

## Going Dutch Diary

Roy Blunt, Cwmbran, Gwent, South Wales

**Tuesday 24th May.** Start off from home in South Wales, it's a lovely day and Dawn and I plan to travel on scenic routes through the Forest of Dean and the Cotswolds to stay overnight at Towcester (where we used to live) before travelling on to Harwich. Coming into roadworks in Lydney (only 30 miles from home), *Suzy's* engine just stops and won't restart. Fortunately it is downhill and we manage to roll a few yards onto a driveway. I get out and look at the back – there is a small pool of liquid on the road roughly where the engine stopped and a trail of drips from there to where *Suzy* is standing – it's petrol. My first thought is that the small fuel tube on the Solex carburettor has split. However, on feeling under the carb, the tube is obviously OK but petrol is still dripping from the inlet manifold drain tube. Can't see anything wrong but try tapping the side of the float chamber in case the float or needle valve has stuck. Something small but relatively heavy falls from the side of the carb, bounces on the heat shield, and disappears under the car. I'm worried that it is a screw of some sort but can't see or feel anything missing – however, petrol has now stopped dripping from the inlet manifold drain tube. Try to restart – she does! – a bit hesitantly, but, after a few seconds, seems OK. Give it a minute or two, then pull out on the road and continue. This is the first time that *Suzy* has actually stopped on the road since she was restored in 2004 – it is not at all like her. Decide that we will carry on for a few miles and then decide whether to continue in *Suzy* or run for home and change to 'the modern'. In the end we have a perfect 100-mile-run to Towcester and *Suzy* passes every test that I can give her. I'm still not sure what caused the problem – possibly a small stone holding the accelerator pump linkage open – perhaps tapping the carb dislodged it?

**Wednesday 25th.** *Suzy* starts perfectly and we carry on – again on a scenic route across country through Baldock, Haverhill, and down towards Colchester. Beautiful roads for Imping. Join the A12

just as Andy Gill's and Dom Smith's cars disappear into the distance ahead of us. Don't try and catch them – we're going at our own pace. Arrive in Harwich and pull off into Morrison's (other supermarkets are available but this one is truly convenient) to refuel *Suzy* at the petrol station and refuel ourselves in their excellent and relatively cheap café. Cross the roundabout to the Brewers Fayre 'Mayflower' pub and join other Impers waiting for the ferry – plenty of time to chat and admire the cars (and a pair of early 1950's Vincent Black Shadow 1,000 cc motorcycles). Then onto the ferry – find it slightly odd following Dom's BMW-powered Stiletto up the loading ramp – it sounds good but, as you might expect, 'different'!

**Thursday 26th.** Wake up after a good night's sleep on the ferry. Find *Suzy* (thankfully with no puddle of petrol under her!) and off we go. We are last in our row of Imps and expect to follow them. However Stena Line have other ideas, they let the other Imps go but hold us (just our car from our line!) on the ferry while all the trucks in other lines disembark! Eventually they let us off and we get to passport control – can just see some Imps ahead of us in the queue. Out onto Dutch roads – we plan to use the sat-nav and follow motorways and main routes to the Groesbeek site. However, we catch up with a few Imps and follow them when they diverge from our planned route (obviously they must know a better route!). After a couple of miles driving through industrial estates we re-join the main route at exactly the same junction we left it! Not sure what that was all about and decide to keep to the sat-nav route in future. Great welcome from the Dutch Impers at Groesbeek – we register and then put the tent up and make ourselves comfortable. A good evening, just chatting with other Impers and seeing more people arrive.

**Friday 27th.** Join the run around Nijmegen and into Germany. Find that the Nijmegen area has hills – some of them quite steep. Didn't expect hills in Holland but since the area around Nijmegen is called '7 Hills' and that is also emblazoned on the rally plaque we shouldn't be that surprised. Have problems following the route but the sat-nav comes to our rescue again several times. At times we are approaching a junction only to see Imps on the main road coming from the left and

There's always someone who has to park the wrong way round! Eindhoven – the overflow car-park for the DAF museum

Photo: Roy Blunt



from the right! Great scenery though. *Suzy's* steering column top bush has started to squeak when we go around roundabouts. Eventually abandon the planned route to return to the campsite, lubricate the steering column bush, and then walk into Groesbeek. Lovely little town. Find a wonderful ice cream shop and just sit and watch the world go by. Return to the site for an excellent buffet with all the Impers – the evening continues in the marquee and around the tents.

