

From French Fleas to English Horses

When eventually came out from the [Eurotunnel](#) I was disappointed: there was nothing special. Of course I was in Folkestone, England, but there was nothing welcoming us: we were simply sent away our train and met no special buildings, nothing but for an anonymous road leading us to more trafficked one. I already wrote about driving in England, to The North, and you can read my impressions [here](#), I love that sign by the way! Today, I will concentrate on what happened in around Stanstead Airport, I think it was there, mile more or mile less, I remember planes flying low over my head.



While waiting for my train, at the Eurotunnel, I noticed some dark brown dots among Briony hair. “Unfortunately”, I have been a parasitology intern for a whole semester, which means I know more than I wish to know about all sort of nasty bugs infesting pets. The combination black dots + dog + hair, therefore, elicited quite an alarming reaction, but I

desperately tried to be positive. Briony had been bathed, cleaned and groomed before I left, to make sure she was not going to travel around Europe carrying any clandestine bugs. She hardly had any parasites during all her life and I am quite picky in these things, I really had no reason to fear the worst. My inquisitive mind, however, was looking for detailed answers. It was afternoon when I decided to stop at a service station: my sat nav told me that there was one (and road signs said the same) so I followed their advice and I got lost. I know it might sound stupid, but in Italy motorway’

service stations are ON the motorway, not elsewhere. Since you pay to access the motorway here, you are not supposed to leave it until your trip is over: they basically lock you inside, together with everything you might need. You do not need to leave the motorway to buy some food, or some gas. So, as naïve as I can sometimes be, I could not believe my sat nav was taking me away from the motorway. I ended up in a small village, at a small village Country Club to be more precise, very pretty but no service stations. I stopped the car in a corner, recollected myself and persisted, eventually landing in a giant parking lot surrounded by supermarkets of all sorts. I badly needed a toilet (I drank so much water on the way!), something fresh to drink and a dinner for the night but... it was incredibly hot, too hot to leave the dog in the car for a prolonged time. I ended up leaving the car semi-open and having multiple- short- trips the shops.

After the first trip – toilet -I went back to the car, took Briony out, walked her and then dug among bags and suitcases to find the “grooming bag” and the medicines case. Flea comb came out first confirming my fears:



the dog was carrying hundreds of bugs. I could not believe it: she was bug free when we left from home and now she was covered with fleas! I do not like chemicals and I know the less toxic products against fleas are not 100% effective but, I had to do something! I decided to adopt a multi-step strategy: part first consisted in looking for any single bug and smashing it, to be sure of its death. It took more than an hour... I then took Frontline spray, Neem spray and Scalibor collar (I travel heavy for a reason!) and placed all of them (these molecules can be safely used together) on Briony... I am an holistic vet in progress, I try to avoid medicines and chemicals at all costs, but I was so shocked by all those fleas that I opted for heavy artillery! I did not want to carry all those fleas around much longer.

As soon as she looked cleaner, I sprayed Frontline inside the crate and inside the car and left, in the hope to reach Woodland, in County Durham, my final destination, before the sunset. I think I parked in my B&B yard at around 9 PM, it was the golden hour and the place looked peaceful and welcoming. The owners were as well, I immediately loved that small “farm” with stone walls, surrounded by horses and paddocks, an ideal temporary home! (Slideshow with pictures below).

Ps. If you wonder where did the fleas came from... I think they were a gift from some French cats roaming around the [French hotel](#)...

Still curious about British trials? Check the section A Month on the Moor or [click here](#).

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 junctions?) specifically allowing drivers to do so. I am still



t 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](#).