

Club Run Report Spring 2005

Hoenderloo, The Netherlands

There is a marvellous black & white British War movie called Ice Cold in Alex, in which John Mills attempts to get his reconnaissance vehicle, disguised as an ambulance, back to Alexandria from behind enemy lines. As he and his crew struggle to manoeuvre their truck over sand dunes, through quick sand and around the Afrika Korps, the thought that keeps them going is the prospect of an ice cold beer when they reach Alexandria – hence the title of the film. This is approximately how I felt as we approached Arnhem at 6:00 pm, following a dash from Calais through Benelux rush hour traffic with my guest, Ian Burgess.

By 7:00 pm we had successfully located the Golden Tulip Hotel, not the correct one as it turned out, but a Golden Tulip Hotel nonetheless. Following a spirited ride through the woods we rolled into the car park of the Golden Tulip Hotel in Hoenderloo at about 7:30pm, 11 hours after leaving oh-so-English West Oxfordshire. After a swift change of clothes & brush up in the room, at a speed that would have impressed Ferrari mechanics, I was back in the bar with an ice cold Heineken and boy did it taste good!

It had been with a certain sense of trepidation that I had ridden off

down the busy A40 that Friday morning; I had never ridden so far in one day (over 360 miles), nor had I ridden in Holland or Belgium. We were on a tight deadline and a Belgian friend had warned me of traffic jams that would make the M25 look free flowing. However, the most daunting prospect was my duty to write the Club Run Report. One of the great benefits of motorcycling is that it gives you the space to think, free from the distractions of mobile 'phone/radio/CD player in the car and I spent most of the outward journey contemplating the job of the Club scribe. Being a relatively new boy, I had only ever read the reports of the late Alan Baker and Martin Lambert, both of whom had the uncanny knack of capturing the spirit of the outing and describing the people riding and places visited in an easy and entertaining style. I decided that the best bet would be to retell the Run through my eyes and to hope that this would rekindle happy memories in the reader.

Dutch Masters

So to dinner. The Hotel Golden Tulip was a modern building but was anything but 'concrete' in its construction. Set in peaceful grounds in the middle of the Hoeg Veloo woods, the rooms and dining

area were light & airy, while the fixtures and fittings had a very solid feel. The initial impression was of a well run, yet relaxed, operation and I saw nothing during my stay to change that view. How is it that Continental hotels manage to run perfectly efficiently with a fraction of the staff it takes most British hotels to barely cope with routine business?

It soon became apparent that there were many roads leading to Hoenderloo. Several people had, like me, chosen the Channel Tunnel route for its speed & efficiency. The other popular route was the Harwich crossing to Hook of Holland. Graham Matcham decided to take the Thursday night crossing, assuming that this would be popular with Club members but in the event spent a quiet night as the only biker on the ferry! Meanwhile a couple of the more astute members had travelled on the ferry to Dunkirk at prices to rival the no frills airlines.

Our first taste of Dutch food was not disappointing and was a good omen for what lay ahead. According to the menu we dined on the following.

Turkey pastrami with fresh herbs salad
and marinated raisins

Pepper steak with salsa sauce and French
potatoes

Passion fruit bavarian cream with mango
and star anise sauce

It tasted every bit as good as it sounds! Then onto the main business of the evening. Guests were introduced; Frank Finch brought Andrew Tempest from Marconi, David O'Neill was accompanied by Paul Peters and Tom Waterer delivered what was described as a party political broadcast by way of an introduction to the MCI's 'Political Officer' Craig Carey Clinch.

In Absentia

Absent friends were remembered, courtesy of co-organiser Geoff Selvidge. Chris Ventress, who had joined us on the previous two runs in France and the Cotswolds, wrote to inform us of his latest mount, a 4-wheel buggy with a top speed of 8mph and a cruising speed of 6mph, (which would have outpaced much of the rush hour traffic we passed). Ever the competitor, Chris had fitted the buggy with enduro tyres, ready for a spot of off-roading. Nick Jeffries stood in as Treasurer as Dennis Bates was unavailable, while Frank Finch was to deputise for Mike Jackson as Sergeant at Arms. In both cases these gentlemen took to their respective roles with the dedication and zeal of a new convert to a religious cult!

David O'Neill, Geoff's partner in this Run, proceeded to brief us on the day ahead. He hoped to show us that Holland was not all "clogs & windmills" and I must confess that

following his description of Holland's draconian attitude towards speeding, I completely forgot about anything else! My attention was momentarily taken by the information that "Wild Rooster" is Dutch for "Cattle Grid".

