

VIBRATIONS!



July 2002, with bikes parked up at the Coventry Canal Basin after the Triumph Centenary Ride.

May 2020



Triumph Owners M.C.C.

Northants Branch



Scribblings

My New Year Resolution has been repeated each year since 2000: To do something I've never done before and to go somewhere I've never been before. Being locked down to avoid catching a nasty bug was not quite what I had in mind though!

If you have read the branch report in the May Nacelle you will have seen that our last actual club night was on 18th March – little did we know at the time that pubs were going to be shut just three days later. And did you all spot that the report repeatedly mentions April instead of March? More fool me.

With the postponement of the AGM in March the existing branch committee will continue to keep things ticking over. As soon as a new date can be arranged you will all be notified.

With 26,000 deaths and 160,000 confirmed cases at the time of writing, it's likely that you all know of someone who has been affected, but we hope that you yourself are keeping okay. In my case employees at my company were asked to start working from home a week before the government lockdown, and one unexpected benefit it is that my fiance moved in about three months earlier than planned.

Stay safe and start planning all the rides you want to do when the whole thing is over.

With not a lot to report I have dragged out of the archives some reports from our trip to France in 1999.

Sarge

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New Members

Welcome to the following new Branch members, who have joined in the last couple of months.

Dave Cross of Mawsley
Fraser Neeson from Northampton

Brian Storey from Towcester

The Triumph factory at Meriden in 1980.

Until its closure, the Triumph Owners national AGM was held in the works canteen on the first floor.



Northants Branch Info and News

To all Northants Branch Members...

As many of you will have seen in the latest Nacelle, we have had a request from our national chairman to cancel all events for the time being. Not only have we suspended our branch nights we must now cancel our Triumph day at Jacks Hill Café on 12th July.

Looking on the bright side, this will give us time to plan a bigger and better event for next year, so get your thinking caps on and let's have plenty of ideas on how we can do just that.

Keep safe

Regards

Phil Barton

Northants Branch Chairman.

Virtual Club Nights

With all branch events being cancelled for the time being one idea we have come up with to keep members in touch is Virtual Club Nights on our Facebook group. Many of you have been joining in with those we held in April and these will continue until such time as we can all meet in person again.

Here is the link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/northantstomcc/>

The idea is that, every Wednesday between 7.30pm-9.30pm, everybody logs on so that there is a community of people there at the same time. You can then upload a photo, together with an explanation of the story behind it. That could be a club event, something from your own motorcycling past, or just something of interest to the other members.

Each post can then prompt comments from other members as the night progresses.

Of course, the Facebook group remains open all the time so you can still put up posts whenever you want; just that if everyone doing so on Wednesday evenings it means that the conversations can flow a bit better.

Those of you with internet access who have so far avoided Facebook may wish to log on to join in.



The 1996 Normandy Invasion, with the sadly missed Neil Barras leading the pack.

