

WORCESTER AND HEREFORD ADVANCED MOTORCYCLISTS



October 2023



EDITORIAL – JIM ROLT

The autumn equinox has passed and soon the clocks will be going back... ah for that extra hour in bed! But the dark nights don't appeal, - however the Sunday Suicide Squad will be off the road for some months.. On the other hand it will be cold and the hours spent cleaning the bike and applying the rust reducer of choice is not one's preferred way of spending the afternoon; I guess there are positive and negative aspects to each season.

To the right you can see your editor winning his heat of the slow riding competition; sadly, the next round saw him eliminated by the eventual winner, so disappointing! What a great day it was, and such perfect weather too, that saw most participants tackling the slow manoeuvres in shirt sleeves.. - I did opt to keep my gloves on! If you didn't make it to the event this year make sure you do next time, it was great fun with the added benefit of plenty of tea, sandwiches, and even CAKE!



So this month, as well as our regular columns from [Chairman Richard](#) and [Chief Observer Alex](#), we have a report on the recent [visit to Belgium](#) by a group of our intrepid members put together by the wonderful Sam Green. Ant Clerici has a brief mention of the Slow Riding Day too, before going on to describe [the work of the Blood Bikers](#), Severn Freewheelers. They are looking out for new riders, so if you have any spare time why not join up!

Don't forget to check out the events and weekly Sunday rides on the [website](#) or [Facebook page](#), and of course my usual and mostly ignored plea for bit and pieces for this publication, anything gratefully received at whamnewsletter@gmail.com



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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

I'll say it quietly, Christmas is coming! Apologies to those of you that develop a frown at the mere mention of the C word (no not that one!); but the WHAM Christmas do is now on the [WHAM website](#) and preparations have started in order to ensure it all goes off as splendidly as it usually does. The Falcon in Bromyard will be hosting us again on Friday 22nd December and as we were at full capacity last year and I'd recommend you get online and book up to attend.

I'm pleased to report attendance on Sundays has improved and the rides I made it too reminded me how lucky we are to have such superb routes so close to home. Thanks, as usual to Tony D for making these happen.



On Saturday 21st October your Treasurer, Andrew Peckston, and I, have been invited to attend an IAM HQ 'autumn forum'; this annual event provides HQ with the ability to disseminate its plans for the coming year, share stats from the current year, and importantly, enables group officials to put to those in positions of power questions from the membership as a whole. I do intend to provide you all with some output from this event at a latter stage, yet if there's issues that you would like to seek some HQ clarity on, please do drop me a line and I'll table upon your behalf.

Anyway, enjoy your riding and hopefully see you soon.

Rgds

Richard

WHAM Chair

Winter's on the Way

Well, winter's most definitely on the way, and as I try and write this piece, storm Agnes is just about to try and take the barn roof off. However, that's no reason not to ride, in fact as we always say, those who ride through the winter and get out on their bikes on a regular basis tend to make much better riders. Obviously at this time of the year you sometimes have to take a different approach to your riding, one of the main concerns is your road position, where you would like to be, isn't always where you can be. One of the biggest problems we have at this time of the year is a huge great dollop of mud in the middle of the road, combine that with water, wet leaves and mud (and worse) left by farm traffic, all of which combine to make for some very slimy conditions on the roads. So, you seriously have to think about which line you're going to take, because you may not be able to cross the road in order to take up the correct position on the next bend. Sometimes you're actually better taking a position on the nearside, although this may not give you the optimum view, remembering of course that your safety is paramount. It's a decision you have to take on the day as you ride. If you go to the offside and something big comes towards you, then you may be forced to cross the very mud you're trying to avoid but don't want to go on, so sometimes a nearside line is the best and only option.



I actually enjoy riding at this time of the year; I know that sounds a little bonkers, but you can get some really cold clear crisp days. Now at this point I will say that I absolutely refuse point blank to ride if the temperature is on or below freezing, in which case simply turn over and stay in bed. But if you wait a little, then the weather normally warms up as the day goes on, and if the roads have dried up a bit, then it's really good to get out and blow the cobwebs away. The other advantage is that all the boys on the plastic fantastics, who only ride during the summer when it's nice and warm and sunny, have put their bikes away for the winter, so you won't have to deal with them when you get to the cafe, and you'll stand a much better chance of getting that big breakfast that you've promised yourself, which is of major importance, particularly to me.

