



Welcome to the latest issue of the Tandem Club Journal.

First off, a big thank you to all who have contributed the stories we've included in this issue and for the few we have 'in reserve', which will probably grace the pages of the October/November TCJ.

Please keep sending content in to us for it's the readership that makes the TCJ what it is and it's always good for us, as editors, to have a varied pile of content to go through and lay out.

Which leads neatly into the content of this issue... unusual to hear of tandems being stolen but opposite is one such example. These Cannondale tandems can't be very common, so please keep your eyes peeled.

Karon and I took part in the Cyclotourisme Salviac Randonée at the tail-end of June and you'll see we had a great long-weekend. It's something we'd love to go back to next year, but would probably give ourselves more time to travel and stay. Even without the Randonée or French Tandem Club weekend as added activities, it's a great base from which to explore the area. Incidentally, I didn't mention the name of our B&B. It was the 'Maison de Fortitude' run by Heather and Barry from the UK – www.maisondefortitude.com

It seems we can't get enough of Germany as a destination for tours and that theme continues this issue. As a 20-something year old soldier in West Germany I can remember paying an illicit visit to the border. We were banned from within 50kms unless on official duty but it didn't stop me paying a clandestine visit to see what all the fuss was about. It was quite sobering to stand and look across the river at the wires, minefields and watchtowers. Fortunately, that is all in the past and the 'Iron Curtain' that divided the countryside between East and West is no more. Better still is the fact that much of the course of the old divide can be ridden and there's an interesting account of one such venture within this issue.

I was going to say 'closer to home' but, if like me, you live in the South, then the Hebrides are further away than much of Europe! However, it seems the islands provide excellent touring grounds and you can read a daily account plus 'closer to home' (really) we manage to include Norfolk!

Well, that just about concludes this preamble. Karon and I have been making good use of the Beast this year on 'mass rides' too, with the Tweed Run back in May, the Three Counties ride out from Bracknell, our local Basingstoke Big Wheel this past weekend and next Saturday we are off to London for the Prudential Freeride – along with around 50,000 other two and three wheelers!

All the best for the rest of the summer and, after the last few rather damp ones isn't it nice to have to check that the sun cream is in the saddle bag?

Bob and Karon

As I collated and laid out the content for issue 254, I was struck by similarities between Bob Stokinger and Mary E. Duffy's tandem riding experiences (back cover) and our own. Both Bob and Karon are insulin dependent diabetics and both use an insulin pump. The need to stop now and then, check blood sugar levels and, if necessary top up, is a common occurrence on our rides together.

This prompted an email back to Bob and Mary to compare notes and resulted in an invitation for us to Salviac, a typical French village about halfway between the Dordogne and Lot rivers, to join the French Tandem Club at their annual gathering there. Bob and Mary were heavily involved in organising the weekend's activities. The meeting also coincided with a Sunday Randonnée starting in Salviac and heading roughly north-west, towards the Dordogne, with a choice of three distances.

This was a 'whistle stop' tour for us which involved an overnight stop in Dover to catch an early morning ferry on which we took a big breakfast and filled our flask with coffee, then a long drive from Calais, past Paris and south through Limoges before we left the big, fast autoroutes to wind our way through a labyrinth of twisty country lanes, arriving at Salviac at about 7.20pm, with just enough time to dump the bags in our delightful B&B then walk out to the campsite on the edge of the village for a hearty meal in the café/restaurant there.



Next morning, after a good night's sleep, I assembled the Beast while Karon and Heather Groombridge, our B&B hostess got to know each other. Then we walked back to the campsite to meet up with our fellow tandemists.

Now I'm ashamed to say that my French is virtually non-existent, while Karon's is little better, so we were relieved to meet up with Bob and Mary, who introduced us to the gathering and made sure we were ok. Good fortune too, that Janet and Tony Prichard, our UK Tandem Club rally organisers were there too. There were a few other English speaking couples, ex-pats and visiting Americans, so, for the morning walk around of Salviac we had our own 'English (Welsh)' guide.



After a pleasant lunch we met back at the campsite for the afternoon ride. This headed into the hills of the Midi-Pyrénées to the south of Salviac, in an anti-clockwise tour that took in two rest stops. Our first, after a long, hot climb was in the village of Les Arques where the Belarussian artist Ossip Zadkine lived for a number of years. There are several of his sculptures around and inside the church. The soft drinks and snacks laid on were most welcome.



