

Brian & Colettes 25th Anniversary Trip



We are lucky enough to have had the chance to take the FJR1300 around Europe for 2 months. For anyone who's interested, here's my take on it. I've tried not to swear but sometimes they were the only words that seemed to work.

28/07/2012

Over 2 years to get to this point. It's been a long time coming but at last we're ready to go. With the prospect of 2 months on the bike travelling around Europe I'm like a kid waiting for Santa. Colette is excited but she's got a bit more trepidation than me. Leaving our son and daughter even though they're more than old enough to look after themselves is harder for her.

The plan? There is no real plan. We've got an apartment booked in Dubrovnik for a week at the start of week six and 3 days accommodation arranged for the San Marino MotoGP. Other than that we'll make it up as we go along. We've got 2 months so we don't need to do 500+ miles a day on the bike and the intention is not to travel every day. We've got the Green Card an IDP and fairly comprehensive accident and health insurance that does cover us for riding a motorcycle - I made a point of checking this thoroughly before we left. Money side is dealt with by currency cards. We load them up online and can use them for paying for hotels and fuel, withdrawing cash at ATM's etc.

The Method? It's 22 years since we last went abroad on a bike. We're both obviously older and maybe a bit wiser (but hopefully not too much), but we're unanimous in that we don't want to camp. We've been there, done that and it was ok 20 odd years ago, but the thought of 2 months in a tent holds no appeal. On the odd occasion in the past that we booked into hotels while abroad on the bike we just turned up. This time the easiest solution seems to be, to take a small computer and book the next days accommodation from wherever we are. Our main criteria for booking hotels in advance will be WiFi availability, secure parking and location.



From early on in the “planning” we both agreed that we’d travel as lightly as possible and surprisingly there were no last minute attempts to smuggle hair dryers or “just one more pair of shoes”. We spent some money on quality, lightweight clothing that can be easily washed and dries quickly.

We use the standard FJR panniers, a 55 litre Givi Top Box and a tank bag. A pannier each for clothes and big waterproof sacks from a camping shop should any water get by the seals on the luggage. The top box has shoes, toiletries etc and is only about 2/3 full. The tank bag has a built in waterproof cover and it’s home to the computer, various cables and chargers and the enormous security lock plus a few odds and ends. It is also loaded to well below capacity. Claims that the tank bag won’t foul on the bars are bollocks!

I’ve never had any use for a Sat-Nav system in the past and have no prior experience of them. I thought about buying maps as we went along but we want to visit some city centres along the way and don’t need the stress of trying to stay alive while looking at a street map of a strange city. We go for a Sat-Nav and plan to use it along with Google Maps to plan our routes and get us to our destinations. Apparently the voice in my head for the next 8 weeks is known as Emily and our “relationship” will have its ups and downs.

The logistics: Tyres are the big concern. Attempts to source tyres in advance prove fruitless. I send out loads of emails to various bike and tyre dealers across Europe and get not one reply. Tyre company dealer locators on internet are about as useful as a chocolate toothbrush. As we haven’t got a set route and don’t know what our eventual mileage will be it’s difficult to really plan. Based on previous tyre life I’m expecting to change tyres every 3500-4000 miles. Not what some guys get out of their FJR’s but I can’t base our plans on someone else’s riding style. In any case I’m not taking chances with the tyres, we really don’t need pictures due to wringing the last few hundred miles of life from goosed tyres. I’ve done the side of the road break down stuff in the past and it just isn’t any fun.

Everything that can be done to the bike has been done: suspension linkages greased, oil and filters changed, plugs replaced, throttle bodies checked, brake pads and fluid checked, battery checked, all levers and pivots checked and greased. Apart from the tyres, all I’m hoping to do while we’re away is change the oil as required. Under the seat is the standard tool kit plus a couple of decent spanners and allen keys, a small compressor, tubeless puncture repair kit and spare bulbs.



29/07/2012

We left at 07.45 in damp weather. The forecast is sunny with showers. South of Aberdeen and the roads are dry. First stop for fuel was at Asda on A1 and next stop was around 50 miles from Newcastle for food. Had nice burger and chips then finished the journey to the docks. We had a few hours hanging about at ferry port. Ferry was boring but crossing ok. Ate crap food had a few beers and went to bed early.

Day 1 mileage: 269.9, Total Mileage: 269.9

30/07/2012

Colette woke me at 5am to tell me the boat was rocking, made sure I was completely awake by climbing over me to look out the window. Breakfast on boat was not bad - eat as much as you like. We get off the ferry at Ijmuiden full of enthusiasm and head for Berlin, it's nearly all motorway and autobahn but we want to get some miles under our belt. Sat nav gives me grief (operator error). Start it again and it worked perfectly. Rode through some heavy rain and hailstones. Stopped for a while till the worst of the rain passed and finished the day still dry. Made great time on Autobahns. German drivers mostly very good but occasional arse. All drive too fast! Sat Nav got us right to the hotel in Berlin 1st time. Well impressed, think it's going to save a lot of grief over the next few weeks. Hotel seems to be really good. We have good food, beer and wine in a traditional German pub.

Day 2 mileage: 426.5, total mileage: 696.4

31/07/2012

Spent the day wandering around central Berlin, it's ok but much prefer Rome or Barcelona. People were all friendly enough. One Day's enough though, heading for Poland tomorrow.

01/08/2012

I'm still learning the Sat Nav and didn't believe what it was telling me a couple of times when leaving Berlin which meant it took a bit longer than it should have. Also it lost the plot at a detour for a new motorway intersection. A choice of 2 directions and I picked wrong one and had another 1/2 hour of grief to get back on track. More fast Autobahn till Polish border then some new Polish motorway and nice "A" type roads. Arrived in Człuchów and ended up in middle of run down housing estate, not the lakeside hotel we'd been expecting. Wrong address typed into sat nav was the cause. Less than a mile away was our hotel. Sat Nav works great but will only do what it's told - part of the problem is that it doesn't recognise street names as they are given in addresses and it's taking a bit of time learning to give it certain bits of info to get a result. Człuchów isn't exactly jumping, 1 restaurant and that's it. We're booked in for 2 nights and it seems like a bad decision. I suppose that's one of the disadvantages of booking a place even a day in advance rather than just turning up. There are definite advantages to using the computer and internet to search for hotels in advance though. We don't have to waste time looking when we arrive somewhere, we get a lot more choice about how much we want to pay and we can be reasonably confident that there's secure parking for the bike.

Day 4 mileage: 228.4, total mileage: 924.8



Poser



Tesco Poland - thought we were getting away from this stuff!

