

Europe End-to-End 2010

A Brief Report

I have always been a traveller, as a child; with my parents I moved towns five times in 13 years. Eventually I got bored with this and joined the Royal Air Force at 15 years of age - more travel, seven postings in 15 years plus the detachments and deployments but I did see the World. As a civilian and married to Rosemary there were UK and overseas holidays and with my work - motor sport, there were UK, European and World Championship rallies to attend.



I purchased my first motorbike at 16 from Pride & Clarke; part exchanging my Dansette record player (trading up from 33rpm to 197cc!) but my first encounter with biking was in 1948, at the age of two riding on my dad's ex-Army Royal Enfield, perhaps that set the seal? Although I have only ever owned nine bikes they have covered 2-stroke and 4-stroke from 70cc to 800cc.



Moving to Norfolk in 2000 I gave up motor sport and fixing cars but it was back to bikes; to service, modify or just potter with. My long-range biking projects have always been enjoyable, well at least when I get home! It has been the planning and preparation that has been my real enjoyment, doing the events was OK, but if I could have only got someone else to ride them! Having done the UK's biking challenges - LEJoG (Lands End to John 'o Groats) and Side-to-Side (Lowestoft to Ardnamurchan) a move to mainland Europe was required. As I had never read or heard of a solo biker doing Europe End-to-End this had to be it - North Cape to Europa Point. Being a staunch supporter of our Armed Forces, but not the war in Afghanistan, my charity of choice was never in doubt - Help for Heroes.

Wednesday 4th August and day one of my epic was damp, going on very wet, as I rode down to Harwich to catch the afternoon ferry for the first of my five ferry crossings. The next day was taken up by crossing Denmark from Esbjerg to Fredikshavn and then the night crossing to Gothenburg in Sweden. I was in Norway early on Friday morning and had completed an excellent total of 722 miles by late afternoon when my ultra reliable, 10,000 mile, 20-month old, dealer serviced 850 miles ago,

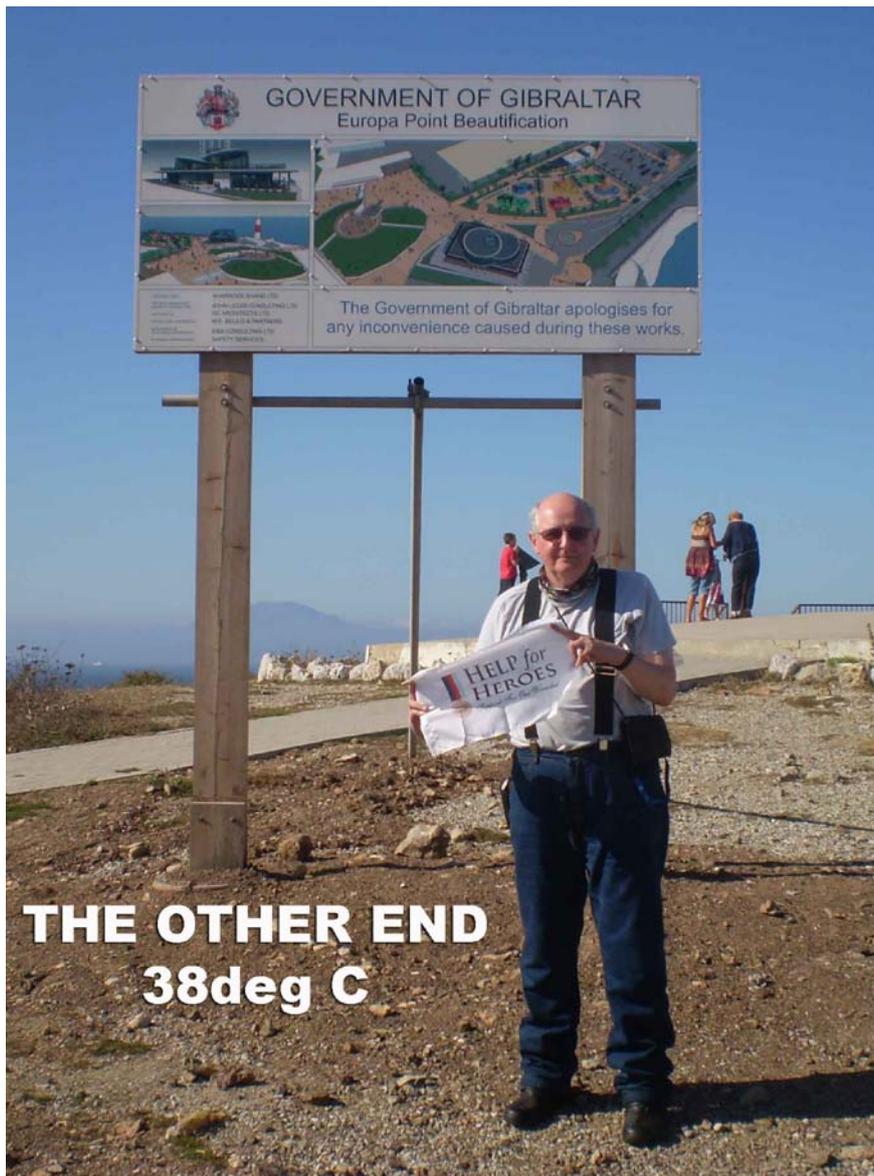
BMW broke. I won't bore you with the details of my two days in Oppdal, (nice town but with a bit of Twin Peaks about it, if you know what I mean) and then three days in Trondheim, well worth a visit if I had been a tourist.



