

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Darren & Jon



Smiles at the start, departure imminent on 18th May 2012

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Preface

Being a keen motorcyclist, and a travel enthusiast, I love the idea of touring Europe on a motorcycle. However, it is a selfish pastime if you have wife & children who cannot share this time. It is hard to justify a 10 or 12 day break away from family while they're stuck at home, worrying about you, and wondering why you'd rather be away from them. You need a very understanding family to comprehend the need of a biker to be free like a bird for a few days with your mates on motorcycles riding new roads, through foreign countries, exploring the mountain passes, amazing long straight D-roads, through rural emptiness, forest, winding along rivers, around peaks and over hills. But for many of us the need is there. There's a whole world of roads out there, and we feel imprisoned in our local reach. Occasional day trips out to Donnington, or Cadwell, or Brands Hatch, or the short sprint to Snetterton are normally about as much as we can manage. Once in a blue moon a cloud comes along and you can knit a silver lining for it. My friend and fellow motorcyclist Darren has a niece called Danii. In January 2011, at the tender age of 14 she was diagnosed with cancer of the spine. This was devastating news for the family and friends, and although I had never met Danii, the effect it had on Darren and his family, had a knock-on effect with me. He and I discussed her bravery and the level of treatment she was having to endure over the course of the year of 2011 and towards the end of the year, I heard him talking about 'Danii's Charity'. It transpired that even in her condition, at the end of a year of operations, bone marrow transplant, removal of a section of her spine, countless bouts of chemotherapy and radiotherapy, she had started to spend her 'free time' working on raising money for children with cancer, less fortunate than herself. This notion planted a seed in Darren and he told me about a plan to help her fund-raising. He'd been a fan of 'The Long Way Round' as had I, and we started to discuss the possibility of doing something along those

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

lines, but to raise money at the same time. We briefly discussed it with our families and got the green light, pending more detailed arrangements. We planned a basic route and decided we'd do 5000 miles in 10 days. We plotted where this 5000 miles could potentially take us then ruled out a few countries, and settled on a route through Europe visiting the capitals of all the countries we would visit. After several discussions with experienced tourers, we were strongly advised not to exceed 400 miles a day. So we settled for 450ish and re-plotted the route through 12 countries hitting 9 capitals but to include some challenging Alpine mountain passes. We then decided to organise the timing around Dani's 16 birthday when we were aware there would be a fund-raising party. So we worked backwards from that date to be in Southern Spain, to our departure date, 18th May, 2012. Having received agreement from our families on the concept so far, we started to look for accommodation, ferries, and looked into the Foreign Office Travel advice for our chosen destinations and way-points, before confirming a more carefully defined route. And following that we bought a Garmin Zumo 660 Sat-Nav and used the Garmin Map Source PC based navigation program to specify types of roads, places to avoid, timings between stops, fuel stops, alternative routes if running behind, etc. We were then able to define the route into days' riding, decide on stop-over points and search for hotels close to our over-night stops. Following a session on Booking.com, and finding reasonably priced hotels, as close as possible to our destinations, we then re-visited the Map Source route to finalise it, placing in the correct hotel addresses and re-mapping fuel breaks from the new overnight stops. All bookings were made in early February. With the trip sorted, we needed to start raising some interest and find some support. I had set up a website. We agreed on the name of our fund raising as 'Euro Ride 4 Children With Cancer', and I'd bought the domain name er4cwc.co.uk to be our web address. After many iterations, a couple of photo shoots, we launched the site at the end of January and later had

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

a Facebook page linked to and from it. Neither of us is a marketing guru though and we found getting the word out was painfully slow and tedious. Both having busy professional jobs, running our own businesses, made it difficult to put the time in when necessary, but without the fundraising being a success, the £2600 cost for the trip would be a waste of money. Until 3 weeks before the trip, I was tempted to say, refund everyone their donations and give Danii the cost of the trip, but we'd worked very hard on it all so far, it would have been devastating to quit! As a support fundraiser, I compiled a quiz to be held in our local pub, with questions about Europe, which was a fun event and made around £185 and raised the awareness locally, then Danii's dad ran the same quiz in his local which raised a similar amount which is great, but that went straight into their fundraising pot. I organised a Casino night to be held in our village hall, which took more than a considerable amount of time and effort, as I was desperate to increase the profile and level of funds. However, we failed to sell enough tickets to break-even on the costs of the event so decided to pull the plug 3 weeks from the event. I was both mortified and relieved, as I cancelled it. Mortified because of the wasted time, effort, embarrassment, but relieved because it was in risk of costing us money, and we couldn't afford that.

While all the background fundraising was going on, we had the bikes and equipment to consider. Darren had a KTM RC8 and a KTM 690 Duke, neither of which was really suitable, so he'd planned to chop in the Duke for a KTM 990 Adventure. This was the first choice bike of Charley Boorman for 'The Long Way Round' and an ideal contender. But it was only 6 weeks before the trip that Darren actually got it. With the very up-right stance the Explorer gave, I was seriously considering buying a Triumph Tiger 1050 just for the trip, to sell on afterwards, but decided it was an extravagant move which I couldn't really justify, and my Triumph Sprint ST1050 was more than capable, and comfortable.

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

We knew we would need to be able to communicate with each other, so I loaned Darren one of my Cardo Scaler Q2 bluetooth headsets which paired with my Schuberth SRC, and we went for a 420 mile trial run up into Derbyshire and the Peaks via Norfolk, Lincolnshire and South Yorks. What we learned from the day was invaluable. The comms doesn't work. Bluetooth was not really designed for this, dropping out regularly, broken conversations, poor connections, and limited battery life. It was clear we would need to spend considerable money on Autocom systems and PMR Radios. We did this, based on the trip first but justifying it with continued future use, and both bought Logic L1, with 1 satnav isolation adapter, cables to connect music players, phones, and PTT cables, radio adapters as well as power cables as we didn't want to worry about charging devices daily. When we bought the radios, we bought the 12V power adapters for them, but later discovered they cannot be used at the same time as the comms cable is attached, which is useless in a bike comms situation. After pulling a radio to bits, I figured a way of adding in an additional charging socket, and modified the power adapters to suit. So now we have bike powered radios, bike powered intercom hub, bike powered Garmin. We're all set! In March I thought a great fund-raising gimmick would be for people to be able to track us. For a small donation we could pass on log-in information to sponsors, so they can track us live on our trip through the Smartrack website. I talked to Smartrack about this as a fundraiser for us and a promotional tool for them and they were very keen to help. They offered me a tracker for a cost price, and minimum possible European cover subscription, and we fitted the tracker to my bike. They monitored it for a while to check reliability of connection and set up an account for the sponsors to log-in. As it turned out, this was a great comfort to our families on the trip, as they were able to see where we were, even at street view level, view the places we stopped and the hotels we stayed in. It was a relief for them to see we had made our destinations, and to see where and why we'd

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

stopped for prolonged periods. It also meant that as long as we kept moving, we were fine. During the trip we believe that the tracking became quite a phenomenon, and even an obsession to some as over 300 people were logging in. We were receiving texts when we'd stopped at services, as people were aware we'd be stopped for a while. I believe the Tracker represents great value for money as peace of mind for our loved ones alone. As a bonus it's a fun thing, and a potential fund-raising tool.

