

5 go mad in Austria.

escape v. 1. get free of restriction or control by fleeing or exertion.
2. get clear away from.

Last year (2006) in what my family and friends called a "late life crisis" (my 50th birthday) I packed up my BMW R1200GS and headed off to the Alps in search of paradise and no I didn't come home with a Bounty, I came back to N. Ireland after 2 weeks away with an exhausted bank account, 30 of the major Alpine passes covered in 4,000 miles and a very, very wide smile.

This smile was so obvious to my biking colleagues in the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service that most of them wanted in on the next trip, so when I bumped into Klaus Stubenbock at the Motorcycle Show in the N.E.C. in November 2006 it seemed too good to be true.

Klaus looked like a hyper Pixie in Austrian traditional Lederhosen at his stand in the touring section of the Show and quickly convinced me that there was a better way to see the Alps on a bike than riding my own all the way there and back as well as being a lot more cost and time efficient (It had cost me over £700 and 3 days riding each way to get to Austria from N. Ireland on my own bike).

After talking it over with my workmates and costing it all out, 5 of us took the plunge in February and booked our flights from Dublin to Friedrichshafen in Southern Germany with Ryanair for the 2nd week in September. Job Done!! That was the easy part - the hard part was waiting patiently for the next 7 months to get there.

So after working our way through the alleged summer of 2007 we boarded our flight out of Dublin at sparrowfart (0610 hrs) en route to

Friedrichshafen and freedom. After landing we were welcomed by the sight of a Zeppelin Airship manoeuvring on the far side of the airfield as it came into land. There is a Zeppelin museum at the airport which will give you a 1/2 hour flight over Lake Constance for the low rate of 200 Euro's - Cheap at twice the price, I think !

After picking up our bags we were met by Emanuel from Hotel Enzian who was to transfer us the 90 miles to Landeck in the West Tirol, arriving at 1230 hours. Before dinner that night we did the passport, driving licence and paperwork routine before being assigned our bikes. The arrangement was that we would all collectively hire 2 of Klaus's bikes (R1200GS/ Tiger 1050) for 6 days at 80 Euro's per day as well as hiring 3 out of a selection of 8 different BMW Test Ride bikes at 44 Euro's per day. This meant we would each pay 350 Euro's (£250) for 6 days bike hire with a daily limit of 350 km. (200 ml.) before a surcharge. Complicated - nah, we can cope. We also had free use of the Hotel's selection of Rukka Goretex suits, Daytona boots and Schuberth helmets. After all this intellectual stimulation we retired to the bar for much needed self-medication.

Sunday morning came bright and early which was more than we were so by 10 o'clock we were ready to roll. Kenny was on the Triumph Tiger 1050, Norman on the R1200ST, Conor on the K1200S and Paul was on the F800ST while I (Alastair) was on the R1200GS. The Hotel gave us 3 laminated mapbooks between us with over 40 different tours on them, so as this was our first day we decided to stay locally and visit the Kaunertaler glacier before heading over towards Imst and trying out the Alpine Coaster for size. This was a coaster on stainless steel rails wending its way down a 2000m slope on what seemed to be a wheeled tea tray with levers which when pushed forward allowed gravity to function while pulling the levers back slowed you to brake. Big Fun. We finished the day off by heading over to the Bindsee and Fernpass and back to Landeck.

Monday saw some of us changing bikes as planned before heading off towards Piztal where Conor planned to throw himself off a

perfectly serviceable bridge on a bungee jump. When he asked us to jump with him we all declined. Suffice it to say he screamed like a girl on the way down (as did we) while the event was recorded for posterity. After that highpoint we rode over to the Zugspitze which at 2962m. is Germany's highest mountain. The cable car took us up to the summit where we had 360 degree views for over 100 miles. Finally we went to Castle Neuschwanstein at Fussen which was the Castle used in the film Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and is also the inspiration for the Disney castles.

Tuesday morning was the only day that we had rain and began with white water rafting in the local river which was not only very cold but gave a new meaning to "spin cycle".

After defrosting we headed off to the Silvretta Stausse via the Hohalpenstrasse or High Alpine Road. This toll road was one of the best that we rode in the entire 6 days leaving us in dire need of another defrost and decompression after adrenaline overload. Superb! Then back to the Hotel via Bludenz and the Arlberg Pass.