Northants Branch Info and News

| | Events List |
|---|--|
| Fri-Mon 1 st -4 th May | Trifest Somerset – postponed until 2021 |
| Wed 6 th May | Virtual Club Night at your house. |
| Wed 13 th May | Virtual Club Night at your house. |
| Sat-Sun 16 th -17 th | MCN Show, Peterborough – postponed until September |
| Wed 20 th May | Virtual Club Night at your house. |
| Wed 27 th May | Virtual Club Night at your house. |
| <i>Events shown for June-October are obviously subject to cancellation/postponement to meet whatever the current government guidelines are.</i> | |
| Wed 3 rd June | Club Night at The Crown (or more likely Virtual Club Night at your house.) |
| Sat-Sun 6 th -7 th June | Coventry Moto-Fest – cancelled |
| Sun 14 th June | Ace Café Triumph Day – the Ace is currently closed. The probability of this event going ahead is very small. |
| Wed 17 th June | Concours d'Elegance at The Crown (or Virtual Club Night at your house). |
| Sun 21 st June | Wellesbourne Mountford Airfield taxi runs by the Vulcan – the airfield is currently closed so not known yet whether this will go ahead. |
| Sun 28 th June | Ton-Up Day at Jack's Hill Café. The café has limited opening at the moment; it remains to be seen whether it will resume normal business in time for this. |
| Wed 1 st July | Club Night at The Crown, High Street, Hardingstone from 8pm. Theme night: All Meriden machines |
| Sun 5 th July | World Superbikes at Donington |
| Sun 5 th July | Rideout to Blaze Inn Saddles, Burdrop, Banbury, OX15 5RJ |
| Sun 12 th July | Triumph Day at Jack's Hill Café – we have already decided to cancel this. Back again in 2021. |
| Wed 15 th July | Branch Open Night & Barbecue at The Crown, Hardingstone. All welcome. |
| Sun 19 th July | Branch Display at Founders Day Rally. Stanford Hall. |
| Sun 2 nd August | Run to the Sand (Hunstanton) |
| Mon 3 rd August | Run to Bedford Triumph Owners at Wilstead on A6 south of Bedford |
| Wed 5 th August | Club Night at The Crown, High Street, Hardingstone from 8pm. Theme night: Thruxton and Triton |
| Sat 15 th August | Northants Bike Show (provisional date) |
| Sun 16 th August | Brackley Festival of Motorcycling (branch display) |
| Wed 19 th August | Club Night at The Crown, High Street, Hardingstone from 8pm. |
| Sun 30 th August | Moto GP at Silverstone |
| Wed 2 nd September | Club Night at The Crown, High Street, Hardingstone from 8pm. Theme night: Custom and Bobber |

Northants Branch Info and News

| | |
|---|--|
| 5 th -12 th September | Trifest France (TOGA) – postponed until 2021 |
| Wed 16 th September | Club Night at The Crown, High Street, Hardingstone from 8pm. |
| Sun 27 th September | Distinguished Gentlemens' Ride |
| Sat 3 rd October | Ride To The Wall |
| Wed 7 th October | Club Night at The Crown, High Street, Hardingstone from 8pm. Theme night: All Meriden machines |
| Fri-Sun 9 th -11 th October | Skegfest |
| Wed 27 th October | Club Night at The Crown, High Street, Hardingstone from 8pm. |

The Wrinklies Runs for this year are under new management; being shared between Barry Gambrill and Chris Dickens. Thanks to Norm who has done a fantastic job running them the last 3 years.

The runs this year will start in June and finish in September – **subject to government guideline allowing them to go ahead**. All dates shown here are therefore provisional.

Meet at the selected WEDNESDAYS at Pure Triumph Wellingborough at 10.45, with full tanks to depart at 11.00, for runs of up to 50 miles and taking about 90 minutes. The destination will be a pub or café for a lunchtime drink and chat. Can't guarantee that food will be available in all the pubs. If you cannot make the run you are welcome to go straight to the venue and meet us there.

All food and drink must be paid for by the individual members – we won't be running a bar tab.

We will be using the DROP OFF system for all the runs so please ensure that you stop where the leader indicates and DO NOT leave until the back marker arrives.

Barry Gambrill

| Date | Venue |
|---------|---|
| 10 June | The Spread Eagle, Piddington, NN7 2DA |
| 24 June | The Crown Inn, Tur Langdon, LE8 0PJ |
| 8 July | The Greyhound, Milton Malsor, NN7 3AP |
| 22 July | The Cross keys, Kings Cliff, PE8 6XA |
| 12 Aug | The Bull Inn, Clifton upon Dunsmore, CV23 0BH |
| 26 Aug | The Bell Inn, Gumley, LE16 7RU |
| 9 Sept | The Royal Oak, Walgrave, NN6 9PN |
| 23 Sept | The Kings Arms, Polebrook, PE8 5LW |

Northants Branch Info and News

Branch HQ:

The Crown, High Street, Hardingstone, Northampton, NN4 6BZ.

The main access to Hardingstone village is from the roundabout at the junction of the A45, A508 and A5076 (ring road). Other access from the Newport Pagnell Road (B526).

1st and 3rd Wednesdays of each month, starting at 8pm.

