

Trip to the Schwarzwald: 1 June to 10 June 2016, by David Clark

This trip included four Harley-Davidson bikes - Phil's Softail Custom 2009, John's Heritage Softail 2003, Steve's Heritage Softail 2009 and my Road King 2008.

Day 1 1 June: Teesside to Hull, 95 miles

We arranged to meet at Stokesley at 12.00 pm. After a group photo, Dave Jordon joined us until the Osmotherley turnoff on the A19. Phil led us and we had low mist and drizzle until we left the A19 for York when the weather cleared for a dry run to Hull. The traffic around the York ring road was heavy as usual so we arrived in Hull around 3.00 pm. Filled up the tanks at Tesco and had a bite to eat before boarding the P&O ship Pride of York around 4.00 pm. The boarding process was reasonably smooth - the customs officers checked our panniers and my helmet (not sure what he was looking for) but they were a friendly bunch.

The ship was a decent size with seven decks but our twin bunk cabins were very small. We needed to take turns to stand outside the cabin or go to the toilet to allow the other person to get dressed or sort out his gear. We all met in the bar for a drink as we set sail at 7.00 pm. Our dinner was pre-booked but we had to wait until hordes of school children were fed, so we didn't sit down until nearer eight o'clock. The food was very good, with lots of choice and better quality than I expected. The return ferry cost, including breakfast and dinner, was £204.00 each.

By now, the temperature was down to ten degrees and the sea was rough with gale force eight winds forecast for our overnight crossing. We had a drink after dinner in the main lounge and set off to bed at 11.00 pm. None of us slept very well due to the rolling ship and creaking cabins but none of us were ill.

Day 2 2 June: Zeebrugge to Cochem, 266 miles

Breakfast was good and enjoyable until a young female passenger threw up her breakfast on the floor close to where we were sitting. Steve was delayed at breakfast having had a minor accident cutting his chin while shaving and making a bit of a mess.

We arrived in Zeebrugge late at 9.45 am due to the bad weather and didn't get off the ship until ten-thirty. The weather was overcast and cool at thirteen degrees with some drizzle, so we all donned our waterproof clothes to be prepared for the worst.

John took the lead, with me at the back. This was to be a long ride so we stuck mainly to motorways - the A11 and E 313 heading towards Antwerp, Maastricht and Aachen, rather than via Brussels. The motorway close to Antwerp was very busy with lots of lorries and some aggressive car driving, so close attention was required at all times. We hit a major traffic jam near Antwerp, resulting in us white lining for ten miles or so as the result of a broken down car closing one lane in a tunnel. All the lorries and cars moved over to aid our passage. The first stop was for petrol and a drink and snack at McDonalds. The sun then got out and we removed our wets. It was still cloudy at times but no rain.

After the boring urban scenery beside the motorways in Belgium, it was a pleasure to see the open countryside once we reached Germany. The motorway climbed through rolling hills covered in forest with some elevated sections giving beautiful views of the countryside. The last section of road into Cochem was a beautiful twisting road. I took the lead for the last part of the ride into the centre of Cochem where our use of the buddy system failed, leaving John (who was now at the rear of the group) stranded. After ten minutes or so, he worked out where we were and soon caught up.

We arrived at the Altes Winzerhaus Gastehaus at around 5.15 pm. It overlooks the river Moselle and is located on the edge of Sehl, a fifteen minute walk away from the centre of Cochem. With off-road parking, we unpacked before the rain arrived. The rooms were very good and had been recently renovated. The cost was very reasonable at £34.00 each. We had a rest and a shower before borrowing umbrellas for our walk beside the Moselle into Cochem. The water levels were very high flooding the low ground next to the river. We had a great view of the castle as we

walked into town. Cochem has plenty of accommodation and lots of restaurants to choose from. We selected the Vonderbeck Hotel restaurant which is a Steakhouse und Schitzelfarm with a fine view over the river. The food was very good.



Info: the Moselle, the longest tributary of the Rhine, is approximately 340 miles long from source to mouth. Starting at the Ballon d'Alsace in the Vosges Mountains, it flows through Luxembourg and Germany. For a considerable period, the river forms a border between Luxembourg and Germany before continuing to its end point, Koblenz.

