

English Summer Trials: Daily Life

People keep asking about British trials.... but they always forget to ask about daily life during these trials! A brief recap: I watched Champion Stake 2015 (this falls into “English Summer Trials”); participated in [English and Scottish summer trials in 2016](#); participated in [English partridge trials in Norfolk](#) (autumn trials) in 2017. Now I am just back from English summer trials 2018 and I am still incredibly tired: summer trials are not really a relaxing holiday, probably they are not a holiday at all!



Grouse

I have to admit that Autumn Partridge trials, in spite of being less flashy, are perfectly suitable to the average human being, whereas Grouse Summer trials are certainly more demanding in terms of physical fitness. I do not consider myself a lazy person, and I do my best to keep in shape, but I get tired quite easily, this makes me think that to survive in summer trials with elegance you need to be a bit of a superhero. For this reason, this year I did not even dare to cross the Scottish border: my 2016 experience in Scotland was pretty intense and most of my time was spent on the road, travelling from one trial to another, often trying to reach the micro supermarket (& service station) in Grantown on Spey before it was too late. Maybe it was too much just because I [was staying](#)

[in a B&B](#) I did not particularly enjoy and from which I eventually ran away. Maybe it was so bad because I did not even have a fridge, nor a freezer or... most likely, there was simply too much to do for one person travelling alone.

This is one of the reasons that made me opt for "[England only](#)" this year, as if rural England was easy to deal with. I tried to be more organized and I booked a whole cottage: um mm err... it was a cottage suitable for five people, much more than one small sized human and her dog would have needed, but it was conveniently located and reasonably priced. Most of the people participating in British trials, indeed, do not stay in hotels, or at home, as it happens with FCI trials (at least those taking place in Italy). The Brits normally live in a caravan (some Irish even dared to live in a tent!) or rent a cottage, a few opt for a bed and breakfast. Trials take place every day (one day you have the puppy or the novice stake, and on the following day you normally have the open stake) and most of the competitors have a trial each day.



Newbiggin estate

Trials start later than Italian FCI trials: the meeting is normally at 9 o'clock (and not at dawn as awfully required here), but the venue might be far from where you are staying. In my experience, since I have always skipped the first trials, those that take place near Lauder (Scottish Borders), we have about one week of trials near Blanchland and Barnard Castle, which are villages in [County of Durham](#) and Northumberland, and one second week with trials around Reeth,

in North Yorkshire. People can choose whether to move around from trial to trial, to stay one week in one place and then move somewhere else to get closer to the next trials, or decide to remain two weeks in the same place, and drive back and forth. I chose the third option to avoid packing and unpacking continuously.

Trialers do not travel light: they cannot. Most of the people drive a pick up truck full of dogs, clothes and food. You can have all sort of weathers during a trials circuit, sometimes even during a single trial: this year temperatures ranged from 8°C degrees with high winds and rain to thirty something degrees. You need to bring summer clothes, rain clothes and winter clothes, better if in two copies, as everything can get soaked with water. You also need a hat, a rain hat, some sunscreen, a walking stick, the list of the must have is long, I am just mentioning something to let you imagine how full our cars are.

While supermarkets exist in Northern England, they can be far from where you live or close earlier than you are used to. Shops also close around 5 p.m. and you are not normally back from a trial by that time. This happens because English trials can have up to 40 dogs (20 braces) and at least two rounds take place, which means a trial usually finishes late in the afternoon(*you are expected to stay until the end of the trial and to follow the stake on foot, all day long). There is normally a lunch break, but there is no restaurant, nor do the clubs cater food for competitors: runners are expected to bring they own packed lunches and eat them on the [moor](#), or in the car if the weather is too bad. This also means you have to arrange your own meals by purchasing them or by cooking them in advance.



Lunch on the moor

As said earlier, trials start at 9 a.m. but might be located one, or even two hours away from where you are staying. To reach Masham trial in time, I woke up at 5 a.m., had breakfast and packed everything I needed to carry with me and to met with friends on the way at 6.30 a.m. We reached the venue a bit earlier than planned, but you are somehow expected to be there well before the announced meeting time. Also, travel time on country roads is not very predictable with sheep and tractors ready to sabotage the best plans.



Lunch on the moor

That trial was sadly cancelled and, as traditionally happens, this was announced on the trial's ground, not in advance by phone, or-mail. We reached home earlier on that day but trials do not usually finish before 5 p.m. so, by the time awards are

given and you leave the moor.... you are back at your temporary home at around 7 p.m., or even later if you stop on the way to get some gas, or to grab any food for the following day.

By the time you unload the car, have a shower, feed the dog, feed yourself and maybe dry your wet clothes, is almost time to go to bed and maybe answer a couple of e-mails and messages you received during the day, in the rare instances your cellphone managed to get some signal. That's daily life during English summer trials: Scottish summer trials were similar two years ago, but with competitions taking place much further from each other and with much less service stations, supermarkets and cell phone signal on the way!

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

Newbiggin (Yorkshire Gundog Club) Open Stake slideshow pictures below.