Pure Triumph:

Our local Triumph dealer is based at The Embankment, Wellingborough, NN8 1LD. The company's website can be found at www.puretriumph.co.uk.

On production of a current Triumph Owners membership card, Pure Triumph at Wellingborough will give a 10% discount on the following items: Clothing, Oxford Products, Helmets, Oil products, Labour on Servicing.

The Branch on the Internet:

Our website can be found at: www.northantstomcc.org.uk. Most pages are public but there is one small section that is restricted to branch members only, accessed via the password that is advised separately.

We also have Facebook page: www.facebook.com/groups/northantstomcc/

If you go on any branch events please make a conscious effort to take a photo (high quality mobile phone OK) then send it to Sarge and Les Barras. This will ensure the newsletter and website have something to show when writing the reports.

Other Internet Links:

Triumph Owners MCC national website: www.tomcc.org

Triumph Owners MCC events website: www.tomccevents.co.uk

Triumph Owners Clothing: www.tomccmerchandise.com

The club also has a page on Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/4526704577/.

British Motorcyclists Federation: www.bmf.co.uk

Triumph Motorcycles: www.triumphmotorcycles.co.uk

Northants Branch Info and News

Membership Renewals

If your club membership is due for renewal here are the best ways of dealing with it...

- 1) Renew on-line via tomcc.org/Home/Membership with a credit card, debit card or PayPal account. You can also get a £2 discount using this method.
- 2) Fill in the membership form that was sent to you, then post it direct to the HQ Membership address at Horley, as shown on the form. Include a cheque made payable to Triumph Owners MCC.
- 3) Fill in the membership form and hand it to the Branch Membership Secretary at a club night. Payment by cheque or cash. Memberships renewed this way are only sent to HQ a couple of times a month, so will take longer to process than 1 or 2 above.

Don't worry about the money as the Branch receives the same amount per member regardless of the method used to renew.

Northants Branch Clothing Range

The range of Northants Branch clothing: T-Shirt, Polo Shirt. Sweatshirt, Hoodie, Fleece, Business Shirt and Baseball Cap; can be purchased on-line.

Some items can also be done with a large back-print for an additional fee.

To order click on this link:

www.customkit.co.uk/northants-triumph-owners-club-52-c.asp

Club Night Ordering: If you would prefer not to go on-line you can place an order with Les Barras at one of our club nights. Your selection should then be ready for collection at the next club night.



Above: Philip Wallington's 1996 and 1976 Tridents.

Right: 1973 and Barry Gambrill built up this BSA A10 from spares, many from breakers yards. No log book so he had to get it registered – probably easier then than it would be today.



All photos up to this point appeared on-line during the April virtual club nights.

Tales From Hardingstone: Smoke and Steam

Sometimes in life odd occurrences, which are beyond your understanding, present themselves.

I was 20 years old and the year was 1960. "Rock & Roll Was Here To Stay" according to Danny & the Juniors.

Then as I was walking to the local shops on a fine May morning, listening to the lyrics of Little Richard's latest record in my head and day-dreaming about my girlfriend, I was struck dumb by an apparition. A motorcycle roared past. In a cloud of smoke and steam, and a strange whining exhaust, it disappeared at the T-junction.

When I reached the junction it was parked outside the corner shop. Who should be the rider but one Tony Hollis; proprietor of the local scrap yard. Up close it was amazing. Long and low, with a radiator in front of the petrol tank and two water-jacketed cylinders. Girder forks with a large open spring in the middle; a big lever on the right of the tank with a circular wooden knob on the end. No rear springing; no kickstart; a red square petrol tank with two tank tops – one petrol, one oil. Written on the side of the tank the word "Scoll"? Look again, it's "Scott"; with the t having the crosspiece on one side only

I wanted it and Tony said it was for sale at £15. I had to have it, but how to find the money? It was strictly cash with Tony. This meant going cap in hand to Auntie Doreen. She was rich and only had two children. Both were girls but she always wanted a boy child, I could always fill the gap so off we go. "Yes, okay but you know the rules. Pay back £2 per week."