**Saturday 28th.** Run to Arcen for a visit to the brewery and/or the castle gardens. This time we set up the sat-nav before we start, but manage to follow the route well anyway. Arcen is a pretty little tourist town on the river Maas and the castle gardens are really superb – could spend all day there. Imps are parked in car-parks all over the town and are creating a lot of interest. As we pull out of the car-park the steering column bush gives a scream, rather than a squeak, and partially breaks up – after which it is much quieter. Fortunately it doesn't seem to affect the steering – so we can carry on. It's a barbecue tonight back at the campsite. Another great evening – and a chance to talk to a lot of friends both old and new.

**Sunday 29th.** Nice run to the DAF museum in Eindhoven today. Manage to follow the route for most of the way – just lose our way on the last bit but the sat-nav rescues us again. Lots of things



Massive DAF Paris-Dakar racing trucks  
Photo: Jason Mead

to see in the museum – from tiny DAF cars to huge Paris-Dakar racing trucks. Wonderful demonstration of the Variomatic transmission (what a great system) but I'll stick to my manual gearboxes! Good run back to the site for the evening meal. It's a case of barbecuing the leftovers plus any remaining food people wish to cook. Another good evening.

**Monday 30th.** Up to this morning the weather for Going Dutch has been pretty good, but we wake up to the sound of rain falling on the tent and the forecast isn't good. Take the tent down wet (it's an old cotton frame tent and weighs a lot when wet), and pack it all into *Suzy* – unfortunately we and she get pretty wet but, by the time we have said our goodbyes and are ready to leave, it has almost stopped raining and we can keep the windows slightly open to minimise condensation. We're on the overnight ferry from *Hoek van Holland* so we have plenty of time to use side roads and see more of the scenery. Very pleasant drive – and the rain stops completely about midday so we can dry *Suzy* out a bit. Close to the ferry port we park up in the seaside village of Monster (yes, really), go for a walk on the beach and watch people surfing. Get back to the car-park and a convoy of four Imps arrive looking for a restaurant before getting to the ferry. Unfortunately there

isn't much open today so a Monster munch is out! Drive the couple of miles to the ferry port and join the queue with other Imps. The two Vincent motorcycles are there – plus a couple of Vincent sidecar combinations – as well as a beautiful German registered classic open MG sports car – complete with a notice 'Be careful! The first time in UK' on the back and a similar mirror-image notice on the front! Onto the ferry.

**Tuesday 31st.** Off the ferry at Harwich – it's raining! Stop at Morrison's in Harwich again for petrol and a good breakfast before heading back towards Towcester – again on side roads. The rain gets worse and worse – it's torrential in places and a slip road onto the A12 is blocked due to floods. It's a case of headlights, wipers, and blower fan on virtually all the way but *Suzy* takes it all in her stride and, after a stop in Milton Keynes for a break and a meal, we arrive in Towcester.

**Wednesday 1st June.** Still drizzling when we start off on the final leg home but it soon stops and we have an excellent drive across the Cotswolds and Forest of Dean back into Wales – where it is sunny. Unpack *Suzy* and get the very wet tent up on the lawn to dry while *Suzy* dries out in the sun.

All told an excellent trip. Our first Going Dutch but, all being well, it won't be the last. Sincere thanks to the organisers – great job – and to all attendees for their company. Apart from *Suzy's* little hiccup in Lydney on the first day she's run really well. As for the steering column bush problem – well, it didn't stop us doing anything and, when I was talking to Grahame Pearson (our Editor) about it he said, "She's probably not used to going round the roundabouts the wrong way and felt she had to make some sort of token protest while still ensuring she got back home safely!" How well he knows the workings of an Imp's mind!

