

When in France.....(1) go and play with the traffic. by Lebon Mot.

CROSSING THE CHANNEL has always been an adventure. There's something about the sea, especially when it's associated with ships and passports, that quickens the pulse. Those who live far inland feel it the most so that despite the advent of the Channel Tunnel, apparently the biggest bore in transport, our island mentality goes into overdrive and exotic dreams begin. France is suddenly all wine, chateaux and gastronomic delights, the recipe for a perfect holiday.

But before experiencing these attractions one has to face the traffic.

Don't worry, this article isn't going to frighten the gaskets off you with tales of Gallic mania let loose in the direction of the amiable British holidaymaker. Far from it. French driving seems appreciably better than that in Britain. The demon overtaker is alive and well in both countries but perhaps due to the insistence in France on professional driving lessons for everyone, the general standard of motoring is high.

All new drivers are obliged to display a large red 'A' in the rear of the car to warn other road users, although whether the 'A' stands for 'Amateur' or 'Allez chez soi, Brits' is anybody's guess.

Beware traffic lights. The French tend to put them way up in the air, supported by replicas at eye level. Very sensible, but those with no head for heights can often miss them, the unfamiliarity catching them out.

But then the French aren't slow to use the horn or point witheringly at their head if mistakes are made.

Everyone was warned that in France, give way to the right. Visions of vehicles suddenly joining from the right terrified many a British driver but signs like "cedez la passage" (give way) or "vous n'avez pas la priorité" (you don't have priority) help to remind the loosely orientated French driver that the old days are past. However, if a road merges from the right, beware, or your driver's door will be stoved in before you can say "sacré bleu."

Those of us raised on fuzzy black and white episodes of Maigret will remember that, after the match was struck on the wall and the accordion began to play, France was portrayed in a series of rustic images in which bicycles featured regularly, the archetypal lone French cyclist usually of mellow years and ripe looking clothing, is still a common sight, carrying not strings of onions but inevitably a baguette or two. Over the shoulder, under the arm, sticking up out of a pannier or laid flat across the rear carrier, the mobile baguette is alive and well. Our British device of reflective arms sticking out from rear forks is unnecessary in France as it's surely only a matter of time until a fluorescent baguette takes the cycling world by storm.

But, at least in summer, these single cyclists are far outnumbered by two other types of cyclist, namely the leisure cyclists and the racing models.

Differences are not hard to spot.

Leisure cyclists are usually seen on mountain bikes whose gearing makes legs look like trainee pistons. Haven't they got a gear for fast roads? Clothes are loose and comfortable with little regard for fashion. These cyclists often come in pairs making erratic progress somewhere between the verge and the white line. Occasionally holiday cyclists ride proper touring bikes laden down with panniers both front and rear like poorly sprung dray horses.

But competitive cycling is big business in France, and probably the majority of cyclists come in lean and hungry packs, each one on a sparkling racing bike with go-faster everything. Clothing is inevitably garish, tight fitting and sporting the name of a well oiled sponsor. Shorts and shirts usually match and even the shoes are a gentle shade of pink, lime or puce, anything to anything to match the torso.

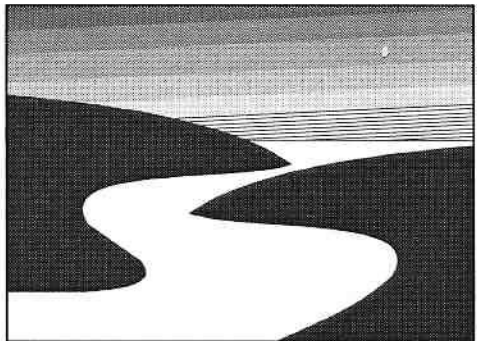
Groups of up to twenty are spread along the road in an atmosphere of competitive fellowship.

From the rear, the differences between these two types of cyclist is painfully obvious; one only has to notice the load carried by the saddle.

Which just leaves the mopeds. The number of these seems to be diminishing and they're reserved for local shopping trips or youthful ego trips. Whining furiously at all of 40km/h young lads display incipient machismo, often gripped tightly by a girl on the pillion. The look on her face quickly shows whether the occasion is one to hang on for dear life or a rather exotic version of Euro-bonding.

All together now:-

Keep droit sur à le fin de la route,
keep droit sur à le fin.



W.O.D.C. SKIPS FOR OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER

Fifield	28th October	On green outside bus shelter
Lynham	25th November	High Street bus shelter
Milton	2nd October	Church Road layby, Jubilee Lane
	30th October	Church Road layby, Reade Close
	27th November	Church Road layby, Jubilee Lane
Shipton	13th November	Coombes Close, Swinbrook Road