Tesco

02/08/2012

The hotel is actually very comfy and we get a great breakfast. We went for a walk through some nice woods and along a lake in warm sunshine, Czuchlow isn't so bad after all. I left my hat on a seat in a park by mistake, went back 5 minutes later and it was gone. We'd seen a woman raking the bins in the park where we sat down and she scurried by Colette as I went back for my hat. We're sure she took it but just have to let it go. We went out on bike for a while and ended up shopping at Tesco - some things never change! Had a couple of beers and a bottle of wine on the balcony.

Day 5 mileage: 78.6, total mileage: 1003.4

03/02/2012

We both need somewhere with a bit more life to it. I text a Polish friend and tell him where we are and he suggests Sopot which is a seaside resort near Gdansk.

It's a short ride from Czuchlow to Sopot and Sat Nav gets us right to the door 1st time. We just get into hotel and clouds burst. 6 days in and not wet yet! It rains on and off all night. We've got all this light weight clothing for warm dry conditions and nothing other than the bike gear for wandering about in the rain. Our hotel is right next to where it all happens so at least we don't have far to walk to get a nice steak.

04/08/2012

We left Sopot fairly early after a banquet for breakfast and followed Sat nav instructions. Some good motorway to start with but ended up on stop/start 2 way roads which waste a lot of time slowing down for all the villages. Roads are badly rutted with all the heavy traffic that travels along them. A lot of overtaking what seems like a never ending line of trucks in between the endless 50 kph zones. Roads are fairly greasy and I'm glad it's not raining, the ruts are bad enough dry, full of water it could all get very interesting. We arrived in Wroclaw with temperature close to 30c but hotel has air con - first of the trip and very welcome. It's also got secure parking and an officious little man in charge of the parking plus it's a couple of minutes from the main tourist square. We got it spot on with the booking this time.

Day 7 mileage: 287, total mileage: 1378.9

05/08/2012

No bike today. Spent most of the day around main square in Wroclaw. There was a Battle for Warsaw reconstruction which was great with real tanks, lots of noise and even stunt men falling out windows. There were a few old guys in the crowd that had obviously lived through the original Battle during the war and they were understandably moved by the whole thing. We ate more good food and drank some more beer. Wroclaw is a good place to spent a couple of nights. There are some nice places to visit in Poland and most people are ok but while the roads are reasonable the scenery was fairly flat and a bit boring, certainly on the route we took.

Day 8 mileage: zero, total mileage: 1378.9



06/08/2012

It's a short ride to Slovakia, the border crossing is empty and it's nice, at last, to get some scenery and a 3rd dimension to the roads. The High Tatras are a welcome change to the flat landscape of most of Poland and is not unlike Switzerland, but in miniature. 30c at 9am and got as high as 36c but dropped to around 30c in the mountains. Nice hotel in Stary Smokovec, bike parked right at the front door. Good meal, couple of beers and bizarrely the village shut down at around 9pm. Day 9 mileage: 252.7, total mileage: 1631.6



Road to Slovakia



View from Hotel, Stary Smokevec

07/08/2012

Left Stary Smokovec early, temperature at around 18c which was great. It's a nice ride to the border with Hungary along some nice motorway then decent smaller roads. I'm not really a great fan of motorways but there really is no comparison with the overcrowded, worn out rat runs we're used to in the UK. The surface is great, traffic is light, the sun is shining and the mountains look spectacular. The Slovakia/Hungary frontier is a tip, it looks as if the border posts were just abandoned and the whole place has a real dirty feel to it. I see a sign for Vignettes and hand over a few Euros, there is some kind of confusion regarding where we come from but the document is eventually stamped and triple copies filed away. I wander back to the bike clutching my latest pile of officialdom. By this time I can feel the sweat pouring down my back in the rising heat. I notice that the woman behind the desk has made our country of origin Ukraine on the document. I can't be bothered withering any further in the heat to get it sorted so stuff the paperwork in the tank bag and we carry on. After the disappointment of the border the road to Budapest is fine and we arrive around 13.30 with temperatures in the mid 30's. Sat Nav got us there first time. The hotel is in the Buda side of the Danube and a bit of a walk to the centre but otherwise it's fine with great off road, out of sight parking for the bike. Really enthusiastic and friendly staff at reception that speak great English arrange to get our laundry done for us.

We walked into town and had lousy ice cream then beer at a bar with really bad service in the pedestrian precinct. We were starting to wonder if Budapest was all like that but we went for a meal at a traditional Hungarian restaurant and the food and service were great. Walked over the Danube and up the hill to the hotel.

Day 10 mileage: 196.6, total mileage: 1828.2



The road to Budapest

08/08/2012

Took tour bus and boat trip up Danube, Good day. Budapest is a great place!!

Day 10 mileage: zero, total mileage: 1828.



The Danube from Buda



Parliament building from the Danube



Colette on Danube

09/08/2012

We left Budapest expecting a long day heading for Bistrita, Romania. Easy life seems to be over. Autobahns were a breeze, most Polish roads were ok though sometimes a bit slow and rutted! Slovakia was just f---ing ace. Roads in Hungary were great and Budapest is something else. Left Budapest and had a fast easy blast along some motorway that's smoother than a snooker table almost right up to Romanian border.

Border guards were ok though they seemed to have a suspicious looking smile to each other as if they knew something that we didn't! First few miles were on a fast smooth road with horses and carts. Great road, nice scenery and blue sky. All very quaint and pleasant, what more could travellers on a bike want? 20 minutes later and the reality set in!. Smooth roads turned into patched, cobbled, rutted, potholed misery! Speed limit was mostly 50KPH. Some f--ing hope, closer to 15kph at times! Then it got worse!! Romanians seemed to agree the road was useless so they just dug the whole f--ing thing up without closing it. What was a terrible road surface changed to no road surface and much of the time we were riding on rutted dirt and in deep sand. Visibility close to zero due to dumper trucks and diggers all around kicking up dust . Temp around 36c. This lasted for 100 miles or so and all the way through the voice from the sat nav calmly issued instructions about turning this way or that. After the road works the road settled down to F--ing sh!t which was a big improvement. Over 9 hours to do 336.6 miles. Should have come on the KTM enduro bike. Having ridden what I would consider to be some hard enduros in the last 10 years or so, this day on the FJR was easily the match in terms of physical effort. Mentally it was even harder, loaded and with Colette on the back I really have no idea how we managed to keep it upright. Keeping the throttle pinned on a 100kg enduro bike to get through deep sand is one thing, doing it on an FJR is something completely different and not something I want to do again. There were no real alternatives or detours, once we were on the road we were committed. We hoped that it would eventually improve but other than

the odd few hundred metre section it didn't! We arrived at the hotel dehydrated, completely knackered and with absolutely no intention of leaving it again till the following morning. Over 9 hours on the road to do 336 miles.