Even more welcome though, was the Domain de Sabrezy wine tasting laid on for our second stop of the day. Under the cooling shade of some lofty trees we were presented with a selection of Cahors and Malbec wines to sample. After riding in the heat of the day, most of the tandemists approached this task with typical French gusto – even the Americans and English! Of course,

Karon and I could not miss an opportunity like this and as the proprietor offered to deliver our case back to the B&B for us, we just couldn't help ourselves!

By the time we came out from the wine-cave, all the other tandemists bar Bob and Mary had left. They had held on for us, to guide us back to Salviac. It was mostly downhill with a few short, sharp climbs and we kept up a good pace, so caught most of the others before we arrived back at the village.

In the evening all the tandemists met up in a large hall next to the campsite for a shared meal followed by some dancing. We slept well again.



Sunday arrived. The early overcast skies were actually welcome as they kept the temperatures to comfortable levels but it didn't take long for the sun to show. Even as we enjoyed our continental breakfast we could see the keener cyclists both on tandems and solos heading out of the village on the Randonnée. We made our way down to the start, outside the hall of the previous night's feast and fun. No familiar faces except Bob's and Mary's but they were helping, not riding, so we set off on the short route on our own. A total distance of some 48 miles would be enough for us in this terrain.



Much of the first hour or so seemed to be spent gradually climbing. We were rarely alone for long as I would catch distant flashes of colour in the mirror that would gradually gain on us and pass with a little English/French banter, then the colourful lycra would disappear up the road ahead. We even managed some of our own overtaking, as we caught the odd slower participant who had set off before us. Of course, as every cyclist

knows, the reward for long bouts of climbing is the descent which follows, albeit usually over far too quickly. Our prize this time was a couple of fantastic, fast, flowing descents where we were able to catch and pass some of the roadies who had overtaken us not long before. The Beast and its cargo may take its time getting up the hills but it absolutely flies down them!

We almost missed our first rest stop, in a little hill-top community. Soft drinks, cake and cookies laid on, in part by some resettled American folks who were helping to keep all the passing cyclists replenished and refreshed.

Next stop was the small medieval hill-top town of Belvés. The climb up actually wasn't too bad. The road surface was good and smooth and the increasingly splendid views over the surrounding countryside provided a good distraction. We arrived in the town square to discover an artisans' fair so parked up the Beast while we wandered. It quickly became the sole focus of attention of a toddler who's arty Mum was on a nearby stall.



The descent from Belvés under threatening skies was another fast, swooping affair and the low centre of gravity of the Beast kept it feeling very stable despite cornering speeds of around 40mph.

There followed a long, mostly flattish ride up and down two adjoining valleys, to the village of Saint-Pompon where we were scheduled for lunch. As we sat inside, at long tables, enjoying the French food, wine and hospitality, the heavens opened and there was a deluge of Biblical proportions.

I'm sure there was another

Biblical effort going on inside as the bottles of wine, each shared between about six, kept mysteriously refilling! We emerged, well fed and very well watered under clearing skies and all that remained for us was the 20-odd km ride back to Salviac. Unfortunately there was a very large ridge in the way and the climb over seemed to go on forever.



On arriving back at the finish I commented to Bob on the difficulty of the post-lunch section. Route analysis showed that the route markers (which we had unerringly followed) had not actually been set along the correct route! Despite the unintended 'mountain' section it was still a great day's ride.

Showered and changed we met back at the hall for more socialising and prize-giving which would be followed by another shared meal, though Karon and I, along with Janet and Tony headed off to the campsite restaurant for a more peaceful meal together.

Monday we were due to ride again before heading homeward in the afternoon. However, one of Karon's knees was playing up after two days of hill riding, so we decided to cut our stay short and split our drive back home more evenly. I cancelled our original booking in Limoges and re-booked in a small town on the banks of the Loire called Beaugency where we stayed in an old abbey. We journeyed at a more leisurely pace than the dash down a few days before, staying off the toll autoroutes most of the way. We even had time to stop off at a 'Leclerc' and stock up with more wine before our evening ferry back to the UK.

All-in-all, a packed weekend, some great riding and company in scenery very different from our home area of Hampshire, Surrey and South Berks. Well worth the long drive, so I think it's safe to say "We'll be back!"

Bob Bending