Approaching the start date, there was still much to do. I ordered, on-line, Vignettes for Slovenian and Austrian motorways, we printed off all the travel, booking and check-in documentation, we shared responsibilities for managing emergency food, energy bars, drink, first-aid kits, puncture repair kits, tools, gas burner, hi-viz vests, bike & legal documents, etc and had regular meetings in the weeks leading up to departure day to organise who carries what in what and how. I am certain that we were not particularly easy to live with over the last couple of weeks as we were both getting stressed out with balancing work, family and anticipation with apprehension of the task which lay ahead of us, and the continuous rain had us concerned we'd spend 9 days getting wet. All of this with the need to reach a certain level of sponsorship to help us feel it's all worthwhile. The week arrived and everyone wanted un-realistic amounts of work completed before we disappeared into Europe for 2 weeks, so the last few days before we left were the most stressful and busiest of our careers. Friday 18th May arrived, I had about 4 hours' work to complete in the morning, then I was clear. My bike was already packed, checked, having been picked up from a service the previous day, and I had a few hours with my wife to chill and get myself ready for the challenge. Last minute checks of all my gear and relax for a while and wait for Dave. Now I'm really excited!

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 0, 18 May 2012, Home to Harwich

(39 miles, 2hrs 8 minutes on bike)

At 6 pm, Dave Loney arrived at my home in Felsham on his Ducati to ride with me over to Great Blakenham. We had a quick cuppa as he'd rushed around picking his bike up from Harleston and was a bit parched. We then rode over to Darren's with Sue & Jemma close behind in the car. When we arrived at Great Blakenham, there was already a gathering of family, neighbours & friends and soon after we arrived the bikers started to turn up. Glenn on his Ducati 999s, Stu on his Ducati 1098, Jason on his Triumph Speed Triple, Nogel on his Yamaha R1. Matt & Sharon arrived in their car. David started the long process of getting his vintage large format Gandolfi box camera set up to take a photo of us all to the delight of many and Niccie was running around supplying everyone with Tea & Coffee while Darren & I were doing last minute checks on our bikes and comm's. It was a jovial occasion, and more neighbours came out to see what was going on. We left Darren's about 7.30pm and headed off for Harwich on twisty back roads via Manningtree and met up with the ladies & children at the Mayflower Brewers Fayre for a quick pint before Darren & I left everyone and boarded the ferry. Darren was a bit concerned about the crossing as he hasn't got sea legs, and also very worried about Niccie as they'd not spent more than 2 nights apart since they were married. I have sea legs and regularly spend weeks apart from my family, so I was really up for whatever the night and the subsequent 11 days threw at us. Here begins our European adventure!

The weather was kind and the crossing smooth, so Darren was more at ease an hour into the crossing and starting to relax and get excited about the trip ahead. We had a small beer and a smoke and got our heads down to prepare for the long day to come.

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Stena-Line Harwich to Hoek van Holland overnight Ferry. We purchase the Economy rate at £98 for 2 persons including 2 bikes, one-way only. The cabin, 2 berth inside (no sea view), was an additional £41 and full breakfast was £10 each.



The leaving Reception at Harwich with Nogel, Jay, Stu, Jon, Glenn, Darren & David

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 1, 19 May 2012, Hoek van Holland to Königs Wusterhausen

(492 miles, 11hrs 0 minutes on bike)

At 06.30 we woke up and got showered before heading off for a full breakfast on board. The bacon, eggs, sausage, hash browns & baked beans set us up for a good while and we left the ferry in Holland ready to take on the world. Amsterdam was our first target and we aimed to just find a sign saying welcome to Amsterdam then take a photo of the bikes in beside it and leave, but we didn't find one and soon found ourselves in the city centre. We stopped for a quick break, took some photos and had a quick drink, then got back on the road for destination 2, Berlin. The weather was much better than we'd expected, so we both removed at least 1 layer, with the temperature being around 18C. Our route plan was to get to Germany and a bit on motorways then grab a bit of enjoyment on the quality German roads so many people had told us about, then back on motorways to catch up time. We did this, and I was glad to get off the autobahn. When you're cruising at 90mph on the autobahns, you feel like you're not moving at all. The whole world comes past you like you're standing still! It's really unnerving. As a biker I'm not used to being left in the dust by Nissan Micras and Renault box vans, but it would seem that everyone in Germany drives flat-out on the autobahn. We managed around 170 miles on proper roads, carefully planned to avoid large towns and built-up areas which would slow us down, and stopped for a roadside cuppa made from Darren's burner at a historic water tower. There was also an enclosed area adjacent with various obstacles where people were bringing their dogs to exercise them which was an amusing distraction.

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)



A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

The day was getting long and we needed to cover some miles, so we soon got back on the autobahns but were soon held up by a 4 mile tailback of crawling traffic due to an accident. We managed to filter through, hampered slightly by our wide loads, and arrived in Berlin just before dusk. We managed a few photos at the Brandenburg Gate, where I was accosted by a hen party and talked into buying a pack of sweets from the bride-to-be (apparently a tradition) and many of the rather inebriated young ladies were curiously interested in our venture and all wished us good luck as we headed off south of Berlin to Königs Wusterhausen in the dark. Filled up with fuel for the next day a couple of miles from the hotel, then arrived at the hotel too late to eat. The hotel had secure underground parking for the bikes, so we unloaded only what we needed for the night and got to our room, showered, quick chat with the families and went out looking for a restaurant, to no avail. We found a Vietnamese guy making oriental food to take-away but decided not to risk it and went back to our room for Special-K bars & Nutrigrain, washed down with a carton of orange juice & bottle of water. Quick update of the website from the netbook we had with us and bed around 01.00!

Hotel Brandenburg, 10 Karl-Liebnecht Strasse, Königs Wusterhausen, 15711 Germany, approx. 30 miles south of Berlin. Very clean, spacious room, underground parking for motorcycles, warm reception with a dry sense of humour (I think). Breakfast was very good. 74 Euros for twin room with en-suite facilities, WiFi, and secure bike parking. Continental breakfast included. Would recommend.