Okay, now I had the money it was straight round to Tony's house. It was a Sunday dinner-time. "Hello. Yes, you can have the bike"; but the alleyway at the back of the house was blocked by a stack of bricks. "Come back later".

Not on your Nellie! I suggested we go in through the kitchen door, up the passage and out of the front door. Grudgingly, he accepted and we managed to get it through the house before his wife came home from shopping. I was now the owner of a Scott Flying Squirrel. No other bike could touch it; it was God's gift to mankind.

To be continued...

Bert.



1999: Chez Torquil

Part 1 – The Advance Guard

It's 4.30pm on Thursday 27th May and I'm travelling south from Northampton on the A43, heading for Portsmouth and the night ferry to St Malo. I'm travelling by car as it's a bit too far to go on the push-bike. Everyone else in the party is setting off on Saturday but I'm going over early to spend a couple of days in Brittany. Despite the dodgy weather forecast the crossing is smooth and at 8.30am on Friday I'm sitting in the car waiting for the ferry to begin unloading. Though I've ridden bikes on the continent and in the USA before I'm a bit nervous, as this will be my first attempt at driving a car on the right. I've only clocked up just over 2,000 miles in England since passing my test last year, so you can perhaps understand my apprehension - similar to that feeling you get when being hauled up the first slope on a big roller coaster. Once off the ship there are no passport or customs checks, merely an automatic barrier that comes down after each vehicle in an attempt to slow down the traffic heading out of the port. Getting out of St Malo should be fairly easy, as it's just a matter of staying in the convoy of tourists following the "Toutes Directions" signs. However, at the second roundabout, a cyclist approaching from the right realises, at the last moment, that I'm in his way so he slams on his brakes and falls off! As I've been on the road for less than five minutes it is not an encouraging start even though I know I haven't done anything wrong.

I intend to cross the causeway to Dinard then head towards Dinan but I see the turnoff too late so carry on along the main route out of town, the N137, then onto the N176 (these road numbers will only make sense if you've got a map of the area). I want to leave the N176 just past Dinan but miss that turning as well. By the time I realise this I'm some distance west of where I want to be and heading towards the north-west coast of Brittany instead of the south-western side.

After checking the map, I plot an alternative route which turns out to be quite scenic and relatively free of traffic. This is probably an advantage as it gives me time to concentrate on my road positioning, and the strange view imposed by driving almost in the gutter, without having to worry about the antics of other cars. At Baud I re-join my intended route which is now all dual carriageway to Quimperlé. It is now noon so, once in the town, I search out the flat of my friend Andy, his girlfriend Corinne and their kids. Luckily, he is a home for lunch so I'm able to drop off some supplies and presents before he goes back to school, then I drive down to the hotel that he's sorted out for me. After checking in, the rest of the afternoon is spent on foot re-familiarising myself with the town (being almost three years since my last visit), also buying postcards, stamps and a toothbrush – I knew I'd forget something. Then it's back to the flat for a meal and a chance to exchange gossip. This is preceded by Andy gently twisting my arm to help with an English lesson for one of his students.

Following a late and leisurely breakfast on Saturday morning I take a trip out to Les Roches du Diable (The Devil's Rocks), a gorge through which the Elle river passes, and my favourite beauty spot in the area. Then it's back into Quimperlé for lunch at the flat. In the afternoon we all head down to the coast, picking up Andy's two Huskies on the way.



1999: Chez Torquil

After the dogs have taken us for a drag along the coastal footpath, we go to see the plot of land Andy and Corinne have bought and on which they intend to build a house. As seems to happen on all my visits to Brittany, I'm cajoled into doing some work, which in this instance involves shifting a large pile of wood. Back at the flat once more Corinne serves up another excellent meal after which Andy and I head into the centre of town for a drink in one of the bars. We are in luck as a small Breton brewery is doing a promotion for its beer and has arranged for a band to perform. The beer is a pleasant surprise as it's a real ale, not the "pression" lager you normally associate with French bars. It's served straight from a barrel sitting on the bar, and into pint glasses rather than standard 25cl measures.