With the majority of his audience by now fairly well oiled and somewhat preoccupied with Dutch traffic regulations, Tony Dawson unveiled his latest and most fiendish quiz to date – a crossword. There were 41 clues, which was impressive and would have been more so had it not been for the fact that there were 42 answers. Apparently we had to work out our own clue for 21 down. Surely Tony deserves some form of literary award for coming up with clues of the calibre of "Part Welsh, part Japanese", the answer to which is "Rhonda".

Then came the raffle, hosted by Andrew Smith, who invariably manages to make the best of a bad lot. Prizes I noted included a tape measure, several obscure books and a pornographic DVD. We repaired to the bar, where a lone barman coped admirably cheerfully with an influx of thirsty Englanders and before I knew it the big hand & little hand were both pointing to 12 and it was time for bed.

Following a blissful night's sleep in a spacious and well-appointed bedroom, morning broke. My ankle very nearly broke too, as I clattered down the somewhat undersized

spiral staircase in full motorcycle apparel, desperate not to be late for an 8:00 am rendezvous with David O'Neill in order to fuel up at a local garage. Andy Smith was due to accompany us but although there were signs of frost on the bikes, there was no sign of Mr Smith. After a quick splash and dash it was time for breakfast. Wow! What a feast. Cooked meats, cheeses, bacon, eggs and Dutch pancakes, flavoured with caraway. With a full 2 hours to the coffee stop it was going to be vital to have a big breakfast.

By 8:45 the hotel car park was filled with the sound of 23 motorcycles with their engines running and what a selection of power plants! Parallel twins, v-twins, boxer twins, triples, and fours, take your pick.

However, three vehicles remained ominously silent. Ian Burgess had a flat battery on his BMW, which I'd already had to bump start prior to boarding the Euro tunnel on the outward journey & didn't fancy having to repeat this feat in full riding gear. Fortunately the RAC, the boss of Holland's biggest parts distributor & BMW's Marketing Manager were all on hand to help out! Greg Elson and Mick the ever-cheerful RAC van man had the bike stripped in less time than a dodgy bike breaker, the faulty battery was identified and David O'Neill had a replacement ordered for delivery to the hotel ready for our return.

Meanwhile David Strathcarron had misplaced the keys to his Grinnell. These were ultimately located still in the ignition, where they had been left overnight. This is either a testament to Dutch honesty or to the difficulty in starting a Grinnell, even with the keys. The other silent vehicle was a Yamaha MT-01, due to the lack of its rider, Mr A Smith, who appeared in the nick of time, walking towards us somewhat unsteadily. It was difficult to tell his condition, as he was wearing a helmet and dark glasses. It transpired that some of the more enthusiastic and high-spirited members had decided to go 'clubbing' in Apeldoorn, the nearest town, when the hotel bar closed at 1:00 am. They got to bed 3 hours (and several kebabs) later!

And they're off

With our fuel tanks and stomachs full in equal measure, David O'Neill clicked his Africa Twin into first and we were off. The hotel's location, in the middle of a national forest, meant a leisurely first leg through winding wooded lanes. Then a quick jog through Honderloo village and before we knew it we were back in the woods, in the most remarkable landscape. Although we were in the middle of the Netherlands, the tight and twisty road, barely wide enough for a Baby Austin, wound through mature woodland that rose and fell, interspersed with bracken and soil that looked distinctly sandy. Most

un-Dutch and very challenging riding, with right angle and hairpin bends, difficult to gauge through the trees. It was apparent why David has chosen the adventure sport style Africa Twin in preference to his more familiar super-touring FJR1300.

Climb Every Mountain

The morning ride was full of surprises, as we rode up a steep incline to our coffee stop at the Hotel Montferland, near Beek. It transpired that the hill had been man-made, on the instructions of a local aristocrat, who wished to be able to survey his vast estates. With the sun up in the sky the view was impressive – you could see Germany on a clear day - but nowhere near as impressive as the cakes. To be fair, it was nearly two hours since we had finished our high octane breakfast, so it was clear that we would need to consume extravagant home made cakes with sufficient calorific content to feed a small African village for a day.

Following such an intake of caffeine and glucose, the senses were heightened and as we broke into open countryside one began to absorb the atmosphere, as we took a route that tracked the border with Germany. We passed by assorted windmills, all pristine and in fairytale primary colours. The gardens were beautifully manicured, with neat rows of

flowers (not may tulips, disappointingly) and assorted domestic animals grazing contentedly. Donkeys, goats, plenty of dairy cattle and dwarf reindeer. Was I the only person to spot these? This was not an isolated example, as I spotted several groups chewing contentedly on the cud in various 'paddocks'.

