

HAUTE ALPES

June 2019

The poor soul looked pitiful in her ripped jeans and short black jacket. She must have been soaked to the skin but still she was determined to huddle outside and have a cigarette before entering the shelter and warmth of the service station. The romance of a young pillion passenger on the back of a Harley had been washed away by hours of torrential rain.

Only an hour earlier, as I began my descent out of the Jura mountains, I saw the menacing black clouds in the distance and stopped to put on an extra layer and waterproofs. This was not going to be fun. I'd planned a route south through the Western Alps, over some local passes, down to Gap but I quickly decided on taking the quickest route via Le Peage. The final hour, with motorway behind me, was dry and pleasant but the forecast for the next few days was rain right across the south of France, with the exception of the Cote d'Azur.

The ride down to Saint Tropez through Provence and the towering cliffs of the Gorge du Verdon was a joy. Staying ahead of the advancing rain, I arrived in the fleshpots of the rich and famous bathed in glorious sunshine. The next two days were pure decadence wandering the narrow streets, sheltering from the heat of the day and sampling local delights, whilst storms raged further north in the mountains.

After two nights the storms passed and I headed back into the Alpes de Haute Provence, fiddling my way, mostly alone, over some minor but really enjoyable passes in a northerly direction. The lycra clad cyclists came in all shapes, sizes and colours, wandering all over the road in an attempt to ascend the Col de Vars. This was no professional competition but a bunch of amateurs, organised by Panic Tours or some such company. There must have been a hundred or more stretched up one side and down the other. I guess they are entitled to be there, just as much as I am but why in such numbers? By evening I was north of Briancon, at the foot of the Col du Lauteret, hopefully well out of reach of Panic Tours.



Col du Galibier

Read more overleaf...



Contact Gordon

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HAUTE ALPES (cont.)

The following day was more like a Who's Who of Cols from the Tour de France. Climbing the Col du Lauteret after breakfast, before riding over the famous Col du Galibier was a whole lot easier than using peddle power. The sunshine stretched out hour after hour, pass after pass until I had no choice but to head for the Jura mountains and an overnight stop but not before I'd spent ten wonderful hours in the saddle.



Cornet du Roseland

I was greeted by a grey wet dawn and a journey through north east France, it was past 6 o'clock by the time I decided to head into town in search of a bed. The faded grandeur of the Hotel Les Jardins was a good indicator of what to expect. I ascended the creaking wooden stairs, helmet in one hand and pannier bag in the other, before navigating along the dark narrow corridor, its aging green paint peeling off the walls. I opened the door to my chambre to find a sloping floor of bare boards and a bed that had seen better days or should that be nights?

Dinner though was another experience altogether. It's quite normal for the fabric of a hotel to have decayed but not the dining room. My table was adorned by a sparkling white tablecloth and the room brightly lit and superbly decorated. The food and wine perhaps as good as it gets, shame I had to retire to a sunken bed.



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