



10.000 km trip to Norway In June 2003

The very first idea about this trip to Norway came to light last January during a weekend spent in Nordeste in the company my brother-in-law, Manuel Carreiro, my good friend Carlos Paz Ferreira and their wives.

After lots of careful planning and detailed preparation, our new adventure started when on June 11th last the three bikes, my Yamaha FJR1300 and the two Honda ST1300 were taken to the forwarding agent Insulartrafego, packed and tied down in a 40 foot container that arrived in Lisbon by June 16th.

We all flew to Lisbon on the evening of June 17th on a Sata flight and on the following morning we rushed to the receiving agent, Rosa de Prata in Chelas, Lisbon, to pick up our bikes.

Contrary to what had happened last year, this time the bikes arrived as we left them, thanks to the sturdy berths we put them on for the Atlantic crossing.

We were already using our bikes when met some friends from the FJR 1300 PT List and the President of Lisbon Motorcycle Club for lunch in Monsanto (outskirts of Lisbon) and to discuss some details with them regarding the 1st FJR1300 PT Meeting that was to take place one day after my return to Lisbon, the weekend of 12th and 13th July.

Also on that same afternoon I bought some new equipment for myself and Elisa and had my alarm's reserve remote control adjusted at Motor 7

Day 1 - June 19th, 2003

We met with the Lisbon residing side of the family at Cervejaria Ramiro for a farewell seafood meal on the night before.

Needless to say that we didn't have to wait for the alarm clock to ring as we woke up long before the planned 06.00 AM leaving time.

The excitement was such that we hardly slept. We met the Paz Ferreira couple at 7.00 AM and, as planned, joined my sister and Manuel Carreiro at the Aveiras Service Station, the pre-arranged meeting point for the start of this new adventure. The weather was superb and, after a quick breakfast, we set off on our long trip. We crossed the border with Spain at Vilar Formoso at 11.35 AM and stopped for lunch in the beautiful city of Salamanca where we arrived by 01.45 PM, local time. The temperature was quite high but, little did we know that we were about to escape the intense heat wave that was to hit the Iberian Peninsula on the following days. After lunch we took off to Biarritz, France, where we arrived at 08.45 PM after riding for 1132 km. Not bad going for a first day!

Day 2 – June 20th

We knew that an even longer day awaited us therefore we were on the road and on our way to Belgium bypassing Paris by 08.00 AM. We had lunch by 01.00 PM and then set off towards the always difficult crossing of Paris under intense heat. It was thanks to the friendly attitude that French drivers have towards motorcycle riders that we were able to negotiate the heavy traffic on the outskirts of Paris in about one hour and without making any directional mistakes. We stopped for fuel and a rest after this tough passage at a service station on the outskirts of Paris. It was here that, maybe due to the high temperatures felt, the alarm on my bike went "crazy" and wouldn't stop setting itself on. A few policemen who were present at the service station gave me a suspicious look until they finally realized I was fighting the wiring and trying to reset the system and had a good laugh at my expense. I'm glad to say that this one, plus a problem with the radio's joystick felt on the return journey, in Ibiza, were the only setbacks felt on my Yamaha FJR1300 during this 10859 km long trip. The new Bridgestone BT-020 tires that I mounted before this trip also confirmed their great durability reputation.

From here we moved forward towards Lille and Dunkirk and crossed the border between France and Belgium at 07.35 PM. This was an 1118 km long day and we finally arrived at the charming Boothotel La Peniche, at 08.00 PM, situated close to the beautiful Belgium long coastal beaches where the art of catching shrimp is done on horseback, a local tradition and something unique in the world.

Vera and Francis, the hotel owners and both FJR1300 riders, gave us an extremely warm welcome together with two other Belgium rider friends, Luc and Ronnie.

After "checking-in" and taking a well deserved shower, we were offered an absolutely delicious meal that included 12 dishes of typical Belgium cuisine, all extremely tasty and beautifully presented, accompanied by some excellent white wine.

