

A PILLIONS OBSERVATION ON THE 2012 TOUR TO SPAIN

From the daily diary of Christine Maidens

Thursday 7 June

The usual routine, make a packed lunch then on the Honda to Newhaven by early afternoon; a blustery day, wet on the roads but no rain en route. A night in the premier Inn, convenient – 5 minutes from the Ferry Terminal.

Friday 8 June

Very windy, again we fear for the ferry as we have experienced problems at Newhaven before when the weather is rough, no harbour just a river estuary. Up in time for a proper breakfast and a check with the receptionist on how the Transmanche ferries are operating, we have heard on the T.V news of cancellations down the coast at P&O Portsmouth, no problem, we are told after an “on line” check – phew.

How wrong can you be - confusion at the terminal means we are told the boat is on time only to find out later it's going to be late. Should leave at 12pm didn't leave till 2pm; we phone the hotel at Forges les Eaux to tell them we will be late. A rough crossing after the captain earn't his wages getting out of Newhaven – no backing out as normal into the channel, he had the boat swung on a stern rope 180 degrees to turn facing front onto the sea and off we went waves crashing over the Marina Wall in dramatic fashion, a definite ½ Kwells day. We arrive at the hotel La paix at 7.45pm after a blustery ride from Dieppe. Our first 2012 dinner in France, always special.

Saturday 9 June

A dry day with brief sun and much cloud and, an easy ride of about 80 miles to the Hotel Brezolles where the group is to meet. A simple hotel with good food. Late in the day just as we were getting worried, Maureen and Tony Street arrived having had a mare of a journey - our travelling companions for the tour so we were very pleased to see them. We learn from Paul of Frank's accident with a barbecue so two down on our party. Also, Roy will join us later on the tour due to work commitments.

Sunday 10 June

A journey of 179 miles to Chauvigny and the Hotel Lion d'Or, a place used many times on club tours. The day started with wet roads and continued cold and wet with heavy rain intermittently throughout the day. Early on a big black Mama Boar ran across our rural road from one cornfield to the other with 9 or 10 “humbugs” trotting behind. Lunch was in an Aire de repose consisting of our hard rations, standing with full wets on, in my case complete with open face helmet, they have there advantages over full face, you can eat with them on. On any other day it would have been a pretty route with very old castles, tiny villages and Chateau to distract a pillion. Typically at the end of the day we met a route barree and a deviation to add to our woes. Our group are all in the annexe; as usual the food is excellent.

Monday 11 June

The longest day today of 237 miles to Floran, cloudy and showery from the off, we managed a picnic lunch in semi sun but it was just a blip – the looming black clouds formed themselves into determined thunderstorm just as we set off again and the rain continued all afternoon, very heavy at times. It was a day to forget, cold and wet. I was not in the best of moods as we arrived at 5.30pm at the Hotel Flaran, my mood matched by the landlord who was as po-faced as could be and disliked the change in numbers Tony had to report.

A hot shower did wonders for my mood, also with a glass or two of a very pleasant Loire wine, the food was lovely but as I said as I got off the bike “it was a bog awful day”.

Tuesday 12 June

Only 129 miles today, and just as well as the weather continued to be awful – wet and cold. To add to my woes in trying to find the correct road out of our coffee stop village to Lanerzaman, Tony stopped the bike to look at the map after doing a U turn, it was a driveway with a slight slope and loose chippings, you know what happened - his foot slipped and over we went – a brake lever that looked like Aladdin's shoe, scratches to the fairing were the bikes scars. Tony burnt a huge hole in his over trousers and I had several little holes in my waterproof jacket. Oh joy - and it's still raining. No more U turns for me, I checked the map and showed Tony a way back onto our route going “off piste” down tiny roads and through little hamlets. Back on route a first for us today as with Mo and To we had lunch in a MacDonald's! well at least it was dry and warm.

We had a 10 minute wait before going through the Bielsa tunnel, it was still showery on the Spanish side but eventually warmer as we descended, roads dry and 23 degrees in Ainsa our destination. Excellent dinner at the Hotel de la Ainsa – wine free – always good for morale. We learn that we were not the only ones to drop the bike as Colin Purches did the same on the alternative route over the Portalet, nice to be in such esteemed company.