Hotel was just what we needed: big, comfy room with really good air conditioning and a restaurant that served great food and even better wine for very little money. Got fairly pished, went to bed, woke up feeling great and ready to tackle whatever else Romania had to throw at us!

Day 11 mileage: 336.6, total mileage: 2164.8

10/08/2012

After a good breakfast we left Bistrita without even seeing what the town is like and head for Piatra Neamt which we reckon is around 150 miles. We're going via Vatri Dornei which looks like a nice road through the Carpathian mountains. I Don't want to be too ambitious with the distance in case the roads get really bad again. Road out of Bistrita is fairly rough by UK standards but much better than what we rode yesterday. It gradually gets better and we're soon climbing up a fairly fast and smooth road. As we climb the temperatures drop into the low 20's which is really welcome after yesterdays sweltering heat. The road and the scenery just get better and we eventually ride through a high mountain ski resort before the roads start to descend and deteriorate. The last 90 or so miles to Piatra Neamt takes us through some stunning scenery but the road surface is really badly broken and patched.

The Romanian drivers are really starting to annoy me, the must overtake at all costs mentality that seems to exist is crazy. As far as possible I try to keep ahead of the traffic but it's the psychos coming the other way that are the biggest worry. Overtaking on blind bends appears to be the norm and after a few experiences of cars, trucks and buses coming towards us fast on the wrong side of the road, defensive riding takes on a whole new dimension. It's a pity as there are the odd sections of the road that have a reasonable surface and should be fun to ride but you never know what's coming towards you. All over Romania there are roadside signs that appear to indicate that they need to reduce their death rates on the roads, they're obviously not working!

We get to our destination in better condition than yesterday but the rough roads are hard work for both of us. Central Plaza Hotel is really classy. Romania is cheap but the roads and drivers so far, are mostly bad! Spending 2 nights here. Going to try and plan routes around what we hope are better roads. After we got settled an English couple turned up on a pair of bikes. They had found the roads everybit as bad as us plus they had got caught in heavy rain that we had missed.

Day 11 mileage: 148.4, total mileage: 2313.2



Top of a pass heading for Vatri Dornei



11/08/2012

Went up in cable car, not quite the alps but ok. Had cake, back to hotel and it rained. Got taxi to good restaurant, had good meal and wine. Had to be wakened for 100m Olympic relay final. Given up with recording daily mileage - too much hassle.

12/08/2012

We left Peatra Neamt, heading for Sibiu which would be a stop over before crossing the Transfagarasan mountains. We looked hard at Google Maps and found that there was an E road most of the way to Sibiu. The hope was that European Routes would be of a reasonable quality. To get to the E route we had to use a small road that took us over a mountain pass and through narrow gorges. Really heavy rain and temperatures down to 9c going over the pass. The road condition was terrible with the tightest sections near the top just rubble. The rain was torrential and it got difficult to see the potholes but it eased up and we were soon on the E road to Sibiu which turned out to be smooth and fairly pleasant to ride. We stopped for fuel not far from our destination and by this time we were cold but more or less dry. The closest yet to getting drenched. Got the usual sob story from the resident professional beggar and moved on. Sat Nav tried to take us through a pedestrian area to get to the hotel and after the usual "recalculating" was heard at least 5 or six times I switched it off. Found the easiest way to hotel was wrong way up one way street. The hotel used to be home of some Romanian composer and conductor (never heard of him). It was ok apart from noisy air con. Had some soup at restaurant in town square "the best soup you'll ever taste" was the claim of the waiter. The old town in Sibiu is jumping with an outdoor Rock Concert, street markets and loads of restaurants and bars.

13/08/2012

Left Sibiu in sunshine to ride Transfagarasan road (Top Gear best road in the world?). Mountains looked cloudy. Road fairly busy. The cloud increased and temperature dropped to 6c as we reached the summit. Road surface was variable, from good to typical Romanian (cr@p). Romanians stop dead in the middle of the road to take photos usually on apex of blind hairpins! We came across horses, cows, dogs, dead dogs, herd of goats, horses and carts. The worlds best road? Given the right conditions, i.e. no obstructions, better weather, consistent surface and not a fully loaded, 2 up FJR1300 then Worlds best road would maybe apply. The views through the mist are seriously impressive and it's a brilliant feat of engineering to put a road across those mountains. We heard howling near the summit, I think wolves, Colette in denial, says it's dogs. Including a few stops it takes us a couple of hours to cover the 90 or so miles of the road. I'm glad we did it but as a road for a bike I found it not that special. Any number of passes in the Alps are way more fun to ride. We eventually ended up in Bucharest in rush hour traffic and soon discovered that every hour is rush hour in Bucharest. A friendly policeman helped us find our hotel using GPS on his phone as sat nav tried to take us through building site where road used to be. Dropped bike at front of hotel trying to park on pavement (@rsehole!!!) Really pissed off, stupid mistake! All the way through the city centre mayhem unscathed and I drop it doing walking speed. A scratched mirror and pannier appear to be all that's damaged. Colette didn't like hotel, I was past caring. We got showered and found nice restaurant away from the ever present traffic fumes, had a good meal and more tasty Romanian Merlot.



Transfagarasan road

14/08/2012

Left Bucharest. Worst traffic I've ever driven in! Usual Romanian Kamikaze, must overtake everything at all costs mentality was in full swing. Finally got on to A2 autoroute heading for Constanta and then the Bulgarian border. Border was no problem and border officials inform us that motorcycles don't require a vignette. We're both agreed it's good to be out of Romania. Glad we went but glad it's behind us. Have read a lot about the appalling standard of Bulgarian roads but route we take to our destination at Balchik is fairly fast and smooth. Bulgarian drivers reputations are on a par with Romanians but they must be having a good day today as I see nothing too stupid. Got to hotel after usual sat nav grief (gets us just about there but not quite). Sitting 15 metres from the Black Sea, hotel is perfect. Day off tomorrow - chilling out at the seaside!!
total mileage: 3049

15/08/2012

Had a day relaxing in Balchik. We went for a run on bike and Colette got stung. Ice cream and cake eased the pain. Parked up the bike and had a few drinks on sea front in afternoon. It's great to take it really easy and what we've seen of Bulgaria so far is good.