## My first Going Dutch

Grahame Pearson, Billingshurst, West Sussex

Not only was this my first Going Dutch trip but it was my Imp's first venture abroad. A rummage through various drawers unearthed an old unused Imp Club Regalia GB sticker which was duly affixed to the rear window. Right, that's the car ready. Well, not quite. Seriously though, a new fuel filter, a few squirts of grease in the king-pins and a quick check of tyre pressures and fluids was the extent of my pre-trip preparation to the Imp. I've been using the car pretty regularly over the last couple of years and have every confidence in its reliability. It had, after all, been to Coventry, Scotland and Darlington for recent Nationals.

My partner Angela, much to my surprise and delight, had agreed several months ago to brave the adventure. However, as the departure date drew near she started to become more apprehensive and, at one point, even asked if she could fly to Holland and meet me there. Well, what would you say? "No way!" How do you explain to a non-classic car enthusiast that the getting there was part of the adventure? While I agreed that my Imp is not as comfortable, quiet or fast (by a long way) as her (BMW) Mini Cooper S daily driver it surely wasn't *that* bad. As means of transport go, it's better than a bicycle and the Dutch seem to manage just fine with those. Anyway, we compromised that she would take a train to Colchester after work (in London) on the Wednesday and I would pick her up at the station for the 30-minute trip to the ferry terminal at Harwich.

I have always loved travelling by ship – so much less stressful than flying. Don't get me wrong, the actual *flying* bit I love. It's the crowded airports with everyone seemingly in such a tearing hurry (despite having got there at least an hour before departure) that I detest; it's difficult to avoid the transferred stress. Airports are simply not relaxing places and holidays are meant to be, well, relaxing. Added to that, as an OCD sufferer I have a totally irrational fear of finding myself on the wrong flight which necessitates constant checking and double-checking of tickets, passport, etc! No, ferries are way better. Set the Tom Tom for the ferry terminal, stay seated in the car, Radio 3 wafting through the speakers, and drive straight onto the ship. Easy. And so it was this time.

Checking in at the terminal the passport officer told us it was *years* since he'd last seen an Imp. I adopted a puzzled expression and pointed behind me to more than a dozen Imps in the queue. His expression had to be seen to be believed!

The cabin on the Stena Line ship could only be described as superb. How could a 'plane seat with zero leg room even be an option? With the North Sea as calm as a mill pond we slept like babes. Rising early and following a buffet breakfast consisting of a bowl of fruit, orange juice, full English breakfast (well, *almost* full – sadly there was no black pudding), toast, marmalade and three cups of tea we disembarked, fresh as daisies, watches set to Dutch time, and tagged onto the long line of Imps ready for what I expected would be a convoy to the site...

Well, the convoy didn't really happen as, like Roy & Dawn with *Suzy*, I favoured a slightly more leisurely pace than many others, must be getting old! As access to the chalets was not until 3 p.m. there seemed little point in rushing anyway, so the cruise control (aka my ankle) was set to 65 mph and off we set.

Any beauty Rotterdam may have had was not enhanced by a dense fog which we initially couldn't work out was weather or pollution induced. Remembering the area has a strong



Chalets were beyond expectations  
Photo: Grahame Pearson

petrochemical industry we concluded it was probably the latter. A shame this spectacle is the first to greet visitors as it is totally at odds with the cliché images of tulips and windmills one associates with The Netherlands. It gradually cleared as we travelled east and the day got warmer, the sun burning through the diminishing haze. As it became ever hotter we were very glad of the Imp's air-conditioning (aka sunroof). Still no windmills though.

Many passing Dutch motorists waved to us, far more so than in England. That was the good bit. Less appreciated was when overtaking lines of lorries (which rarely left sufficient gaps between each other to pull into), and increasing my speed to 70 mph, many Dutch drivers would be initially a mere dot on the horizon but would rapidly fill the Imp's rear-view mirror at a speed that would make a German *autobahn* BMW seem milk-float-like in comparison. Not safe at all, though it has to be said it wasn't *aggressive* in the way an English tailgater is. Angela suggested it was merely a cultural thing: that's how the Dutch drive on motorways and that's that. I decided to be assertive – they would simply have to wait for me to pull back in after the lorries were passed. The kilometres rolled slowly by and, as we neared the site, the roads became prettier. Driving on the 'wrong' side was not an issue (I have driven extensively in France and Spain) though it was reassuring to have a second pair of eyes just in case of a 'senior moment' at a junction.