By midnight and, because it was Manuel Carreiro's birthday, Vera and Francis came up with a huge birthday cake decorated as a motorway made out of chocolate, three bikes and road signs saying Lisbon, Boothotel La Peniche and Norway, all representative of our trip.

The party finished very late and, needless to say, in a great atmosphere, so much so that by the end of the evening we were calling Gerard, Vera and Francis's little "Bichon fris " dog by the name of Richard! Poor little dog he probably is still scratching his head wondering who those lunatics were...

Day 3 – June 21st

It was obvious that after such a long and superb party on the night before, we weren't going to get away at the agreed time in the morning. In fact, we only left Boothotel La Peniche at 09.30 AM aiming at the Dutch border where we were to be met by another group of motorcycling friends, members of the Dutch FJR1300 Club. We crossed the border at about 11.45 AM and, after spending about one hour with our kind friends Toon, Mettes Van Der Giessen and his wife Maritza and Vic Sadowski we set off towards Denmark crossing Germany on the way. Unfortunately we missed a lunch meeting we had arranged with our friend Heiko and other German friends from Germany FJR 1300 Club because we were late leaving Belgium and also due of a little route mistake in Holland. I was truly sorry this happened.

We had lunch at a road side restaurant near Essen, Germany, and then went on towards Bremen, Hamburg and finally Hirtshals, in northern Denmark where we were to catch a ferry to Norway.

The last part of this journey was somewhat "painful" due to the low speed limits in Denmark, the long, plane and monotonous stretches of road and temperatures that kept falling rapidly as we approached Hirtshals. After being on the road for 1275 km we finally got to Hirtshals at 11.00 PM. Because there were two ferryboat docks it took us over 30 minutes under some very cold and windy conditions to find the correct one. We eventually got on board the ferry "Boa Vista", half hour before it was due to depart. The Kystlink Company transports almost exclusively long distance lorries (T.I.R.) and its drivers normally occupy the ship's cabins so, it was almost by miracle that we were able to reserve three cabins for a night's sleep after a tiring three days on the road in which we covered 3585 km.

Due to high winds the sea was very heavy and rocked the boat from side to side making everything creak. Despite all of this, we were so tired that after a quick meal and a hilarious shower during which we were thrown from wall to wall within the bathroom, we managed to sleep soundly until our arrival in Langesund, Norway, at 08.00 AM on the following morning.

Day 4 – June 22nd

As the Boa Vista approached land we immediately became aware of how Norway was blessed with beautiful nature. Upon arrival in Langesund we were delighted with the beauty and calm atmosphere of this seaside town with its little wooden houses painted in bright colours and all very well maintained. It was with great joy that we abandoned ship and found ourselves face to face with a wonderful "welcome committee", Ommund owner of a FJR1300 like myself and Julia and Hakon Blom and their Honda Goldwing all of whom, together with my friend Hening Sunde, helped enormously with the planning of our route whilst in Norway. After the necessary introductions and handing over of some stickers of the Azores and of our Logo we departed towards the next fuel station. It was there that we first became aware of the high cost of living in Norway when we had to pay € 1.50 per litre of petrol.

With Ommund leading the caravan we set off north bound and stopped for lunch at a beautiful restaurant near Haukeligrend with a view over a frozen lake.

Before that Manuel "decided" to drop his bike on the tarmac as we were leaving a place we'd stopped at to admire the view onto a lake; apparently the engine stalled and his foot couldn't find the road quick enough to avoid the sudden bang! The consequence was a deeply damaged pride but no damage at all on his PanEuropean.