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 2, 20 May 2012, Königs Wusterhausen to Bratislava

(472 miles, 9hrs 37 minutes on bike)



We got up around 0700, had a lovely continental breakfast of muesli with fresh fruit followed by bread, cheese & local cooked meats with coffee and grapefruit juice. Loaded the bikes up, checked-out then went off in search of a postcard or souvenir of some kind from the few local shops, but no. We thought the local railway station may have such a thing and gave up after they hadn't. We'd spent too much time already and we hadn't left the village! Motorway to Dresden, then cross into Czech Republic direction Prague. Just south of Dresden we had the most incredible view over Dresden after going through the most amazing stretch of propped motorway & tunnels. We stopped and rested taking in the view, and had another home-made cuppa. Although we had spent a great deal of time in the saddles already, neither of us were feeling any the worse for it up to this point. The wonder and excitement of the task in hand was bigger than the task. That soon changed as we hit Czech motorways! Over a distance of around 180 mile we were subjected to the physical torture similar to

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

that of riding a race horse. I've never ridden a race horse but I can imagine the likeness. The motorway was made of pre-cast concrete slabs. They didn't meet well at the ends and each one was slightly dished. The overtaking lane was slightly better than the inside lane so we spent most of the time there, but we literally needed to slow down to enter the inside lane. I was seriously stressed and concerned for my top-box plate which is plastic and definitely over-loaded. As I rode I put my hand round and felt how much it was oscillating and felt it couldn't possibly last the stretch of motorway we needed to cover. The strain this motorway put on us meant we stopped twice instead of the once planned, and we lost a lot of time. This also meant that we couldn't do



the stretch of single carriageway we had planned so we missed the visit to the 'Church of Bones' which was disappointing. We soldiered on to Prague but hadn't enough time to find the centre or take photos due to diversions &

road-works. Our satnav hadn't accounted for road closures so skirted it and set off for Austria & Vienna. We managed a mixture of roads between Prague & Vienna, and saw no sign of any passport control at the border. The roads and scenery improved somewhat once in Austria and we started to make better progress. We arrived at Vienna in the rush-hour and traffic was virtually at a standstill. Desperate not to lose too much time, we filtered a bit, set up the go-pro and winged it as close to the centre as traffic allowed before setting off for Slovakia and Bratislava. Vienna & Bratislava are not far apart, so we tried to use A-roads for a while, but soon found ourselves back on motorways and arrived in Bratislava around 8.30 pm. Unfortunately, I had an early version of the route loaded in my Garmin, which I later discovered how

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

to use properly, and it took us to a hotel we were no longer staying in. We programmed the address in to Darren's i-Phone TomTom Europe which took us to where we thought we should be..... then re-checked and hunted around a while, before asking someone. We finally found the hotel in a pedestrian-only zone and discovered the Underground secure parking they advertise is actually 600m walk from the hotel and we checked in, parked our bikes, lugged all our gear to the hotel, and showered, checked in with the families, by which time it was almost 11pm. We managed to get fed though as the city centre was buzzing with activity. Slovakia had played Russia in the Ice Hockey World Championship Final and the streets were filled with people donning the team shirts, singing, chanting, blowing horns, and drinking. We had a pizza in a restaurant in the centre and wandered around the beautiful plazas and streets before getting back to the hotel, updating the website and getting our heads down at around 01.45.



A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)



Art William Hotel, Laurinská 17, Bratislava, 82108, Slovakia. Very highly appointed hotel, very spacious room with opulent en-suite facilities, WiFi, and helpful friendly staff. 70 Euros for twin room with breakfast included. We paid an additional 10 Euros for parking our bikes in a secure underground carpark approx. 500 – 600m from the hotel. I would recommend this hotel, but the fact that the entrances are in a pedestrian only zone with the inability to drive or ride to the hotel could be a drawback under some circumstances.

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 3, 21 May 2012, Bratislava to Ljubljana

(421 miles, 8hrs 31 minutes on bike)

Got up a little pie-eyed and with the Czech motorway still heavy on our arses, packed our gear up and went for breakfast. Same again – muesli with fruit then meats & cheeses with bread, coffee & orange juice. Checked out at reception and the concierge told us we could bring our bikes to the front of the hotel. So we left our stuff in reception, collected our bikes and brought them back to the pedestrian zone where a policeman stopped us. We couldn't take them to the hotel, and it was double yellow line at the entrance, so he was suggesting we ride off and lug our gear! Fair play to Darren though as he wouldn't take "Go-away!" (in Slovak) for an answer and gesticulated for 10 minutes and finally got the copper to let us wheel our bikes on foot to the hotel. We loaded our bikes up, wheeled them back to the road and set off on our way, but lost around an hour in the process! We rode out of Bratislava and headed south for Hungary & Budapest on their A-roads which are a bit like our B or 'By' roads, but it was nice to be off motorways. The scenery was different.... Fairly flat, un-interesting and every other building looked like a prison or concentration camp. The rural areas looked extremely impoverished with many concrete buildings & houses and 'shacks' and it kind of reminded us of Russia. At the Hungarian border we were asked for our Passports for the first time, and crossed the river Danube again to be greeted by a Tesco Supermarket. This was a bit of a shock, and we were ready for a break, so we stopped and bought some provisions, had a drink before heading for Budapest. A few miles of A-road before hitting the E60/E75 motorway which took us all the way into the Capital, where we parked up, had a little wander around, took a few photos & Go-Pro. The buildings in the centre of Budapest were very grand with many of them overlooking the Danube, or around large squares. The architecture and opulence of some of the key structures spoke of a

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

wealthy history but not far from the centre the story changed dramatically. Short break then back on the road to Croatia and Zagreb. We did a 92 mile stint on the M7 out of Bratislava before we stopped on the edge of Lake Balaton, which seemed to stretch for ever, re-fuelled ourselves and set back on our way to Croatia again on the M7. The motorway was fine and reasonably scenic and bendy. The Hungarian landscapes were a little more friendly looking than Slovakia, with mainly farming between towns, still a great deal of apparent poverty, but much more cheerful faces. What we both noted was the fact that most young women in Hungary, Croatia and to a certain extent Slovakia were stunning. Maybe we've been away too long, but we couldn't help but notice the high level of beautiful looking women. When we arrived at the Croatian border, we were stopped and asked for passports, but they waved us on as soon as they saw they were EU passports and they weren't checked. We had been a little concerned about passport control & Customs crossing the former Eastern Block countries, but we needn't have been. On to Zagreb. We had a fuel stop scheduled just in Croatia, but we couldn't find it so went off motorway to look for one, stopped, fuelled up and had a snack & drink and a good break before heading back to the motorway and on to Zagreb. We arrived at the outskirts of Zagreb and stopped to discuss whether or not to go into the centre. It was pretty busy, but we agreed we'd missed out yesterday



A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

with Prague and Vienna, so we'd try and get into the centre. We managed to park up right in the middle, illegally and Darren had a word with a traffic warden who allowed us to park for a couple of minutes. We were there around 15-20 minutes but we got away with it. Darren got his camera out and we had a drink & a short break before joining the masses trying to leave the capital. Next destination: Slovenia & Ljubljana. Got out of the capital and soon came to border with Slovenia, where again they were only interested in seeing the colour of our passport and we parked up for a quick drink and puff. Then it started to rain quite heavily so we pulled on our rain suits for the last stint to Ljubljana by motorway. The weather got pretty wet and it was getting late, so we were happy to be on the motorway. We stopped for fuel, where we met Roland from Austria. He was on his way home from having ridden down to Macedonia via Italy on his Yamaha Ténéré 660 and came back via Montenegro, Bosnia – Herzegovina and Croatia. It was quite late and he was hoping to get home that night, and he had another 500km to cover. I hope he made it. We exchanged chat about our trips and he told us he would have done 2500 miles in 2 weeks when he gets home. It was getting quite hilly and the scenery was unfolding before us, and we were riding into mountains and lush green wooded hills. The motorway became more and more interesting as we approached Ljubljana, as it became twisty and very hilly. We found our B&B easily