Cochem is a beautiful small town nestling beside the river Moselle with historical framework houses, narrow streets and quaint shops dominated by the majestic castle sitting high up above the town.

Day 3 3 June: Cochem to Ballrechten-Dottingen, 251 miles

This was a brilliant day. Despite a bad forecast, we woke to dry weather. We all enjoyed a great breakfast. Phil spotted a garage under the hotel which we were not offered the use of and I forgot to ask for when we arrived – in the end the bikes were safe and dry. The bikes were loaded and we were off by 9.45 am.

It was muggy at around 13C and John led us south along the river for around forty-five minutes. It was beautiful with the steep sides of the river valley covered in vineyards. Each vineyard was fitted with its own small conveyor system for bringing down the harvested grapes. At one point, a helicopter was flying 40ft above our heads spaying the vines beside the road with some chemicals. The traffic was very light as we crossed the river three times along the route.

We were starting to notice how good the roads are in Germany – smooth and with no potholes in sight. Due to the height of the water, we saw no boats sailing along the river. As we left the Moselle, we climbed steep twisting roads passing through beautiful farmland and forested countryside – John took us on a cross-country route with very little traffic even on some motorway sections. The last section of motorway near Strasbourg and Freiburg was pretty busy but nothing like around Antwerp.

We had some sunshine, a small shower and one bigger shower close to Strasbourg. We crossed the Rhine at Freiburg and noticed how wide the Rhine is compared to the Moselle. Large barges could be seen travelling along the river.

We had two short stops for petrol and some food. On route, John showed us some more sights on the outskirts of Saarbrücken – ladies in lay-bys touting for business! We didn't stop to check out what was for sale.

We arrived at our B/B Hotel Garni-Landhaus at around half past five. The area is flat prime farmland with some vineries situated at the foothills of the Schwarzwald. We were greeted by the owner Peter who opened the garage for our bikes, showed us our spacious rooms and gave us a welcome drink.



We sat outside in the communal area to relax and enjoy our drink just before a thunderstorm arrived. The bed and breakfast operates an honesty bar providing a fridge full of drink at reasonable prices, which you took as you wanted and recorded what you consumed. We chilled and showered, meeting up at 8.00 pm by which time the rain had eased. We walked for five minutes to a local German restaurant called Gasthof Engel where a pretty young waitress looked after us for the evening. Again the food was excellent and the food and drink was reasonably priced. I had my second schnitzel of the holiday and couldn't resist the apple strudel as well.

Day 4 4 June: no riding!

We woke to rain along with a forecast of rain for most of the day. After a hearty breakfast, Peter suggested we visited Freiburg by train. We cleaned our bikes before Peter took us to the railway station at Heitersheim for the train arriving at Freiburg twenty minutes later. The modern double-decked train was fast and comfortable. Peter had given us a group travel pass which gave us free travel on all local buses and trains for our stay, so no tickets were needed. It rained until early

afternoon but we enjoyed walking around the old town, visiting the Cathedral-Freiburger Munster. The market square was busy with lots of stalls selling fresh produce and hot food. By now we were hungry and sampled our first bratwurst. A couple of coffee stops and a share of John's strawberries completed a good day, returning by train, then a taxi back to our lodgings.

The evening was sunny. After a rest and a drink outside, we walked for twenty minutes to a local winery which was serving food. However, it was full and very hot inside so we decided to walk back to the Lee Garden Chinese restaurant which was very good. We all had a meal and drink for around €20 each. We were home by 10.00 pm, hoping for good weather in the morning.

Day 5 5 June: Ballrechten-Dottingen to Lake Titisee, 95 miles

After breakfast, we left around 9.30 am. John led the way with beautiful countryside and great sweeping roads through steep sided valleys covered in forest. The streams were swollen and the tops of the trees were covered in low cloud. We passed through lots of pretty villages en route and a large logging mill with a mountain of timber stored beside the road. It started to rain just before we reached Lake Titisee.

Steve stopped to put on his wets and we got split up for ten minutes until we made phone contact and found the right car park. The rain was on and off for the next hour or so. Lake Titisee is beautiful – not unlike our Lake District – with boat trips around the lake and cafes and shops to entice the visitor. We took a table in a restaurant overlooking the lake and enjoyed a couple of coffees watching the rain and tourists running past holding their umbrellas while we debated our plans for the rest of the day.