I was back on the road on Thursday morning but only after purchasing second hand parts to fix the bike, which also meant I had to pay to have it repaired as 'warranty' did not cover personal initiative. The failure was the rear wheel bearing, which was found when dismantled to be rusty. On the Tuesday, BMW expected me to wait another six days for the bits even if they weighed less than 1kg with packing and were sitting in the main parts store in Germany. Perhaps the concept of customer service has not spread that far through Europe and anyway, if I had had to wait another week I would have had to come home and scrap the project.



Navigation was just the E6 or the North Cape Conveyor as it could be called and head north, idiot proof really. Roads smooth and flowing but hardly any straight bits and low speed limits, 50 to 90 KPH. Weather generally poor, the Norwegians are big on rain! Very little traffic but loads of road works and to prove the Norwegians have a sense of humour - they tow caravans! Then there are the tunnels; about a dozen of various lengths from half a mile to six miles, some flat some with a deep dip in the middle, some hot, some cold, from a balmy 18deg C down to single figures and on exit everything steamed up. However, I crossed into the Arctic Circle on Friday and after one more ferry, 20 minutes from Bognes to Skarberget, I arrived in Alta on Saturday. Got to North Cape around midday on Sunday, where it was very cold – 0.5deg C, wet, very windy with a 40-minute blizzard in the afternoon – this on the 15th August! But I am further north than the north coast of Iceland. Did postcards and a few photographs and then off on the next leg, having travelled 1720 miles since leaving home.



The sun shone, I headed south and it might even be getting warmer, plus there were lots of reindeer about, mostly standing in the middle of the road. I entered Finland at 12-noon and exited at 4pm into Sweden. On Wednesday evening it was exit Sweden and into Denmark, via the Oresundsbron crossing which is a combined twin-track railway and four-lane road bridge-tunnel and is the longest road and railway crossing in Europe. I was then heading towards ferry number four, from Rodby to Puttgarden and into Germany on Thursday morning. Next stop Venlo in the Netherlands. Belgium was crossed early on Friday morning and I arrived at the outskirts of Paris at about 4.30pm and the traffic was manic. I thought I'll be brave, dialling Arc de Triomphe into the Sat-Nav I went for it, then when my target came into sight I stopped and input