Wednesday was to be the day we went south through the Reschenpass en route to the Stelvio Pass and Livigno. This is one of the highest Alpine Passes at 2757m. and is generally agreed by bikers to be one of the best around. Jeremy Clarkson and co. on the BBC2 Top Gear programme recently declared the road from Davos to the Stelvio via the Ofenpass to be the "Best Drivers Road in the World". I think that's just hyperbole because there are other roads in the Alps that are as good if not better. More research needed methinks. (much, much more and are there any grants available pls). Livigno in Italy has some sort of duty free status meaning shopping is good value. Bike gear - helmets, boots, leathers etc. didn't seem to be any cheaper than the UK but booze, fags, chocolate and parmesan were v. cheap - £6 for a bottle of Bushmills! Outstanding. We live close to the distillery and cant get it for that price. Cameras seemed to be OK too.

On Thursday the others went off to check out Innsbruck (44 miles away) while I had decided to head off to the Timmelsjoch on my own. This is another of the High Alpine Roads (2474m.) for which a toll is paid. It really is a racetrack with amazing views - the only disconcerting bit is the coaches coming at you through the hairpins on the racing line! There is room for all of us though and there ain't too many motorhomes or cars crawling along. The other side of the mountain as you descend into Italy needs concentration as the road surface is not to the same standard as Austria.

After that I had lunch at the top of the Jaufenpass (2094m.) which was choc a bloc with bikes while also having very few cars about. Bliss. One of the few cars to be seen on the way up the Jaufenpass was this well stuffed Dutch registered Lotus on a long sweeping corner. A colleague in another emergency service asked me afterwards had I checked the car for casualties before photographing it. No. Not until the last photo. Oops. Sorry.

The mainly German bikers about were very impressed with the Tiger 1050 that I was on that day. Much discussion ensued in mangled

Anglo/Deutsche. Sorry Triumph if I've ruined any sales for you. I also managed to fit in the Passo di Pennes (2214m.), the main road under the Brenner Pass and the Kuhtai Sattel on the way back to Landeck.

Friday was our last day and Kenny, Conor, Paul and Norman were going back to Innsbruck again in search of cheap thrills ! No that, they wanted to experience the Olympic standard toboggan run down the mountainside above Innsbruck and scare themselves silly. As for myself I was going off towards Salzburg in order to check out the Kehlstein or Eagles Nest at Berchtesgaden. This was Hitler's 50th birthday present from the Nazi Party in 1938 and was carved out of a mountain top at 1834m. in just over a year. Impressive engineering and you really hope that both the drivers and buses going up the steep and scary road have received regular and extensive servicing. No room for error here. Just Teutonic efficiency one hopes.

From Berchtesgaden I headed towards Kitzbuhel and the Thurn Pass before turning at Mittersill for the Gerlos Pass and Zell. The Gerlos Pass is another toll road masquerading as a racetrack - Brilliant road. This brought me back onto the motorway at Innsbruck which is spectacularly set in a valley or Tal below high mountains - Gorgeous.

I got back to Landeck at 7 o'clock that night having covered 584 km. or 365 miles so was liable to a mileage surcharge of 20c per km for which I had to pay 47 Euro. Ouch. The R1200R I had that day proved to be a great bike for the twisties found on the back roads coming back from Salzburg.

In summary we had a ball. The rooms were excellent, 2 bedrooms in each suite, superb food, cosy bar and a nice sauna and steam room.

Klaus's Fly/ Bike package proved to be the perfect way to see the lovely scenery and great roads of Austria. It is also a superb way to experience different bikes and decide which one is best for you. I fell hard for the R1200ST and slightly less so for the R1200R while 3 of the others are very seriously considering buying a R1200GS when they can afford it. Well Done BMW for having the confidence to allow your bikes to be used this way - it seems to me that other manufacturers are really missing a trick here that could really bolster sales. After all if bikers are prepared to spend their own money and time to travel so far to hire bikes then why not let them try your bikes at a low cost.

Finally the roads are just magic - bikes outnumber the cars on the fun roads by about 8 to 1 and while speed limits are only 80 km. on the back roads, 100km. on the main roads and 130 km. on the motorway that is fast enough to enjoy yourself. The Austrian drivers seem to take it as a personal insult to observe these limits and are usually 10 or 20 km. over. In over 1200 miles in 6 days I only saw 1 speed camera which was in a village with a 50km limit.