We'd only ridden about 200 km on Viking soil but we were already completely surrendered to the beauty of Norwegian landscape such was the succession of lakes, mountains, cliffs, waterfalls and little rivers, all absolutely breathtaking. After lunch and still under the leadership of Ommund, we visited the sumptuous Laatefoss waterfall near Odda and carried on northwards towards Ulvik where Ommund's parents own a mountain summer house that has a breathtaking view over one of Norway's prettiest fjords. And it was precisely on the way to Ulvik that the only trip's incident took place, one that could have had disastrous consequences. I was following Ommund and the others were following a little distance behind me going downhill inside a tunnel when the turbo compressor of a heavy lorry that was coming uphill blew up just in front of my eyes leaving an enormous and thick cloud of white smoke that quickly filled the tunnel and completely blinded us. However, because Ommund and I were in front and had already spotted the tunnel's end daylight, we could see enough to guide us to the outside of the tunnel, something that didn't happen to the others who were caught in the middle of the cloud of smoke finding it extremely difficult to breathe and without knowing where to go. The smoke was so dense that Carlos overtook Manuel on his right hand side without even being aware of the fact.

It was thanks to the courage and cold blooded attitude of Teresa, Annie and Julia who got out of the bikes and guided their husbands by walking over the road's painted white lines that eventually they were able to see daylight at the end of the tunnel.

Once Ommund and I reached the outside we soon became aware that they were missing and our anguish and fears increased as we thought the worse might have happened to them.

Elisa and I jumped on our bike and went back into the tunnel trying to find them and provide any possible help although we were convinced we were going to find them all over each other. Meanwhile we passed some vehicles that were reversing out of the tunnel in an attempt to get away from "hell". All of a sudden and to our great relief we spotted Carlos's ST 1300 headlights immediately followed by Manuel's and Hakon's still being guided by their wives on foot. We quickly run away from the tunnel and parked outside. We were all in a state of shock and confused wondering how we'd got away from that deadly nightmare situation. The kind occupants of an auto caravan offered some milk to help get rid of the intoxication.

Ommund, who wisely remained outside all the time, called the police and the fire brigade both of which arrived some 15 minutes later when there was still smoke coming out of the tunnel.

Once recovered from that enormous fright we resumed our journey in the direction of Ulvik and it was in Brimnes that we crossed our first fjord on a ferryboat. The crossing was quick because the whole operation of embarkation and disembarkation was done very efficiently and with great discipline. Once Ulvik was reached, we climbed the narrow and winding mountain road that leads to Ommund's family picturesque summer house. We visited this extremely beautiful and well cared for house that includes a small personal museum of ancient farm implements that Ommund's mother keeps in a shed. Apart from the many photos, we took some time to rest and enjoy the breathtaking view over the fjord. In fact, one or two of us proposed to stay there until the end of the holidays.

Back on the mountain road we made our way down towards the main road that would take us to the well known holiday resort called Flam where we arrived at 08.15 PM after having covered the first 463 km on Norwegian soil. Unfortunately the last Flamsbana train had left some 30 minutes before so we weren't able to tour the mountains that surround Flam. We had dinner at the Fretheim Hotel and had a good overnight rest in Hotel Furukroa, ideally placed beside the fjord.

Day 5 – 23rd June

We left Flam at 09.00 AM leaving Ommund behind because he headed home on that day and also Julia and Hakon as Julia needed to visit a Camping Site - Pluscamp - as part of her job but they were to rejoin us later on.

Just after Flam we crossed what is the longest road tunnel in the world, the impressive 24.5 long km Laerdal Tunnel. Maybe because we were still suffering the negative effects of incident in the tunnel on the previous day, we weren't able to fully appreciate this magnificent feat of Norwegian engineering with its central parking spaces in the form of specially illuminated galleries with huge paintings. After leaving the tunnel we caught a ferryboat to cross a fjord in the direction of Songdal and, as per schedule we arrived at the impressive Brigsdal glacier where we had lunch.

After lunch we passed a mountain road where it was cold (6 degrees C) and there was a considerable amount of snow to be seen as well as another glacier on the way to the famous Geiranger Fjord, a "must" with many cruise vessels. On the long and winding road leading down towards the glacier I "forgot" that a strictly enforced speed limit of 90 km/h exists on most Norwegian roads and allowed my right wrist to twist the throttle taking full advantage of some fast and tight corners and superb tarmac quality. Needless to say I had to wait for some time for my law abiding friends at the sightseeing point down below whilst enjoying its fantastic view.