Leaving the hotel late on Sunday morning (£37 for two nights' B&B) I pay a final visit to the flat to say goodbye and to take some family snaps for Andy's parents back to England. Now it's on the road again for the long trek south. The first part of the journey is straightforward, if a little boring, being wholly along the N165 which is mostly dual-carriageway all the way to Nantes. Nantes is where all the fun begins as I don't have an up to date map of the area and the exit signs off the ring-road (which doesn't appear on my map) are not very informative. Naturally, I end up on the wrong road coming away from the city, being given a choice between that or the Autoroute to Bordeaux. Once I'm totally clear of Nantes I stop to check exactly where I am and in which direction I'm heading. Through skilful use of a compass, and blind guesswork, I manage to navigate eastward to the N137 to get back on track. I figure that this has delayed me by half an hour or so but I've got plenty of time, so there's no need to worry.

However shortly after joining the N137 my exhaust seems to get louder. I'm tempted to turn up the stereo and carry on but decide to pull into a lay-by to check it out. As I'd had part of the exhaust system replaced a few days earlier I'm wondering whether some of the joints have become loose but a quick look under the car reveals a split in the header pipe 1-2 inches away from where it joins the mid-section. There's nothing I can do by the side of the road so I continue driving south-east and turn onto the N148. Shortly after joining this road the exhaust noise gets even louder and I can hear the pipe rattling against the underside of the car. Another look underneath shows that the fracture now covers most of the pipe's circumference. I think it's time to start looking for a phone! The race between the appearance of nearest phone box and the exhaust's total metal fatigue ends in a victory for the latter just as I'm entering the village of Pouillé. I pull over, park the car and get out the warning triangle. It's very quiet as all the shops, cafes and bars are shut and I start to wonder whether there is a public phone here. Just on the far edge of the village, about a kilometre away from the car I find one. My call to the AA is quickly answered and I'm told that they should be able to get someone to me in an hour or so – at 5 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon that's not bad going. My next call is to Torquil & Julia's house and is answered by Julia, who has just arrived in the pick-up with Babs. I explain about the situation and say that I will be in touch as and when there are any developments.

Returning to the car I only have to wait about 15 minutes before a very, very nice man in a recovery truck turns up. We get the car onto the truck and drive back to his depot, which is only 15 miles or so down the road in Fontenay-le-Comte. Oh well, if you're going to have a breakdown you might as well do it that close to an AA agent! The car goes up on the hydraulic lift in the workshop and the offending part is looked at more closely. On the rear side of the fracture, close to the join with the mid-section, there's not a great deal of metal so my rescuer explains that he will have a go at welding it up but there's no guarantee that it will work - in which case the AA will put me up in a hotel for the night and the car will be fixed in the morning. As he gets his welding gear set up two Gendarmes arrive. This worries me, especially when one of them pulls out a large book and starts leafing through it. Are they seeing if they can do me for an unroadworthy vehicle? As it happens, they're just there to help out with the translation if the mechanic's limited English and my limited French aren't enough.

The welding is done, or as much as can be attempted without removing the exhaust from the car, and is pronounced good enough to get me to my destination as long as I don't drive too fast over too many bumps. So, at 6.15pm, just an hour and a quarter after making a call to the AA, I'm back on the road. Stopping at the next phone box I report through to "Base Camp" to let them know that I'm on the move again and I'm told that all the bikes have now arrived.

Through Niort and the N148 mutates into the D948, which I stay on as far as its junction with the N10 then turn south. I'm now on the final stretch and the sign indicating the border of the Charente department is a welcome sight. Following Torquil's written directions I turn off at Mansle, drive through the town and join the D6 to St Angeau. The house is just out of the village, on the far side

1999: Chez Torquil

and I find it easily. It's half past eight as I park the car and let everyone know I've arrived. Julia offers me a beer and I find out that I'm just in time for supper. Well, that's the account of my first three days in France. What happens on the other four I'll leave for someone else to tell.

Sarge.