A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

and managed to check-in, unload the bikes, clean up and get down for some food. The B&B was an Inn so there were many people eating & drinking there and there was a real 'local' atmosphere in the place. We logged on to the WiFi and updated the website while having dinner, then checked the status of the 'Stelvio Pass' which we feared would be closed. The news was that it would be closed until 1st June at earliest. We also learned there had been an earthquake at the top of Lake Garda so we planned an alternative route then got our heads down at around 00.30.....an early one!

Hotel Katrca 1905, 26, Rozna Dolina C.1, Ljubljana, 1000, Slovenia. More of an Inn than a hotel but perfectly pleasant, clean and well decorated. 75 Euros for twin room including breakfast. Parking was outside but off-road and there were locking chain eyes cast into the hard standing for motorcycle security. Room was very spacious and clean with en-suite facilities. Would recommend.



A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 4, 22 May 2012, Ljubljana to Sondrio

(347 miles, 7hrs 58 minutes on bike)

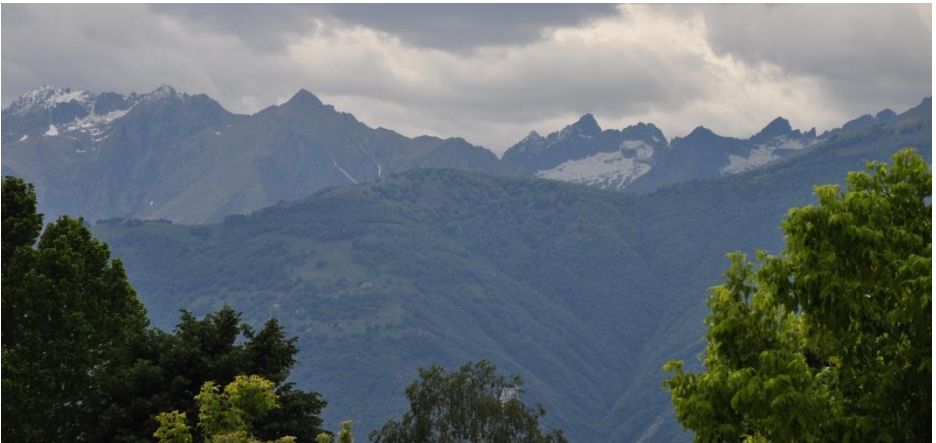
We had our breakfast, which was limited as we were up before the kitchen was properly open, and packed up and left fairly early. We tentatively aimed for the city centre, but soon got lost and decided to head off for Italy. We made a concerted effort to spend a bit of time on Slovenian country roads as we'd been so impressed by the beautiful countryside, and we'd been robbed of a ride on the Stelvio Pass! It was raining so we set off in our rain gear. We used a short stretch of motorway from Ljubljana, then off into real countryside. The little mountain passes in Slovenia were great. The Rain gear soon came off and the roads dried up and we were in biking paradise. At last we were riding roads we'd travelled so far for. The stretch from Ljubljana to the Italian border was a winding stretch I will remember for a long time to come. We really didn't know what to expect of Slovenia, but we were more than pleasantly surprised. Although immensely enjoyable, the mountain roads took a chunk of the morning, and our alternative route to Sondrio took us south rather than up into the high peaks, so we had a longer distance than previously planned, so once in Italy we got on the motorways at Palmanova and headed for Venice, Padua, Verona, skirting the bottom of lake Garda to Brescia. All places I long to visit, and almost cried as I



A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

passed, though the scenery was becoming quite distracting. The mountains visible in the background along the stretch of motorway was bringing a smile to our faces and Darren was pleading with me to stop for photos along most of it. Off the motorway at Bergamo and into the countryside and the views got better and better and better. From Lecco to Morbegno along the edge of lake Como was nothing short of stunning. 20+ miles of tunnels, but in-between, snippets of teasing alpine views and long stretches of amazing scenes of snow-capped mountains, alpine buildings and sky-blue lakes. The ride from Morbegno to Sondrio along the flat glacial valley surrounded by an awesome drapery of rocks and mountains had us pinching ourselves to make sure we weren't dreaming.



The hotel in Sondrio was difficult to find and we asked for directions, got them wrong and finally googled it on Darren's TomTom. We arrived, checked in, parked the bikes in the secure underground garage and went through the usual routine of checking-in with family, shower, and head out for something to eat. The view from our room was amazing, overlooking the river (stream) with a view both up into the mountains and down into the valley. We were too late to eat in the hotel but luckily our host was the Godfather, and he led us out the back of the hotel through alley-ways and corridors to a bar where we could

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

get a drink and showed us where we could get a good meal. We reflected on a great day's riding, and the wonder and delight of this stunning landscape. Surely the rest of the trip would be an anti-climax. And tomorrow we would have to re-tread the last 40 miles of today which was a blow! Got back to room, updated the website and heads down around 00.45.

Hotel Europa, 27 Lungo Mallero Cadorna, Sondrio, 23100, Italy. Although a well established building with history enjoying close proximity to Sondrio Centre, it was very modern in décor and beautifully presented. Underground garage parking for motorbikes and very friendly, helpful reception. Spacious room with amazing view. 96 Euros for twin room including breakfast and secure parking. Highly recommend.



A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 5, 23 May 2012, Sondrio to Nimes

(451 miles, 9hrs 24 minutes on bike)

We got up packed up our gear and had breakfast as usual, checked out and loaded our bikes up and left around 08.30. Having been concerned about taking the same route out of Sondrio, we were delighted that the views were completely different. Pointing in the opposite direction and with the sun low from the east put a whole new perspective on the ride. At the bottom of Lake Como at Lecco we headed South to Monza and skirted Milan, fuelled up and had a break.



Then off to skirt Turin and then back into the mountains for some fun. We headed on motorway north west from Turin and then took a fantastic mountain pass from Oulx in Italy to Gap Aerodrome in France. It was only around 80 miles, but was surely the most amazing 3 hours riding of my entire biking experience. Incredible scenery of lakes, mountain chateaux, small villages perched on hillsides, Snow-topped

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

mountains, and very twisty roads with shear drops. Awesome! On, then, to Aix-en-Provence, Salon-de-Provence, Arles and ultimately Nimes, all via Auto-Route. This is where I managed to lose Darren for the first time.