On arrival at the De Oude Molen (The Old Windmill) site in Groesbeek we registered at Rally Control and received a warm welcome from Henke, Tineke, Hans and the rest of the team. We were given a goodie bag containing a rally plaque for the car's bumper, two small window stickers, various leaflets for local places of interest and, the crowning glory, a superbly produced A4-size ring-bound booklet with itinerary, route instructions and colour maps for all the runs.

With some time still to go before the chalets could be accessed, we enjoyed meeting and chatting to the other Impers. Most seemed to have enjoyed trouble-free journeys though Phil Mountain from Doncaster was a spectacular exception. Coming over a day or two earlier, he suffered a sheared drive-shaft (you simply can't plan for that!) with the wheel disappearing up into the wheelarch, thankfully on a straight road, as any steering input could have been disastrous. The Imp ground to a halt amidst a shower of sparks from the silencer and brake drum, the latter finishing up far from round. A tow to Henke's well-equipped workshop soon had Phil's Imp as right as rain and bizarrely without even a scratch on the bodywork!

I have always found scorching sun difficult and, with no shade available, was glad when 3 p.m. arrived and we could retreat for a while to the inviting cool of our chalet. Angela had refused point blank to camp and, with increasing years, I have to agree that a chalet certainly has its attractions and was very welcome after the long drive. With the little Imp basking in the shade of a palm tree it was a real home from home.

After a brief rest and very necessary cup of tea we drove into Groesbeek to get some essentials: milk, eggs, cheese, etc. and then visited the nearby Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery where many of the 1,680 graves belonged, as you'd expect, to Parachute Regiment soldiers. More surprising was the huge numbers of pilots from the Glider Pilot Regiment, a reminder of the catastrophic risks involved in landing the gliders in Operation *Market Garden* in September 1944. Some of the graves belonged to soldiers who had died in Germany, having crossed the Rhine, but after the war it was felt they should not be buried on German soil so their bodies were exhumed and they now lie in this cemetery.

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One of many RAF Lancaster crews buried at the Reichswald Forest War Cemetery. Three of this crew aged just 20  
Photo: Grahame Pearson

I will at this point say that it was never our plan to do *all* the runs and I apologise if this seemed unsociable; this was not the intention. We were treating this not just as an Imp Club trip but also as a mini (OK, bad choice of word!) holiday and much-needed break from our hectic daily lives.

So it was that on the first full day, Friday, we decided to venture into Germany and across the Rhine to visit the Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, a much larger one than Oosterbeek. Angela, being a Kiwi, had read online that among the cemetery's 7,672 allied graves were some 127 belonging to New Zealanders who had served with the RAF on bombing raids over Germany. The cemetery is beautifully kept, as was Oosterbeek (where we were told local Groesbeek children are each allocated one grave to tend, a task they carry out with great diligence). It was particularly poignant – and admirable – to see that crews of downed bombers (mostly Lancasters) were buried together in groups of seven – just as they had lived, fought and died together. Looking at the ages on the headstones many were only just out of their teens. Most would never have even driven a car but were given command of huge bombers, flying at night enduring flak and night fighters; those boys certainly grew up quick. We owe a huge debt to them all.



Getting all lovey-dovey at Arcen's wonderful castle garden  
Photo: Grahame Pearson

While in Germany we filled up with petrol – wow!, mega cheap and 98 octane too – real *autobahn* brew! The very pleasant young *fraulein* on the till asked me what my car was and couldn't believe it was nearly 50!

On Friday afternoon we visited club members Bert and Ernie Clewits who coincidentally live in Groesbeek. Bert, whom I've known since the club's very early days having first met him at the club's first big gathering



Bert Clewits heads the queue for the Arcen ferry. Takes twelve cars at each crossing  
Photo: Grahame Pearson

at Knebworth in 1984, had e-mailed me a few days before the trip to invite me to his home for tea and cake. I see the Clewits most years at the National but visiting them on their 'home turf' was a first. It was nice to be shown over Bert's fleet of Imps and also his Sunbeam Alpine.