Also, in this day and age with the advent of heated grips, heated gloves, heated vests and jackets, even heated socks, and trousers, what next you ask, perhaps heated underpants, well maybe that's just too much, there's no excuse for not getting out, because you can stay warm and cosy on your bike. Obviously you need to make sure that your bike is in tip top condition, and that your tyres have a good level of tread on them, also when you get back at the end of the day and wash

your bike down, don't forget to use MPOWDERS as a means of checking over your bike and making sure that everything's in good working order.

I know sometimes riding in winter can be a little daunting, but quite simply the more you do it, the easier it gets. In actual fact if you've got good tyres with good levels of tread, they have a tremendous level of grip even in the wet. Most of us never ride our bikes anywhere near the limit, and even though it may be wet on the road, there's no excuse.

So, give it a go, if you don't practice it, you'll never get any better at it.

Alex Hoyle

WHAM 3260 Chief Observer



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...SLOW RIDING: A POSTSCRIPT – ANT CLERICI

Severn Freewheelers was present at this year's slow riding day; but why?

There were two reasons; the first the event provided an opportunity to support SFW and second, to raise awareness of blood biking generally.

WHAM raised a magnificent £475

As a charity SFW needs to raise around £70k every year for the bikes and their fuel and maintenance. The new Worcestershire bike, a BMW 1250 RT, arrived earlier this year and has already travelled over 18k miles.



WHAM is the main feeder group for riders on SFW's Worcestershire and Herefordshire bikes.

Why? Because SFW riders have to hold a current advanced qualification; IAMRS or RoSPA.

SFW riders are checked on a regular basis and have to renew their advanced qualification every few years.

New riders are introduced to the bike, the system of managing jobs including HAZMAT training. There's a short informal interview and a "buddy run" that introduces you to the main pick up/collection points.

What's it like?

From my personal perspective it is a fabulous way of using my advanced biking skills.



We ride as obvious ambassadors for the charity making smooth safe progress through traffic. Sometimes we have to show persistence in getting to our destination especially when hospitals are locked at night and you have something urgent for "ward 4" but your coordinator is there as a great back up.

We ride to the rules of the road, safe and legal, with no dispensations.

Sometimes our deliveries are met with thanks for bringing something urgently needed to help a patient; other times we leave a sample with a less than enthusiastic porter to take into the labs. I've learnt that we can't judge; we simply take whatever is needed from A to B efficiently and in a professional manner.

An RT in the driveway

A duty consists of having the bike for half a week: Wednesday to Saturday pm or Saturday pm to Wednesday morning with handovers Wednesdays before 7pm or Saturday late afternoons.

We are on call from 7pm to 7am weekdays plus all day weekends and Bank Holidays.

A typical trip usually involves a number of "jobs" but once you've started not only can the jobs overlap but very urgent jobs will take precedent sometimes involving being diverted en route only to return later to complete the less urgent task.

What do we carry?

Anything that the NHS needs transporting that will fit on the bike.

Never organs but sometimes whole blood which is transported in large boxes (think top box size). Usually it's a blood sample from a smaller cottage hospital/minor injuries unit that needs taking to a pathology lab at Worcester or the Alex. Occasionally we help with delivery to specialist units, so samples can be taken in a relay from say Hampshire to Birmingham.

A typical duty

Here's an example of a typical weekday for the Worcester bike.

Bike checked and coordinator informed you are "ready to ride". After the first call at 7:05pm the bike left at 7:15pm and returned home at midnight.



We operate a simple text message system for jobs:

"pick up WRH AnE, sample for Alex Blood bank. Urgent"

Riders acknowledge the job, send a PU (pick up) time, DO (drop off) time and a "home" time.