Julia and Hakon rejoined us in the centre of Geiranger and we all left towards the most northern point of our trip, the city of Kristiansund which I symbolically chose because it was from here that my grand-father, Nicolau de Sousa Lima, imported many tons of dried cod fish to sell in his little grocery shop, the embryo of our current Group of companies.

On our way to Molde we visited the impressive Trollveggen Cliff, the highest stone cliff in Europe with its impressive 1814 metres (5959 feet). We then caught another ferryboat to Molde and went on the "Atlantic Road", as far as the embarkation pier for the last ferry to Kristiansund at 11.30 PM. The Atlantic Road joins many tiny islands of the North Sea to the mainland hence its name. We covered 574 km on this day.

After arriving in Kristiansund we had a quick meal in a pub before going to the hotel, still under some daylight. We were near the spot of the midnight sun and at the right time of the year. On that day the sun set at 11.35 PM and rose again at 03.10 AM waking me up due to the thin curtains at Havna Guesthouse. It's a strange feeling that makes one lose the sense of solar timing altogether.

Day 6 – June 24th

The weather was overcast, cold and wet for the first time since the trip had started which made us alter our route and head straight to Oslo where my friend Henning Sunde and his family had planned a BBQ party for us.

It was a tough day making us realize how hard Nordic the climate can be. The temperature came down to 6 C again, the rain became heavy and I nearly froze, a situation only avoided thanks to the nice gesture of our friend Hakon who kindly lent me a fleece sweater.

We arrived in Oslo at 06.30 PM having covered some 640 km, part of which on a motorway. We couldn't find the very typical rural house (Berger Gard) we'd hired rooms in on the outskirts of Oslo so, we decided to ask a taxi driver to lead us there. After the usual and necessary shower our friend Henning came for us and led us to his house for the promised BBQ. It was a nice evening in which we all had fun and talked about how we'd met three years ago when they were in S.Miguel Island. Henning very kindly asked his father, an ex-ski jumper, to provide us with a guided visit to the Oslo Olympic Ski Jumping complex. His father was also a member of the Organizing Committee of the last Olympic Winter Games held in Oslo.

Day 7 – June 25th

We met Julia and Hakon again at 10.00 AM who, in yet another friendly and kind gesture, provided us with a guided tour of the very pretty city of Oslo. We had a superb lunch by the marina and afterwards proceeded to the Ski Jump where we were welcomed by Henning's father

who went out of his way to show us everything in detail. The place is very impressive and boasts an incredible view over the city of Oslo.
By 04.00 PM we finally said goodbye to Henning's father and to our friends Julia and Hakon who were extremely kind and helpful to us during our stay in Norway in which they were with us for most of the time. We were only together for three and a half days but that was sufficiently long to develop a deep feeling of friendship amongst all, so much so that when time to say goodbye arrived, an embarrassing and moving moment of silence took over. It was with great regret that we finally crossed the border into Sweden leaving behind a country full of fabulous landscape, great roads and wonderful, well mannered, orderly and kind people. This is indeed a country where the word democracy has full meaning. We didn't see any signs of extreme wealth and saw no poverty in this country where minimum salary is four times higher than in Portugal.
As per program we left towards Gothenburg where we arrived by 07.00 PM after riding 375 km. I took a wrong turn on entering the city (first road mistake of the trip) and had to ask a lorry driver for help. We followed him as he drove his huge tractor and led us almost to the hotel door.