Wednesday 13 June

We are off to Nuevalos today for 2 nights at the Hostal Las Rumbas and at last a full day of sun. Tony Street went up front so I had a rest, lovely route, a good mix of long straight and very wiggly roads, not all as smooth as silk.

It was today that Gordon's K1100LT gave up the ghost at Carenina. We had seen Gordon and Hugh at coffee when we stopped to join Keith, Brenda, Paul and Lydia. The K1100 was a bit sick then, and later at our tea stop in the afternoon we saw it being pushed from a garage down the road. Breakdown assistance was invoked and Gordon waited to be taken to Zaragoza while Hugh followed us to the Hostal. Another bike also headed for Zaragoza, Andy Bishops KTM was leaking oil. With Maurice and Pat as outriders they headed off on the quickest Motorway route to the city. In a story that only improves by Maurice telling it - a motorway barrier crashed down on Maurice's helmet destroying his visor and the barrier, the incident caught on CCTV resulted in an un-amused ticket collector at the other end who fined

them. Colin and Steve followed later so Andy could be brought back to camp on Steve's bike while Colin took the luggage. The "scissor sisters" as the proprietors of the Las Rhumbas were nicknamed, were very welcoming and provided an excellent dinner of Beans and Potatoes, Pork Chops, Chips and Red Peppers followed by Cherries with copious quantities of free wine.

Thursday 14 June.

Blue sky and 33 degree, a lazy day for us although some walked to the Monasterio or rode there. While Mark took Andy on the back of his BMW (how brave of Andy) back to Zaragoza to collect his KTM. They returned about 1.30ish as we were eating lunch. Phil and Pete did some fettling, Tony found our Scot oiler was not working because water had got in the system (well I never, what a surprise!).

About 1.20pm Roy appeared having travelled all night on motorway's to join us in a day of leaving home – he had a heroes welcome. We learnt that Gordon was going home via Bilbao leaving the bike in Zaragoza, a reported cost of 1500€ to repair not being an option for the bike Insurance Company. It was written off by them and sold eventually to the dealer – for spares? His companion on the tour Hugh had bad news from home and also left for Bilbao.

Friday 15 June

So, 22 of us now proceeded to Ciudad Encantada. Unfortunately Maureen was unwell in the night so a bit wobbly all day. It was a lovely day, sun and blue sky but not too hot as we were travelling fairly high, saw Vultures on the cliff near Molina de Aragon, it's a lovely sight the Sandstone Fort and it would be nice to explore the old town but, that would mean staying in town to do so in comfort, so perhaps another time.

Tony Street led all day on empty roads, the scenery was wonderful and varied. After unpacking in the Hostal sited right next to the enchanted city, we left Maureen to recover and, went to explore the "city".

The meal was rustic but OK, the free wine just about drinkable. The "Essex Heavy Horse BMW GS Battalion" as we called them surprised a dozen vultures on a carcass en route at the side of the road. We only had 4 deer run in front of Tony Street's bike.

Saturday 16 June

Only 152 miles to Anya and due to Maureen being off colour we led having abandoned the route for a more main road and shorter one. It was very hot on the La Mancha plains, we arrived about 2pm at the Hotel Phillipe 11 for lunch on the terrace. The Hotel pool was much appreciated. Having visited this hotel many times and no pool being available this was a big improvement.

Sunday 17 June

Mojacar here we come. After a very simple breakfast of a piece of toast, a piece of cake, orange juice and tea or coffee - just like old times in Spain, we set off on a lovely ride until Lorca and the autovia which was fast and uninteresting, when we got to Aquida we at last turned off on to the coast road. All new of course, didn't recognise any of it. All new apartments and, half built complexes'. We went through the middle of Garrucha, another place that was unrecognisable. The white hill top village of Mojacar was lost in a sea of hotels and houses on it's foothills with a promenade along the coast. The Hotel Punta del Cantal - low rise and in the form of apartments was fine with settee, chairs and a balcony apart from the bedroom and usual facilities. We ate in the sister Hotel Le Puntazo next door. No complaint, a huge buffet to select from for dinner and breakfast and the hotel nearly empty. The roof top swimming pool especially welcome.