Miscellaneous Thoughts:

Though some people use a European driving atlas I prefer to take maps on my continental jaunts. The Michelin red map (1:1,000,000 scale) covering the whole of France is good for long-distance route planning but is not detailed enough for exploring a specific region - it also doesn't help if your copy is 11 years old. The Michelin yellow maps (1:200,000 scale) split the country into 16 areas and are superb. They show all roads and villages, and contain a good amount of tourist information.

Looking back in my archives to 1988 and a Phil Short led expedition to Spain, I'm reminded that the exhaust pipe on my Bonnie also fractured on the N137 south of Nantes. I think I shall avoid that road in the future!

Finding out that the 300 francs you've saved from your last trip is in notes that are no longer accepted blows a bit of a hole in your budget.

Breton cider is a wonderful drink but remember to check the label in the supermarket to make sure you are buying the right bottles. Otherwise you end up with 2% strength stuff which is refreshing enough but doesn't quite have the effect you were expecting.

The Nantes ring-road is pretty dull but it does include a spectacular bridge over the Loire. Approaching the bridge, you get the impression that it ought to be attached to the Big One roller-coaster at Blackpool.

Part 2 – At Home With The Warners

Er well, part 2 never actually got written by the person who had volunteered to do it. We spent the next five days visiting a variety of places around the area (a chateau, a fag paper museum), swimming at an inland beach, eating in restaurants, having barbecues, lazing around, cutting down an overgrown meadow and getting my car exhaust replaced. Here are a few photos instead...



1999: Chez Torquil



Most unlike me I know, but I didn't take many snaps during those few days. If any of the other participants have some more, I'd appreciate copies of them.

1999: Chez Torquil

Part 2a – Suspension

What a wonderful trip we are having in France! The farmhouse is great, the company brilliant. I've been looking forward to seeing Torquil and Julia's French home for years. When they first told me about it, I had visions in my head of what it looked like. Well I must say when the work is finished it will be a dream home.

Back to the holiday, I'll tell you how I got my new name 'Suspension!' It was on the Monday of our week, we had had a lovely day, wondering around a Chateau in the local town, coming out we'd lost some of the men, eventually found them sitting outside a bar, ah, we should have known. After a bite to eat and a short walk we headed back to base. Torquil knowing the way we all followed on, this included going up a no entry street, the poor local people just stopped in their tracks at the sight of the bikes and truck, but then noticing the GB plates, well need I say more!

Later that day we decided to go out for dinner. Instead of using the bikes, we would go in the four-wheel vehicles. Along with Sarge in his car would be Janet, Julia, Phil and me (Babs). In Torquil's pick-up truck would go Trevor, Bob, Bernard and Paul. Torquil, thinking of this, was worried about the weight in the car, (Sarge had just had the exhaust temporarily repaired), so he asked me if I wouldn't mind travelling alongside him in the truck "But why, do I have to go in the truck Torquil?" I asked. He answered that he was worried about the suspension, so I was banished to the truck!

Poor Torquil, hasn't lived it down since, considering Phil weighs more than me, I couldn't quite work out the logic. And so, that is how I acquired the nickname: SUSPENSION!

Babs Short

Part 3 – The Return Home (of the Triumph Hares and the Chuck Wagon Tortoise)



The "Chuck Wagon"

1999: Chez Torquil

9am, 300
miles to
port

Locking the barn doors for the third time, listening to the drone of the impatient machines, I just had to put out of my mind the thoughts of someone breaking down, or worse! In any case we didn't have the room on the chuck wagon for a bike as well as the booze! Saying that, we could fill Sarge's Orion, well there's the front and back seats, (oops, well maybe not, as he's just had the exhaust fixed.).

French kissing now behind us (not tongues, cheeks), off we go, we'd all had our instructions (and later I would be reminded of them). On the Triumphs leading, were Torquil, then Phil followed by Trev and Janet, then us, Bab's and me, (Julia, Torquil's wife), in a P100 pick-up. (Babs had already said to me "the chances of us keeping up with the bikes was about zero"). Behind us came Sarge, refining his car driving skills abroad, followed by Paul, Bob and Bernard, on their motorcycles. As you can imagine quite a little convoy, but it wasn't to last very long.

