

Views from the Pillion. Written as it may be that other partners will want to join us too.

In the early Seventies, when I was in my twenties, I drove a Honda 90. I wore of white helmet complete with my purple Midi coat and long black leather boots. I reckoned it was pretty trendy! I could never get onto a bigger Bike as I could hardly lift the bike off the stand! Two of us managed to drive our Honda to Liverpool and Nottingham and back on one tank of petrol for 25 p. That was before I passed my driving test and we bought our first Mini. Barry then passed his car test and the bike went out of the window!

In 2011, only two years ago, after over forty five years as a car driver I faced the prospect of getting back on a motor bike. Something to do with Ulysses! Barry has never lost his love of bikes. I was quite nervous about getting back on a bike as you felt exposed after driving a car for so long. I went on my first Ulysses meet in Bakewell, Derbyshire. I drove there and decided to take photos instead of the ride. My brother John said that people rarely have photos of themselves on their bikes, especially when moving, and it's worth getting people together for a group photo. Even this was new to me. I then Googled various articles on how to photograph bikes and riders.



The day came and there I was, in the pouring rain doing by best, dripping wet in the shelter of trees and with very poor light and visibility. This did not entice me to get on the bike as they got soaked! I had a lovely outing to the open air baths in Hathersage and enjoyed swimming in the rain in warm water. I then had a dry afternoon inside Chatsworth House. The weather improved in the afternoon and the Biking group gloried in the beauty of the landscape of Derbyshire and Staffordshire.

Later I met I met up with members of Germany Ulysses and some of those who had been on the trip to Germany. What a great bunch. That's when I decided to join in. This group are the core of the Shining Bikers and later Ulysses GB.

Barry (Vanamonde) organised an extended tour of Scotland in 2012. If you can't beat them, join them! Barry had already enjoyed two International meets in Europe, and I had met German Ulysses members when they came to England. I did not want to miss out this time especially as other partners were going too. I had to give it a try! The prospect of going up to Scotland still seemed awesome.



I had some fear and trepidation of getting on the back of the bike, as I am a lot more safety aware. Barry suggested that we tried a few practise runs before the outlay of all the gear. I needed to see if I liked it. I had no protective gear so for my first outing, in 2011, I borrowed an old style helmet complete with fleece, cagoule, extra trousers and leggings. After all I did not want to get cold and wanted some padding ! I found short boots and thick socks for my feet. Barry's bright yellow Triumph jacket and over trousers did not quite look the part when we met up with visiting Australian Ulysseans, Andy Luck and his wife and their English friends.



The next trip was to JTS biker clothing store in Coalville. This was great as they had all shapes and sizes and colours and you could try everything on. Eventually I found something that could fit someone of five feet high and an over wide build! The gear may not have been straight out of the catwalk, but they did the trick. I also struggled to find boots for women for shorter legs and low calves but found some wonderful expensive boots at Hein Gericke. They are protective and warm and waterproof and feel like slippers. I have never regretted buying them!



The ride to Coalville and back was great. I got used to Barry pushing up the speed and I just 'clung on'. Then I started to get more relaxed. I even took a picture on the way back. This time I was clinging to the camera. Before this trip I had also looked up various ways to help pillion passengers. These were written from the driver's viewpoint including making sure that your passenger wore protective clothing. I found the most helpful point was to look at the driver's left ear if he's going left and right ear for the right turn. That stopped me from moving in the wrong direction and to try and synchronise with the driver. As a car

driver I automatically watch the road ahead and this helps me anticipate any potential hazards and to hold on, if he is likely to have to brake sharply. I still struggle a bit about not having control of the bike itself! We had various practise forays getting longer each time but I found this a Romantic adventure driving through lovely countryside together with a good view above the hedgerows and ending up in a tea shop. I can handle this I thought!



However ,what is not in the books or Google, is how to mount a bike that was not bought with you in mind, and is far too high for you to reach the pillion seat easily? The bikes I have tried are not built for 5 foot people, even though the driver may find it a comfortable ride. So this is a problem, if you can't lift your own bike and you can't get on others bikes, surely the needs of predominantly little woman are not met? Others must have had this problem? Do they have any suggestions? After two years of trying I have just managed a technique of putting my toe on the foot rest, pirouetting on it with all my weight and standing on tip toe, manage to get my leg over! No mean achievement with the driver on the front and luggage to the front and the sides and having to squeeze in the middle ! I just love kerbs that give you those extra few inches to be able to alight on and off more easily!

This is enough for now, as I have persevered as a pillion rider and my next instalment will include our trips to Scotland and then Germany, both of which have been lovely from the point of view of the exhilarating drives, the scenery and the great company. The problem of getting on an off the bike remains but I love riding pillion and even have the courage to take photos on the back, so long as I protect my camera with a lanyard to avoid losing it en route!



PS In my book, bikes and cars move me from A to B and I am not one to look under the bonnet or elsewhere! I have been somewhat mystified by some new language that is appearing on the forum which sounds mighty strange to me. To quote,

‘ If you've increased the preload to max and upped the rebound damping, it still bottoms out over bumps ?’

‘ a Rule of thumb is it should not sink more than 40mm when you sit on it !?’

‘ If your old springs are knackered one fix is to add your own spacers?!’

‘If you are lucky enough to have drain screws, watch out for the potential of tiny O rings!?’

‘When all in and fork top nuts back in, bounce a few times’.

The mind boggles!

Apologies to you who are keen on the mechanics but I am a novice both to bike riding and bikes! But lets hope that we can all enjoy many more journeys to come, Growing old disgracefully! Have fun!

Mrs Vanamonde July 2103.