



Across The Alps

... or how to attend an Italian Treffen without a GL1200A by Kevin Newstead from Auchenblae, Scotland

So, having spent weeks planning for the big adventure; not only our first Treffen as Wing owners, but our first International Treffen; we were confident that we had thought of everything. Purchased a trailer, rewired it, gave it new bearings – perfect. Purchased new tent, chairs and other home comforts. Doublechecked the checklist – perfect. Service pride and joy, new brake pads all round, new front tyre, new oil filter (and oil!), change all hydraulic fluids (except clutch – Dougal, I need to see you at Ardingly!) etc., etc., – perfect. One hundred mile test run with trailer fully loaded – perfect. Insurance checked for coverage across Europe and all other documents checked – perfect.

I then had a last minute thought, 'I know it's very unlikely but what happens if my normally very reliable GL1200A gets sick while abroad?' Hmm, OK, here's the theory, I have fire insurance for my house and it hasn't burned down yet, I have life insurance and I haven't snuffed it yet (OK, OK, early days, I know), sooooo, take out breakdown insurance and I won't need it, right? OK, so many of you are now way ahead of me here, but not so quick dear readers.



The bike gets loaded on Gerrard's trailer

I call Britannia Rescue (I have a CSMA membership) and yep, they'll cover me for the rest of the year for £25. Bargain, I'll take it! All sorted, just waiting for the big day. Nice sunny day arrives, along with sister-in-law and husband who are accompanying us on Hondas but not GoldWings (give me time!).

Quick scoot down the road to the Rosyth ferry, board, get settled in cabin and head off to bar to enjoy cool drinks and hurl abuse at the very bad cabaret singers. Bar is full of Belgian Hell's Angels, Blue Angel Chapter – actually a nice bunch of blokes who had us all in stitches taking up all the gannies to dance – can't confirm if any of them took things further!

Up bright and early for breakfast then down to the deck ready for the off. Plan was to motor through to the east of France for first night's stop, one night in Switzerland, one in north Italy then onto Pratovecchio. All went well for most of the day and we were within 20 kilometres of our first stop when I noticed the temperature gauge had crept up to four bars. Now, my manual says between two and eight bars is normal but I had never seen it go above three. Well, I've been towing all day at motorway speeds and it's a lot hotter than Scotland, perhaps that's OK. We stop for fuel and I mention temperature to my brother-in-law who was a mechanic in a former life. We check the fan – no probs, water at correct level and having been sitting for about five minutes, temperature is back to two bars. Set off again. 5k down the road, temperature goes to four then five, I back off to about 70kph and watch carefully – so far so good. Another 5k and the gauge goes to seven. Pull over, switch off, fan running, five minutes later temp back to one bar, water level still OK – hmmm something definitely amiss. Limp the last 5k to the hotel and call Britannia. Right, I think, this is where I find out why it was 25 quid 'cos they didn't think I'd call either!



Have Micra – will travel!



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Nice sympathetic lady, says we'll get it recovered to a Honda garage right away, not much point says I, it's 7pm, OK she says, what time do you want the truck there in the morning? Right on the agreed time, Gerrard and his recovery truck turn up, Wing is loaded in ten minutes and were all off to the local dealer (50k away). Big problem when we get there – they are expecting me but the best English speaker among them speaks less English than I do French. Now I'm not one of these folk who expect everyone to speak my language and I do make a fair shot at making myself understood but my French does not extend to 'do you think it's the thermostat or the cylinder head gasket that's the problem', and other technical terms that Miss Birnie (my old French teacher of 35 years ago) failed to teach me (perhaps that was sixth year?). I call Brittanica and explain the dilemma – no problem t hey say, we'll put you through to Angelique (sounds promising). Turns out, Angelique is a fluent French speaking brummie – she converses with the Honda man, Frank, and relays the news. Can't get the parts for two days, he has mechanics on holidays, they are closed Mondays, etc., won't be ready for a week. Now, this is Tuesday and the Treffen finishes on Sunday. We could strip it ourselves but what if it's more serious, and we still won't make the Treffen. Brittanica lady says, don't spoil your holiday, we'll give you a hire care free of charge under your policy, go to Italy and pick the bike up on the way back.



Above : *With all the troubles behind, and a beer in hand at the Treffen.*

Reluctant decision made but probably for the best. Frank's father offers to collect my trailer from the hotel and store it until our return. Brittanica organise a taxi to take me to the nearest Avis office for the Nissan Micra; I drive it back to the hotel, load all the gear from the trailer and we are on to Switzerland.



Left : *Not your usual hotel sign!*



Great hotel in Switzerland and north Italy (Brunate) and we are now well on our way to the Treffen; just a good blast down the motorway and we're there. Now the next bit is complicated and still a mystery as to how it was perpetrated, and I'll go into details at Ardingly for whoever is foolish enough to give me a beer and ask,

Left and below : *The Italian Treffen*

'how was the holiday?' Bottom line is my bum-bag containing, amongst other things, my traveller's cheques, cash, glasses, Leather-man, mobile phone and GWEF/GWOCGB cards, was stolen near Bologna – by this time, the sister-in-law had christened me 'Lucky Eddie! Usual flurry of calls (on borrowed phones of course) to cancel cheques and





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phone. After we all calmed down and realised all the things could be replaced, Amex covered the cheques etc., insurance the rest, then all we had really lost was a bit of time.

Onwards to Pratovecchio, explain predicament to Sergio at inscription, who takes pity on my story and after some casual inquiry to determine if I knew some GWOCGB committee member names, concluded that it was too far fetched a story to have been made up. He even let me take the Micra into the compound for safe-keeping. He also arranged for Ettore, who spoke very good English, to take me up to the local Police to report the theft for the insurance. That in itself was an experience, we were ushered into the Commandants office and he personally took the report. He explained, through Ettore, that Italy had a lot of trouble with immigrants especially in service areas. He said he was sorry that this had happened in his country, but he was glad it hadn't happened in his town!

Great Treffen, well organised, good food, beer, wine etc., a few well stocked traders (I bought too much stuff!) and entertainment – not to everyone's taste but they were trying to cater for the home team as well. The four days passed all too quickly and we headed back north, spending a couple of days on the Adriatic coast and three days in Switzerland. We really will go back with the bike, the mountain passes are unbelievable and the scenery beyond compare.



Another overnight stop in Italy and we were back in good old Freyming- Merlebach at Moto Passion Honda. Bike all fixed, two new head gaskets (only one gone, but better safe than sorry), No clue as to the cause but all is well. I speak to the mechanic and manage to get across that perhaps it was because the bike had 99,000 miles on it, the reply? 'Pas probleme, c'est une GoldWing' The bill? A mere 300 Euros.



Needless to say, all was well on the trip home and we're looking forward to Ardingly, so by the time you read this, we'll hopefully have met face to face.



Above (L&R) and Left : *Taking advantage of the great weather in the Alps on the return journey.
Next time by GoldWing and not by Micra!*

A big thank you to Brittania for our holiday not being spoilt, thanks to Frank and his team at Moto Passion, and a special thank you to Ettore, Sergio and all the GWCI team.

Safe Riding