The Black Sea at Balchik

16/08/2012

Left Balchik for overnight stay in Sozopol, another real seaside resort. Hotel was good, right in the middle of the old town and bike got what seemed like the only piece of free parking in the whole place. Ate, drank and went for a walk. Road along coast from Balchik was fine, starting to wonder if the bad Bulgarian roads are a myth.



Old Beemer on a Fence, Sozopol

17/08/2012

We left Sozopol with sat nav in charge heading for the Turkish border then on to Istanbul. It seemed to be taking us the wrong way but a quick check showed the general direction to be good. Road got quieter and we went for ages without seeing traffic. I really started to worry when the road turned to cobbles but it soon opened up and before we knew it we were at the Turkish frontier. We joined the fairly short queue and met a young guy from Berlin (Clemence) on an old Africa Twin. He'd been travelling alone for a few days and asked if we could travel to Istanbul together. Getting through Turkish border controls was slow and very repetitive and nobody smiled. We got held up at the first check, there appears to be a problem with our passports but it turns out that we need visas. The official points to a gate through a fence and says something about a yellow building. I see no yellow building but carry on looking. I come across some lorry drivers cooking a meal next to their trucks. They look as if they've been there for days but they manage to understand my problem and point me to the "yellow " building. By no stretch of the imagination is it yellow. I wander through a corridor to an office. There's a guy sitting at a desk. He ignores me but after a lot of clearing my throat he grudgingly looks up. If he speaks English he's not doing it today. He makes it clear that I'm a big interruption to his day but eventually gives us the visas and stings me for 30 euros. I rush back to the bike thinking that all the cars in front of us will have moved on but nothing has changed. At least we're in the shade now as the temperature is 34c and the sun is blazing.

Over 1-1/2 hours in the queue, we had shown passports, green card, registration documents countless times and we were at the last check bar one. Clemence got stopped and was informed that he'd have to get his bike and all his gear x-rayed. With no idea how long we'd have to wait, rising temperatures and now out of shade we opted to leave. We both felt a bit guilty about it.



Nearly there

The road from border was empty as there was only a trickle of traffic getting through. Eventually we joined a superb, empty, 3 lane motorway and headed as quickly as possible for Istanbul. High temperatures were hard going and we stopped for fuel and food in an air conditioned service station. The quiet 3 lane motorway soon changed to a frantic 2 laner and with sat nav showing 20 odd miles to our 1st turn off in Istanbul, the skyline turned from dry countryside to a massive, modern city. The motorway leading into Istanbul was chaotic but fun in a strange kind of way. It took a minute or so to adjust to the weaving across 5 or more lanes without warning and the never ending blasting of horns but the drivers seem to have a high level of awareness. At least I hoped they did! Sooner or later it all must go badly wrong though. Depending what you read the population of Istanbul is between 14 and 18 million and they all seem to be on the road and they're all in a hurry. Sat Nav has a good record of getting us to our city centre destinations if I follow the instructions correctly. I really don't want to miss a turn so amid all the chaos around me I listen to every instruction carefully, double check it on the screen and soon, as if by magic, we're at the hotel. Brilliant result! There is no way I could have got here in this traffic without the voice in my heads help.

Turkish hospitality springs into action and we're checked in and luggage is brought to our room in no time. One of reception staff jumps on back of bike and guides me to the underground parking. Istanbul at last! I've wanted to ride a bike here for 30 years.

Haven't checked mileage for a few days and still haven't got around to it.



Modern Istanbul Skyline



Old Istanbul at end of Ramadan

18/08/2012

Turkish hospitality again at breakfast with waiter serving up some Turkish tea and chef bringing us cold cooked apple stuffed with figs and covered in raspberry sauce. All this after we'd had plenty from the banquet style buffet.

Tyres have been a big concern since long before we left and Istanbul was always the favoured place to get them changed. With over 3500 miles they still have a bit of life but they'll never make it to Italy which is the next realistic possibility of getting replacements. I really don't want to be stuck at the side of the road repairing a threadbare tyre or dealing with high speed failures on some of the sh!t roads we're still likely to encounter.

Operation tyres swings into action: Hotel reception guy has an R6 and recommends a man that deals with Yamaha. R6 guy arranges for taxi to take us to see Yamaha man. Tyre deal falls through at Yamaha man, meanwhile taxi driver is juggling 2 phones trying to source tyres for a couple of total strangers. Eventually a specialist Pirelli dealer manages to source us some Michelins and arranges for local bike shop to fit them. Deal done, driver takes us back to hotel to pick up bike then guides me back to shop. Guys at bike shop work past their stopping time on the eve of the end of Ramadan holiday. Everybody involved in getting our tyres, from the guy at hotel reception to the tyre dealer and the mechanics that stayed late to get the tyres fitted were all brilliant. The taxi driver was the real star, he gave up half his day to help strangers and we both really appreciate his help and humour. I got lost in the traffic on way back to hotel, sat nav got really confused or maybe confusing? Actually, I quite enjoyed aimlessly riding around in the city centre mayhem. The tyres are soft compound but that's all that's available. I check reviews on Internet and some claims of up to 7000 mile life. I'll believe that when it happens. I've been riding fairly conservatively, trying to avoid hard acceleration and braking and at most I would have got 4500 out of BT023's. Previous rear BT023 was way past illegal at well under 4000!

Got showered and went to reception for coffee. Waiter brought us cakes for free and we were informed coffee was also on the house. Got another taxi up hill to Taksim and did tourist bit.

19/08/2012

We rode across one of the bridges over the Bosphorus into Asia and came back to Europe on the other one. I set the route on Sat Nav and all it wanted to do was take us back to start - doing my head in! We went a walk across bridge at Golden Horn into old part of Istanbul. The holiday for end of Ramadan is in full swing and everywhere is busy. Roads are quiet by Istanbul standards but still hectic by any other measure. I had Turkish tea in Gulhane park overlooking the Bosphorus then later on we walked up the hill from hotel to Taksim Square and had a meal just off Istiklal Street. Everyone in holiday mood. Istanbul is great and I can't think of a better time to be here.



Turkish Tea

20/08/2012

Went to Dolmabahce Palace and then a boat trip on the Bosphorus followed by nice ice cream. Hotel informed us that our laundry wasn't done due to holiday so all our dirty stuff will be getting taken back to Bulgaria with us.



Boat trip on Bosphorus



Cooling down

21/08/2012

Got a nice send off from staff at hotel in Istanbul. Had a great time in Istanbul and would love to go back sometime but it's time to be getting back on bike again.