A Shocked France

A Shocked France: From Basel to Saint Quentin

How was that? Creepy, one of the weirdest trips I ever had. As said [earlier](#), I did not want to be in France on the 14th of July feeling something was going to happen. Well, I was right but being there on the 15th was even worse. As soon as I crossed the border, French radio stations went on and it was awful. France was shocked about what just happened and did not try to hide it. There were almost no cars, nor trucks on the road and radio stations had no music, only endless talks about terrorism and death. It was surreal: harsh sunlight, empty

roads and Italian like sceneries. Alsace and Champagne could be home: same light, same heat, same fields and hills surrounding the motorway. I stopped a couple of times but I do not remember much, just the heat, the harsh sunlight and the occasional farmer driving his tractor on the horizon. France was trying to anesthetize itself, unsuccessfully. I reached my "hotel" right before dinner time: it looked like one of those American motels you see in movies and it was full of British bikers. I highly respect bikers because... they know how to travel light!



I was given a room on the ground floor and I managed to park the car right in front of it. A giant motorbike was parked in the nearby spot. The hotel receptionist gave me a keycard lock, instead of a plain key, this is fairly common now and usually convenient unless, you have a dog, there are cats everywhere and the door locks by itself. So... It kept happening that the door locked itself while I was bringing stuff inside. I ended up being locked outside a couple of times and the receptionist lady developed a "magnetic" dislike for me. I am not the smartest person when it comes to keys, I know, but, this time, it was not completely my fault. In the meantime, I discovered who the owner of the large motorbike was: a giant

grey haired, bearded man who looked like Hagrid. I got quite familiar with him as he spent hours on his parked motorbike (placed right in front of my window) chatting over the phone with several women. Once he had finished with one, he would start with another one. I was not trying to listen him, but he was not exactly a silent critter and I had to walk in front of him!



Speaking of back and forth, since the parking lot was filled with cats, I decided to walk Briony in the neighbourhood: bad idea, it was full of rabbits so I moved even further and ended up in front of a war cemetery, just to put some more creepiness to the table. When I went back to sleep, the images on TV were still showing and shocked France and the British biker was still chatting with a woman.

[And then the cockroach came...](#)

Switzerland and Team Bond :-)

Somebody asked whether I forgot about the “ A Month on the Moor” section. No! I did not, I am just busy with so many things to do at the same time, like always! This is why I am “taking advantage” of Tok Mostert writings on training but... I still want to tell my tale.

So, let's try to be brief and remember some things about the day [I left](#) from Italy. It was July 15th and I had set this date because I did not want to be in France on the 14th. I somehow felt something was bound to happen on that day, France national day. I was going to go to bed on that night, when the TV announced there was an ongoing terrorist attack in Nice. I was sorry, worried and moved but not surprised.

On 15th morning, I had to finish to load the car: I have never completely grasped the concept of “travelling light” and UK 2016 trip was not an exception, my “packing” issues will be told in another story . I passed Milan swiftly, and stopped at a service station near Varese, right before the Swiss border. I had a coffee flask with me: my plan was to be smart and save money. Bad idea, the temperature was already around 30°C and my coffee was still steaming! Why did I stop then? Because... people told me that when you travel with a dog you need to stop every two hours, which I stupidly did on all my way to England! While trying to sip some coffee, the service station man came to greet me and look at the dog. It was the same man I met on my way to Switzerland, a couple of years ago, while I was travelling to meet Briony's breeder. He did not remember me of course, but I did as he told me again about his Maltese dog and about his love for these four legged critters.



Team Bond

What astonished me the most, however, were two cars parked by mine: they were wearing a Scottish plate! I have never seen any Scottish plates in Italy before, so I took it as a good sign! These cars ended up being three, not two: they were expensive cars, Audi or Saab if I am not wrong and, weird thing, each of them had a driver and no passengers. Drivers were two middle aged men and a girl, I know this for sure as they sort of escorted me until the French border. I was missing them, finding one of them again, miss them another time and so on. I crossed Switzerland with these three unusual travel mates, which, for no rational reasons, reminded me of James Bond... and British spies!

How do you travel in Switzerland? Are there any breathtaking sceneries? Yes there are, you drive through mountains and lakes, but you cannot really enjoy them as you need to be well focused on the road. There is much traffic, as many car drivers and truck drivers favour Switzerland over France because the Mont Blanc and the Frejus tunnels are very expensive (while the Gottahrd is free). Also, French and Italian motorways are much more expensive than the Swiss ones: in Italy and France you pay according to your mileage and your veichle, in Switzerland you pay about 40 Euros and you can travel as much as you like for one year. Driving in Switzerland is cheaper, but equally demanding: speed limits are really tight, these roads are not made for high speeds and speed limits keep changing constantly. Beware of them and of all the cameras set to trap incautious motorists. We stopped before the Gotthard, again , having been told that you must

stop frequently when you are travelling with dogs...



South Gotthard service station

We were right in the middle of the Alps this time and it was pleasantly cold. Past the Gotthard tunnel – full of Belgian cars – we enjoyed bordering the Luzern Lake (in the midst of a thunderstorm and still escorted by Team Bond). We finally reached Basel when we stopped again for lunch. I had food with my but I went inside the service station to see what else they had: very cute cakes, 7.50 Euros (6£) a slice! I therefore opted for my homemade “piadina” which was consumed under a tree. My neighbour , under the next tree, was a Swiss man with a wirehaired Dacshund. And then... in the blink of an eye, [I was in France](#).