pace well in advance of any solid traffic. Approaching the advertising hoardings on the Cromwell Road, the radio crackles “Yeah, nowhere to go ahead, Gordon”, and Gordon, the easy rider slows.

Moments later, I hear “Lane three for straight ahead” and

the traffic ahead of us begins to move, clearing a path. As we crest the hump past Tesco on our left, I see one of the working bikes has positioned himself in the junction and is ‘pulling’ the traffic in our lane through the red traffic

signal (ATS). Even as he is doing this, the other working bike has raced ahead and is advising the easy rider, “Use the SEG Lane for straight on and then I'll take you offside at the next ATS”.

As I expected, we filtered past the stationary traffic along the ‘SEG Lane’ (See picture), before being taken

onto the offside carriage of the Cromwell Road, along a path cut through the oncoming traffic! The working bike, which had held the previous junction leap-frogged ahead and held the traffic on the nearside carriage at the ATS by the Cromwell Hospital, allowing us to cut back across.

All through Central London, the process was repeated and we delivered our VIP to Tony Blair on time, without incident and without the Easy Rider putting his feet on the ground! Whilst not excessive, our speed was constant and I was amazed at the superlative teamwork that I had been witness to.

Throughout the journey, I had to keep reminding myself that there were only two working bikes cutting a path through the traffic for us, so busy were they constantly leap-frogging one another. Each member of the team seemed possessed of a deep-rooted confidence in the abilities of both himself

and the others, and it showed in the harmony with which the team worked.

The whole event was discreet in the extreme, every aspect of it honed to perfection, the result of years of experience being filtered into a relatively small arena. The manner in which the riders escorted the VIP's was thoughtful, with great attention paid to detail - each time the last working bike leap-frogged ahead, for example, it was at a controlled pace in a high gear so as not to disturb or inconvenience the VIP in the armoured Jaguar Limousine. I had no impression of noise, no panic, just a controlled, steady pace moving with clinical precision to cut seamlessly through London's rush hour traffic.

I tried hard, but it's difficult not to feel a frisson of schadenfreude at the misfortune of the other road users, sitting immobile in their cars and bikes as we glided past in the face of oncoming

traffic and filtered through red ATS across junctions held by working bikes with their blue lights strobing and reflecting off surrounding buildings. This surely, is the way to travel!

The SEG only escorts those who really need it and even then, only when carrying out official duties - the group is not an asset of the Royal Family to be used at whim on personal business. The job isn't always enjoyable, either; a more sombre duty was given to the group in 1997 when it was charged with escorting the body of Diana, Princess of Wales from London to her burial place at the family seat in Northamptonshire and more recently, when accompanying Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother to lie in state.

Not all escorts are as easy and low key as the one I experienced, although matters are a little more straightforward now than they



Image by Bill Scott

used to be. Other nations tend not to be as discreet as us in their protection and escort duties and the Americans and Russians in particular have needed some persuasion that presidents can be adequately protected with no more than three bikes to speed their progress. One state visit by the Russians a few years ago saw the group escorting a motorcade along the M1 that stretched over three-quarters of a mile from easy rider to back-up car!

The Americans adopt a habit in their own country of closing roads that the presidential convoy will be travelling along, and surrounding the president's car with Secret Service agents, at great cost and inconvenience to the local community. However, for all that, a determined assassin will find a way, as has been seen countless times in the US, proving that a large and visible security detail is no guarantee of safety. Our approach of quick and unobtrusive progress at minimal disruption to others seems to offer a better alternative but then, understatement is not really the American way!

A seamless model of efficiency such as was displayed on the escort I accompanied is the result of intensive training the like of which exists nowhere else within the police service.



Image by Bill Scott

An applicant to the group must already be experienced as a Class One driver and Class One motorcyclist. If accepted, he (or she - there have been women PCs in the group) must successfully complete the national Bodyguard course, an anti-hijack course (a week at Hendon Driving School learning high speed turns, breaking through road blocks, where to hit the vehicle that is attempting to block you - and more) as well as various advanced firearms courses. The group is armed as appropriate, with 9mm Glock personal side arms and when necessary, Heckler and Koch MP5 carbines. The protection that the SEG offers has to be accomplished within the framework of the law as no officer has diplomatic immunity and as with every police officer, must be able to justify his actions after the event.