Set sat nav co-ordinates for hotel in Smolyan in Rhodope mountains in Southern Bulgaria. Turkish holiday still ongoing so light traffic leaving Istanbul and no tolls on motorway. Motorway was quiet so we made fairly quick progress to Bulgarian Frontier. Leaving Turkey much was quicker than getting in, a small problem with registration document but 5 minutes to sort and we're into Bulgaria again. Road to Smolyan was mostly good and we arrived at Hotel Kiparis Alpha early afternoon. We cleaned up, had a walk then great meal in hotel at Bulgarian prices minus our 20% guest discount. Good food, good few drinks - £24 including big tip! Great to be back in Bulgaria!
total mileage: 3,955



View from our hotel room – Smolyan, Southern Bulgaria

22/08/2012

We spoke to a German couple on a BMW at breakfast who know the area. They recommended caves at Yogodina. I bought a map from the tourist office which was useless, so having new found confidence in sat nav I zoom in on location and press go! 1/4 mile into the trip and doubts are setting in but it usually gets us there and its only 50km. How wrong can it get it? The road deteriorates to a never ending series of potholes. We come up to a tunnel through a mountain and the road surface through it has completely gone. We make it to the other side and a bit further on see "Border Area" sign covered in bullet holes!! Colette thinks we're going wrong way but I carry on. Eventually we bounce our way to what appears to be an unmapped but guarded (Greek) border crossing. We about turn and switch Sat nav off. Eventually find caves but they're too busy. We ride some nice roads up to 1450m. Scenery is great. Road quality goes from superb to diabolical from corner to corner! There's loads of building work going on, mainly hotels in the middle of nowhere. It

all seems a bit strange, there are very few tourists that we can see and all around there are half built hotels that lie abandoned. It all seems a bit pointless but maybe they're gearing up for a rush? We have lunch of nice bread and tomatoes at a roadside fountain. We hear thunder and ride through heavy showers on way back to hotel. Bulgarian drivers are just about as bad as Romanians.



Gorge – Rhodope Mountains



That Nike Shirt!

23/08/2012

Lazy day! Get bike washed. Nike riding shirt goes missing and after informing reception who protest that crime is unheard of in this hotel we go for a walk and it strangely re-appears under Colettes pillow. Bizarre!!!

24/08/2012

Set Sat Nav for central Sofia. We go via Plovdiv. The road to Plovdiv takes us through some spectacular scenery and we ride up to 1700m but usual inconsistent road surface quality spoils what is an awesome route. Perfect road surface alternating with potholed patched and crumbling mess. After Plovdiv it's mostly motorway (Bulgarian style) to Sofia. It's not actually that bad and has got to be the best option, dodging potholes at 40kph in this heat holds no appeal. I take it easy and we stop couple of times, have some Bulgarian grilled meat at roadside cafe and owner and his wife are really nice. People like them brighten up our days. Temperature around 37c but feels much warmer today. We arrive early in Sofia and find that our room has been upgraded to an apartment - loads of space, brilliant! We go for a wander in the heat, find main tourist street and it seems like a big disappointment. We eat in the hotel restaurant and are the only ones there.



Sofia church



Big shiney woman-Sofia

25/08/2012

Get taxi to Eagles Bridge expecting to see a bridge crossing a major river but find it's just a flood channel. We walk around park for couple of hours then check out some of the sites. Central Sofia is quiet compared to other city centres we've visited but it's relaxing and we're glad we came. It seems that to appreciate Sofia takes a bit of time. We went for coffee, Colette had pancakes with honey, cream, ice cream, fruit and nuts, I had chicken salad, neither of us had coffee!

Next stop Belgrade.

26/08/2012

Fast motorway more or less all the way to Belgrade. With forecasts of 43c it really isn't weather for dawdling along on the back roads. By time we get to hotel, temperature is 38c and we're very hot. Glad we got there early as it likely peaked at well over 40c. Good hotel with underground parking for bike. Had nice meal in the old town and listened to the musicians. Forgot to take any photos as usual.

27/08/2012

3 capital cities in 3 days, 3 countries in under an hour!

Only one night in Belgrade. Should have maybe spent more time in Serbia. I heard rain through the night but roads had dried by time we left, Belgrade city centre traffic moves painfully slowly and it takes us what seems like forever to get through. Temperatures dropped around 20 degrees since yesterday which is a welcome relief. Set sat nav for Sarajevo (capital no.3) and eventually got out of Belgrade traffic. Mostly fast motorway and 22c till we got to Serbian Customs then through passport control into Bosnia?? A few miles down

the road a few things didn't seem right so stopped at garage and asked guy "what country are we in?" Turned out sat nav had taken us into Croatia! Bosnia & Herzegovina frontier was a few miles down the road – **3 countries in under 1 hour!** What we saw of Croatia was really nice and we look forward to Dubrovnik. Wasn't really sure what to expect in Bosnia. First impressions – brilliant! Beautiful countryside with hills everywhere and great roads. No potholes, no patches just smooth surface, great corners and nice scenery. Stop for lunch at roadside cafe - burger Balkan style + free soup and free sweet thing after it. Last 50 or so miles is motorway and it looks as if it was designed by a guy that designs race tracks – super smooth surface, great elevation changes and 200mph corners – around 250 miles today and best day on bike so far! Sitting at a set of traffic lights in Sarajevo we see the bullet holes still on the buildings from the war. Hotel is right in the middle of things and less than 50m from where Franz Ferdinand and his wife were shot sparking WW1. Our room faces one of the many mosques and the haunting call to prayer sounds great. It adds to the mix of cultures and atmosphere that seems to be here. Went out for a meal and against our better judgement let some pushy waitress talk us into "traditional Bosnian food" - greasy, doughy horrible things. We found them disgusting, paid and left. 2 nights here then who knows where?

total mileage: 4,690



View from our room in Sarajevo



Speaks for itself



Colette on the Latin Bridge

28/08/2012

We wandered around old town Sarajevo and bought hats. Had a nice meal and a few glasses of wine. Mostar looks like tomorrow's destination, I still have vivid memories of the terrible images we saw on the telly during the Balkan war and the bridge at Mostar collapsing is one that I remember really well. We can't come this far and not go.

