

THE DAMBUSTERS TOUR 09

THURSDAY

We booked ages ago and now the day was here! Already we had met a handful of the group at the overnighter at Maidstone and now we were waiting at Maidstone services for the other half plus our guide and mentor for the tour, Mr Tony Dadson. Around the RV time everyone had gathered and Tony had given us our ticket info, we had a little chat about what and how we were going to proceed. No CB's, no flag waving and no riding at a sedate ** MPH so's we all keep together. I looked at the motley collection of bikes and hoped everything would be OK and we would be able to stay together!

This is who we were through my eyes.....We have the black 1800cc Goldwing, under me, me the slim suave slightly off the wall Dave, an ex pitman from oop north in Yorkshire, employed by HMP in the "free" hotel trade for the last twenty two years if you get my drift? My wife Julie was of HMP admin staff and formally of the RAF, but has now retired early to spend more time looking after Lightning, her oss

In front and back sat the likes of a Honda 900 Fire blade, with a number 46 stencilled on, meaning he feels the need for speed! Young Matt is not military but an amenable long, LONG haired student from Huntingdon and a follower of Valentino Rossi. Vocally he is the double of Neil from "The Young Ones" bless him!

Andy sat quite bald and quiet on his CBR 600, looking and observing, he grinned a lot too, giving not a lot away, a bit like a copper maybe?

Our mentor Tony Dadson rode a handsome beast in the form of a Honda CB1300 special that looked a fast S.O.B, I didn't say much at first because he looked such a thug when he took off his Union Jack helmet and stared in ones direction(ish). Looks do deceive though because he's a reet nice bloke!

Andy's dad Stuart (also bald) chugged up noisily on his bronzed Harley Davidson, a fit mature man with some reservations about his bike getting round certain bends. He was in for an arm wrenching ass puckering time me thinks! I hope he's brought plenty of skiddies!

Stuart came next with his beautiful old dark purple Kwak ZZR 1100, perhaps it was purple so the blood wouldn't show? Stu is a knight of our roads you see, in the guise of a paramedic.

An even older bike coasted to a stop, al the way from Gloucestershire with Brian and Pat Ayers on board, their ride was an original Yamaha FJ 1200 they had her from new, he says. I hope the bugger doesn't fall to bloody bits I thought mischievously! A big black 1200 Beemer roared up to an uncontrolled halt, driven by the oldest biker I have ever laid eyes on. Old Brian from deepest West country, he remembers the first Vikings and coined the original battle cry "Gerroff of moi laand" Brian was a good old boy from the west country spoke like he had marbles in his mouth, so far not one of the buggers came from God's country, Oh my god how will this lot understand me? From darn sarf too came Neil and Amanda Fuller they arrived on a plain grey Pan European with lots of gadgets bolted to it, hence he became "Gadget man", he admitted to loving gadgets, his TOM TOM never left his side and he constantly fiddled with it, his wife Amanda was a supple feline beauty with blonde hair that cascaded to her toes, the image was shattered by the ancient art of "rolling one's own" which she constantly did, yes a very practical girl our Amanda, she loved osses too so her and Julie had LOTS to chat about.

Keith the chef brought another blonde bombshell who went by the name of Susan, she introduced herself to me with a "shake hand" and a twinkle, they came on a modern grey Yam FJR called Doris. Keith was a Suffolk boy and liked a chuckle or two.

We were to meet up with another jet jockey at the terminal in the shape of Jules Ryder, a pretty fit mapping Wren (did that come out right?) on her runaway black Kwak Ninja, this was the Ninjas first sortie on the continent, Jules was a very fit focused girl who knew her own mind...except when pissed...read on folks, she always had a smile for you and very pleasant to know.

Appearing from nowhere came "The Grim Reaper" in the form of peachy bummed brunette Anna Simmons on a long red 650 Beemer, her other half Pete came last on (a working version) an Aprilla CapoNord 1000cc which had panniers, nay, steel caskets nailed to it for the carriage of beer, socks, skiddies and more beer, an imposing Druid like fellow of dubious looks, he slipped from the seat and cuddled Tony the brutish thug. Ah So! Maybe I have these two "lovelies" wrong.

I know for sure we looked and sounded like the real Wild Bunch, perhaps England's answer to Wild Hogs maybe? We certainly looked the part as we hit the M20. The Harley coughed loudly, the pocket rockets pitched in with

ominous deep bellied howling, the Pan European and mine said not much, Tonys muscle bike growled from the front as the black Aprilla at the back kept running in a Singer sower kind of way!

We settled on the undersea train for the thirty minute crossing, I had sat a few hours under the Earth's crust doing not a lot in my coal mining days so was OK with this. We were through France, Belgium and on the road to Antwerp before you could say "Zut Allores!"