I think it must have been at least the top of the street where we first lost the machines in front. Then Paul became restless at the 60mph. pace, overtook and blatted off into the horizon. Settling down to the long journey home caught the last glimpse of Bob and Bernard, in the rear-view mirror as they exited the N10, at a small town called Ruffec, why? God knows? Futuroscope's another 40 miles yet, I can't think of a short cut that way! I had so wished I could have been going to Futuroscope today, rather than going back home,

"Have a good time lads".

So, the chuck-wagon train was now down to Bab's and me, followed on by Sarge's car, treating the French countryside to some of his very tasteful music. Now, funny things can happen on these long journey's, the first of which is being overtaken by Trev and Janet (mind if you'd blinked you would have missed them), we just assumed that they had stopped for coffee. They were not travelling as far as we were that day, staying on in France a few more days, an extended holiday you know! Ah, if only! Then Paul reappeared; he attempted to follow, but gave up after about 15 miles, and passed us. "Hope you got home safely Paul".

12.30pm.
Halfway

The Châteaux-du-Loir square was busy, the car park full, and so it made finding the two Triumphs difficult, but there they were, parked under two trees, to shield them from the showers we kept getting. Now which bar are they in, the less salubrious one, perhaps! Yes, there they were, the two men had spread themselves over a couple of chairs, looking very smug. We ordered coffee. "How long you been here" asked Sarge, "Oh about 10-15 mins", came the reply. "What sort of speed you doing then?" "Oh you know cruising around 85-90" said Phil. (I but in at this point) "Well to me that's not cruising" knowing these words had fallen on deaf ears I changed the subject, to where we would finally meet up, before reaching the docks.

"I've already told you the blue bridge, just before we get into Caen", said Torquil, "we'll wait for you there". Knowing the blue bridge vaguely, I agreed. Then Babs reminded me of the ferry tickets; (she was travelling on Phil's bike ticket and hence would have to be at least, beside his bike at the port's ticket office), "No problem", we reassured her. Oh! And yes, our own tickets, Torquil's and mine. OK, so I admit it, I'd either lost them or left them in the dresser drawer back at the barn. The last time I had seen them was on board the ship coming out (You had to carry them with you, this being one of the last duty-free crossings). I remember putting them in the carrier bag, alongside the brandy and gin, but after that my mind's a bit of a blur! In any case, I knew our reservation would be on the computer, so I wasn't too worried.

Leaving the car park, the rain started again. The bikes took off ahead. "Au revoir Torquil! Bye Phil. See you at the blue bridge" (they're bound to be sat in the lay-bye for an hour or so.). Babs turned to me and said, "Oh dear they're getting wet again". Shame! The journey for our two vehicles slowed dramatically after the coffee stop, must be doing about 50mph.

1999: Chez Torquil

"What times it, Babs?" "1.30pm", she said and we're to be at the port for 3.30, an hour before sailing, with 150 miles to the port of Ouistreham, I was starting to feel a little tense. The road after Le Mans is not so good, single lane traffic and this particular afternoon quite busy, how Sarge managed to stay right behind was amazing.

Outside
Alençon

Now that sign up there, pointing right, the one with a picture of a lorry on it, is it telling me to go that way, or does it mean not suitable for big vehicles, we'll go that way anyway. Wrong! Slap bang into the town centre. Oh dear, now we are going to be late, but it's a very pretty town, pointing out the places of interest, to Babs whom I'm not quite sure was convinced and Sarge behind scratching his hairless head, wondering why we'd come this way.

3.10pm
(approx.)

Back on the right road now, dual carriage, the traffic still building and the rain pouring. "The blue bridge", I shouted; now where's that lay-bye, all I could see was the hard shoulder, you're joking! Surely, they don't expect us to pull in there and where oh where are the men? Swizzling my head around, like something from the exorcist' nope, definitely not there. "Well", I said, what now? "well if I know Phil", Babs said, "he would have headed straight for the port, with it being as late as this, the road works ahead and the bad weather". How sensible, I thought. I bet Torquil's already sorted the lost ticket problem and now patiently waiting for the slow coaches to arrive. We joined the contraflow, dodging the cones, now at a snail's pace.