Not only was the architecture distinctly Dutch, so were the roads, with extensive use of pavé. Which begs the question, "how do they lay pave?" One assumes that it must come in some form of matting, that is laid conveyer belt style, because to lay it by hand would surely take decades. We were certainly lucky that the sun was blazing down by this stage, as I suspect that damp pavé would be particularly challenging to the unaccustomed rider.

One of the joys of motorcycling is that it seems to heighten the senses and one becomes more observant of the surroundings. Hence I noticed that Graham Matcham of Avon tyres appeared to be on point duty on every other corner. How did he achieve this when he only passed me on two occasions? Was he taking some secret parallel route?

We stopped for lunch at the Hotel Onland in Meddo. This had the feel of an 'auberge', clean, simple and cool inside, with the most

enormous buffet of hot and cold food imaginable. It was just in the nick of time, as it was nearly two hours since our coffee and cake stop and some of the members were beginning to flag. It was a shame that Dave Martin couldn't have joined us, as the catering on this run would definitely have met with his approval.

Everybody disrobed and sat out in the glorious sunshine – struggling to come to terms with the fact that this was northern Europe in April. Nick Hopkins settled down next to me, carrying the largest (and brownest) glass of beer I had seen all weekend. Initially I assumed that this must be a jug of beer for the table, but no, this was for Nick's personal consumption. I made a mental note never to get involved in a drinking competition with Mr Hopkins.

With waistbands loosened, we remounted in bright afternoon sunshine, filled with the joys of spring and a substantial quantity of salami.

As we departed, always an impressive sight, with the Andy's Yamaha MT-01 and Craig's Harley competing for bass note supremacy, we drew a crowd of un-helmeted youths on Tomos mopeds as spectators. How very Continental.

We exited the town onto winding country roads, narrow, but with perfect visibility, so that the more

sporting among us could wind it up a bit. We passed houses with some particularly tiny variety of Shetland pony grazing in the fields beside them. This was perplexing. The Dutch are a tall race of people – presumably they evolved to this height as a defence against dykes bursting – so what possible use could they have for miniature horses? The only one we encountered being put to work was drawing a pony trap, with limited success and even less enthusiasm.

We passed through quaint villages that were picture postcard perfect – apparently unchanged since the days of Rembrandt and William the Silent (the first victim of a political assassination). I tried to remember some of the names but they all involved too many syllables for me to get my mental tongue around. It was during this stage that we started to encounter large numbers of cycle racers, in increasing frequency. As we slowed to 20mph to negotiate a drempel (speed hump-cum-launch ramp) in a village, I checked my mirror and spotted a cyclist approaching at speed. He shot past myself and Frank Finch (who was in front) in a blur and I mused that it's not every day you see a man who has lapped the TT course at over 100mph overtaken by a bicycle!

Everywhere we went we found the Dutch people to be hospitable, friendly and able to speak English to a higher standard than many of

our fellow countrymen. This was exemplified during the afternoon when David O'Neill indicated to the rider behind that he should take up point duty on a roundabout, which he duly did, after a moment's hesitation. He manned his position diligently, until our tail end Charlie, Geoff Selvidge, arrived, only to discover that this was not a fellow Club member but a Dutch motorcyclist out for a sunny afternoon blast who had become embroiled in our merry band!

Tony Dawson took over Graham Matcham's multiple point duty from the morning, appearing at almost every junction and before I knew it he was signalling me into the Arnhem war Museum, where he was to surprise us all later on.

The Allied airdrop at Arnhem went down in history as one of those great British acts of military folly. The bravery, tenacity and stoicism of the British troops are an inspiration to us all. The family who run the museum had collected huge amounts of military hardware, discovered in the local woods. All of the British equipment had rusted almost beyond recognition, while the German arms appeared to be in working order, which just about sums it up.

The staff were incredibly knowledgeable and enthusiastic and we could easily have spent a day listening to them. Although the Netherlands was overrun in just six

days in 1940, their modern anti aircraft guns destroyed 300 Luftwaffe aircraft. That's an amazing fact, as it could well have saved our bacon in the Battle of Britain! However, most of us struggled to share their excitement about Hitler's sofa, which he may, or may not, have actually sat upon.

It was while we viewed a selection of Allied parachutes that Tony Dawson amazed us for the second time, by disappearing to retrieve a piece of parachute silk from his bike. The staff confirmed that it was Allied parachute material and Tony explained that he used it for towing, although he didn't enlighten us as to what he tows behind his Yamaha FJ1200.