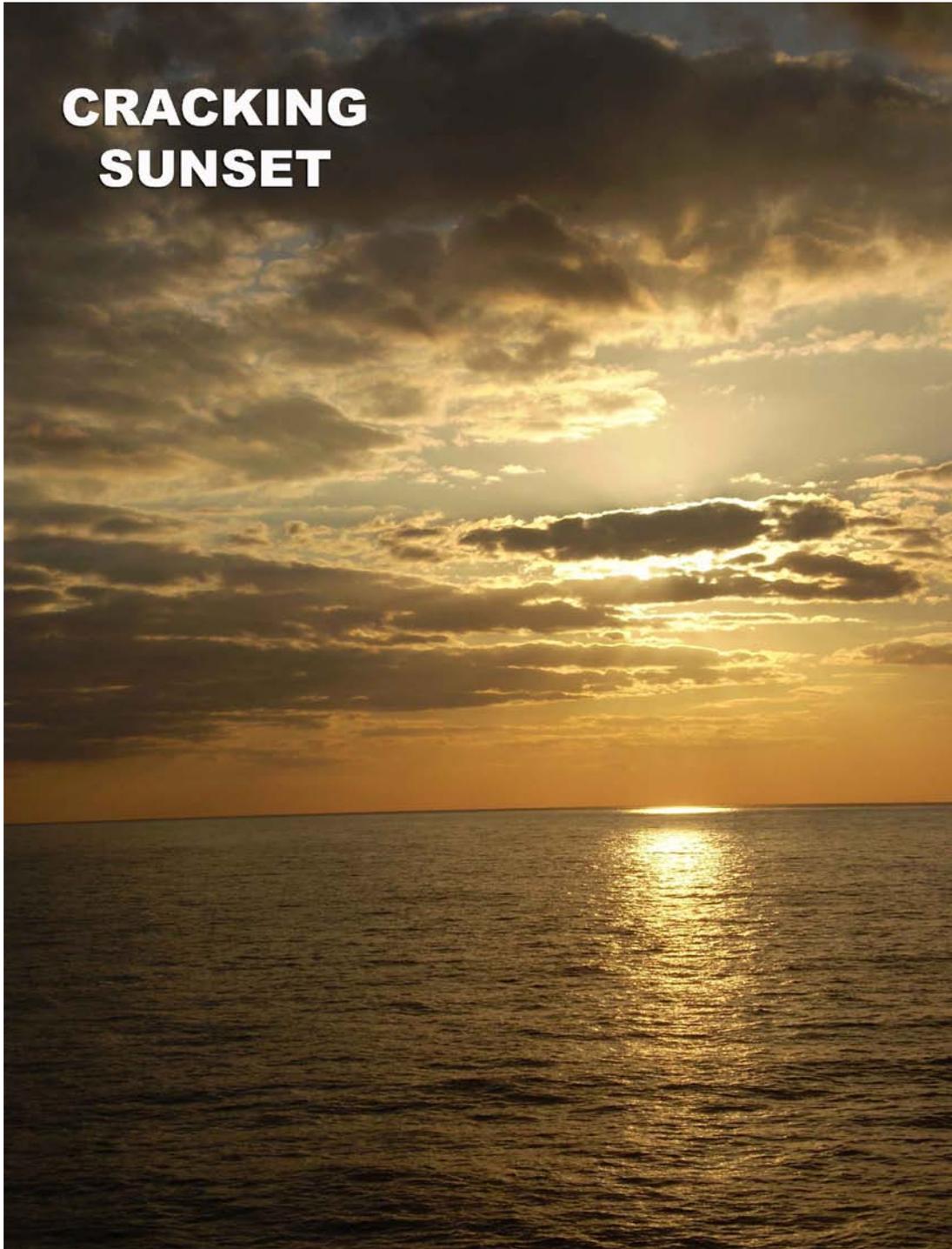
Orleans, to get out the other side. It took 40 minutes to cross 18-miles of the City but would probably have taken at least two hours to go around.

I now declared it officially hot and humid, up to 30deg C, I was OK but above that it starts to get serious inside biking gear with helmet. If I stopped I could feel my body temperature rising, so I did not stop except for 'official' breaks in the shade and of course fuel stops, normally at every 150 miles. As it was peak holiday time the main road traffic was always very busy and potential hold-ups plentiful, accidents, breakdowns and Toll Plazas to name a few. But filtering on a bike is OK on mainland Europe, far better than I find in the UK and if all else failed I just used the hard shoulder to keep on the move. Later when the temperature got up into the mid 40's my plan was the same but I just took in more fluid.

Crossed into Spain on Sunday morning and headed southwest to miss out Madrid and arrived in Jerez on Monday evening. Last here 43 years ago, it seems to have changed. I was at Europa Point in Gibraltar mid-morning Tuesday, although slowed by thick fog on the run down, not much else left to encounter! I had now travelled 3488 miles from North Cape and 5208 miles since leaving home. Time now for postcards and photographs plus even managed a live chat on North Norfolk Radio, before going on to Terifa, 30-miles away, as that is the real southern most point of Europe.

Heading home now, I reached Bordeaux on Thursday to spend the night in a cheapie hotel and endured the highest humidity I have ever encountered and that includes my time in the Gulf. Boarded the last of my five ferries on Friday afternoon and was on the M275 out of Portsmouth at 9.30pm. Arrived home in Holt just after 1am having travelled a total of 6637 miles in 25-days, although thanks to BMW I did spend 5-days as a pedestrian!

CRACKING SUNSET



This is only a brief report of my adventures. My diary runs to 12,000 words and a few dozen photographs and if anyone is interested in a 40-minute illustrated presentation - local clubs or associations, I am available for a small donation to Help-for-Heroes.

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