

huge grin - «Moi, je suis professionnel, aussi, monsieur». Or your wife and your friend's wife are waiting by the bikes in a small village and when you return from the market, they are not to be found on the street. They have been lured into a nearby courtyard by a World War I veteran who remembers fighting with the Canadians at Verdun and wants to show them his house. Or your wife is leading the foursome down a lovely, deserted road in Brittany when the group is very gradually overtaken by a local woman on a moped, who is travelling barely faster than you are. No problem, except that when she attempts to pass your wife, your wife is extremely competitive, and the two of them crank off into the distance, each determined to pass the other and willing to set new land speed records in the process. Or you come upon a tiny village in Hungary, well off the main road, in which is a jewel of an Esterhazy palace and where Haydn laboured long and successfully, if not profitably, for his noble master. Or you find yourself in sun-drenched Alsace on a narrow, steep and winding lane between endless rows of grapevines marching off into the green and blue horizon, having spent a magical hour tasting the fresh, fruity riesling of Riquewihr. Or you are following a sinuous footpath in a Swiss meadow, in an enchanted soundscape of distant cowbells.

All of these happy vignettes flowed perfectly naturally from the use of that wonderful device, that ecologically sound, healthy, and socially non-threatening form of transportation - the bicycle. And none would have occurred if, instead, we had hurtled through the countryside in a steel, plastic and glass cubicle, kept safely at arm's length from all human and animal contact.

When we next see a cluster of cyclists in the County, remember that they are here on a similar experience of discovery - of us, of the County villages and farms, of sun and sand and water and landscapes and the ever-present wind, and, most of all, of themselves. We have a little corner of Ontario every bit as appealing to cyclists as Alsace or Vermont, so let's make these discoverers feel welcome. Who knows - you may even find occasion to bend a rule or two

to help them. "Normally, you can't do that, but I don't see why we couldn't make an exception."

On our first trip to France, we had come to believe that the *normalement* phenomenon was uniquely Gallic, a quaint characteristic of the francophone bureaucracy. We were mistaken. We left France by a ferry trip across the Channel to Portsmouth, followed by a next day's ride to Gatwick Airport. The plan was to leave our bikes there while we took the train into London for a final weekend before our departure. The Wardair office was then a tiny space in some obscure part of the terminal. We arrived late in the day and very tired after cycling 80 miles through the South Downs.

I explained to the clerk at the Wardair counter that I wanted to leave our bikes in a left luggage location, but was astonished to learn that no such location existed at Gatwick. Well then, could he please find space for them in the Wardair office. Unfortunately, he said, as I could see, the offices were very cramped and there was simply no room for four bicycles. Suddenly, it was *déjà vu*. I found myself following much the same routine as in French railway stations, although it felt odd to be doing this in English. But the urgent question was: would a patient exercise in diplomacy produce the same results in England as it had in France? "I can see your problem, sir, believe me, but storing our passengers' bicycles is not something we're equipped for here. We just can't handle them. Sorry about that. Now, it's true, there is a little extra storage space for our office just across the hall, but I am sure you will understand that we wouldn't want to open that up to every passenger that comes along. *Normally, sir, we can't do that.*"

Yes, he too found himself on the slippery slope created by the subversive bicycle conspiracy. And, sure enough, the bikes stayed at Gatwick in the Wardair office for the weekend while we went into London. Minding bicycles is something they don't do at Gatwick. *Normalement.*

Richard Potter