Then we were off, for the gallop back to the hotel, in time for more ice cold Heineken. Sitting in the hotel courtyard, sipping a cool beer and watching the local birds (of the feathered variety, alas, not the under 19 football team), I looked around at the contented faces of my companions. I don't know how to say 'la dolce vita' in Dutch, but that's what I felt like saying.

Supper's Ready

On my way to dinner I encountered Keith Davies, looking immaculate in a lounge suit and every inch an advertisement for the Englishman abroad. How does Keith manage this? In spite of riding from Dorset, across France & Belgium to

Holland, his shirt & suit were pressed to perfection. The only explanation is that he transports a pigmy valet secreted in one of his panniers and a foldaway ironing board in the other.

Out of the Cordura suit and into the lounge suit and into the Bar for a swift pre-prandial, then to Dinner, which was a repeat performance of the previous night in terms of quality & efficiency.

[Tatar of marinated salmon with egg and green asparagus](#)

[Pork filet with herbs and a sauce of bacon and capers](#)

[Citrus fruit parfait with sauce of forest fruit](#)

Another fine mess

We should all be grateful that Frank Finch is not a traffic policeman, judging by the strict and vigilant attitude he displayed as deputy Sergeant-at-Arms. The fines came thick and fast and when I was penalised for "looking like Tintin" I realised that there would be no quarter given. Poor Nick Jeffery had a fine carried over from last September's Cotswold run (oversleeping on the Sunday morning). The more notorious 'crimes and misdemeanours' included Keith Blair, who had forgotten to pack his suit trousers and arrived at diner in jacket, collar, tie and leather saloppettes (some wag pointed out that they wear lederhosen in Germany, not in Holland). Dave Plummer was caught for bringing his own tie-downs for the ferry

crossing and Graham Goodman for completing a 4.5-hour journey in 9 hours, thanks to the technological marvel that is Sat Nav. Craig Carey Clinch, 'the respectable face of the Motorcycle Industry' had an illegal number plate and Greg Elson for, according to my hastily scribbled notes, something to do with 'pole dancing' (I'm not sure whether it was for watching, performing, or the East European folk variety). Rick Parish, an accountant by profession who should be trusted with money, lost both his wallet and bike keys, only to discover, some 24 hours later, that he had locked them in the safe in his room and promptly forgotten its existence!

Nick Jeffery, who has won the Quiz for as long as I can remember, received a handicap, which meant that there was a draw between seven entrants for the first prize. Following a draw from a hat, David O'Neill was pronounced the winner. So to the bar (again) for a light digestif ... followed by a heavy beer (Nick Hopkins' suggestion) a large Scotch to wash it down, a swift lager to refresh the palate and before you could say "A large Bols for Mr. van Gough" the bar was shut.

Homeward Bound

In spite of predictions to the contrary, Sunday dawned dull and cloudy but with no sign of the forecast rain. Ian Burgess would

be my travelling companion as far as Antwerp (where he would depart to complete the 700 mile run to his holiday home in Bergerac) then I would have to make my way across the Border and Northern France without the aid of Sat Nav or any sense of direction.

We decided to ride back through Arnhem and it was there that we fell foul of Dutch road signs, or rather, the lack of them. There was no indication of how to find the main A50 South. When we finally did locate it, we discovered some 50 miles later that the road to Breda was shut & had to divert via Rotterdam or somewhere equally out of the way. I waved farewell to Ian at Antwerp and he disappeared towards grey and thunderous skies, safely cocooned behind his touring BMW's fairing, with the radio blaring (lucky sod).

From Antwerp it was a dash to the Channel ports, sixty five years after my father had made the same journey, in rather more pressing circumstances and on foot (together with 250,000 other British troops). We should never forget how fortunate we are to be living through an unprecedented period of European peace and prosperity – long may it last!

Once on the sub-Channel train, I surveyed the mess that assorted Belgian bugs had made on my screen. Judging by the colour and texture of their remains, they feed

primarily on moules et frites. It was at this moment that something happened to remind me that motorcyclists are inherently good people, who look after their own. A chap in a Land Rover Discovery in front of me appeared with a bottle of water and packet of baby wipes and offered them to me to clean the screen so that I could see through it. It transpired that he was a keen trail rider and wanted to find out where I'd been on my travels. He

Dan Sagar

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was returning from a weekend at Euro Disney and for the second time in as many hours I thanked my good luck to have avoided such an unpleasant experience.

This had been the furthest I had ever travelled for a Club Run and the fact that 26 riders did the same is proof, if proof were needed, of what a fine institution the Club is – just don't tell too many people!