After some shopping for presents for our loved ones and a visit to the cuckoo clock shop, we headed back to the car park. At this point it had stopped raining so we headed off on the B500 towards Triberg. Again, the scenery was amazing – looking like a picture from the Swiss Alpine

region but it was not long before the heavens opened up with a heavy thunderstorm and hail. We stopped in a lay-by which had turned into a stream and agreed to head home with me taking the lead.

We dropped down out of the forest along the L128, L127 and L112 towards Freiburg which was a cracking road in good weather. We just needed to take it steady in the heavy rain. Phil had particular problems seeing around the tight bends as his screen was too high affecting his visibility in the wet. We made it back, completely soaked. Peter showed us to his boiler room where we could start to dry off our clothes. Our boots were full of water.

The sun came out so we could enjoy a drink outside and chat about our experience. We cleaned the bikes again before fifteen bikers arrived from East Germany to say they had enjoyed a dry day's riding! Our evening meal was at Gasthof Engel again where our usual nice waitress looked after us. We arrived early as we guessed correctly that the group of bikers would be eating there later in the evening. As we paid our bill separately, she did very well with the tips.

It was a lovely warm evening and on return to the hotel we had a chat with Peter about our plans for the morning. John was keen to visit the Transport Museum in Sinsheim, 120 miles north of us by motorway. Peter suggested a car museum in Mulhouse, France a relatively short ride away and also a village called Eguisheim – both of which looked interesting.

Day 6 6 June: France – Mulhouse and Eguisheim, 86 miles

Steve was concerned that his clothing was still wet from yesterday but with some help from a hairdryer for his boots and a tumble dryer for his jeans it was wearable after breakfast. We left in dry weather with John leading again selecting a great cross-country route on beautiful tree lined roads. We crossed the Rhine into France and arrived at the National Automobile Museum in Mulhouse around half ten. This museum displays the original Schlump collection and now has 520 cars from all the main European car makers such as Bugatti, Ferrari, Mercedes, Peugeot etc. We spent around two hours walking around the impressive exhibition and left in bright sunshine for Eguisheim in the Alsace region of France. After a short ride we arrived at one of the most beautiful villages in France. Its narrow streets are laid out in concentric circles – with a central square and quaint old houses to feast the eye.

We were hungry by this time and stopped at the sleepy cafe in the square. I couldn't resist one of their ice-cream deserts along with a cold drink. The service was very slow but it gave us time to chill out in the shade. Storks were nesting on the top of the church bell tower and soared above the town. Many of the houses were beautifully decorated and we enjoyed a stroll along the medieval cobbled lanes. This was the hottest day of our holiday around the mid-twenty degrees. We had a treat of some nougat before riding home. The countryside was very fertile with various crops being grown including vines. It was the season for Spargel – lovely white asparagus which could be purchased at the roadside. Phil chose Spargel for a couple of his evening meals and really enjoyed it.

We decided to head back to the Chinese restaurant and sat outside for our meal enjoying the warm summer evening. Another good meal at a reasonable price. A brilliant sunset walking home topped off another good day.



Day 7 7 June: Baden-Baden, the B500 road, 182 miles

Up for another good breakfast, some of us having boiled eggs. The place had a facility outside where you could cook your own boiled eggs. We left around 9.30 am with John plotting a route to join the B500 road. The weather was dry at fifteen degrees. Great winding roads with little traffic passing Swiss chalet-style houses through valleys and forest. We stopped for views along the B500 – one section was down to one lane due to road works and another section was shut in our direction for the same reason.

We stopped at a cafe for lunch – I had Black Forest gateau – what else – while the others had bratwurst. Our departure was delayed by heavy rain. We donned our wet gear but after a short while the sky cleared and it was lovely sunny weather hitting thirty-one degrees by the time we reached Rick's Harley Davidson store in Baden-Baden. The lady on reception made us very welcome and gave us coffee and cold drinks. After some purchases, we headed home mainly via motorway closely monitoring a huge black cloud just behind us. We could feel the change in temperature from the cold front and the wind gusting as we rode south to escape the inevitable downpour. We succeeded in missing the storm and arrived back at our lodgings at 7.30 pm, tired but having enjoyed another good day.