It was lovely sunny morning and not a cloud in the sky as we settled into staggered pairs, Tony leading the way at the front and Pete watching our backs. Now this kind of riding I'm used to, back home I help run Sunday ride outs and tours on the continent as the back door man with my buddy leading the way for folk riding Honda Goldwings. We are known as APPY WANDERERS and are more free spirited than the normal Gold Wing types! We had a 300+ mile run with two or three stops built in. Riding those pocket rockets are no fun on long straight roads and the heat was certainly rising as morning turned to noon, much water was consumed by the knowing few, fellow riders got the idea and bought bottled water, Old Brian was making hard work of things, he had had a bad night and was ill after a fish dinner came back, we made sure he drank water and convinced him to take some of his woollies off, it was really hotting up now as the temp hit 32 degrees.

It was quite hard going and more bike kit was discarded as folk tried to stay cool, at the last stop before the Ruhr we flopped down on the grass verge, the last inch of Velcro was ripped open, fags were lit, liquid was consumed which by now was like drinking straight from a warm kettle, YUCK! Everyone's face was flushed with the heat, the baldies looked like ripe tomatoes and the ladies didn't look like ladies anymore, we resembled a half dressed horde of scavenging heathens. Neil took off his heavy jeans replacing them with lightweights, hot Amanda managed to produce several roll ups from her comfort tin, the poor lass looked so bedraggled, she had the look of a dweller from the poor end of a council estate! We were all in need of a shower and a long cool drink. I have never ridden for so long in such oppressive conditions.

We had covered over two hundred miles and had curled north eastwards skirting underneath Antwerp on the E40, passed Eindhoven and Venlo, gone just over the border and into Germany. At Duisberg, 36 degrees flashed on the gauge, we were at the start of the Ruhr section and our speed dropped to a crawl in the traffic congestion. We made slow progress between the vehicles, the temperature on my bike gauge crept towards the red rather too quickly, unfortunately the radiator is housed on the right hand side of the fairing and pretty useless in such conditions. What cretin thought that a good idea then? It was sucking in hot air from standing trucks and was soon showing 40 degrees! I need to move a bit quicker or switch off. We managed to filter and the temp held as the likes of Essen, Bochum and Dortmund slowly passed; thankfully we began to go faster and cleared the heaving mass of the Ruhr.

We soon saw our destination on the huge yellow road signs, it read SOEST 10K. Tony brought us directly(ish) to the first hotel, depositing the first group there he took us on a tour through the backstreets to the couple's hotel just a stones throw away. Bike gear was peeled from sweating bodies and sweating underwear marched under the beds to dry out. Down into the bar we went for the first of many quenching beers. Late afternoon turned into midnight as quick as a flash or so it seemed. We had crowded into an accommodating bar betwixt both hotels to dine and recall the hard days ride. Above us the skies flashed and cracked as the impending storm crept slowly over us. It's funny but when it's too hot one craves the wet and when it's wet one craves the sun! We toddled off to our beds before the unseen sodden clouds upended their load on Soest (pronounced Zorzt)

FRIDAY

Yesterdays hot run on long flat motorways seemed an age away now as we gently pushed out of Soest and headed in the general direction of Mohnesee and the Mohne Dam. Thirteen bike engines enjoyed cooler air in the early morning sunless conditions. Tony knew these parts like the back of his hand from his early biking days so knew the perfect roads to take us on. The first Dam wasn't far away, we parked up and eagerly walked to see it more closely. I had only seen old black and white photographs and the film of course. To actually stand here at the scene of such a feat of arms was quite a feeling I have to say. To stand there and imagine heavy four engine Lancaster bombers coming over the low hills less than half a mile away then to drop down to sixty feet and slow down even more as their bomb was spun up, the bomb aimer used a crude device to line up and drop the charge on target, they did this whilst being shot at by a dozen or more guns, to top it all they did it in complete darkness. I looked beyond the wall down the valley at where the water rushed and tried to imagine the scene, pretty impossible really, after watching all the false American disaster movies!

The huge destroyed section was repaired and now sits majestically across the valley, I tried to look exactly where the breach was but couldn't, in fact the dam looks quite a thing of strength and beauty now, with turrets and vent holes along its length, huge grey stones holding it together. The lake with its plethora of boats is now used for the pleasures of a less adventurous people.

Next was the Sorpe Dam, we didn't go in a direct route, more a meandering cruise up and down wooded valleys and through small hamlets and the occasional town, twisting and turning along perfect biking roads, we took turns to drop off as junctions and roundabouts presented themselves, with our small group the drop off system works perfectly, you just have to remember what the last man looks like and wait for him, in our case we just looked for Druid shaped Santa Claus in black on a yellow head lighted 1000cc Aprilia. We all embraced the system with confidence.

