

Happy days on a motor bike made for four

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Happy days on a motor bike made for four

IT is true to say that since marrying my Schweizerinnen some 29 years ago she has seen more of Switzerland than ever she did before making her home in England.

It is natural I suppose to want to squeeze out every sight-seeing ounce when visiting relatives and friends in such a beautiful country as Switzerland and we have done this in no uncertain manner.

Our methods of transport to and from Die Schone Schweiz have been many and varied and our en route experiences, especially in the early days, ranged from hilarious to hair-raising.

Having married in England we spent our honeymoon in Switzerland travelling by rail which allowed a stop-over in Paris. I do not know if any readers have ever travelled a day and a night in the old style French railway carriages with their straight backed wooden seats making it impossible to sleep or even doze off for a couple of hours, but if they did perhaps they recall feeling like a letter L for some days afterwards.

I vowed that never again would we subject ourselves to such an uncomfortable experience and in 1953 I purchased a motor bike and sidecar, booked my driving test and the car ferry from Dover to Calais which, if my memory serves me right, cost approximately £5 10s return plus a few more pounds for the passengers.

Petrol was about 3s 6d a gallon and for every pound we received 19 Swiss francs. Happy days!

My driving test was to be held in Leeds on the Wednesday and we were to sail from Dover on the Saturday following, therefore it was imperative that I passed that test bearing in mind that one is not allowed to drive on the continent with a provisional licence.

My brother-in-law who was also a keen motorcyclist, gave

me a preview of the test and fortunately for all concerned I passed first time.

All concerned were my wife, our son then aged 18 months, my mother of 65 whose furthest journey in life had been from Newcastle to Leeds some 25 years before, and myself. Armed with a lot of British madness and Swiss confidence we left our waving neighbours in Leeds with that sort of "They'll be lucky if they get as far as Doncaster" tone of voice on their faces. How wrong they were.

Our motor bike was a Panther 600cc made in Yorkshire and was renowned for pulling sidecars, a proper work horse in every sense of the word. On that 3,000 mile holiday it took us



My fellow travellers were my small son, now aged 28, grandma and my wife.

through five countries, over the Alps, through hail, rain, snow, and boiling hot weather without ever complaining or refusing to go. How the Japs captured our motor cycle trade when we were producing products like the Panther I shall never know.

Motorways as such had not then been constructed, except in Germany, and the journey from Leeds to Dover was not usually accomplished without a night's stopover. The A1 road to London seemed to be little changed from the time it was built by the Romans. It could take up to two hours alone to get through Doncaster, and every town to the south had to be negotiated — no by-passes, nothing.

France by comparison at that time was a driver's paradise.



My trusty Panther never let us down

One could sometimes travel 20 miles or more without seeing another vehicle and we sped our way in glorious sunshine through La Belle France.

I had my shirt off — it was that hot — and with our son and grandma in the sidecar, my wife behind me on the pillion seat, fresh air all around life was perfect, we were free, free, free.

Just then we ran into a swarm of wasps, a large special French breed which took an immediate liking to my bare torso. I felt their stings going in and was faced

parked up for a meal or whatever we inevitably found a small crowd of curious continentals taking stock of our machine. This brought us into contact with the local people, making the holiday far more interesting.

The Swiss customs man was equally curious, no doubt wondering how anyone could be daft enough to travel so far in such a contraption. He cleared our papers and smiled us on our way.

We had travelled long and far that day and our first thought after crossing the border was for a good Swiss meal. We found a restaurant (not a terribly difficult thing to do in Switzerland) and in it I made my first Swiss faux pas. I had been learning German for a short while and being anxious to demonstrate my great linguistic ability I said I would order the meal.

All went well until it was suggested that a cake each would be nice to finish off with. Now, as all your Swiss German readers will know cake in German is Kuchen and kitchen is Küche. Yes, you've guessed it, I went and ordered four cream kitchens.

The Fraulein brought the Ober, the restaurant went quiet, and I repeated my request for four cream kitchens. Just as everyone present was about to tap their heads with their forefingers my wife clarified the situation in perfect Swiss German. We left the place in an uproar.

Our faithful Panther carried us faultlessly the length, breadth and heights of Switzerland and back home to England. I only wish some of the four-wheeled transport we were to use in the future had been as reliable as that faithful three wheeler. But that is another story.

Peter Selby-Huber