139 miles

19:15 - midnight

Home – Princess of Wales Bromsgrove – Birmingham Women’s Hospital – Worcester Royal Hospital - Tenbury Cottage Hospital - Princess of Wales Bromsgrove - Worcester Royal Hospital - Pershore Cottage Hospital – Home

Rarely there are very urgent jobs in the early hours.

On a typical Saturday for the Herefordshire bike

Ride 1: 102 miles (1230 to 1715)

Home - Hereford SO - Ross CH - Hereford Pathology Lab - Wooferton - Bromyard CH - Hereford Pathology Lab- Hereford Fire Stn (base)

Ride 2 1820 to 1930

We have fuel cards so it’s a no hassle fill up.

Riders decide to accept a job or not. I encountered freezing fog one night and agreed with my coordinator to “call it a night”. On really busy weekends your coordinator will enforce a break – “you’ve been on the go since 0930, go home and have lunch!”

It is an important service that’s free to the NHS.

Riding for SFW can be challenging and rewarding – **think about joining us!**

Please contact Ant Clerici ant.clerici@googlemail.com or via

<http://www.severnfreewheelers.co.uk/>

AN ENGLISH GIRL, IN BELGIUM... - SAM GREEN

For a long time, I have wanted to take my motorcycle to Europe on a ferry. Hit 40, married a non-



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motorcyclist, and that was that, it was never going to happen. But common sense prevailed, when I replaced my former husband for an Optimate trickle charger, that fun opportunities started to trickle my way.

There were murmurs of a trip to Southern Ireland to check out Kerry's ring or somewhere, but also murmurs of a Belgium trip amongst the group... I was hearing these vibrations, (using my yoghurt pot and string) so without considering any logistics, I was going to Ireland. I thought Belgium can be a second step, and I will build up. Ireland, just up the road, speak English and involves a ferry; ticks the box. Go me.... or not, as Ireland didn't happen.

Sadness shadowed me; cue the violins, but then a giant drum kit crashed in - Mark Saxton said, 'there's a spare room going in Belgium.' Now this can sound like a shady chat up line, so I asked Donna would she like to be my roomie. Donna was also disappointed to miss out on Ireland this year and thought, why not, let's do it! Us girls were going on an adventure (which involved a ferry)! Tick, tick and double tick!

I pulled out my plastic folder, paper and pens ready and....Donna did all the booking for me. I was poised but she beat me to it. Next... what do the French police need? Donna was taking cash, so that was ticked off too. I'm sure the French police would listen to Donna if I got myself in trouble. Ken shared a useful website with me and Eric provided a very useful check list for the group. I read all these intently, making piles of print outs and applications saying 'I did do it, but it hasn't arrived yet.'

Passport, Crit'Air sticker (Ken went Blue Peter on us), GHIC card, travel insurance, first aid kit... the list went on. My garage was a pretend DFDS ferry from Dover to Dunkirk (there's a leak in the roof so water in the hull). My elderly neighbours thought this was great, and started asking me for my passport, every time I wanted to enter my garage. Got a little tiresome. I practiced reaching for my hi-vis without getting off the vehicle, but after nearly dislocating my shoulder, I decided to wear it in the French regions.

Packing time - the boys had informed me I will need to pack a ball room gown for the evenings and jewellery. First lesson, never ask the lads what you need to pack. I packed my three panniers, three times. I packed my hairdryer and spare knickers, and Donna packed her straighteners and the peanut M&Ms, so we were all set.

The big day of departure arrived. The plan was to meet at Burford Garden Centre café for breakfast. Being from the Gloucestershires, it was just up the road, using a teaspoon of petrol. Even though I had the shortest distance, I was the last to arrive! I could not find the entrance, let alone the café! I asked three people - it was easier to find Belgium! Finally, I saw some familiar faces and so I climbed tables and display shelves to reach them.

When I am on my holidays, I like to do something different, so to everyone's surprise, I had two poached egg on sourdough toast. Not a sausage in sight. Once all fed and watered, the Fab 5 (Uncle Ant, Dad Ken, Grandad Eric, my big sis Donna and straight-talking cousin Mark) and the runt of the litter, me, headed off on our big adventure.