29/08/2012

Short run to Mostar. Forest fires make seeing the mountains hard. Nice road and great scenery if we could see it. Rubbish lying everywhere as we get to the outskirts of Mostar. The old town is another tourist trap but I really like it. We cross the old bridge and have a nice meal, this time the waiter's recommendation is spot on. There's a cave that's become home to a bar/nightclub, we make ourselves at home and listen to some great music. I meant to ask what it was but never got around to it. We've really enjoyed Bosnia & Herzegovina, it is a beautiful place, the majority of the people are friendly and the mix of cultures gives it a great character. There are still a lot of reminders of the war, all the graveyards are full of mostly young men who died between 1992 and 1995. You don't have to look hard to see buildings that haven't been repaired and still bear the signs of the shells and bullets that hit them.



Old Bridge rebuilt at Mostar



Road to Mostar

We planned a long day through northern Montenegro to Mojkovac then on to Podgorica. Landscape view on Google maps looked like a spectacular route taking us through some great looking mountains and valleys. Podgorica, as far as we could gather had nothing that would make it a high priority destination but it was just planned as somewhere to end up for lack of anywhere better at the end of a long day riding. We spoke to the hotel staff in Mostar and while they weren't 100% sure they seemed to think that the route we were planning was worth doing. I put Podgorica in as a destination in sat nav with Mojkovac as a via point. It calculated the route but seemed to want to take us back to Sarajevo first. This wasn't the most obvious route but guys in hotel thought that other routes could possibly be closed due to the fires in the mountains though they couldn't know for sure. As we knew the road to Sarajevo was good and it seemed like another opportunity to see the scenery assuming the smoke had cleared, this route was ok with us. The rest of the sat nav route appeared to match what we were seeing on google maps.

30/08/2012

A couple of hours after leaving Mostar and we were heading roughly south east away from Sarajevo. Slowly we climbed, the road surface was mostly ok, the scenery just kept getting better and it looked like we were going to have a great ride through some spectacular landscapes. A couple of times I heard the sat nav muttering about recalculating and instructing me to follow the route. After a while it became obvious that the route on the sat nav and the actual road were getting further apart. Had I been following the sat nav I would be riding along the side of a valley where there was definitely no road. Eventually the road on the sat nav disappeared and we were left with an expensive compass! I'd looked at a map of Bosnia in Mostar but wasn't prepared to pay 12 euro asking price - I wished I had. In most other countries road signs can generally be relied on but this is not the case in much of the Balkans. There are plenty of warning signs but often there are no signs showing directions. We eventually came to a partial barrier across the road with some hand painted arrows pointing towards an old road branching to the left. Beyond it was what looked like a newly resurfaced or possibly even a new road. As the route ahead seemed partially blocked by the barrier and there was no sign of any traffic using it we decided to follow the indicated route. Whether or not we could have successfully went straight on, I'm never likely to know but I do know the road we took was the wrong one. I could frequently see the Montenegro frontier on the sat nav but there just wasn't a crossing point and there were no roads showing on the sat nav. The road we were riding had obviously been there for a while but the sat nav didn't see it. So much for the Garmin claim that it covered all Europe. After a while in the very hot sun and no real idea where we were other than still in Bosnia and riding parallel to the border we wanted to cross, we saw a sign for Mostar. We'd travelled for 5 or 6 hours and had more or less ridden in a big circle. A complete screw up that could have most probably been avoided if I'd bought the 12 euro map. With no access to any kind of map and nowhere to now buy one or anything else for that matter I followed the road blindly, reasoning that at some point I'd come to a road that would get us into Montenegro. Meanwhile we were getting hungry and for the first time in the whole journey there were no regular filling stations though fuel wasn't really a great concern. We eventually ended up in Trebinje in Southern Bosnia where we got a great meal at a roadside restaurant and got directions to Montenegro. The Montenegro border post we arrived at was very quiet and fairly high up in a really parched landscape. The sat nav was working sporadically now, the problem seems to be that what maps it does have of the area are inaccurate and at best very out of date. As usual there are no road signs. I'm starting to think that they took all the signs down during the war and never got around to putting them back up again. We end up in an endless 50kph zone with constant nose to tail traffic and in a rare moment of performing as intended the sat nav takes us to a 2 euro ferry crossing. Haven't got a clue where but we pay our money and swelter in the heat.

After some more really frustrating riding in the slow traffic we eventually end up riding through Budva. More really slow riding in traffic then the sat nav takes us inland and up a really tight and twisty mountain road. We're wondering if it's going to lose the plot again but eventually we arrive in Podgorica just as the last of the daylight is fading. We're relieved to be there but I'm really disappointed that the day got screwed up so badly. Our feelings about Podgorica were confirmed, it's a city with little history and even less character. Hotel is ok with a really big room but is nowhere near anything, not even a restaurant. Hotel owner insists I wheel bike into hotel which is fine with me.



Road to Montenegro, Eastern Bosnia

31/08/2012

We the ride to Mojkovac and the road and scenery are indeed spectacular but visibility is still poor due to the ongoing forest fires. Sat nav pisses me off some more, it takes me off a dual carriageway in the middle of Podgorica that goes straight to hotel to ride to a f&cking dead end! Later on, the voice in my helmet switches off. Hotel owner is a really ok guy but speaks no English. His son does and explains that before the war the hotel used to be full of Russian guests but they stopped coming. They are obviously struggling to make a living but their hotel is not even close to the centre of a not very appealing city. I really hope things pick up for them but can't see how. Looking forward to getting to Croatia.

total mileage: 5214



Road to Mojkovac, poor visibility



01/09/2012

Leave Podgorica and sat nav gets us lost within a couple of miles - we're not even out of the city. It re-calculates and sends us a different route from the way we came in. As the inward route was lousy I thought that we had nothing to lose and for once was proved correct. The new route took us over a fairly high and winding road that eventually ended up in Budva.



2 euro ferry in Montenegro

From Budva to the border crossing near Herceg Novi we've got same traffic nightmare as we had in way in. When we get there we queue for around 1-1/2 hours in 35c heat, it seems everyone is leaving Montenegro. I Can't think of any reason why I'd ever want to go back to Montenegro. Nice scenery inland but traffic in and out is a complete nightmare.

We get to our apartment in Dubrovnik no bother. Sat Nav seems to be working better.



First sight of Dubrovnik through the haze



Dubrovnik cat

02/09/2012

Take bus to old town and have a wander around. It's good to be out of hotels.



Old Dubrovnik from city walls



City walls

03/09/2012

Go for swim in Adriatic - water great. Go into old town and have a nice meal then have a few drinks at various bars and get late bus home. (Pished)

04/09/2012

Left washing out for landlady to wash and it goes missing. Serious pain in the arse - a lot of expensive lightweight gear that can't be replaced easily. Albanian guy that checked out early is main suspect!

