

View from the rear

With both Barry and I having the same sat-navs (TomTom Rider) loaded with the same itineraries from the wonderful TYRE program, it is common for one of us to be leading a group of riders and for the other to be the sweeper at the back – the tail-ender.

Leading a group requires constant concentration and a sense of humour. It is hard to please everybody and you have to set a pace that is not too rapid or not too leisurely – and try not to lose anyone. Overtaking presents a problem as often you go for it only to find that you are riding alone. The most embarrassing situation is when you miss a turning and then have to make the snake of riders do an impromptu U-turn. Mature riders are a genial crowd but never slow to comment...



No such problems at the back however. It is more relaxing and allows for plenty of day-dreaming with the snake of bikes stretching sometimes for quite alarming distances ahead. It is fascinating how quickly a compact group of 8 or 9 bikes waiting at traffic lights can transform itself into a half-mile long snake. This is why Frank, our wise statesman with experience of riding in groups of rockers in the 50s and 60s advises a staggered formation at stops. It allows for a quicker getaway and also keeps the car drivers behind happier.

It is interesting to see how different riders approach the same bends. Frank is a joy to follow on the mountain roads. He slips around the bends on his Triumph like a ballet dancer. Hard to keep up with though... I had the pleasure of following Frank on some great rides this year in the Black Forest and then on in the Bavarian Alps.



The sounds vary depending on who is riding in front. It is always good to follow Ba on his Triumph or Steve and Gray on their Harley. The pop-popping from their exhausts is quite relaxing.



Our German Ulysses friends are experts at leading trips. Their planning is meticulous and their tail enders help with overtaking when on autobahns. If you can see Thomas' or Silke' lights in the outside lane you know it is safe to pull out without being mown down by a Porsche travelling at the speed of light.

However while thinking about tail-enders we must have a special mention for Knut, our Norwegian Ulysses friend. Knut is experienced in leading bike trips all over the world and is the master of assertive tail-end riding. When the bikes are ready to leave he will drive his bike across the carriageway and stop the traffic until the snake of bikes is underway. I am never sure if this is legal in UK or on the continent but what is obvious is that the drivers ever seem to argue with Knut who cuts an imposing leather-clad figure on his big BMW.

The Danish owner of this “interesting” bike was not one to follow as a tail-ender. We met him at the Harwich ferry. Somewhere underneath the scrap yard was an old Harley. There were so many bits that looked as if they were about to fall off and some that did. After he drove up the ramp one of the staff came up with a spare spark plug that had fallen off the bike. The guy just pushed it behind a bungee and carried on. As a tail-ender there is more likelihood of picking up gravel and cow muck from the bike in front but dodging bits of motorbike is less fun!



twoshedspete 2013