As a direct contrast to VIP escorts, the group also escort certain prisoners to and from court and prison. In addition, they provide escorts for cash and bullion movements and other high value cargos such as drugs, or weapons scheduled for destruction. In these cases, the group works exclusively with cars and the methods couldn't be more different. On an escort using cars (Range Rovers, Omegas and Volvo T5s), the defining characteristic is noise, with liberal use made of sirens and blue lights. The lead vehicle goes ahead to scout for potential problems as well as taking control of junctions for the following point and backup vehicles. Only the driver of the lead car will know what route the convoy will take, this because he is making it up as he goes along. The experience is more akin to a runaway train, assertive,

purposeful and highly visible!

Clearly, the SEG's record speaks for itself. One of the reasons for the group's continued low profile stems from the fact that it has been so successful in what it does. The SAS received such widespread coverage after the Princes Gate siege in 1980 that it found it impossible to shrink back to anonymity afterwards. By contrast, the SEG have managed to paradoxically establish an enviable reputation without attracting widespread media attention - no mean feat for a group involved in such high-profile work!

Notwithstanding my preconceptions, I was struck by the efficiency and commitment shown in one of the greatest displays of teamwork I have been privileged to witness. That the job is difficult is beyond doubt. I considered on more

than one occasion how difficult it must be to enter a junction so assertively against the flow of traffic and armed only with a whistle and an (almost) unmarked police bike. Add to that that you may be escorting a head of state, and that you are partly responsible for their safety and it becomes even more stretching. Given the workload of the group, it is testament to their professionalism that they have managed to maintain their record. Not every escort however is trouble free, although you need to look back a little further at the group's antecedents to find the evidence! I was informed of one occasion when two officers had to put themselves at great personal risk to protect their principal by Inspector Bob Flinn, the head of the SEG. He told me:

"Just off of the A3 in Reigate, there's a long island that

is one-way on either side. The group were escorting the German President into London from Gatwick Airport and they'd reached this one-way system when the two working bikes were confronted with a car driving straight at them. They attempted to wave him into the side of the road but he just kept coming. Sensing a threat, they had to position themselves to take the impact and protect their principal in the car behind. They were both knocked off and injured, one of them severely. The President's escort pressed on, because at that time, they thought that they were under threat and stopping could have led them into a trap. Someone in the tail car was detailed to attend to the injured officers until an ambulance arrived".

The car that took out the motorcyclists was driven not by a terrorist but by an 80-year old man who had become confused by the road signs.

"The President was very concerned about the two officers who had been injured to protect him," Flinn told me. "In fact, he was so impressed at their bravery that after visiting them in hospital, he decided to confer on them the Iron Cross 3rd Class. They have since been invited back every year to dinner at the embassy!"

Antony Loveless



Image by Bill Scott

Whilst Antony was out with the SEG, he made a film from some DV footage he shot and due to an incident in the Middle East, it's pretty much a one off.

He was at London Heathrow(LHR) awaiting the arrival of Kofi Annan and the Israeli Premier who we were due to escort to a meeting with Tony Blair at Downing Street. The Israeli premier arrived only to be greeted with news of a crisis at home.

He promptly turned around, re-boarded the jet and took off. Now there was an SEG team, 2 Special Branch close protection teams, and a Rover 827 Gunship together with a back-up chase car which Antony was to be travelling in. They all had to get from LHR to New Scotland Yard (NSY) or SE11 (SEG base) so the boss decided to treat the run as a training exercise and Antony's car was tasked as the VIP one meaning he got the view normally reserved for a head of state. The video shows the skill it takes to move a VIP through rushhour.



You can view the video along with rider comentary on you tube here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8A_Un28wc8

Huge thanks to Antony Loveless who wrote the article after his visit to the Special Escort Group and who has kindly allowed us to include it in our newsletter. Antony is a Freelance Journalist, Author, Ghost Writer and Photographer. His words and pictures have appeared in, among others, The BBC, The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, thelondonpaper, Metro, Loaded, and Escape.

Antony's most recent title is Force Benedict, which he ghosted for Eric Carter, a 94-year old WWII fighter pilot. It tells



the little-known story of two RAF Hurricane squadrons which were despatched to defend Murmansk in August 1941 following a personal plea for help by Stalin to Churchill. It was published in April 2014 and immediately became a No1 bestseller on Amazon. If your interested you can find it [on Amazon](https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1472800000) or in all good book shop.

You can find out more about Antony and his work on his website <http://about.me/antonyloveless> or you can follow him on twitter <http://twitter.com/AntonyLoveless>



Thanks also to Bill Scott who took many of the photos of the Special Escort Group that Bill kindly let me (the Editor) use alongside Antony's article. Bill has a massive collection (over 40 thousand) of photographs including planes, trains, boats and emergency vehicles.