05 - 07/09/2012

Chilling out in Dubrovnik. Take bike out for short ride up coast - Dalmation coast route is awesome but around the town, 5 months without rain has left roads seriously greasy.



It did eventually rain

08/09/2012

Wake up early and try and get up but I'm seriously dizzy, sense of balance all over the place, seems ok when I'm standing up or lying down but moving between them leaves me feeling really bad. Went a bit deaf in left ear for a couple of days a week or so ago and wondering if it's connected. Leave Dubrovnik feeling rough, couldn't face breakfast. Great road up coast to Zadar. Arrived feeling rough, hotel guy pissed Colette off when checking in. Tourist area of Zadar is good, we have a nice meal then sit out at a cafe and watch the world go by. A busker plays Stairway to Heaven on his guitar among other things.

09/09/2012

Left Zadar, heading for Zagreb. Motorway nearly all the way but it's awesome. Road is brilliant and scenery is great. The terrain changes from arid, rocky landscape to green fertile farmland with great mountains and long tunnels. Not far from Zadar and we stop at a service station that looks as if it's there just for the view and the view s qualify it as the best roadside stop of our whole trip. These are roads that the FJR is made for - fast and smooth with plenty of sweeping bends. Anyone who thinks all motorways are the same and are boring on a bike needs to try out the new Balkan ones. We get to Zagreb and are a bit concerned about my balance problem. It seems ok on the bike but I'm worried that it might happen while riding. We enquire about the best way of seeing a doctor at hotel reception. They advise a trip to casualty to get balance checked out but it's a waste of time. Go back to hotel and they us call doctor. The doctor turns up fairly quickly and diagnoses wax blocking my ear as the problem which makes sense. We talk for a bit and it turns out he was a captain in the army during the war. He is really proud that he contributed towards Croatia getting its independence. We make arrangements for me to attend his surgery the following day to get my ear syringed.



Leaving Zadar



Road to Zagreb



Best motorway service station anywhere

10/09/2012

Find doctors surgery no bother, get ear done and feel a bit better. With Slovenia as our next destination Sat nav appears to be taking us on another wild goose chase. After 45 minutes of going around on tiny ever more deteriorating back roads we about turn and eventually end up on motorway heading for Slovenia. Turns out it's wrong motorway and we end up entering NW Slovenia rather than heading for Ljubljana. Luckily Slovenia isn't that big and 1st sign for capital shows 130km which we do in around an hour. Sat Nav takes us off motorway and we get our first sight of the Alps. Bizarrely sat nav takes us back onto another bit of motorway. We eventually find our selves on smooth 2 way roads riding through some great scenery with loads of "bikers welcome" signs. Sat Nav takes us up a great mountain pass and briefly into Italy before coming back into Slovenia where the road snakes down to Bovec and our hotel. Bovec is a nice one night stop with a great restaurant.



First view of the alps



Bovec Hotel



Leaving Bovec for Italy

11/09/2012

We look at hotels in the Italian alps and what is available is either ridiculously expensive or in the middle of nowhere. As we move back into "Western Europe" finding hotels is getting really boring but we book a hotel in Milano Marittimo just north of Rimini. Road from Bovec into Italy is great and takes us along a beautiful mountain pass and we ride for nearly an hour without seeing another vehicle. All of a sudden we're out of the alps and the intention is to take motorway as far as we can as there's no real scenic route to where we're going. Another sat nav screw up sends us towards Venice. It's more bother than it's worth trying to pick up the correct motorway again so we ride the last hundred or so miles on small roads which are really busy. On the way we stop at roadside cafe and a really friendly woman serves us and makes us smile. A lorry driver nearly knocks us off while overtaking him and ten minutes later a woman in a small car that appears to be out of control cuts out in front of us. Great to be in Italy! We check into hotel and get parked right inside grounds.



12/09/2012

Got MotoGP tickets from big Valentino Rossi fan at a travel agent a couple of miles from hotel. Managed to get oil changed at Yamaha dealer in Riccione -we just appeared, no warning and they did it there and then - brilliant. Tyres from Istanbul are well worn but a bit of life in them yet. Hope they're going to last the distance. We've got a bit of time on our hands and our next accommodation is in the area so we decide to check out Castello di Montegridolfo. It sounded great when we booked it in January but we arrived mid afternoon and felt like we'd stepped into a Clint Eastwood spaghetti western. The place was completely dead and the thought of 4 nights spent in what appeared to be like a deserted prison didn't appeal to either of us. We cancel the booking - costs us 150 Euros but as far as we're both concerned it's money well spent. Book a hotel in Cattolica for 4 nights, 10 minutes from the circuit and hopefully get a bit of motogp atmosphere.

13/09/2012

Move from Milano Marittimo to Cattolica. It's only 30 odd miles but it rains heavy. We're trying to kill time so stop at a garage for coffee. Italy hasn't seen much rain recently so the garage is doing a roaring trade in replacing car window wiper blades. We arrive fairly damp (couldn't be bothered fitting waterproof linings to suits). Hotel is ok, minutes on foot to restaurants and less than 10 minutes on the bike from Misano circuit.

14/09/2012

Head for Misano to suss out parking etc.. and to watch a bit of free practice. End up having a screaming match with some woman trying to rip me off for parking. I then get directed by "officials" to parking area. Queue in pissing rain only for some officious little man to inform me that I don't have the right type of ticket. I ask him nicely where I can buy a ticket and he starts shouting abuse in Italian. I carefully turn bike in muddy grass and make a point of getting accurate aim and roost the little twat. I eventually just bluff it and ride past a marshal on the service track that circles most of the circuit. I get into circuit and it rains on and off. Hang about till 2nd Motogp practice but hardly anyone comes out, mostly crt bikes though Jonathon Rae looks seriously quick on the works Honda. Rossi does a couple of slow laps then rain gets heavy. 1st time I've heard Moto 1 - 4 strokes in the flesh and they sound horrible - wish they'd kept the 125 - 2 stroke class. Moto 2 bikes sound good, go good and there's a decent field. Hope weather gets better for qualifying and races.

15/09/2012

We both go to the circuit for free practice and qualifying. Slovenia Vignette is still on screen and marshal seems to think it's some kind of authorisation to allow us access to outer road which lets us ride right up to our gate. Qualifying is good and Rossi looks quick on the Ducati. He makes 2nd row on the grid and crowd are delighted.