We found ourselves taking a tight curved slip-road, from the motorway, in different lanes and it took us a few seconds to ascertain who was in the correct lane but it was too late. The slip-road split into 2 and I was launched on to the motorway again. Being so close to our destination I was so sorely tempted to stop and push my bike back up the slip to the split, but seeing how fast and erratically the cars and trucks were coming round there I headed off to the next junction 5 miles, slipped through the central barrier at the pèage and shot back to the previous junction joining a

smirking Darren in the hotel carpark! There was no secure garage for the bikes tonight so we unloaded the bikes completely and then found our room was about ½ kilometre walk from reception! The hotel was the least impressive to date, and the staff at reception were no more than adequately helpful. We checked in and hit the same routine, before coming down to eat. At reception we had been told we could

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

order food up to 10pm, and as we were on the drag, I left Darren in the room at 9.50 and went to the restaurant to order. They told me they were closing so I had a little discussion with them and beckoned them to the receptionist who told me 10pm, so they reluctantly served me. The meal arrived around the same time as Darren, and we ate, had a quick beer before heading up to our room, the pokiest one yet, update the website and heads down. I won't be recommending the Best Western Nimotel in Nimes.....

Best Western Nimotel, 152, Rue Claude Nicholas Ledoux, 30900 Nimes, France. A rather basic hotel more suited to the large group or budget business user than for pleasure. I'm sure it would cater well for family gatherings and conferences, but I will not be staying there again. 88 Euros for twin room (very compact) with en-suite shower /WC, adequate furnishings and very ordinary décor. Food was disappointing for France and the parking was outside in main car park with no special facilities for securing motorcycles.

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 6, 24 May 2012, Nimes to Valencia

(461 miles, 8hrs 58 minutes on bike)

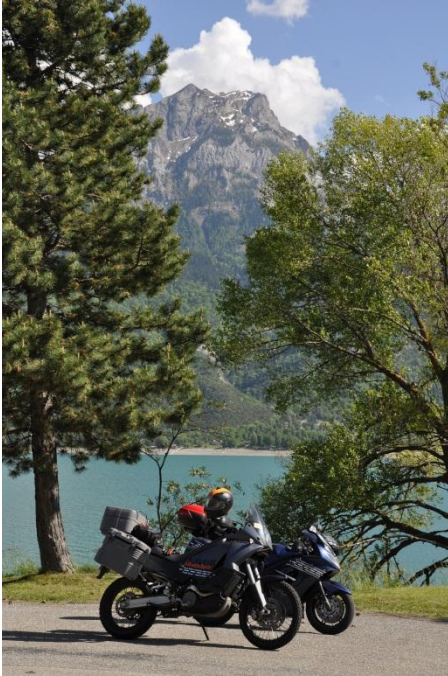
We got up, packed up our gear and headed off the long walk to the breakfast area, found ourselves in the wrong area and were greeted by “What do you want!?” by the nice gentleman from the restaurant the previous evening. He ushered us off to the correct area where there was an un-appealing array of un-inspiring food to help ourselves to. So much for the culinary delights of the country I love so much! We ate, loaded the bikes and headed to Valencia via Montpellier, Beziers where we stopped for fuel & a break. It was clear that the temperatures and the past 5 days were going to take their toll on us today. We were both showing signs of fatigue, soreness and aches already and melting in the heat.



A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Next 90 mile stint took us past Narbonne and into Spain along the edge of the Pyrenées. Again the views were awe striking, from beautiful coastal views of the Mediterranean and into the mountains



brought a new vision of wonderment. At Figueres we left the motorway for a while and headed into the mountains across to Olot and down to Manlleu, to re-join those lovely duals, headed for Manresa, Martorell, Vilafrance del Penedès, Tarragona, which was quite a good stretch of winding bendy hilly motorway giving us glimpses of Sea, mountains and undulating terrain. It was here we discovered my Sat-nav faux-pas as we realised that my route to Valencia included a 90 mile ferry trip, included in the mileage but not the time, so we had 2 more hours riding than we had accounted for.

We went from wondering which roads to use to kill time, to planning the shortest-fastest route which included tolls. The rest of the day would be a test in the heat and we'd be arriving at our hotel late again! This realisation played heavy on us both as we were already beat with tiredness, fatigue and heat. So we jumped on the AP-7 Toll motorway down the coast. After the next fuel stop, both feeling pretty well drained, I failed to do up my seat-pack flap, and 3 miles down the motorway after that, Darren had to duck to miss my bike documents as they flew out of my bag and off into never-never land. He flagged me down and I walked back about a mile to look for them, then back to the bike on the other side of the road, but I didn't find them. That was an

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

added worry I could well do without, and didn't relish the idea of being stopped and unable to produce my MOT, V5 or Insurance certificate. We then covered the 160 miles in 2 stints arriving at our hotel around 10.15, and while I checked-in I found that we were too late to eat again! We moved the bikes from the pavement outside the hotel to the underground secure parking and made our way up to our room. We were both pretty shattered so when we'd cleaned up and spoken to our families, we decided not to go out hunting for food and we grabbed some water, Nutrigrain bars and Special-K bars and hit the sack. The website can wait a night! We desperately needed a good night's sleep if we were to make Torreguadiaro in the increasing heat tomorrow!

Silken Puerta Valencia, 28 Cardenal Benlloch, Valencia, 46021 Spain. Very salubrious hotel, fairly close to centre of Valencia with huge reception area and a grand feeling of spaciousness. The en-suite twin room was spacious, immaculate and nicely decorated with wifi available and lift to all floors & garage close by. Garage was underground, secure and catered for cars, motorcycles and small vans. 69.75 Euros for the room, 10 Euros for parking and breakfast was additional at 14 Euros a head for full breakfast. I would happily stay here again.

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 7, 25 May 2012, Valencia to Torreguadiaro

(453 miles, 7hrs 46 minutes on bike)

Breakfast wasn't included in the room, for the first time, so we decided not to bother. Darren needed fuel so we decided to get on the road early and grab a snack at the services. We left the hotel around 08.30 and got onto the A-7 non-toll motorway, then stopped & fuelled up.