The first few miles, it was a time to get comfy on the seat and settle down as a riding group. Luckily as advanced riders we ride to the same IPSGA formula so it wasn't long before a staggered riding formation formed, we seemed settled and progressed through our journey. We took some beautiful A roads through Oxfordshire and beyond to our destination that night, The Inn by the Lake, just off the A2 Shorne, Gravesend.



On route we stopped at the tiniest café with the tiniest loo, called Dennie's Café in Cowfold, Sussex for some tea and cakes. In fact, we bought all his cakes and made a sharp swift exit before the locals realised we had taken everything.

The weather was kind. Bright, dry and sunny and our bikes were soaking up the miles as we headed South East. We arrived at our hotel and strapped all our bikes together with Mark's huge chain. We retired to our respective rooms to make ourselves look half civilised for the evening.

Ken introduced me to a fruity cider which was refreshing but could be dangerous. First night was settling down, ready for the big day tomorrow – the ferry! We talked plans, routes, strategy – it was a proper EU Summit. What was really nice for Donna and I was to be with people who have done this motorcycling abroad lark before. It was reassuring and the funny stories and memories they shared, confirmed this was an adventure to be had. I listened, absorbed and worked out my plan of execution. Belgium was in our sights...

Now, for you seasoned foreign bike travellers amongst us, it's no big deal – you ride on to the boat, strap it in and head to the canteen. No brainer. When you have not done it before, multiple people have shared different experiences (good and bad) then expecting the unexpected was the only way forwards. Heightened senses – into mission mode. Remember the EU Summit.

We headed down the A2, M2 towards Dover. We all pulled over at one stage and in a version of Chinese whispers, I heard Ken's tank bag had gone flying off in to the central reservation. The first casualty of the trip. I rode the rest of the way to Dover thinking, I wonder if his passport was in there and whether he can go to Belgium? We filled up with petrol and still no conclusion about Ken's passport but he still seemed to be hanging around, so I went with it. Perhaps we were going to smuggle him, in his panniers?

We carried on and another thought popped into my head, why Belgium? My Dad had been to Belgium back in the 90s and he brought back nice chocolate, but described the place as boring and grey. Lots of Government buildings. Did I really want to go to Belgium? I'm hurtling down the M2 thinking wait, hang on, Belgium, can we do Spain? Then the signs appeared - Dover - Ferries - Port – round the spiralling road down to the first little passport cabin. I handed over my passport and thought, that's it, you're going. Then I felt huge excitement and started giggling in my helmet inanely. Second cabin – what, they want my passport again??? Eric dropped his bits and pieces all round his bike. Mark went and scooped up his money and returned it to a grateful Eric. Once he was through, Mark, Donna followed seamlessly. I handed my passport over, received my lane number and followed the group, to be reunited with Ken and Ant, who just went through proficiently. I did find it funny that I kept my full faced helmet on, and glasses and they checked my passport. Perhaps I need to get a special passport picture with my helmet on instead, if I am going to make a habit of this.

I rode on to the ramp and onto the long ferry, right down to the bottom. A helpful gentleman gave Donna and I the pad for the seat and the straps to hook and ratchet tight. The mystery of

motorcycle ferry travel was dispelling and was not as scary as I thought. This rather bedraggled man (a cyclist from the front of the queue) approached me and said, 'Your hi-vis is great! You rode down the ferry...' (now you'll love this), 'and you were a beacon of shining light, heading down.' Well, I've heard some lines in my time, and so I thanked him graciously, and took some 'bikes on the ferry' pictures!



As per the plan, we legged it up the stairs (not me and the cyclist) but the group, we headed towards the canteen. We had got the earlier ferry and breakfast was ready for us! I had the appetite of a horse, and didn't disappoint as I ordered my double sausage breakfast and a cup of tea. I was in my happy place. The waters were calm and we headed to Dunkirk!



On arrival at Dunkirk, the motorcycles were released first and we rode out of the port. It steered you to the right, and there was even a little roundabout to get that feeling of being on the right hand side of the road. It was like a little training ground before letting you out into the wild. My friends were correct – riding on the right did seem easier. Just as well, as we head out on to the motorway through France. We would have done the back roads, but time was against us and we knew the end part of the route was technical. Dark and tired on unfamiliar roads probably wouldn't be wise, however skilled we are.

