

SCANDINAVIA, BALTICS AND EASTERN EUROPE

August 2017

A day and a half's riding saw me into Copenhagen from the Rotterdam ferry and in that short time I'd already met my first character. This one had lost his car in the 30 minutes it took the ferry to sail from Germany to Denmark. "Could I help him" he asked, in broken English. Hmm.

Three more days navigating the island strewn coast of the Baltic sea along undulating, curving roads and the trademark forests of Sweden and Finland I arrived, via yet another ferry, into Tallinn, Estonia. It was the 28th anniversary of the Demonstration for Freedom, when the three countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined hands in a humanitarian chain of two million people, 420 miles long. It's difficult to comprehend that the Baltic States have only been free of Russian occupation for 26 years. Independence arrived in 1991.



Whack! The ferry check-in barrier dropped straight back down again as I pulled off. The arm went between my bike's screen and mirrors, shearing off as it glanced my knuckles and struck the clutch reservoir. I sat there displaying a 6ft barrier across my handle bars. No one appeared at all interested and when I banged on the check-in cabin window I was told that the car behind had triggered it. Apart from grazing the back of the mirror there was no obvious damage but I did have to tighten and reposition them.

South of Tallinn I encountered a road that was dead straight for several kilometres and twice as wide as it needed to be. White lines marked the road down the middle and the verges on either side were clear of trees and bushes with not a telegraph pole or lamp post in sight. The last time I'd encountered a road like this I was heading for the southernmost tip of Argentina, where just off the coast lay the Falkland Islands. Obviously both runways in waiting.

Latvia followed Estonia and then Lithuania before I sidled up to the Belarus border but as I didn't have a visa I was forced to turn back, against the oncoming traffic. I was just trying a short cut into Poland and the opportunity to tick off another country but no joy.

Read more overleaf...



Contact Gordon

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SCANDINAVIA, BALTICS AND EASTERN EUROPE (cont.)

Throughout the Baltics 800 years of turbulent history, everyone from German knights to Swedish kings and Soviet commissars have left their mark and the resulting Gothic Architecture and Medieval Old Towns jostle side by side. All a magnet for tourists but worth a visit all the same. I thought that Vilnius was the classiest.



Hill of Crosses

It was my second day in Poland as he rode past, upright on the foot rests with his arms outstretched imitating a crucifix. When we met up roadside his eyes were glazed and he was sporting a silly grin. High as a kite on something. On one forearm he bore the face of a wolf and on the other a BMW roundel. I declined the offer of lunch from Mr Wolf preferring to travel on alone.



Polish Harvest Celebrations

It was nice to witness the Harvest celebrations and see the fences and gates of Polish farming villages adorned with corn dollies and sun flowers, some villages even had people and animals sculptured in straw. Quite an art form.

It was too ambitious, time wise, to ride into the Ukraine, so I diverted into the Tatra mountains, a welcome change from the plains of eastern Europe and by the time I reached Hradec Kralove in the Czech Republic I'd encountered my eighth medieval city with a large square, more than enough for one trip.

By now I'd ridden in more countries than I'd had birthdays, having celebrated my 65th a few days earlier on the ferry from Stockholm to Turku in Finland. Two more days across the Czech Republic and Germany, via the Harz Mountains and I arrived in Rotterdam and my seventh ferry. I'd crossed eleven countries, seven of them new and ridden almost 4,000 miles. I intend to stop counting now.



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