Friday evening was the buffet meal in the site's hotel restaurant. This was superb and yet another example of the Dutch hospitality. On our table we met a delightful couple with many stories to tell: Chris & Caroline Wittering from Dunstable, Imp owners for many years but relatively new to the club. Later we were joined by the Simon & Karen Benoy and Keith & Mary Robbins as well as several others who came over for 'stop and chats'. A lovely evening.

Saturday's run to Arcen was one we definitely wanted to take part in but, once there would it be the brewery or castle and its gardens? As I gave up drinking in 2012 Angela very kindly suggested the castle and gardens might be the better choice. Although a lifelong non-gardener I



No spoiler to worry about on the Editor's Imp!  
Photo: Angela Goddard



Replica Waco CG-4A glider at Groesbeek a poignant reminder of the town's wartime history  
Photo: Grahame Pearson

was blown away by the gardens. It wasn't so much the flowers (and birds) that impressed – though they were many and varied – but the sheer *architecture* of the gardens. In some places they resembled English formal gardens while in others they were far more adventurous with all kinds of materials used

in their construction, from rusty steel sheets being used as pathways to bamboo and extensive use of water. There was even an indoor tropical hothouse like a miniature Kew Gardens or Eden Project. Amazing. Bert joined us on our walk around the gardens as did Ann Dowler from Stroud who was on the trip with husband Tony though he had elected to give the gardens a miss. His loss! Afterwards we stopped at the castle's café where Angela and I sampled Dutch apple pie and whipped cream for the first time. I must admit I had not realised this part of The Netherlands was famous for this delicacy but having tasted it I can fully appreciate why. It was quite simply the most gorgeous I had ever tasted!

On the way back to Groesbeek, in convoy with Bert, we stopped off at a huge field just outside the town which, Bert informed us, was one of several sites used for the allied glider landings. A framework replica of one of the gliders was at one end of the field. Although this was the only visual clue to the site's wartime history it was quite eerie to stand there in the silence and imagine how this field must have been transformed in 1944 during Operation *Market Garden* with the air thick with gliders and parachutists. Leaving the field we all stopped after a few miles for delicious ice creams at a wonderful little café which gently and delightfully brought us back to the present.

By now fully relaxed and most definitely in holiday mood we enjoyed a lovely evening at the barbecue. The weather was perfect, as was the company and of course the food. We enjoyed chatting to many members I had only met briefly at Nationals or, in many cases, only known via e-mail. It was particularly nice to chat with Roy Blunt following his prolific *Impressions* submissions and whose Imp, *Suzy*, is the spitting image of mine – or at least it would be had I not got bored with it some years ago and started modifying it! I'd also been keen to catch up with Phil and Lesley Smith. Sadly, Phil had just received devastating news that his father, who had been unwell, had passed away that morning (my sincere condolences, Phil) which would necessitate an early return to England the next morning. But that was tomorrow... Lesley, keen to enjoy the present, literally grabbed my arm and hauled me over to meet *Hilda*, her beautifully restored Wardance (orange) Imp Super! It only took a few seconds to appreciate that Lesley is one very talented lady and has retrimmed *Hilda's* interior to perfection. *Hilda* brought back memories for me as my first Imp was

the same colour. A really nice Imp, Lesley, and a credit to you. Angela, wondering where I'd disappeared to, came to rescue me (just kidding, Lesley!) and led me back to the throng but not before a 'stop and chat' with Dom Smith who didn't need much prompting to show me his BMW motorbike-engined Stiletto...