Day 8 – June 26th



After a good night's sleep in Gothenburg we left to Berlin at 08.30 AM, going past Malmo, Copenhagen and Gedser where we caught the ferryboat to Rostok in Germany. The weather was perfect as it was for most of the whole trip.
I met Jorn Rosenkilde, an old friend from my early Internet days, someone who has fallen in love with the Azores. His passion for these islands is such that he maintains a well illustrated site named "Beautiful Azores" which is full of information and has more than 100 visitors per day. That's why I decide to nickname him the "Virtual Ambassador for the Azores " in Denmark.
After this nice meeting we took to the road again and headed towards Gedser which we reached at 01.30 PM and had to wait for the 03.00 PM ferry because we were too late to catch the 01.00 PM boat.
We disembarked in Rostok at 05.00 PM and set off to Berlin. I took the wrong entry into Berlin and ended up on the East side of the city. This mistake meant that we only got to the hotel at 10.00 PM after stopping for dinner at a motorcyclist's bar in the outskirts of Berlin. After this mistake I decided that this was to be the last trip without a GPS.
The day was 740 km long.

Days 9 and 10 – June 27th and 28th



After a routine oil level check and at 8.00 AM we were on our way to Dresden and finally Prague, Chek Republic. According to the AutoRoute program we should see a road sign pointing in the direction for Prague. Due to road works this direction was always painted with a red cross over it. Finding this strange we stopped at a petrol station where a smiling employee handed over a photocopy of the alternative itinerary. The number of people stopping and asking must have been so large that the owner of the petrol station decided to provide a free public service by giving away photocopies of the road map... Even so, the itinerary was so complicated that we got temporarily lost on one of the many little villages we went past. I wonder where we would have ended up if it wasn't for that copy!
On arrival at the border I had a little incident with a German driver who seemed to be annoyed because I passed him on the right side on the approach to the checkpoint; he then threw his car at me and nearly run me over deliberately. Generally speaking German drivers almost never leave the left lane and show total disrespect towards bike riders. It was my wife that prevented the issue from having a more drastic ending. On this matter and after many thousands of kilometres all over Europe, my opinion is that French and Spanish drivers are those who show the kindest attitude towards motorcycle riders whereas German drivers are the worst behaved.
The first impression after crossing the border wasn't the best because of the high number of prostitutes standing by the road side. This is definitely not a very nice welcome note for any country.
Later on and still in a village near the border I was stopped by a police woman who accused me of overtaking a car in a stretch of road where it was forbidden and also of riding over the

speed limit. The woman spoke but her own language and German so the dialogue between us was somewhat difficult and funny. She checked my bike's documents and passport and eventually allowed me to go without applying any fine. It was there and then that I realized I was visiting a Police State, something that is still felt along the whole of the country, Prague included. We met many police patrols on the road to Prague especially in critical places. They use binoculars to spot their "victims" and seem to be very fine hungry. Annoyed at the whole situation I missed the entry to the centre of Prague and the quickest solution was to ask a taxi driver to lead us to the hotel. I had been warned that a taxi fare should always be previously negotiated in Prague prior to the ride but, anxious to get to the hotel after the 420 km and all the incidents in the meantime, I didn't do this and as a result, the driver charged us € 30.00 for a little ride of about 15 minutes. After checking in at the hotel we still had time to have a stroll in the city centre. On the day after we went on two different guided excursions which enabled us to get to know almost the whole city with its superb architecture, beautiful monuments and ancient bridges over the river Vltava. The only thing we didn't like in Prague was the authentic exploitation of the tourist. Everything is very expensive and in some cases even more expensive than Norway.

Day 11 – June 29th



In order to try and minimize the effects of the intense heat that increased and we progressed southwards, we decided to leave to Lyon (France) at 07.00 AM.

Curiously, maybe because it was a Sunday, we didn't meet any Czech police patrols on the road to the German border which we crossed at 08.15 leaving behind that feeling of police oppression. The road between Prague and the border was excellent.

We rode pretty fast and, after lunch in Baden-Baden, we arrived at the French border, near Besançon, by 02.45 PM.

For the first time in this trip we almost lost Carlos when he was delayed by German drivers who wouldn't move out of the left lane of the road to let the bikes overtake them.