Quick espresso, litre of water, can of Redbull ® (Other stimulant drinks are available) and a manky looking sarnie and we're back on the road. Today's mission is to get there, easiest, quickest way possible. We knew it would be a struggle, so we were communicating regularly to check each-other's mood and state, and stopping whenever either felt it was required. We managed 80 – 90 mile stints, drank plenty of water at each stop, and the motorways were bendy enough, up and down enough and scenic enough to keep us interested, so all was going pretty well. We were both struggling terribly at times but working through it and we were taking lengthy breaks as well after each long ride. Once we'd passed Malaga, almost at Marbella by just after 6, we opted to take the coast road to save pennies over time, and also we were both flagging and needed to reduce the pace and keep ourselves alert. Only the finishing post was keeping us awake by now and the thought of seeing our wives. Although painfully slow progress in the last stretch, compared to the rest of the day, we managed to stay up-right

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

and arrived at Danii's parents' place at about 7.20pm to a rapturous applause, and a wonderful reception. Baked, knackered, parched, aching but full of self-satisfaction and pride of what we'd managed to achieve, and most certainly ready for the celebratory beer (after a couple of litres of water). It was great to see our wives, for Darren to see his children, and for me to finally meet Danii and her family, who had organised for us to eat down at Sotogrande that evening. Danii had all her friends coming round for her birthday party at home. Frankly, at that moment, all I really wanted to do was go to bed! We both felt a bit better for taking a shower and freshening up in some light clean clothes and went out for the evening. I was completely finished after 2 small beers and desperately needed to eat before I passed out, but having eaten and relaxed a while, I was able to enjoy the evening and reflect kindly on the past 7 days with a beaming grin. 3200miles through all terrains, fantastic roads, crap roads, views to die for, areas you'd kill to leave, great camaraderie, great humour, and all this with no dramas. We just needed to get home now, but not for the next couple of days. We have a weekend to enjoy with our wives and the big fund-raising party tomorrow night! Bring it on! Sue and I were staying in a hotel just outside Sotogrande, so made our excuses at about midnight and headed off to our room.



A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 8, 26 May 2012, Danii's Charity Party Day

I awoke around 10.30 which was a real treat! We got showered and dressed and with no time pressure we packed up a pannier bag with a change of clothes for the evening and wandered into Torreguadiaro. We stopped at a bar Sue had used the day before and had breakfast with a cup of coffee each, then I had another, and Sue had a cold drink before we made contact with Darren, who was staying at Danii's parents' house. Darren said he and Andy (Danii's father) would drive down and pick us up. The walk up to their house is about a mile at 45 degrees, quite a climb, and as it was already around 28 C we welcomed that offer. They came and joined us for a drink and then we went up to their house for the rest of the day / evening.



There was much to do in preparation for the party so we all mucked in and did what we could. I checked over my bike and was satisfied everything appeared to be okay and gave it no more thought for the day. I managed a dip in the pool for a short while and did some sorting of photos videos, etc., showed them to all those interested, spoke about the trip to a few people who enquired, then got ready for the evening. There was a band setting up by the pool, and a paella team setting up in the parking area. They brought pre-prepared fish, meat & vegetables with them and made 3 huge

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

paellas in 5ft diameter pans over an olive wood fire. It was a spectacle and smelled and tasted divine. Sue and I had been asked to do the bar, which we gladly agreed to, not knowing many people there, and from around 8pm, people arrived by the dozen. The theme of the party was purple. The whole house & garden were decorated in purple & lilac balloons with purple ribbon and almost everyone was wearing at least a bit of purple. Everyone had a great time and Sue & I really enjoyed serving everyone as we got to know many people we probably wouldn't have otherwise. The celebrations went on into the night and the event itself raised over 2000 Euros which is amazing. Sue and I left around 2-ish and walked down the hill to our hotel. It was still around 25 C and we were both pretty shattered, as well as a little bit pickled!



A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 9, 27 May 2012, Rest Day!

We were woken by the bin men this morning, around 06.20. I managed to get back to sleep for a couple more hours but Sue didn't. Showered, dressed, checked out of the hotel around 10.00am and strolled up the road for breakfast at the same place, 'Luxor' bar – restaurant by Maria, where you'll receive a lovely smiley reception, excellent food at great value for money and a wicked *caffe-con-leche*. Communicated with Darren and he came down to collect us in the Mini convertible.

Back at the ranch, we helped as much as was needed to clear up and get the place back to normal, though most of it had been done long before we arrived. The whole family were planning to go to the beach for a few hours before Darren's wife & children and Sue had to fly back to UK. Neither Sue nor I were up for that so we asked if we could hang around at the house. I then discovered I had a flat tyre. Pressure was 9



PSI, so I investigated to discover a small nail in it. I must have picked it up towards the end of day 7. I also checked my rear pads as I knew they were getting low and Sue had brought a spare set out for me on the plane. I had a bead-type puncture repair kit with me so got that sorted, then tried to re-inflate it using the air capsules we had brought with us. After 3 capsules, the pressure was only up to 17PSI and I needed 42. I

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

had another 5 capsules but was reluctant to use them as we may need them en-route, so I found a bicycle pump in their garage and brought it up to 40PSI, and then had a hunt around for tools to change my pads. The tools required weren't in the kit we'd brought with us, so hunted around Andy's garage but found nothing suitable. I tried to remove the callipers with the tools from Darren's kit but the 14mm A/F open ended spanner was not up to the challenge. I would have to use the rear brake sparingly tomorrow! The crowd had a great time down at the beach and arrived back only 20 minutes before Darren needed to set off with our families to Malaga Airport, so we said our goodbyes and off they went.

Darren got back around 8.15pm and decided he wanted to prepare his bike that evening in 'daylight' so when everyone else went down to the village to eat, he and I got our kit ready for the off in the morning. After we were happy the bikes were ready, Darren showered and we walked down to join the rest of the family and friends at the restaurant. Darren & I had a T-bone steak each which was a bit much but I was famished! Just the one beer tonight and back up the hill to bed! Early start tomorrow. We had a quick coffee, checked over our gear and documents, then hit the sack around midnight.

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 10, 28 May 2012, Torreguadiaro to San Vicente de Toranzo

(611 miles, 11hrs 16 minutes on bike)

We got up, quietly, around 06.30 and crept around, grabbed a coffee and some juice, and left around 07.30, before any other sign of life in the house. We stopped for fuel in the next village along the road towards the motorway, filled up and I pumped my tyre up to 4.5 Bar to check the integrity of my repair, before letting it down to 2.9 Bar. Although we had planned to go north via Madrid, we'd been talked into going via Seville & Jerez as the roads are cheaper, much quieter and the route is more interesting. Apparently, though the distance is almost the same, the time and cost are considerably lower. That was enough for us, and we headed for Seville. The ride past Gibraltar, and Cadiz up to Jerez and Seville was impressive with large craggy mountains and severe terrain, then we reached the high plains with miles and



miles and miles of barren nothingness which was in itself an amazing sight. We managed 240 miles with a couple of short breaks before the heat of the day came in to play. Now it was around 38 C and there was no 'air' to breathe, we decided to ride shorter stages and take shorter breaks. The next stop was just under 70 miles, and we made a meal of it. As we'd seen no rolls or sandwiches we fancied so far today, and

