

ISDE Poland 2004

The Six Days Diaries

Report 1 – The Road Trip – Stripshows and speedbumps!

I've ridden a few ISDE's in my career, 11 in fact and every one was different and memorable for different reasons. Some were great, some were horrible. All were worth it.

Like every rider out there, after an event you have a post mortem and swap tales with fellow off-roaders. The difference with the Six Days is that you tell the stories to guys from all over the world and you repeat them about 100 times. That social side of off-roading is almost as much fun as the riding. Almost.

I want to share this trip with my friends who aren't able to make the event and try to give them a flavour of what happens out here.

For the 2004 ISDE I decided that I wouldn't be racing, but felt I could still help out. So with kind permission from my much better half Rachel, I headed off to Miedzieana Gora, Polska.

This year I will be acting as an Outrider for World Trophy teamster Chris Hay. To make me feel really old, I remember in my first ISDE (Sweden 1990) that I had my photo taken in the parc ferme with Chris – aged 9!

This will be his third ISDE, having taken Silver as a club rider in France (2001) then spectacularly taking an FIM Gold in Brazil (2003) as part of the Junior Trophy team. He's pretty quick for a young lad! He's well known as a top notch motocrosser and a pretty competent Enduro star. He loves riding in the sand and results such as his 3rd overall at this years Breckland British Championship Opening round certainly back that up.

He has a refreshing and thoroughly focused approach to his riding. As a top UK rider he is very approachable and modest whilst at the same time fiercely determined, cool-headed and very well prepared. Considering the company he will be keeping, he will also need to have his fair share of luck if he wants to achieve his target of top 15 in class.

So, what does an Outrider do? Well, at the ISDE, a lap will have around 6 checks and be about 125km long, which is a long time for anything to go wrong on an enduro bike. It is physically impossible to have all the spares likely to be required at each check, so an Outrider has a fairly straight forward job. The outrider meets his rider at each and every road crossing possible and at each test and time check. If the rider doesn't appear, they go look for him and offer limited assistance in the way of spares or tools. I will carry all the spares Chris is likely to need in the event of scheduled or unscheduled maintenance and will rob bits of my bike if required. Unfortunately, this means

(against my religion and better judgement) I will also be seen on the dreaded orange Austrian machinery. Never mind, there are certain sacrifices one has to make!

So after a busy day in the office, I set off for North Berwick to meet Chris and start the adventure. On Saturday morning we loaded the kit in the van and scooted down to Dover, with a quick stop into Bikesport of Newcastle who sponsor Chris. On the way down the road I remembered all the things I'd forgotten – nothing major, just things like my CD's and a sleeping bag.

We planned to get a ferry on Saturday night about midnight, but unfortunately weren't able to cross the channel until 8.15am the following day. A night in Dover it was then. We crashed out in the van and (having again forgotten to get a sleeping bag!) I huddled under my towel to get some kip. It wasn't too bad, I managed to get about 4 hours in before the cold woke me up and didn't let me sleep again! Trophy teamster was snoring away in his sleeping bag, with a pretty smug smile as well. Git!

The sun shone on us in Dover on Sunday morning and we headed to the ferry terminal. Our esteemed HM Customs & Excise thought we were a couple of football hooligans heading out early for England's World Cup Qualifier on Wednesday 8th, until we said we'd be supporting Poland! Chris is actually half Polish and half Scots, so there really is little doubt as to which side he'll be cheering for on Wednesday. We are trying to get Polish football shirts to watch the game in and will be sitting at the front of the big screen in the team GB hotel. Nothing like winding these guys up. Wonder if the Welsh guys will be behind Poland too?

We cleared customs in France and headed West for Belgium, Holland, Germany and then Poland. With a fair bit of navigating to be done and reminiscing along the way, we again forgot all about sleeping bags until about 8pm on Sunday night. We tried about 5 different supermarkets and shops on the way, but didn't find any that were open.

We did however manage to find signs for an "Erotic Messe" (exhibition), so started to follow them! For such innocent souls as Chris and my own, this was quite an eye opener – they had a very amusing and painful looking array



of adult toys which covered every taste and then some! We felt it was best to open ourselves to new cultures and hung around for a bit. Then, the compare announced it was time for the showgirls to come out! Well we couldn't leave now, could we? No, we couldn't! The girls on the stage did their thing and were cheered by all there. One very naughty girl picked on Chris and asked him to help her with her top – he was only too

willing to oblige!! After that we decided the night couldn't get any better, so headed back to the van to continue our trek towards Poland. After a couple of hours we flaked out and spent the night in a service area – still without a sleeping bag!

Monday morning greeted us with fantastic sunshine again and another candle to blow out on my birthday cake. Rachel had made sure I had a few cards with me, just to remind me of how much of an old fart I am getting! We started to chew up the miles and travelled for hours across Europe without had any major hold-ups. Crossing the border into Poland, Chris insisted that we stop for some chunky, meat and veg filled Goulash soup – well and truly a Hay favourite! About £4 later we had soup, pork cutlets and a drink – for both of us. It looked like it was going to be cheap to eat here anyway. As we tucked into the local cuisine, Juan and David Knight passed us with their caravans so we were definitely on the right road!



Setting off again, we wished that we hadn't stuffed ourselves quite so much when we got onto the notorious Polish roads. The last time I went over anything as rough as these roads was when I rode the last check at the Lossiemouth Enduro! The roads have proper pot-holes – none of the namby-pamby rubbish we have at home. We decided to reload the van with all the heavy items to the back – the theory was this would keep the front wheels up and we'd be able to keep it pinned over the bumps. It didn't work!

Poland has recently joined the EU and it is now pretty much like most other member states – plenty of MacDonaldis dotted along the highways, with a liberal sprinkling of IKEA's, Tesco's and Makro's. The main motorway is as good as the legendary Autobahn's of Germany, unfortunately that only took us about halfway to Kielce, the nearest major city to Miedziana Gora. The last part of the journey was done at night, which made spotting the major bumps, people walking on the roads and other obstacles quite interesting! About 30 miles from Kielce we even managed to double-jump a railway crossing in the van! These Sprinters have some pretty impressive suspension! As I was driving, I spent the next 20 minutes trying to convince Chris I had done it deliberately in an effort to miss the big bumps which form between the rails. Somehow I don't think he believed me!

We arrived at the race circuit start area around 11pm and flaked out in the van again. This time though I'd made sure we stopped and had bought a fleecy blanket! I wasn't going to be cold tonight despite having a fantastic clear view of the stars!

I guess this trip is going to be a story we'll be telling my friends about when we get home – as I said, the social side is almost as much fun as the riding!