Now, I have to admit to being in the camp of keeping an Imp Imp-powered but this is partly because I don't really like to see irreversible mods on a classic car, and most engine transplants entail cutting the bodywork. I believe we should always remember that we are only temporary custodians of these classic cars and with that comes a duty to preserve them. However, I was genuinely impressed with the BMW transplant – no cutting of bodywork is necessary and it even utilises the standard Imp rear engine mount. Brilliant. Dom told me he would have loved to keep the car as Rootes intended but his *volte-face* was prompted by a run of unreliability with a succession of Imp engines so I can fully appreciate his thinking. Certainly the BMW route should give excellent reliability and is a lot cheaper than building an Imp engine of similar performance – a big factor for a young chap of limited means. Dom was keen to stress that well-known Imp restorer Clark Dawson is the talented man behind the conversion and can supply the adapter to mate the BMW lump with the Imp's gearbox. I can see more people taking up this option though I would hope they keep the original Imp engine to pass on to the car's next owner.

On Sunday we gave decided to give the DAF museum a miss, opting to chill out out in the local area. We enjoyed a another run into Germany and also stocked up on local goodies at the Groesbeek supermarket including a massive Edam cheese to take back home. We then walked to the *Bevrijdingsmuseum* (Liberation Museum) which was literally next door to the site. That was extremely interesting, the visit culminating at a tree where young visitors of all nationalities are invited to write messages on leaf-shaped pieces of paper and pin them on the branches. Many 'leaves' gave thanks to the many soldiers and airmen who gave their lives in the liberation of Holland. Reading them was a very moving experience. On a lighter note I was pleased to discover the museum also had a café – it would have been a crime not to have another slice of apple pie with cream. So we did!

Monday morning dawned wet and got wetter. We allowed ourselves a little gloatette that we did not have to pack up a tent in such heavy rain! Saying goodbye to as many as we could, rain permitting, we tapped 'Hook of Holland' into the sat-nav, allowing ourselves plenty of time bearing in mind the weather. I won't say it was a *pleasurable* drive, with much spray from lorries



Hilda and Lesley: woman and machine in perfect harmony  
Photo: Grahame Pearson



(Imp windscreen wipers were not exactly cutting edge in 1963 and are pretty dreadful by today's standards) and the antics of the aforementioned fast-lane *Kamikaze* drivers, seemingly undeterred by the appalling driving conditions, but we arrived at the ferry without any problems, looking forward

to the relatively sedate M25! Again, the cabin on the boat was a haven and we rested, read, made a sizable dent in our Edam, and had a zizz, knowing that we would probably not arrive home until around 11 p.m. Once again, the North Sea was surprisingly calm. Our cabin had a huge porthole window some five feet or so in diameter. The return trip being in daylight I had thought to pack my binoculars and it was fun looking at the numerous tankers and container ships.

The final leg from Harwich to Billingshurst was also extremely wet but failed to dampen our spirits and we arrived home feeling we had enjoyed a superb trip and a well deserved break away from the daily grind. Next day we would be up with the lark at 5.30 a.m. Business as usual!

The Imp covered around 700 completely trouble-free miles. I didn't work out the fuel consumption but it was extremely impressive. The last Blighty fill-up was in Colchester and the next time I filled up was in Germany where the tank was only around half empty – or half full if you prefer! My carbie is a Weber 28/36 which, driven mostly on the primary choke, seems every bit as economical as a Solex but with the secondary choke giving performance when needed. Water usage was zero and oil consumption (Valvoline VR1 20W-50) a little over a pint which I'm happy with.

I would encourage all members to consider Going Dutch in 2018. I reckon most Imps in the club are very reliable nowadays so don't let that deter you. Besides, all decent classic insurance policies cover breakdowns abroad (and there are plenty of other Impers to assist of course) so it's really no more risky than driving to a National and, for many, it's actually fewer miles. It's huge fun and very satisfying.

The Dutch are extremely hospitable and, I'm embarrassed to say more friendly to us than we are to those who visit England. One time, I was parked outside the Lidl supermarket in Groesbeek and a lady tapped on the window, waved a GB sticker (which I can only assume she kept in the glovebox for such occasions) and gave me a thumbs-up! I wound the window down but, unusually, she couldn't speak English. She didn't need to... her huge grin needed no translation: we welcome English visitors! I think that says it all.

A big thank you to the organisers who made our first Going Dutch so wonderful – it certainly won't be our last. And I have a sneaking suspicion that Angela enjoyed it just as much as I did!