You can see Bill's other photos on his Flickr site (a photo sharing website) here <https://www.flickr.com/photos/billkatygemma/>

Northumbria Blood Bikes



The official handover of two brand new Triumph Trophy motorcycles on 24th Aug at the Cobblers Hall Pub in Newton Aycliffe, bringing our fleet up to SIX bikes.....

The motorbikes were donated by MADATHLON, a charity who raises funds for life-saving equipment by performing physically demanding challenges

swimming, cycling, mountain climbing, running & hiking. Madathlon have spent the last year holding many events and challenges to raise enough money to give us two bikes, Named "Claire" and "Bella", and will soon be seeking another good cause to support in 2015.

Thanks to the continued efforts of Owain Harris (publicity),

we where lead bike in the Great North Run for the second year in a row. As one of the North East's most prestigious annual events this was an excellent opportunity to raise awarress of Northumbria Blood Bikes and the work that we do. In addition to the publicity, our runners raised in the region of £2,400 though sponsorship and donations.





The handover of “Bright Northumbria”, funded by a £5000 donation from Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, generated articles in five of the local newspapers this month.

Why do we do it?

We know what we do ‘makes a difference’. It can help save lives and also saves our hospitals substantial sums of money, often tens of thousands of pounds, which can then be used to directly benefit

patients. The opportunity to achieve this, by doing what we love – riding motorcycles, is a compelling mixture for NBB Volunteers.

How can you help?

We provide our services to the hospitals for free, so we rely 100% on donations from the public, from charitable groups and on company sponsorship to fund our work. Financial donations and sponsorship are therefore always very welcome. We are also grateful to

companies who can donate or heavily discount the products or services we need to operate. Please call our fundraising line on 07766 479 770 for any opportunities to increase our funding through sponsorship, locations for collecting tins, supermarket events etc

Want to be involved by riding or fundraising?

We are always on the lookout for new members to join us in helping make a difference for the people of the North East.

All of our riders need to have passed an advanced motorcycle test (IAM, ROSPA, POLICE) before they can ride for us. A good number of NAM members are already NBB volunteers, but we are always looking for more. All we ask is that riders be able to volunteer for 2 shifts a month. We provide a jacket, guidance and support. It’s hugely rewarding when you deliver something that you know is possibly



saving someone's life.

It's not just riders that we need. Fundraising is critical to NBB. Without it we would not be able to keep running. At the moment it costs around £1000 a month to fuel, tax and insure our fleet. We regularly hold fundraising events at supermarkets and shopping centres. In addition to raising funds it's also a great opportunity to speak to the public about what we do. No experience is required to help with fundraising, all are welcome. As we fundraise all over the north east there is likely to

be a local fundraising event near to you.

Questions

For anyone thinking about volunteering and making a difference, please have a read of our Frequently Asked Questions page on our website. <http://www.northumbriabloodbikes.org.uk/faq>.

Still got questions?

You can also email any questions to me at

membership@northumbriabloodbikes.org.

Ready to join now?

Complete a membership form on our website http://www.northumbriabloodbikes.org.uk/membership_form

Want to keep up to date with what Northumbria Blood Bikes are doing?

Check out our public Facebook page (you don't need to sign up to Facebook to view it), twitter account and website using the links below.

Barry Bullas



www.northumbriabloodbikes.org.uk

membership@northumbriabloodbikes.org.uk

www.facebook.com/northumbriabloodbikes

www.twitter.com/northumbriabb

www.linkedin.com/company/2866951



New members

NAM is pleased to welcome the following new members

- Shaun Hegarty
- Paul Waters
- John Dean
- Brian Slassor
- Simon Ambler
- George Spuhler
- Darren Burton
- Scott Douglas
- Steven Brander
- David Stanley
- Chris Murphy
- Gordon Avery
- Alan Burdis
- Adam Steven Morris
- Michael Cole
- Alan Burdis
- Simon Allan

Awards

NAM is pleased to congratulate the following members who have recently passed their advanced test

- Colin Bates
- Tim Fisher
- Richard Henderson
- Mark Lees
- Phil McGonigle
- Graham Moor
- Tom Ramsey
- Simon Ryecroft
- Brian Slassor
- Ashley Webster
- Lee Wright



- Kevin Patterson
- Mel Leach

IAM F1RST recognises excellence during the IAM advanced driving or riding test.

Easy fundraising

Easy fundraising is a simple and easy way for you to help raise money for NAM at no cost to yourself.

1. Join easyfundraising (link below) and select your cause , in this case NAM
2. Follow links on the website to over 2000 leading online retailers (Ebay, Tesco, Asda, Amazon etc) and shop as normal
3. Online purchases earn an automatic donation to NAM.

Easyfundraising has already raised £409.91 for NAM so far.

<http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/nam/>