

Snippets 8 ...about Abroad

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This is a somewhat unusual collection of *Snippets*, in that it is about showing rather than doing, and specifically about exhibiting on the Continent. Rather than boring you with the equivalent of “holiday videos”, I will try to present them in a more “documentary” form, with many of the do’s and don’ts, where the etiquette of exhibitions differs from our own.

Exhibitions on the Continent are organised in several different ways, for example with the financial backing of bodies such as the local Rotary Club or Tourist Boards (local or national), or with local business groups as sponsors, or as a business venture by people who organise shows around the country. These folk often have no knowledge at all of model railways. Our expenses for fuel, ferry, hotels and very good meals all come from the profits of the table rentals. I said it was different!

Since Dave Rowe introduced us to the “circuit” in Holland nine years ago we have visited around 60 shows throughout France, Holland, Belgium and Germany. On a rough basis, only 12% were pure model railway shows, about 6% were based on swapmeets, and the remainder were a mixture of aircraft, boats, military modelling and railways. With a couple of delightful exceptions, the shows are very big. The big shows are in vast custom-built exhibition centres, into which you can drive a car and trailer. So no hauling of baseboards and stock boxes up narrow, winding staircases –sheer heaven!

Some of the shows we have visited in Germany are enormous swapmeets in large market halls, with hundreds of tables selling items in every modelling form, from dolls’ houses, aircraft, boats, soldiers through to railways. In contrast, the show in Hanover has only two small-scale operating layouts, and we are back for our third visit next November – by public request! Can’t be bad.

Because of the very high quality of the ready-to-run mechanisms, there is as yet very little scratch-building in the smaller scales. The scratch-builders are there all right, but in 7mm and upwards. Some of the model shipbuilding is breathtaking. At one show in Valenciennes we saw a collection of farm machinery, in about 1/12 scale, modelled in sheet pewter, cut, rolled and beaten to shape. If they ever *do* start in the smaller scales, we had better look out!

Actually this is a devil of a subject to précis down into a readable article without leaving out small points which can cause all kinds of pain if things go wrong. I propose, therefore, to list as many basic facts as I can and then to go in to our survival kit, which includes all sorts of odd things, as you will see later.

Systems vary from club to club and even between different parts of the same country, so always expect the unexpected and enjoy it. Here are some facts anyway:

- Letters of invitation from Belgium, Germany and Holland will almost always be in English;
- Invitations from France will almost always be in French. Unless they feel that their English is perfect, they will not use it – in the event it is almost always better than our French;
- If you require barriers, tell them when you write back;
- Final joining instructions from France are usually late enough to cause a panic, but don't buy the ferry ticket till you have them;
- In Holland, en route accommodation is hard to find unless it is top quality, and therefore expensive. In France, it is much easier: rooms over bars are cheap, as are the Formula One Motels (we paid F139 in Cherbourg), but the desk is not open for booking before 5pm. You can book outside in a card machine. In Belgium it is also cheap, and plentiful in places like Ostende, and in most towns, though you may have to search a bit. In Germany the Gasthouses are very reasonable, but you might have to try a couple of small towns before you strike lucky;
- You won't always find food available if you are checking in much after 7 pm. We take a continental plug, a small jug kettle, some "Cup-a-Soup" and tinned meat or pâté and some biscuits. You probably won't need it but it is a life-saver if you do;
- By the way, there are two continental plugs – the German and the French ones have the earth connectors in different places, but one or the other will work in the other countries;
- Diesel is cheaper than in Britain, so buy when you get there. The cheapest is in Luxembourg – tough if your show is in France;
- The 5-Day Saver is the cheapest fare on the ferries, but ask for the Apex as well – it is sometimes even cheaper. The Tunnel only seems to have bargains that don't match our needs;
- If you have a trailer, make sure it is booked as "a private baggage trailer" on a social visit. Some people have been charged commercial rates – probably because of the "booze" runs;
- You will want Green Card Insurance cover. My company allows me 90 days per year without extra charge;
- Get decent large-scale maps: the Michelin range is very good;
- Take a compass! Yes, a compass. Ours has saved us going miles astray either getting through or out of cities. In France, when they repair a road, they just close it – maybe for miles, put up the dreaded "Deviation" sign, and leave you to find out where the next one is;
- We only charge for ferry crossing and fuel. The Club will provide accommodation with good food cover – sometimes even the evening meals. Ask for Sunday night, so that you can return on a Monday ferry with plenty of time;
- When you quote your expenses, do so in sterling, as the exchange rates can change and you could lose out. But don't be greedy – we don't expect to make a profit in the UK, so don't try over there;
- A lot of the continental clubs make reciprocal visits to one another. They arrange accommodation, but each pays the other expenses – so beware;

- When you leave the host country, try to use up your small change in fuel, as the charges to exchange small amounts of money are high.