DB on the black beast began to get noticed for his erratic swooping riding style, he hung back then shot forward as though loosing concentration momentarily to close within spitting distance of the next bike. Lovely long open sweeping corners invited one to ease open the throttle and enjoy the ride, to ride those long dreamed about perfect roads. DB on the other hand headed for the white line more and more, often drifting across it for long stretches, it wasn't through going too fast that the bike drifted into the danger zone. On the odd occasion I found myself behind him I was breaking as I was gaining on him and would have undertaken him otherwise, and I am on a Goldwing remember? Then to see the overtaking manoeuvres, these proved heart stopping to say the least.

DB seems to rip open the throttle and swoop in a mad S, he rode so close to one side and swoop back again passing the vehicles in one dangerous high speed shimmy In fact after parking up on one occasion I sat on the bike and watched DB waddling and struggling, when parking up next to me he nearly backed into my fairing, only by leaning forward holding him away at arms length and shouting at him to stop did I save any damage. I did suggest perhaps a smaller, lighter less powerful bike would be the intelligent move to make upon our return to blighty, or words to that effect! I gave DB a wide berth from then on and all was well again in my world.

The rains came and visited for an hour just as we pulled into a biker stop that Tony knows, we ate lunch and watched the rain come, stay, then go away again. Fine smooth wet roads meant a slower pace through the valleys to our second destination, by the time we got there the roads had dried out again.

The Sorpesee is another fine place of water sports these days, many bikes had already landed so we dipped into any available space, thankfully I have the "poncy" reverse gear so parking up is ever so easy and I grin somewhat as others push and pull at their steeds. We walked down to the waters edge and round to the dam. This dam was attacked along its edge, the dam profile was of a triangle, the wide bit at the base, built up with earth and boulders with not much of the wall visible to hit so the bombs had to be dropped directly along the edge and not along the waters surface. We looked at the village church steeple on the nearby hillside less than 300 yards away, it sounds impossible doesn't it? Believe me when you look with your own eyes you can't imagine how the two Lancasters ever got close enough with their bombs in complete darkness.....but they did. This dam was damaged but not breached.

After coffee and a leg stretch It was time to head for Soest going back the way we came with a few detours here and there, we visited the really nice twisting roads for a second time. Tony began to make faster progress and I latched onto his tail, the pair of us zoomed ahead of the pack for a few miles enjoying every inch of tarmac, at adult speeds, yes we lost the group quickly but it was just one road for a long while. We slowed long before the next turn was due giving the group plenty of time to catch and reform again. One or two had raised eyebrows that night at the Goldwings exploits on the twisties. They hadn't seen or thought Honda Goldwings could twist and turn with such deftness. Like most things its practice, practice, practice and a belief in yourself and the bike you ride. The bike behaves just as outrageously with a passenger and luggage, in fact it holds the road that much better! I'll leave it to you to decide why others don't go that bit quicker! The dinner and drinks went down well that night, Saturday was going to be a free day, for us it was going to be a bimble day around the town.

SATURDAY

It just happened to be the town's 500th anniversary today and lots of medieval re-enactments were going off, Brian of Gloucester was so impressed that he asked Tony if they did this every year? Tony replied, "No, just every 500 years mate"! Soest looked relatively untouched from the 500 years shenanigans that went off around it. Plenty of the "olde worlde" housing in the centre still stood and was worthy of exploration, around the towns edge were the remains of the old wall, along this were camped the re-enactors who dressed lived and worked every day village life, it was fascinating to see.

Tony went back to the Mohne dam for the day, exploring his roads at his pace no doubt! He sent back a text that he was eating chips, so he was in heaven and doing OK I bet he really enjoying his trip along memory lanes! Pete followed Anna and rode off for the morning to find her first army home. Towns nearby used to billet our military, she was tripping down memory lane, Pete wanted to do the same but dare not in case some old frau recognized him! He thought about a visit to see his local "House of Fun"....I say his, but I really mean the wilder single warriors of the regiment OK? All the same "The Grim Reaper" took along some matches and vowed to burn the place to the ground! Needless to say Pete never strayed. Right mate?

Taking advantage of today's rest day the "singlies" contingent hit the town on Friday night out flying the flag until the early hours and so struggled somewhat in the following daylight hours. Especially Matt who looked like death warmed up. We caught fleeting glimpses of others here and there around the town, Meanwhile Jules, our mapping wren, and one of the guys went on the rampage through the late afternoon amongst the local mead and came back suitably tipsy, she even bought a fur hearth rug, she sat giddily stroking it declaring how it should be christened.

Pete and Anna arrived back at the hotel after tasting dozens of various types of mead from the medieval stalls in the nearby square Anna was quite pissed, it was so funny to hear her voice wailing up and down the octaves as she attempted to engage in long sentences! Well bugger me this was like back oop north in't pub after't shift darn't pit, aye lad! What was strange was that we could all understand each other perfectly now.