3.35pm

Sarge drove his car into the ferry terminal and handed his ticket to the young lady. Well, there was no point in us all missing the boat we decided. We had arrived five minutes earlier, drove around the vast overflowing car park, but no, the men were definitely not here either. I parked the truck right beside one of the kiosks at an angle, so that we could see back down the street we had just travelled and there we sat, eyes peeled, waiting for the first glimpse of anything resembling motorcycles, whilst keeping dry.

4pm

We were now getting rather worried. "Stay here Bab's and keep look-out. I'll go to see if I can sort the ticket problem". The young girl greeted me with the usual politeness as I walked towards her open window, "Bonjour madam," "Bonjour mademoiselle," I replied. Then took a deep breath trying to keep the words I was to use inside my head.

"J'ai beaucoup des problèmes! J'ai perdu mes tickets!"

"Et ma copain et moi avons perdu notre Maries, sur les motos!"

(Roughly translated - Lots of problems. Lost tickets and lost husbands on motorbikes.)

"No problem" she spoke in English, thank-god. She printed out new tickets with the information I gave her and suggested we board the ship and if the men were to turn up, that she would tell them that we had already boarded.

I walked back to the truck to give Babs the latest, not even noticing I had become a little soggy standing in the rain. "We can't go without the men" she said, in a shaky voice, "Yes I know' but we both have to be at work in the morning," Oh, come on boys, where are you? I sat back in the vehicle watching the cars being loaded on the ship in the distance wondering what to do next, visualising going home without them, then phoning all the police stations and hospitals in northern France, not a nice thought. As the minutes ticked by.

4.10pm

"I can see a bike, look in the distance, looks like Torquil" said Babs "but where's my Phil?" Torquil stopped his bike on the other side of the ticket kiosk, not even noticing us in the truck, so I gave him a sharp blast of the horn, he looked across. Where's Phil? And where ya'been? We both shouted. "Waiting at the blue bridge," said Torquil and "Phil's still there, said he'd wait another 10 mins or so. Well, there's no point in arguing about it now, I thought and there's only about another 15 mins until we sail.

1999: Chez Torquil

The young girl in the box was now waving her arms, beckoning us to board. Torquil went over, had a quick chat then remounted his machine. The car park had completely emptied by this time; we were hurried up the ramp by the anxious foreign speaking sailors and parked just inside the ship doors.

4.25pm

The rain had finally stopped and from here, I could see shafts of sunlight, falling in the distance between the two forms belonging to Babs and Torquil, as they stood motionless in the doorway' straining to see as far as possible into the distance, looking for a lonesome rider.

A cry went out, "he's here!" Babs turned to me almost tearful, "he's here" she repeated, "oh' I need a cuddle", as put her arms around me. (I remember thinking at this point, shouldn't she be cuddling Phil). Phil rode up the ramp, his helmet draped from his right arm, looking the ever-cool dude we have come to know him as. The sailors were quite amused, as they closed the ship's doors behind him, phew! "I've been driving around in circles, in the car park wondering, where is everybody?" he said. (Well, where did he think we might be?). If it hadn't been for the girl at the kiosk shouting to him to get on board he'd still be there to this day, quite oblivious to the panic shared by his wife and companions.



Well to cut a long story short, we regrouped together at last, in the ship's bar. Sarge had been watching from a window there, I think he was glad to see us.

My temperament by now had changed somewhat, from that of concern, to that of a little bit cross. Well, how is it we'd managed to be ahead of the bikes by at LEAST half an hour or more? To this day we're not sure. Some excuses were given like: "Oh, you must have overtaken when we went through a town". "Ah' the petrol stops must have taken longer than we'd anticipated" and so on. Mind, Sarge didn't help matters by saying ("cause' it's a well known fact, Julia, that there's a Red- light district in every port")

Well, did I really need to hear that?

Just a little word of warning to all you would be, Triumph hares out there, don't be caught kipping, at the side of the road, because the chuck-wagon tortoise, will definitely, BEAT YOU.

Julia Warner