The motorway culture over there is different in my view. They signal, they move, they act, they get back in. No messing, no middle lane hoggers – it made sense. Slip road approaching, get out because they won't give way to enter a motorway. Fair enough. The experience could be perceived as 'hairy at times' but actually, everyone was on the same page, and it just worked. There was a lot of road furniture to read and understand. Some clearer than others initially but I learned and adapted. Speed cameras galore but followed my more experienced rider friends to navigate this new right-hand experience. I had attached my guardian bell to my right-hand mirror arm as a reminder. It served me well.

Later, we stopped for fuel and a sausage roll. We chatted and shared observations of our ride so far. 80c to use their immaculate lavatories. Worth every cent by that time. The boys headed out and spotted Eric's helmet – he wasn't going far without that.

Once all kitted up, full tanks, empty bladders, we continued our journey to the wild Blue Yonder. We were heading to Ardennes and Eiffel Adventures, run by a lovely British couple Ann and Neil. Neil is a Nürburgring instructor and it became clear on the trip, he has no brake light working (he just doesn't use it) but grips the road so skilfully.

Once we left the motorway, I was initiated to the Ardennes region of Belgium which is a completely different beast to the North of the country. We arrived safely to our new base, at sunset, and was greeted by a home cooked food. Shortly, it was time to go to bed, ready for my first foreign adventure!



It was the Friday – day one of exploring the Ardennes. Beautiful forestry, extraordinarily quiet roads, long straights finished with a little twisty or three to keep us awake. Some of the roads

were quite technical, so that, with a dash of riding on the right, I knew this would be an interesting few days.

We left Moulin du Ruy and rode to Moto Kaiser dealership at Limerle, near Gouvvy. This was a crazy place of many floors. There were hundreds of motorcycles for sale and then through a door, there were helmets as far as the eye could see, followed by gloves, jackets, trousers, armour, undergarments; anything you would need to ride a motorcycle. Some of the prices were fruity, but buried in the store was the odd bargain. Our guide Neil was quite chuffed with his 50% off boots, he had found and ordered.



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I thought this trip was just Belgium, but my mobile provider text me in a café saying, 'Welcome to Luxembourg.' Now I confuse easily but we had skipped across the border, abandoned the bikes in a side street, and ended up in a lovely little restaurant in Clevaux. I didn't fancy sausage on my pizza, so I went for the Regina.



Afterwards we headed to Houffalize, which was a strategic location during the Battle of the Bulge of World War II. The town was flattened in 1945, by ninety RAF Lancasters of Bomber Command to block the key crossroads for German supply columns and the escape route for German forces. There was a display of a Panther Tank which I wasn't allowed to climb. Here, we stopped for afternoon coffee, before heading back to base.

Saturday morning, we planned to stay in Belgium and headed back to Moto Kaiser to pick up Neil's new boots. As we rode, Ant was my new comms buddy to keep me company through the scenic roads. The roads were busier being a weekend but nothing like it is back home.

We stopped for coffee next to the River in La Roche en Ardennes. This was a busy little place with a beautiful medieval castle. We didn't stay long and navigated the tight centre, and headed off out of town. Then Mark and Ant pulled over... I sat patiently as I saw Eric and Donna turn off a different road from the roundabout, in my mirror. 'Oh they've gone the wrong way' I said to Comms friend Ant. Mark went to rescue them. Ant and I waited patiently but it seemed like no one was coming back. Ant and I decided to save them all ... headed down the road and it seemed everyone had taken a wrong turning and were waiting for us! I am not sure what happened there, but for 5 out of 7 people to take a wrong turning was very strange. We carried on along this route regardless. As a result, we ended up having a late lunch at a Buddhist Retreat.



Govinda's restaurant in Rahadesh Temple was near to Durbuy. The sun was out and I walked around the grounds. However, just as I was going to sign up to be a novice nun, I was told, we had to move on and ride back to base, for a beer in the garden.



Stay tuned as Part Two will conclude this exciting report next month!