

## The Impberian Job – Part Four

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### Day 12 – Barcelona (0 km)

We met for breakfast and then shared a taxi into the city. It was the 11th September which is a city holiday in Barcelona and a day of Catalan celebration. Many shops are closed, the tourist buses only operate until 2 p.m. and there was a protest march planned too. On the plus side, there was a discount on the bus tour; the bars and restaurants were open and there was free music. We explored independently but mostly did fairly similar activities and of course seeing Gaudi's *Sagrada Familia* cathedral was a must. (Picture 17.)



We bought our bus tour tickets and set about getting as much value out of them as we could before they stopped. We all managed two of the three available routes. We saw some fantastic sights, but some of the most interesting ones were associated with the day, the people and the march. We saw a huge motorcycle cavalcade, Catalans being brought in by the coachload, and the march passed us twice – once on the bus with firecrackers being set off, and again on foot in Las Ramblas; it was

heading towards us so we stepped into a bar for some well earned refreshment.

We met up again back at the hotel where we shared tales of our day over a drink before finalising the arrangements for the next day.

### Day 13 – Barcelona to Andorra (240 km)

A short distance trip today but with some interesting roads instead of the motorway munching we'd become used to. Si and Nikki led the way out of Barcelona avoiding the clean air zone and very soon we



were in the mountains. We stopped for some fuel and had the cars admired by a couple on a motorbike who were also headed for Andorra. There was no coffee at the fuel stop so after a short while we stopped at a pretty mountain town for coffee.

Refresed, we were soon climbing the winding mountain roads, stopping regularly to take in the views and because we kept catching up buses. We reached the summit at 1790 metres and took a quick photo, but this was no Stelvio! No gift shops, only one restaurant and the place smelt like a cesspit, so we carried on. (Pictures 18 & 19.)

We had fun heading down the mountain, it was reminiscent of scenic runs at a Wicked Welsh Weekend, but longer and higher up. And much, much hotter!

We were well on course to arrive in Andorra quite early but were hungry so our last stop in Spain was at a great little place called Davids. Sated, we then did lots of little towns and some tunnels before reaching the border with Andorra. We were all expecting tiny mountain villages, chalets and more rural roads, but as soon as you cross into Andorra from Spain you are basically in the city; the duty-free shopping starts within metres. Fuel is cheap though, so we filled up.



Then we set off for the hotel in Andorra La Vella. The traffic was heavy but despite one setback with the sat-nav trying to direct us down a road that didn't exist, we found the hotel quite easily. We arrived in the car park at about 4.30 p.m. There was a very helpful parking attendant who took all our





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the toilets were and no bar either, although on a search around the cavernous lobby Simon found a vending machine containing cans of cider, so we grabbed a couple of those. We were glad we did; when we reached our room, having established that the bar was in the sister hotel next door (together with all three of the hotel's restaurants), only to find it was closed. It was 5.40 p.m.!

However, there was a pool and spa on the top floor so most of us headed up there. We spent an hour or so chilling and enjoying the stunning views of the mountains all around.

After a shower we headed out for a dinner which we enjoyed next to the beautiful but very noisy river. (Pictures 20 & 21.)

#### Day 14 – Andorra to Montelimar (478 km)

Today was a day of two halves. It started with heading out of Andorra and expecting to get on to roads that were very squiggly. However, we failed to translate the road signs and ended up paying a toll for the privilege of missing the interesting Pas De La Cassa!

We were redeemed though. When we got to Ax Les Thermes the sat-nav took us over the mountains and we had a lovely drive, stopping for the view and then for a coffee in a tiny village.



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details and directed us to our parking spaces. We then made our way to hotel reception. The check-in was appalling. There was a queue when we arrived and multiple nationalities communicating their frustration with the universal language of rolled eyes. There was no indication where

After coffee we carried on through a beautiful valley and then we started our descent down the mountain; more fun on the squiggly roads. (Picture 22.)

Once we were down the mountain the roads became both boring and frustrating. In and out of villages with roundabouts,

regular changes of speed limit and no opportunity to make fast progress. We eventually made it to Carcassonne for our lunch stop and had a pleasant hour or so exploring the old city. (Pictures 23 & 24.)

The rest of the drive was long and hot but uninteresting, just mile crunching on the

motorway until we reached the junction for Montelimar. A few kilometres on country roads there were 'interesting' – the 50 km limit was ignored by others and a Citroën almost took Si's front wing off overtaking!