Having walked to both of our favourite restaurants to find them both shut, we took a taxi to a village nearby called Staufen. Steve had opted to have a night in. The taxi driver recommended the Alter Simpl pub which was a fine choice – again, good food at decent prices and excellent service. A late night walk around this village showed it to be another beautiful place and we wished we had visited it earlier.

Like Freiburg, it had open drains with water running along the length of the high street and as we found everywhere in Germany, no rubbish or graffiti. Everywhere was pristine. Getting a taxi coming home proved a bit of a problem – we had to wait nearly forty minutes and I felt a bit conspicuous standing at the roadside under a street lamp in the dark dressed in my shorts peering at every car that passed ready to wave down the taxi when it arrived. I did get some strange glances from passing motorists but fortunately none of them stopped.

Day 8 8 June: route to Monschau, 320 miles

After another hearty breakfast, we settled our bills and thanked Peter, and his wife Hildegard, for their hospitality. The five nights had cost us €192 each, plus drinks from the bar. They were excellent hosts and could not have done enough for us. Peter said we were very polite and gentle and would love to have us stay with them again.

Peter had advised us on a route which John loaded into his satnav taking us due west, via Colmar before heading north to Strasbourg, then onto Ludwigshafen, Bad Kreuznach, Bingen to Koblenz along the Rhine, then the B258 across to Nurburg and on to Monshau. We were away in good time, with dry weather at around thirteen degrees, knowing we had a long ride ahead. We had light rain for the first hour then it warmed up to twenty degrees. The motorway was busy near Strasbourg with lighter traffic afterwards.

We had some concerns about petrol availability in France due to the strike by tanker drivers. We stopped at one motorway petrol station to see bollards blocking all the pumps and numerous lorries parked up, but when we asked they told us they were selling petrol to cars and motorcycles but only if we paid with cash. So we all filled up.

This was a great route. We noticed quite a lot of damaged crops, as a result of the recent storms. The section of road beside the Rhine was a major highlight – lots of river traffic including many river cruises. We had two brief stops to take photos. Beautiful villages and castles were dotted along the river bank. We left Koblenz on the B258 which is a dream road. Lots of open countryside and sweeping bends, a fast country road with lots of sports cars on the road in the area of the Nurburgring. The weather had been ideal all day with the sun coming out later in the day.



There were two ways to get to our hotel in Monschau – located at the bottom of a steep sided valley - from the main road turning left into Monschau was the easy way but if you turned right, it was the difficult way. John did not have the address in his satnav and the plan was for me to take over the lead approaching Monschau. We did not hand over the lead until we had turned right and dropped down the steep road and entered Monschau. By now, my satnav had stopped telling me to turn around and it now led us through the middle of the town which is all cobbled stone narrow streets just wide enough for a single car. It took us past the outside cafes, through side alleys, up steep alleys with me thinking all the time 'is this going to work out OK?' Eventually we headed down a steep and narrow one way lane and there at the bottom of the lane was our hotel. Phew, we could have done without that as we were all tired by then. But we made it, landing about 7.00 pm.

We paid extra to store our bikes in a lock up garage, so we got the keys, parked up and unpacked. We were staying at Hotel Haller Garni, which was Euros €49 each, including the garage fee. The rooms were excellent – brand new with a balcony overlooking the road and river. Again, they had an honesty bar. After a quick shower and a drink, we walked for fifteen minutes into Monschau. What a magical place. It was very quiet at that time of day with most of the shops shut and only a few tourists walking around.



After taking many photographs, we selected the Zum Haller restaurant where we sat on the terrace beside the Rur stream which snakes through the centre of the town. We just managed to get our order in before last orders. Again, another great meal to give us chance to savour Monschau and discuss the highlights of our day. By the time we had finished our meal, it was getting chilly so after taking some more night time photos we walked back for a coffee before bed.

Day 9 9 June: Monschau to Zeebrugge, 208 miles

We woke to a sunny dry day and after another fine breakfast, we took a stroll back into sleepy Monschau for another look around and even more photos before we headed off. It was so early none of the shops were open and only one cafe was serving breakfast. We settled our bills and John led us off with the aim of avoiding the motorway ring road around Brussels.