SUNDAY

Today would be a longer trip to the last dam on De Edersee, it lay about ninety miles away along some fine roads that cut through some picturesque German countryside, those rolling hills were just so inviting. First we fuelled up, always a good start when you have bikes of varied fuel capacity, from us with a two hundred and twenty mile tank to the Ninja and the 900 Blade at nearly half the range.

The morning was warming up already and promised to stay that way all day. Tony took us the long way round, at some point he will e-mail us the route he chose, but for the moment we all have just a rough idea of the way we took, he did it all by nose and memory and suited our needs perfectly, the twisting rode beckoned us, the throttles were wound back. Again, Stuart and the Harley gently pushed back their boundaries and were having great fun, in spite of his white knuckles showing her and there, well done that man! Even Anna had a mini orgasm as she briefly ground her peg and squealed out in delight!

Matt was getting in his zone as he tailed Tony through some exciting sections, I pushed the 1800 on and ground my pegs slightly here and there. We were all having tons of fun, we were aware of the dangers and rode to our capability and so concertinaed as corners of all shapes were eaten into. DB took his bike over the white line too often for his own good, a red car came the other way flashing his lights and sounding his horn. He swooped mid corner changing his line barely hanging on, "Oh for Gods sake buy yerself a fekkin bus ticket"! I said to myself.

The Druid sat even further back, black bag and red triangle at the ready! Lunchtime arrived as we rode along the waters edge twisting quickly to the left and right as we neared the dam, this was a really beautiful but busy place, parking was difficult and it was a case of get it parked where you can. Suitably parked and stripped of bike gear we made our way across the dam to lunch at the far side and marvel yet again at what had happened here over 60 years ago. The Eder dam is hemmed in by high hills and was approached by using the Waldeck Castle as a marking point, the castle sits at 1000 feet on top of a hill less than a mile away! To dive down quickly to a height of 60 feet and to slow down, spin the bomb then drop on target as they did in under 5 seconds beggars belief, it took several practice runs and several bombs but they managed to breach this dam wall too.

The ride back to the hotel was taken via the bike café again only today it was full of Sunday riders. I only saw one other 1800 Goldwing, the 50 or so bikes lined the entry road and were of all shapes and sizes. We had drinks and snacks then Tony took the team photo. We rode off soon after this and had a long ride back to the hotel, arriving in the late afternoon. It had been a good day out on the bikes, even now at this time of day it was still really warm.

Our last dinner together was fun, we altered the seating plan outside and took over the whole side ally, our servant was a nice chap who spoke really good English, Our Druid exchanged Deutch banter with him, it was all very nice. We even gave him all our shrapnel, so he had a drink or two on us, the drinks were consumed at a mature pace as we had a long ride home of over 300 miles after first crawling back through the Ruhr.

MONDAY

The last day came all too soon, we awoke at 05.30 hrs in order to eat, pack, RV with the others and be on the road for 0700 hrs, only DB thought it was a 0730 hrs start ..Plonker! The congestion on the motorway through the Ruhr wasn't as bad, neither was it as hot as the inward journey, we made fair progress approaching Venlo in Holland in good time. We took several stops after all there was no need to break any records going home eh?

Calais soon came into view as the clouds joined us and a few spits of rain hit the screens. We had a long wait at the tunnel because there had been a problem with a broken down coach on an earlier train and the back log meant we were going to be delayed; I just hate that don't you, being so close yet so far? It was mid afternoon before we tucked the bikes into the undersea train. I'm not sure I like the Eurotunnel I know it's a lot quicker but I miss the boat, the sea and the seagulls. We said our goodbyes on the train, I was sure we would meet up again at some event or other so it wasn't really goodbye.

We came out at Folkestone in bright sunshine, Neils "TOM TOM" declared hold ups on the M20, I thought otherwise, after all it's a wide motorway and we were on a motorbike! So we split from everyone. Piling on the coals we surged north, filling up at Maidstone services we saw some of the guys for the last time, we even spotted DB as he swooped in front of a car scaring the crap out of them! I hung back in a different lane before zooming by leaving him far behind.

The Dartford tunnel wasn't that busy, the M25 even less so, the M11 was transited quickly up to the A1 and we munched some pie and tea before swallowing the last 90 miles comfortably arriving home at around 19.30 hrs in the evening. I put the ticking 1800 in the garage for the night happy that we had no dramas in spite of the antics of DB! Julie put the kettle on as POOKA the 3 legged cat came to say "where's my dinner then!"

So that's that then. That was the Legion Riders Dambuster Tour 2009 care of Tony Dadson. It was well sorted, well thought out, and the weather was more than kind too! We all had a brilliant time and Julie and I made some new friends.

Dave Sharp BR3542