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

we'd left without breakfast, I noticed there were fresh baguettes for sale, so we bought some cheese, ham and a baguette and made our own lunch. Washed down with an espresso, litre of water and a Redbull®, we sat in the shade and devoured our fresh sandwiches. This clearly gave us renewed vigour as we managed to drink a tankful before we stopped again, covering 145 miles (Darren's tank full that is, I was still showing 90 miles range). We stopped at the top end of the lake by Hervás for a photo opportunity and I spoke to a French guy who was driving home from southern Morocco who told me the outside temperature was 40C, but it had been 55C in Morocco and it was 18C in the cab of his motorhome! I really didn't need to know that. Darren took some photos and we set off on our way. The next stop was for



fuel but we had left the high plains and raised our altitude for a spell, where the temperatures dropped to a freaky 4 or 5C as we were adjacent to snow covered peaks, before we came down into hilly low lands where the temperature shot up again. We literally moved from all vents open, still sweating and desperate for fresh air to all vents closed, heated grips and shivering, back to all vents open and sweating in the space of 60 miles up to just south of Valladolid. Our next fuel stop took us off the motorway a couple of miles and after fuelling we decided to continue on nice roads for a short but very welcome stretch of 20 odd miles before re-joining the motorway for around 40 miles to leave it again and

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)



head off the last 20 miles via the tightest, scariest mountain pass yet. The roads were poor quality single track roads around the mountain with the occasional length of Armco, very blind bends and we met a few vehicles coming the other way. Darren very nearly got wiped out by a Toyota HiLux, before we stopped and took the opportunity to have a look across down the valleys and take a few photos from the vantage point of this delightful and truly unexpected mountain traverse. We were only 15 minutes from our destination and soon arrived at the hotel around 10pm, where the hostess was concerned we wouldn't be turning up. She was very pleasant, helpful and when I asked her if there was anywhere nearby to eat she offered to cook us something. By the time we unloaded, cleaned up and spoke to the families, it was almost 11pm. She offered me the menu and we just asked her for something that was quick and easy for her. 15 minutes later she turned up with the biggest sirloin steaks I've ever seen, trimmed with fried garlic aubergines and a pile of chips, and a couple of beers. The hotel was excellent. The building was a large alpine looking place at the foot of a mountain, the grounds were well kept and there was a pool and many other facilities we hadn't the time to enjoy. The staff were very

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

friendly and helpful, and the food was great. Our wives appeared concerned about our crossing the following morning for some strange reason, as they seemed to know more than we did. Our overnight stop here was selected for its proximity to Santander so we had only 20 minute ride to the port in the morning. Having checked our booking info before dinner, we discovered our ferry was leaving Bilbao at 09.30, not Santander. OOPS! How the hell did that happen? Oh well, re-route to Bilbao which was around 90 minutes away. No breakfast in the morning then! We updated the website after dinner and went to bed around 01.30.



Hotel Posada del Pas, San Vicente de Toranzo, 39699 Spain. A beautiful hotel in a stunning setting with many facilities and a very warm, friendly atmosphere. I didn't want to leave this place. The décor although a little unusual with polished copper ceilings in corridors, had highly polished wood floors and very grand woodwork, staircases,

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

balustrades, and was beautifully finished and decorated. The room was amply spacious, had a view up the mountain, and the facilities were very clean and in excellent condition. I cannot speak highly enough of this hotel. 44 Euros for the room (with 3 single beds), continental breakfast would have been 4 Euros each extra but we hadn't enough time for breakfast. With the 2 beers each, the sirloin steak dinner cooked at 11pm, a coffee before we left in the morning, and the room, our bill was 74 Euros. We couldn't quite fathom this and checked the bill with the hostess. I would like to say I will be staying here again except my wife hates the ferries across the Bay of Biscay!

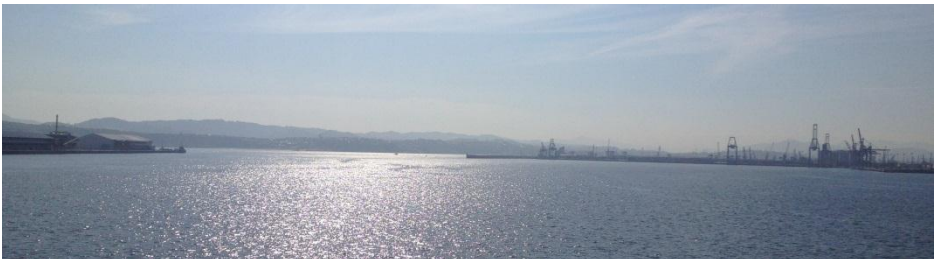
A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 11, 29 May 2012, San Vicente de Toranzo to Bilbao and into the bay of Biscay

(67 miles, 1hrs 27 minutes on bike)

We got up pretty early and were concerned we wouldn't be able to get out of the hotel. I lugged my pannier bags, seat pack and top-box bag down to reception and went back to help Darren after being unable to exit the building. When we came down with his gear, the hostess arrived and asked us if we would be having breakfast. We accepted a coffee and loaded our bikes before taking a brief breather and coffee. We left for Bilbao up into the hills again on lovely B-roads, picking up the motorway not far short of Santander. I have driven this stretch of motorway around 15 years ago but had forgotten what a great stretch of road it is. It's not often you find such an enjoyable motorway with almost hair-pin bends, up and down with steep gradients, excellent sea views with bays and bridges over estuaries. The last taste of Spanish duals would be a fond memory. We arrived at Bilbao docks in plenty of time and joined the queue for the ferry at around 09.20. We had a fairly long wait at the dockside, as they were running behind schedule, and we managed to chat with other bikers and compare our ventures in Europe. Once they started loading the ferry, the bikes were fairly early on the loading order as they were packed in a void in the bow on deck 1 so after the bikes had been shoe-horned in to the tightest possible space and strapped down, it was clear we would be last off, as the lower car-deck needed to be empty before we could leave. We managed