So how could you make it better - easy. Klaus' set up is part of a Group of 7 Biker Hotels through the Alps but not all hire bikes. He hopes next year to be hiring BMW Test Ride Bikes out of Munich so if you were able go to the Oktoberfest (Munich Beer Festival which starts in September) as well for a couple of days before or afterwards would that not be Biker Heaven? We thought so.

Did we achieve the definition of escape as listed above - Sure did.

So what are you waiting for - Klaus will be at the N.E.C. from Friday 23/11/07 till Tuesday 27/11/07.

Go tell the leather clad Pixie that Alastair sent you and book your trip - IT WOULD BE JUST PLAIN RUDE NOT TO GO

COMPACT GUIDE.

www. Hotel-enzian.com or www.motorrad-hotel.com

Nearest Airport - Innsbruck : 44mls.

Friedrichshafen :90 mls.

Munich :150 mls.

Salzburg : 160mls.

Car Hire : @ £150 - £170 per week.

We paid - £300 for 7 nights 1/2 board.

£250 for 6 days bike hire.

£90 return with Ryanair Dublin Friedrichshafen

£70 return transfer per head Friedrichshafen - Landeck

Other costs - £15 per day petrol (approx) + lunch + drinks at night.

Bike season runs Mid May to Mid October with special offers at the start and finish of the year with Ski Safari's the rest of the year.

Alastair Greer.

Captions to images

Those Images numbered in **Red** with an * are the best in my humble opinion. If other captions are needed please contact me with the image no.

034 - 037. Hotel rooms

038 - 046. Views from room balcony

***048** The 5 of us at the Kaunertaler dam. L - R: Conor
O'Kane,

Alastair Greer,

Kenny Moore, Paul Canning, Norman Pancott.

054 Gepatsch Stausee - the run off from the Kaunertal glacier.

- *069 Paul on the F800ST.
- 080 Lemming Tours.de - A German minibus seen at the Alpine Coaster, Imst. Must be one way trips only to nearest cliff !
- 082 - 103 Alpine Coaster at Imst.
- *104 - 105 Klaus with carbon fibre exhaust drinks tray - rocket fuel!
- 108 Conor's bungee platform at Piztal - 100 metres up.
- 110 - 121 Bungee!
- *120 Such elegance - and stupidity. 10 / 10 for artistic merit.
- 122 - 130 Zugspitze - views for over 100 miles over 6 counties. Wow.
- *127 Spiderman (or his over inflated ego) at 10,000 ft. No web.
- 134 - 140 Castle Neuschwanstein and Koenigschlosse at Fussen.
- 140 Silvretta Stausee.
- *148 At Silvretta Stausee, L - R: Conor, Norman, Paul, Alastair.
- 152 - 155 Reschenpass.
- 156 - 170 Stelvio pass.
- *161 Head for heights needed - Norman, Conor, Kenny, & Paul with some of the "best drivers road ever" behind says TG.
- *169 Who forgot to bring MCN. Kenny, Conor, Norman & Paul at the Stelvio Pass.
- 171 Parking sign at Hotel Enzian. No discrimination here then.
- 172 - 176 Undercover parking and facilities at Hotel Enzian.

- *177 Pixie alert - Klaus with his favourite alpine toy: K1200S.
- *178 Klaus and friends head off on tour. Be afraid, be very afraid.
- 183 Hotel Enzian from the Beer Garden.
- 184 - 192 Timmelsjoch.
- 193 - 194 Jaufenpass.
- 195 - 202 Dutch Lotus binned on Jaufenpass. The corner shown isn't that severe - honest.
- 206 - 208 Tiger and moi at the Penserjoch.
- 209 - 210 Looking down into Italy nr. the Brenner Pass.
- 212 Some Italians will build anywhere.
- 213 - 225 Kuhtai Hoh Sattel.
- 227 Emanuel and his brother Didi in the BMW marquee.
- 230 - 234 Bikes at rear of hotel.
- *234 Kenny, Paul, Norman and Conor ready for the off.
- 235 - 246 View from the Eagles Nest (1834m.) at Berchtesgaden.
- 247 Fully equipped workshop complete with mechanic - Didi.