

On driving in the UK, to the North

When people plan to drive in the UK they are usually very worried because they will have to drive on the “other” side. My plan was to follow the car ahead of me, and to remember that my body had to remain close to the sidewalks. Left and right did not concern me that much, for the very simple reason that, I will tell you a secret, I am not good at differentiating them. I have a right hand dominance and a left eye dominance, a thing that makes any kind of shooting a bit more complicated and that makes hard to differentiate the left from the right. In the end, I can always solve the puzzle, but I have to think first. The left & right thing resurfaces each time I have to cast the dog or, even worse, when one of my trainers, yells out loud the direction I should send the dog.

Confusing as it is, my complicated relationship with the sides becomes an advantage when I had to start driving on the “wrong side” (the British side will be referred as the “other side” or as “the wrong side” throughout the text, as I cannot say if you drive on the left on the right, for the reasons I explained above).

When I arrived in [Folkestone](#) I simply followed the flow and immediately felt at ease. There was much traffic but it was a polite traffic even when we were stuck in queue for the Dartford Crossing. The Dartford Crossing is peculiar thing: I went through a tunnel on my way to Northern England and on a bridge when driving Southwards but, most of all, the Dartford people want you to pay for the crossing but do not give you any chances to pay. I knew I was supposed to give them a few pounds, but no Dartford elves showed up to collect my money, nor the Dartforders placed any barriers to stop me and force me to give them my coins. So? Well, I did not pay, I think they will try to track me and I will simply answer that there

was no way I could pay them, as none told me I had to do it in advance (or by the subsequent midnight) with a credit card. I think, that soon or later, before Brexit will be Brexit, some continental driver will rightly bring up the issue at the UE Law Court: how can you ask people to pay and, at the same time, don't allow them to pay? This reminds me of Alice's travels In the wonderlands.

But anyway, let's move northwards, what you meet next is London or, rather, a motorway that goes around London. This step would probably scare the average foreigners but not anyone used to drive on the Milan bypass. If you survive driving around Milan in the rush hour of the morning, you can survive anything. Let's take the A7, for example, the motorways that goes from Genova to Milan: at 7 in the morning is absolutely common to be passed by someone on your right (which for us is the wrong side to pass a car) speeding at 160 kms/hour. The Milanese needs to reach the office on time and you are not allowed to be slow in Milan, no matter what, everybody must run. Equally normal are the Milanesi imbruttiti (the ugly Milanese) who, facing the motorway's last barrier towards Milan, speed up against it instead of the decelerating. The Londoners might be many and might be busy, but none of them drives like the average Milanese driver so passing London was incredibly easy.

When I reached Stanstead I realized I needed a service station and, following the signs, I ended up in a small village, with a nice country club right in front of my car, and no service station in sight. I then went around a roundabout for about twenty times and I finally realized that the service station was a shopping centre close to the village. I have nothing against shopping centres, I was simply expecting something different: in Italy the Autogrill (which are usually nice service stations) are ON the motorways, you do not have to go hunting for them!



Past the service station, I continued driving to "the North", as written on the signs, and began to get to know the [A1](#) darkest sides. I thought the A1 (called also M1) was a motorway but the Brits say it is not. To me it looks, indeed, like a motorway, maybe not an excellent motorway, but still a motorway hence I was driving as it was. Wait a minute, how comes that "dumb" individual crosses the motorway with his car? Is he crazy or what? I was sincerely shocked: in Italy you would be jailed if you dared to do that on a motorway but...wow, someone else is doing the same, again????!!!! Paying more attention, I noticed signs and "points" (aka deadly gap

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ing drivers to do so. I am still amazed by the fact that this is LEGAL! As it is legal that a pedestrian crosses the A1, or that a tractor or a horse appear on it, signs warn drivers about “Farm Traffic”, a traffic which constantly materializes in the worst moments and locations. Some parts of the A1 are undergoing a restyling and you can also be forced to drive for miles at a very slow speed due to some “works in progress”. The A1, as all the other British motorways, is free: drivers do not pay a pound to use them and I sort of understand why. Curiously, even though the Italian motorways are expensive, the worst trait of the [A3 Salerno-Reggio Calabria](#) in Southern Italy (known as the motorway none wants to be on!) is free: I really have to try it and then compare it to the British A1!

Nevertheless, I arrived in [Woodland](#).