We found the hotel fairly easily, set back from a row of restaurants and shops, but the parking wasn't immediately obvious. When we did get in, we had to double-park in the small courtyard. (Picture 25.) The hotel was nice; no bar or restaurant but it was on the main drag so we didn't have to walk far to find one, and we had a lovely meal, including nougat ice cream.

#### Day 15 – Montelimar to Reims (634 km)

A nice breakfast in the hotel, a quick dash next door to the nougat shop, setting off just after 9 a.m. This was a long day, but we were prepared for it. We made good time despite a minor incident with the Singer's dynamo which was thankfully just a loose wire.

We kept pressing on in long stints and it was hot again, but not Portugal hot, it was touching 30°C but didn't get any higher.

Once we got to Reims the hotel was pretty easy to find, right next to the train station, but it was 6 p.m. on a Saturday and there was a road closed so actually getting to it was more difficult than it should have been.

Once we were checked in and showered we had a quick drink in the hotel bar before heading into town. We started looking at whether we could visit what's left of the famous circuit, only to discover that there was to be an event there the next day. A quandary – do we sacrifice our



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well earned lie-in so we can spectate for a while before we have to bolt for the channel tunnel?

The Benoys and the Witterings had stayed in Reims on their way back from the Imptalian Job, but Si and Nikki had missed out and were determined to have champagne.

On a Saturday night in

the champagne capital? For some unknown reason it was more difficult than expected; we tried two places that were just closing but then found a good place and shared a bottle as we toasted Roger, the 7th musketeer and mastermind of the trip. (Picture 26.) And then we went for a curry.

We walked back to the hotel via the fountain and stayed up playing bar football, Connect Four and pinball.

The last full day of the trip over, we retired to easily the smallest and hottest room of the adventure and fell asleep looking forward to our own beds tomorrow.

#### Day 16 – Reims to Home (277 km plus distance from Folkestone home)

Yes, you guessed right, we did. We gave up on our last lie-in, ignored the champagne hangover and got up early to head to the event at the circuit.

We left the hotel just after 9 a.m. for what should have been a ten-minute drive. There wasn't much traffic but the phasing of the lights meant we got split up immediately.

We reached the location that Google thought the circuit was at, but the road was closed for the event. We parked in a restaurant car park nearby to regroup and enjoyed watching a huge number of interesting cars arriving.

Chris and Caroline had been directed into the event. They had a quick look around and took a photo of the old pits buildings (Picture 27) but time was getting on, we didn't know what it would cost to get in and we didn't think we'd be able to do it justice. Shame though, if we had



known before then we would have booked a later crossing.

We reunited and headed for Calais, a fairly short journey. We stopped for fuel just outside Reims, and again for coffee about 100 km from the tunnel – our final foreign motorway services.

We arrived in good time for our booking and were offered earlier trains, which we took. Our train was delayed anyway so we headed in for a spot of duty-free and some lunch. There were more delays so we ended up on a train ten minutes later than the one we'd booked.

As always, there was a delay at Dartford, and some slow moving traffic on the rest of the trip back but nothing to hold us up for long.

We haven't worked out the exact cost of the trip; we paid for some hotels when we booked them and others when we stayed in them. They ranged in cost from about 40-90 euros per night, usually plus breakfast and parking. We got through quite a lot of petrol, this was cheapest in Andorra, then Spain. It was most expensive in Portugal. Tolls can add quite a lot to the price – we used a lot of toll roads as we usually had long distances to cover. We had toll devices to enable us to pass quickly through the gates, often without even stopping. Then there were evening meals, drinks, stops at services for coffees, cakes, etc.

In summary, it was a fantastic experience, a truly superb adventure, but much too arduous to be considered a holiday! The cars were brilliant, handling the extreme conditions really well and able to cruise continuously at about 115 kph / 70 mph on the motorway, except during the very hottest periods when we slowed a bit. But all the cars have front radiators, I am not sure that this trip would have been as straightforward in a standard Imp in these timescales and with such heat.

To pass the time on the long drives, Chris and Caroline came up with the following nicknames for the men – can you work out which applied to who? They were Captain Cautious, Sergeant Speedy, Lieutenant Lightfoot and Admiral Absent!