A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

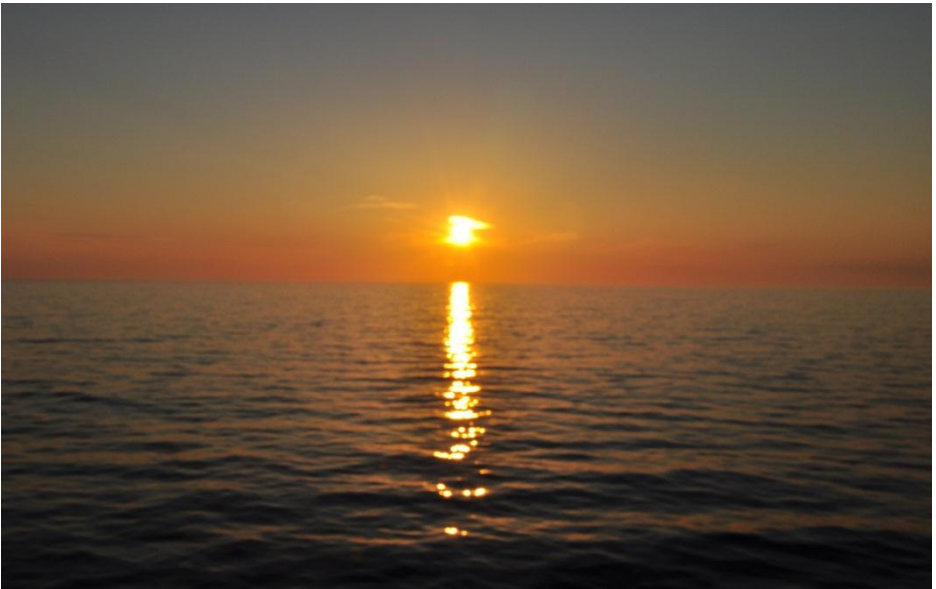
to grab ourselves some breakfast on the top deck, in the sunshine near the pool, and washed it down with latte coffee before exploring the vessel and all its wares. We hadn't left the harbour yet and Darren was glad to have eaten before hitting the waves. It was a very clean boat with 1 restaurant, a café, and a food-bar, 1 shop, 3 bars and a pool. I bought a note pad in the shop and sat down to write a log of the trip, asking Darren questions as I worked through the days. We had a quick walk out on deck when the boat started moving, but came in as Darren was starting to feel a bit apprehensive of the swell and rocky journey to come. After a couple of hours of writing my log, Darren disappeared for ages and I found him chatting to 4 bikers from Cardiff. Carl, Mark, Geoff & Steve had all been riding round the Pyrenees for 10 days, from Bilbao to French Mediterranean to Andorra to almost Barcelona and back up to Bilbao. It sounded great. Ride around until you've had enough or you like the look of somewhere, find a hotel, go out and eat, have several beers, crash down for the night, get up when you like and do it again the next day.....for 10 days. Not quite like our fixed destinations which we needed to make or would have slipped our schedule, feeling more knackered each day. I think they got the balance right, but then they weren't trying to raise £5k for good causes, but having a well-earned break. They were a great bunch of lads though and they kept us amused for hours with stories of their businesses and antics. They even came and found us after dinner and donated £20 each to our cause having discussed our crazy whistle-stop trip over their meal. Top men! GoPro? Who needs a GoPro when you can stick your iPhone 4s to your front fork or number plate with duct tape? That's what Carl did, and I have to say there were some impressive videos of their rides around the Pyrenees. We'd been out on deck a few times for a smoke and we wondered when it would get rough as the sea was like a mill pond. There was literally nothing more than ripple out there, even as the sun set, we couldn't quite believe how calm it was. We decided we were quite peckish at about 10.30, so just

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

managed to grab something from the food bar before it closed, and get a pint before the bar closed. It was fun seeing Darren eat a salad with coleslaw and shredded fruit and veg with his fingers..... I had a sandwich, boy we know how to live it up! Time had run away with us on our lazy day on the ferry and we hit the sack around midnight.

Brittany Ferries, Bilbao to Portsmouth, 2 adults, 2 motorbikes, 1 large 2/4 berth inside cabin, £323



A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

Day 12, 30 May 2012, Portsmouth to Home

(176 miles, 3hrs 30 minutes on bike)

We messed up our times the night before as Darren put his iPhone clock back instead of forward, so we got up at 5am instead of 7am. We didn't realise this however until we'd freshened up and packed away our gear before walking up to grab a coffee. There was no-where open and it dawned on us, so we headed back to the cabin for another hour's kip. Gear all ready to go, we went up for another coffee at around 7.45 then made our way to get our stuff and head down to deck 1. We were pretty convinced we had the correct stairway, but it only went down to deck 3. After wandering around lugging our gear for 10 minutes up and down deck 3, unable to find a way down, we went back to stairs G, went up a deck and found another stair G adjacent which took us down to deck 1! Not a great start! We loaded our bikes in the confines of the sardine can which was the bike park, and of course 30 other bikers were trying to do the same, so it took a little time & patience to prepare them for disembarkation but we got there in the end, then waited for all the cars to clear before turning the bikes around and riding them up and out of deck 1. We cleared customs & passport control in no time at all, and made our way to the exit where we stopped and discussed the route home. We decided to get to the A3 and head up to M25, round to Dartford Crossing and up the A12. Both of our fuel lights were on, and I needed more air in my tyre, so we'd be stopping soon for a spot of breakfast and fuel & air. We hadn't travelled far up the A12 when a couple of guys in a layby were leaping around waving their arms at us. It was Matt & Nigel! Our biking buddies had ridden down to meet us off the ferry. We were made-up! They'd left at 5am to come down and ride home with us. What a fantastic surprise. We had a brief chat and got back on the road to the next services where we sorted our bikes out and all sat and had breakfast, spilling tales of delight & woe from the past 4000 miles. We rode back to Darren's and had a cuppa and

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

smoked our 'fat lady' cigar in celebration of having achieved what we'd set out to do! 4000 miles in 9 days. A challenge we set ourselves, and a challenge it certainly was. One we will not be attempting again!

Editor's Note: when I got to this point I wanted to know how Danni was faring, so asked Jon for an update. His reply:

In November 2012 she was clear of any trace of cancer. In early 2014 she was diagnosed with juvenile leukaemia and following more treatment, put on a list for bone marrow transplant. Her brother donated bone marrow in mid 2014. She graduated at Leeds University last year. Tough kid, one of the most grounded young ladies you could ever meet.

[*Link to Danni's charity*](#)

A European Mad-Venture

By Jon Jamin (Jammy) with Darren Stevenson (Del)

And now we're Home

What do we take from the trip?

We both enjoyed the Trip, without any question of doubt. It was an amazing tour of some of Europe's beautiful regions and landscapes. We've been able to see some fantastic scenery, landmarks, buildings, and will always be able to look back on them with fondness, wearing a grin. We also managed to nearly see so much more, frustratingly close to some of the places we long to visit. Riding so close to so many destinations on our wish list, with not enough time to visit them was as challenging as the endurance of covering so many miles in so little time. We try not to dwell on that too much. From a technical point of view, we discovered that the radio & communication system, although we managed to make it work one way or another most of the time, was sadly lacking and we should have perhaps bought the more expensive Kenwood radios. I should have done more homework learning the functions and features of the Garmin navigation which would have made a few of the routes less complicated and avoided confusion between us. Our bikes were certainly up for the job but the heavy loading over the rear of mine seemed to generate a substantial amount of vibration at speeds in excess of 80mph, which put unnecessary load and fatigue into my wrists. My throttle lock was a godsend, and although I've taken a bit of stick for it, I wouldn't attempt another long trip without one. The ability to rest your right hand & wrist for short periods without losing pace was an absolute must-have with the level of vibration I was feeling through the bars at 85mph plus. I learned that you mustn't leave your Garmin mount exposed to rain. It *will* stop communicating until it has thoroughly dried out and that took 2 days to work reliably again. Although the navigation was working fine, I couldn't hear it or my music on it. I started out with a pair of Pirelli Angel ST's with around 2k miles on them, and the rear was squared off to around 40mm at the end of the trip, so I have replaced it even though it probably had another 2k miles in it. The front looks like new. I have a Scottolier so the chain is still in good shape. All in all, we had a great time. Aches and pains and tiredness beyond comprehension have all gone away and we're left with the good bits. The laughter, the sights, the fantastic roads, and a long list of places we want to go back to and do properly next time.