Having ridden for about 1126 km we reached the Lyon ring road at about 06.00 PM under intense heat and were helped by a young French rider who volunteered to show us the way to hotel. After the usual shower and change of clothes we took the underground to the historic centre of Lyon and ate an excellent meal in a typical restaurant called Le Gaston. Upon returning to the hotel we left the underground station and got lost taking some 45 minutes to find our hotel. Obviously we were doomed to get lost even on foot!

Day 12 – June 30th



Once again we left early, at 07.00 AM to Valencia, Spain, attempting to ride before temperatures rose for as long a distance as possible and to see if we could catch the ferryboat to Ibiza at 05.00 PM.

We crossed the Spanish border near Girona at 10.30 AM and later stopped at a road side restaurant just after Barcelona to have lunch.

On the road to Barcelona we saw thousands of Harley Davidson bikers who were coming back from meeting organized in that city to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the manufacturer.

The last stretch of the journey on that day was almost painful due to the intense heat felt by us all.

We didn't make it to Valencia on time to catch the ferryboat so, the decision was to proceed to Denia where we could catch one later on.

The 90 km distance between Valencia and Denia was a race against the clock so that we could catch the 07.00 PM ferryboat.

After a day of 1098 km most of which were run under temperatures above 30°C, we finally got to Denia just 30 minutes before departure time.

We were at our hotel in Ibiza, Blau Park Hotel in San Antoni, by midnight.

It was in Valencia that Annie and Manuel separated from us because their option was to spend the rest of the holiday period in a resort near Almeria.

Days 13 to 21 – July 1st to July 9th



We spent 9 glorious days in Ibiza, going to the beach and generally resting after the first 13 days of the trip in which we covered about 9000 km. Even so I managed to do another 911 km whilst on the Island, visiting its many beaches and beautiful bays. On the last day I damaged my auto radio's joystick while washing the bike prior to our return to Portugal.

Day 22 – July 10th

It was at 02.00 PM that we caught the ferryboat in Ibiza to return to Denia. We arrived in Denia at 07.30 PM due to a delayed departure. In order not to vary too much I got lost entering Valencia again and only found the Express by Holiday Inn Valencia-San Luis Hotel at 10.00 PM, thanks to a taxi driver yet once again. Annoyed because I'd managed to get lost again, I dropped the bike right in front of the hotel. Thanks to the protectors I use, the bike was only scratched on the side case but my ego suffered a great big bump. After this unfortunate episode the idea of eventually buying a GPS became a certainty.

Day 23 – July 11th

We set off at 07.00 AM eager to get to get home in Lisbon. As opposed to previous occasions, this time I didn't get lost in the outskirts of Madrid and we went by this city around 11.00 AM. We rode fast and managed to be in Badajoz at 02.00 PM where we had lunch. The temperature here was around 42°C in the shade! We crossed the border with Portugal around 03.00 PM, local time and at 04.30 PM we were crossing the Vasco da Gama Bridge and arriving in Lisbon after covering the last 1008 km of a memorable trip with no major incidents except for that one in the tunnel in Norway. It was only when I got to my apartment in Lisbon and connected to the Net that I became aware of a kind email sent by the Portuguese fellow biker and MP, Rodrigo Ribeiro, inviting us to a reception in front of the Portuguese Parliament. This would have been the perfect ending to this unforgettable 10958 km long trip.

Trip statistics:

The best: Our visit to Norway, its wonderful landscape and people

The worst: Our incident in one of Norway's tunnel

Total Kms: 10.859 (including 911 km in Ibiza)

Total days: 23

Average consumption: 7,6 liters / 100 kms. The best was 5,65 in Norway

Technical problems: A little trouble with the alarm, in France, and with my bike radio "joystick" at Ibiza

Total cost: about 4.000 euros each couple (excluding our staying at Ibiza)

Countries we passed by: Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Czech Republic

[Translated by Manuel Carreiro]

Visit my web site to see the pictures: <http://pierre.inazores.com>