16/09/2012

Get parked no bother and 10 minute walk to our circuit entry gate. Racing is good but really hot and uncomfortable sitting on banking. Colette gets a blistered knee through her denims! Pedrosa has a bad day and gets knocked off on 1st lap. Crutchlow bins it early on. Lorenzo gets easy win and Rossi is a fairly convincing 2nd. Last Italian race on the Ducati - great result for Rossi and the crowd. Valentino fever all over town with restaurants flying no. 46 flags and everyone dressed in yellow. Italians have great attitude to bikes which is welcome. Italy has been good but we're both ready to move on.



17/09/2012

Head for Lienz which is just across the Austrian border. Motorway most of the way. It's fairly boring but gets the miles in quickly and it does get better when we get within sight of the alps again. Never really sussed out how the Italian speed cameras work on motorways so generally ignored them as did most of the Italians. If they work like any Italian electricians I've ever known they probably won't work anyway, but I could possibly be going home to millions of euros in fines. We leave the motorway and come over a great mountain pass with the Austrian frontier located just below the top. Hotel in Lienz seems ok and I even get free underground parking for the bike. Tyres looking really past their best. I try to source some via internet in Austria or Germany but have no luck - need to speak to an english speaking german or austrian biker to see where they get tyres. Bikes everywhere here and bikers made very welcome.



First stop in Austria

18/09/2012

Leave Lienz and head for Salzburg via Grossglockner high mountain road. Grossglockner is highest mountain in Austria and the Grossglockner pass is one of the best bike rides in the alps at 2504m. Road and scenery is the best of the trip. Great fun even on worn out tyres. I stop at a Harley dealer who gives us address of Yamaha shop 5 minutes from our hotel in Salzburg. The shop has tyres but we're too late to get them fitted that day. We arrange for tyres to be fitted the following morning. We go for a wander around Salzburg old town and have nice meal. Weather forecast for tomorrow is bad and hotel can't fit us in for another night so after a lot of searching we get a hotel in Vienna.







Colette and new friend





Top of the Hill

19/09/2012

The rain hitting off our window wakes us up early, it really is torrential. After breakfast I head for the bike shop. A couple of hours later the bike's got some new Metzeler Z8's which hopefully will last a bit longer than Michelins we got in Istanbul. I'm really glad I got them as the Michelins really are close to being bald, both front and rear. The forecast is for heavy rain all day so any notion of taking a scenic route to Vienna is forgotten. Motorway again seems like the best option. I would have preferred to scrub the tyres in for a few miles on dry roads but it's not an option. I take it easy for a few miles but have to speed up to clear visor of rain. A couple of times the rain gets so heavy that I have no choice other than slow right down. The motorway traffic grinds to a halt and I spend 40 minutes or so filtering through it. Austrian drivers like most in Europe are happy to move over to let bikes pass. A crashed lorry is the cause of the delay. The rain gets worse and by the time we get to hotel in Vienna we've had our worst soaking of the trip. I'm really glad I got tyres done this morning. Hotel is like stepping back into the 70's, I like it but Colette's not so sure. I dry out jacket and gloves with hair dryer in hotel. We go for a bit of a wander but don't really see that much. Have a meal, few glasses of wine and that's it. We're both about ready to go home.

20/09/2012

Set sat nav for Prague. Blue sky and dry roads but only around 12c. We stay off motorways for a fair bit of the journey and it's nice to ride with new tyres on decent roads. We stop 40 or so miles into Czech Republic to put more clothes on, wind is strong and we're both feeling the cold. Think we've seen the last of the hot weather. Last 70 or so miles to Prague is fairly crap motorway with lousy surface a lot of the time. Usual outside lane super heroes trying to push their way past are pissing me off more than usual. Open bike up a bit to put some space between me and a twat in a Volvo right up my exhaust and tyres feel really good on fast motorway bends at high speeds. Sat nav gets

us right to hotel and the parking is seriously secure. Go for a walk around Wenceslas Square, guy tries to short change us at hotdog stall and then we pay around 9 euros for 2 coffees and lousy service. First impression of the place is that it's just a rip off. We go out for a meal at night and same thing. Can see no reason I'd ever want to go back to Prague, nice buildings but that's it. It's a city I'd wanted to try and visit on our trip and was really disappointed. Seedy, dirty and generally an unfriendly place.



21/09/2012

Leave Prague heading for Erfurt in Germany. We're both in the mood for heading straight to Amsterdam and the ferry but we've arranged to stay with friends near Kassel tomorrow. Still in Czech Republic we ride through a few ok looking villages but soon pass a massive industrial complex spewing out fumes that hang in the air for miles around. The border crossing is seamless, the only difference is the colour of the road. Glad to be into Germany, the Czech Republic that we experienced left us wishing we hadn't bothered. I'm really pleased that we got tyres changed in Salzburg as it's back to unlimited autobahns. I really am a big fan of the autobahns, not because I want to go flat out all the time but because I can ride at realistic speeds for the conditions without wasting concentration on looking for cops. In no time we're in Erfurt which was always only going to be a stop over but we're both surprised at how quiet it is. We find an Italian restaurant not far from the hotel and have a nice meal then go for a walk. The whole town seems to be dead so we end up back at hotel. We're both looking forward to catching the boat home in Amsterdam on Sunday as we've had enough of hotels! We get bored and go for another walk and this time find the old town centre - it's not so dead after all.

22/09/2012

Quick ride along autobahn to friends near Kassel. We have a nice meal and sit and talk, it's great to be out of hotels.

23/09/2012

We leave early and make great time to the Dutch border on the quiet autobahns. Things slow down on the other side, the Dutch motorways towards Amsterdam have generally 100kph limit. After the high speed and quick progress of the autobahns it's really frustrating to be riding on such boring roads. Sat Nav stops talking and does the usual re-calculating crap. Eventually we get to the ferry port and have a last meal on foreign soil. We meet up with a bunch of Scottish guys on bikes just back from a blast through Germany and the Swiss Alps. Watch Prometheus in the boats cinema - I think it's ok, Colette thinks it's rubbish.



24/09/2012

Breakfast on boat is ok, weather forecast is spot on - pissing and gales - nothing's changed in our absence then. We get off boat and immigration guy makes us take off our helmets (first time in 25 border crossings). Other than that he's pleasant enough. We ride out the docks in the rain and wind and head north. Have to pull off A1 and ride for miles to get fuel which is a real pain after being used to fuel stations every few miles throughout Europe. Forth Bridge is interesting in the high winds but I'm glad it's still open, can't be @rsed with detour to Kincardine. Rain eases at Perth and it's just high winds all the way up A90. Get home around 3pm and the adventure's over!

Total Trip Mileage: 8140.2