

A trip down south

You wouldn't normally expect a newcomer to two wheels to want to ride any distance on a moped, but Kathryn Howarth, recently rode down to the south of France in aid of charity. Her father, Steve, takes up the story...



Kathryn and Steve are all smiles before their departure

Kathryn, got her moped in January and passed her CBT. We were sitting around the table one day and I suggested she might want to do something adventurous – like ride down to the south of France to raise money for a good cause (the good cause being Cancer Research as Kathryn's mum had died of cancer in late 2007). I never thought more about it until Kathryn came back a little while later and asked how we'd organise it.

Kathryn has a Pulse Scout 50cc and I have a Honda Super Blackbird 1100cc. As I was going along for logistic support, it was never going to work. So I bought an eight-year-old Piaggio X9 125cc on eBay. In true fashion, the X9 soaked up a chunk of my time as I sorted it for the trip, but it was a better option. The moped on the other hand was just ready to go.

We decided to get sponsorship for as much of the logistics as possible so that people who donated gave their money direct to Cancer Research. Q Hotels, Fujitsu, DFDS Ferries and Rezidor Hotels generously gave support (www.justgiving.com/mopeddash)

The journey was about 1000 miles from Warrington to La Londe les Maures near Toulon. We got out a map and drew a straight line across France from Dunkirk to Toulon and planned the route around that.

The route looked like this:

- July 10: Warrington/Birmingham
- July 11: Birmingham/Ashford (Kent)
- July 12: Ashford/Dover (crossing)/Villers/Cotterets (France)
- July 13: Villers/Cotterets/Pouilly-en-Auxois

- July 14: Pouilly-en-Auxois/Lyon
- July 15: Lyon/Pertuis
- July 16: Pertuis/La Londe les Maures (between Toulon and St Tropez)

We planned on averaging about 20mph and covering 150-200 miles each day and then adjusted the schedule to fit in with the sponsored hotels and their locations. With lunch and other stops, it was going to be long days in the saddle. Luckily we had a couple of short days as well.

Shortly before departure, Kathryn was knocked off her bike. We had a few weeks of panic as we tried to sort things with the insurance. A minor bump in practice, the moped was a write-off. We got the replacement Pulse Scout the week before the trip, so no time to sort any problems – it just had to be right.

The first part of the trip across the UK was split at Birmingham so that we didn't have to do 300 miles at once and avoid riding through London. The weather was great on both the days and we looked forward to better in France.

We were wrong. The skies were grey from Ashford and were even greyer in France; then it rained and didn't stop until we left Pouilly-en-Auxois. After that it just got sunnier and hotter, peaking at 30 degrees.

Outside towns and villages we were 'belting along' at 30mph-or-so which meant traffic delays were never a problem, but it gave plenty of time to actually look at the countryside, take in the smells (not always good) and actually relax a little. In both the UK and France traffic generally gave us



On the road to St Maximin

plenty of space and we didn't have any 'moments'. We'd also taken intercoms so we could talk through the trip and these were brilliant.

Both bikes proved comfortable(-ish), reliable and economical. The moped did 120mpg and the X9 managed 80mpg with me and most of the luggage. The only thing that broke was the speedo cable on the moped.

On a big bike or a car you race along and miss it all in the rush to reach your destination. On the smaller bikes you appreciate the whole journey – it just takes longer. Does this make touring on a moped or small scooter feasible? Well, technically, yes, but you will have to be realistic about how far you will actually get, but it really makes the travelling part of the adventure.

STEVE HOWARTH



The Rhone Valley provides a fantastic backdrop