We started on the N67, a beautiful quiet country road through farmland and woods. Just before a town called Eupen, we saw a large road sign: **Road to Hell** - Shake your Bits - 5km. Well, we soon realised what it meant as the road surface changed from smooth tarmac to uneven concrete. This meant we couldn't ride much above thirty mph. This road was as straight as an arrow passing through a forest. There's a video on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBOPZSFg29k>

It reminded me of the cobbled section on Marine Parade in Scarborough.

After some motorway riding, we headed through a city called Leuven where at a right turn junction, John moved off but due to heavy traffic we could not follow until a couple of minutes later by which time we could not see him ahead. After a mile or so we took a right fork towards the centre of the city and stopped to make contact with John. We eventually agreed to meet up at a town called Mechelen, just north of Brussels. After a motorway ride, we parked in the underground car park at the Grote Markt in the centre of the town and stopped at the nearest cafe for a snack and a coffee.

Another pretty town square complete with cathedral and impressive buildings. We made contact with John by mobile phone who was having problems finding us so I initially agreed to meet him at St Niklass en route to Zeebrugge. However, looking at travel times and our need to get to the ferry by 4.00 pm, I decided we should go straight to the Port and messaged John accordingly. It had been sunny all day and now it was getting hot – mid-twenty degrees. Getting out of Mechelen proved a bit tricky with a one-way system and roadworks resulting in road closures to contend with and then busy traffic. When we got out of town, it was busy motorways all the way including the manic Brussels ring road to take us to the port. John had arrived earlier and had passed through customs quickly but we had to wait a good thirty minutes before meeting up with him prior to boarding the ferry. John bragged, 'I avoided Brussels and Antwerp and did thirty miles less than you!'

The forecast was for force three conditions so it was to be a gentle crossing. We were all glad to get a shower in our tiny cabins, get changed and have a drink before dinner. The food was very good again with plenty of choice. However, the music was a different story. We had to restrain ourselves from throwing the pianist overboard – he thought he could sing!

Day 10 10 June: Hull to home, 93 miles

After a smooth crossing and yet another hearty breakfast, Phil led us off the ship at around eight-thirty. The weather was overcast with some drizzle. We stopped to refuel in Hull and headed off towards York. The traffic was slow due to breakdowns and slow-moving vehicles then just before York, the heavens opened. With heavy traffic around the ring road, the conditions were very unpleasant. John could see that Phil was struggling to see through his screen in the heavy rain so he took the lead.

At one roundabout, a lorry driver took pity on us in the pouring rain and blocked the traffic to allow us to pass when he had the right of way. The rain did ease off for a while on the A19 but by then we were all cold, fed up and soaked to the skin. A planned stop for a goodbye went by the wayside and we went our separate ways getting home by half-ten.

We travelled 1,600 miles through Belgium, Holland, France and Germany. The weather was mixed with more rain than we wanted but it could have been a lot worse. The highlights are too many to list but the Black Forest, Lake Titisee, Cochem and Monschau in Germany, riding beside the rivers Rhine and Moselle along with Eguisheim and the motor museum in France were special.

All of the accommodation we stayed in was a good standard and perfectly suitable to bring our wives next time. My wife always says that three-stars are never good enough! The food and drink was excellent and at a reasonable prices. What stood out was that the all of the roads (except the Road to Hell) were in great condition with no potholes. The cities, towns and villages, particularly in Germany, were beautifully clean and tidy with no rubbish or graffiti. Europeans seem to take more care and pride of their houses and the area where they live. Everyone we met on this trip was very helpful and friendly.

The countryside in Germany was beautiful with lots of forests - we lost count of the number of deer hides we saw from the roadside. The land is very fertile and highly cultivated. The four of us got on pretty well. The total cost of the trip was around £766.00, including petrol.

Unattributed quotes spoken by or to a member of our group during the trip:

'Where you sleep tonight?'

'I am the Pope - I am in love with you'

'If I slip down any further, please give me a yank'

'I love you'

What have we learned – well, we are rubbish at the buddy system. It failed three times! Next time, we will add more transit time so we can avoid motorways. Would we do it all again – YES, for sure!

David Clark

Geordie Chapter