Monday 18 June

A day off so while several people took the bus to Mojacar Tony and I did our favourite people watching from the bar next door. Hot and sunny we waited until the afternoon to amble by the sea down to the old Indalo Hotel and the Laing apartments (now residential/shopping complex) where we last stayed all those years ago on Ken Craven's tour now looking rather tatty. In the evening Tony presented Steve, Mark and Roy with Mojacar "T" shirts as they were our "Mojacar tour virgins".

Tuesday 19 June

Our route started pretty grotty on the way to the Cazorla National Park until after the coffee stop. We stopped in a small rural town for lunch in a bar and were joined by Paul and Lydia. Once again the town of Cazorla was a bit of a nightmare to navigate through until eventually we were picked up by a lad on a Yamaha who led us out of town and firmly on our way before we waved him goodbye. The last 30 miles on all zig-zag roads in very humid and hot conditions. The arrival at the Hotel Mirasierra was as welcoming as usual and had had a makeover. Nice cool rooms and a swimming pool for our day off Wednesday. We were losing several of our group on Wednesday so, a presentation by Brenda was made on the Tuesday night to Maureen as "Miss Mojacar" and, Tony Street gave Tony and I a thank you speech with a signed note from everyone on the tour showing their appreciation of his work, which was lovely.

After dinner we all went outside to see a Wild Boar come out of the dark forest to eat the scraps of bread put out by the proprietor, he was christened Cyril? By Lydia.

Wednesday 20 June.

We were up in time to see off the Essex Heavy Horse, Vince and Mike, Keith and Brenda. Mark was still nursing a bruised knee after coming off on diesel in Boza but all OK. Andy went off with Tim towards Switzerland. For us a lazy day by the pool and some packing ready for the off.

Mo and To were staying with us until Perigueux on the return trip. Our first stop Manzanares on the road to Madrid and a hotel Tony and I have used before. We were also going to be accompanied on the first leg by Maurice and Pat and Paul and Lydia who would then peel off to go to Bilbao.

So another tour drew to a close, it was good to have companions for part of the trip home, it made it seem as if the tour hadn't really ended and our very pleasant week together was another adventure; an epic tale for a future date.

P.S. Our thanks to Mo and To for putting up with us and to the RAC for getting us home when the bike broke down after we had parted at Perigueux. With Mo and To's help the Honda is now back home, repaired, cleaned to concourse standard and ready to go again.

Christine Maidens.

Its twelve years since the club ran a tour to Mojacar - back to base as our secretary said to me. I enjoyed visiting many of the venues we have used before, particularly Nuevalos, Ayna and the Cazorla national park, the ride from Nuevalos to the Ciudad Encantata (enchanted city) was the best days ride for me, temperature perfect, sky clear blue and, the air so clear through forest and hills to this geological wonder. The Hostal was a new one for us, very pleasant and rural.

As Chris has said the weather for the first few days in France was pretty grim but, once over the Pyrenees it's like going into another world, the sun was out every day and warm with it, but not too hot as many feared it might be. Our group consisted of many of the "old timers" who had done it all before but wanted to do it may be for the last time. There were also many who were doing it for the first time - wanted to know what the club Logo was all about, I hope they enjoyed the experience of touring in rural Spain. I for one still find riding in rural Spain the most enjoyable in Western Europe.

It was a great tour and adventure with a great group of members, I hope the club will one day venture to southern Spain again, it is a wonderful country, you can guarantee the sunshine every day.

After my bike breakdown in France near Chartres, I was summoned to collect it by the RAC two weeks after I had returned home. Six and a half years old and the alternator still under warrantee so, no cost to me at all. An occasional technical glitch, which Honda accepts and will reimburse the cost. As Andy said after his KTM was repaired in Spain - it seems to be running better than ever now - so does my Honda.

Tony Maidens