

new zealand autocar

Celtic Crossing



We journey to Scotland to put a bevy of BMWs under our bums, and sample the single malts and salt-laced fresh air. Luxury bike tour company, Edelweiss Bike Travel, took care of all the details

Words Paul Owen/Kellie Higginbotham

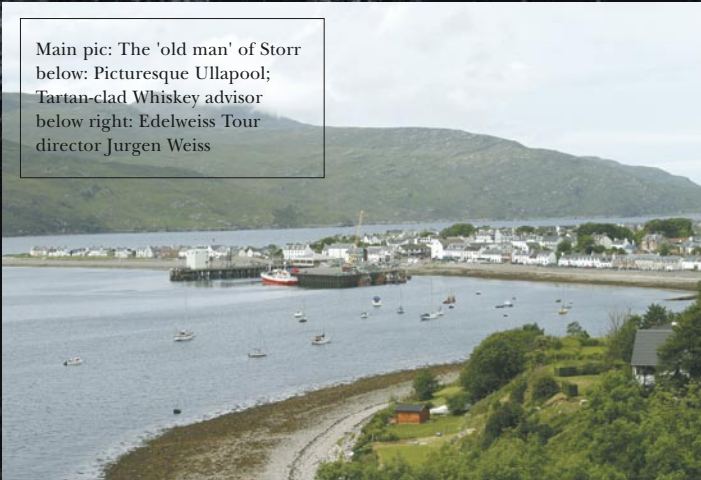
Photos Paul Owen/Jurgen Weiss/Tom Gasnier

AN NZ AUTOCAR REPRINT

YOU INSTANTLY KNOW WHEN YOU'VE BEEN RIDING A BMW for a long time. When Beemer's unique three-switch indicator system starts to make total sense, it's time for a rain check on whether the most idiosyncratic bike marque may be getting under your skin. Long-term marriage or quick fling? Until recent times I would have opted for the latter, but now that bikes like the K1200S, K1200R and lightened R1200GS fill Munich's larder, I no longer need to be ushered with a shotgun towards the altar.

I got to sample all three bikes on a recent seven-day 'Royal tour of Scotland' with Edelweiss Bike Travel. It wasn't meant to turn out that way. Originally I'd arranged to do the tour on just the K1200S, but the Edelweiss bike developed a nasty dose of clutch slip right from the time I turned the bike off the motorway on the first day. To be fair, this fault was unlikely to be picked up in the company's pre-tour check of the bikes, and was most

Main pic: The 'old man' of Storr
below: Picturesque Ullapool;
Tartan-clad Whiskey advisor
below right: Edelweiss Tour
director Jurgen Weiss



probably caused by an abusive rider on the bike's previous tour. I only noticed it first after 100km of travel – roughly 50 times the distance of the pre-tour check. How the company reacted to this crisis – and a couple of others on tour – really puts into perspective the worth of having Edelweiss back-up on your ride.

I'm not a natural-born tourist. Motorcycle touring to me is usually a meditative, solitary experience. The buzzword for me is 'freedom' – to the extent that I prefer to ride free of consideration of the preferred pace and needs of others. Freedom allows me take my destiny into my hands, but it also means I have to deal with any consequences of this control on my own. Without Edelweiss on this trip, I would have had to carry all my luggage, deal with the K12's clutch issue on my own, fix a rear puncture myself, and definitely would not have slept in such salubrious surroundings, nor eaten as healthily (even the token haggis slipped down rather better than the haughty President Chirac predicted it would).

Better yet, I was still able to indulge in passions for speed and cornering lean angles shared by few of my fellow tourists. Each day, I programmed the route into my brain, and did my own thing, occasionally socialising with my fellow travellers at roadside restaurants and ferry terminals. It was also comforting to know that the Austrian plates on the bikes made them immune from prosecution if they triggered speed cameras – a fact several locals were quick to inform me about.

Edelweiss responded to the clutch problem with breath-taking speed. A staffer was quickly dispatched from the company's HQ in Munich with a replacement K1200R for the stricken S-bike. For the two days it took for the KR to arrive

in Inverness, the tour's rotating guides, Jurgen and Harald, handed over their R1200GS. Top blokes.

Both Jurgen and Harald brought plenty of motorcycle touring experience to Scotland. Tour director, Jurgen, had worked for Edelweiss for 10 years, handling around 15 tours a year during that time. He's been everywhere, man. Part-time guide, Harald, designs bathrooms for the rich and famous as his real job, but being self-employed gives him the opportunity to help the company out from time to time. He confessed to me that he'd done "just about everything there is to do on a motorcycle", including long tours of South America and Africa on his beloved Honda VFR750.

Highlights of this tour are almost too numerous to list, so you'll find excerpts of fellow traveller Kellie Higginbotham's tour diary to give you the day-by-day skinny on one of the most amazing experiences I've ever had on a motorcycle. Personal highs for me included a 481km ride on the 'rest day' of the tour, riding through the least populated part of Europe, Northern Scotland. The last Ice Age left its mark on this part of the world, with solid ice grinding the mountains into dust, leaving behind a harsh yet beautiful landscape that struggles to support one human every square mile. Yet there is plenty of warmth to be found along the 60th parallel, and I'm not just talking about the local tippie. Mary McKay, of Dunnet Head (the UK's third highest point), invited me to join her family for a delicious lunch of freshly snared crayfish once she heard I played badminton back in New Zealand with a bloke named James McKay. That James is Maori, and a member of the Ngai Tahu clan, didn't seem to matter in the slightest...

Three bikes, seven days, six hotels, and at least 10 new friends. Numerically it all added up to the best \$US3000 anyone can spend on a tour. You can also bring the cost down considerably by bringing your own bike. Edelweiss doesn't just do Scotland. Check out www.edelweissbiketavel.com to find out why this 25-year-old company now travels the world as the leading brand in escorted bike tours.



In search of the ancestors

Extracts from the travel journal of Kellie Higginbotham, an Edelweiss tour first-timer from Phoenix, Arizona, who rode a BMW F650GS in search of her ancestors, the notorious Campbell clan



Daryl Alexander and Stuart Echols exit Portree; Bonnie Prince Charlie's memorial; K1200S at Norton House, Edinburgh; first day lunch stop



Day one

EDINBURGH

After stowing my bags because my room wasn't ready, I headed to the bar for a Diet Coke. They only have 200ml bottles; I've never seen anything so tiny! After about three, I headed out past the car park to check out the bikes. There I found both tour guides, Harald and Jurgen (from Austria and Germany, respectively) counting motorcycle tyres and arranging other support supplies in the Edelweiss trailer. I also met Elizabeth and John Jo from Redondo Beach, California, and Kathryn and Jay from Middleburg, Virginia. Both Elizabeth and Kathryn are riding their own bikes; I think we're the only three ladies on this trip riding solo. Both of these couples have done several Edelweiss tours, which seemed like a pretty good recommendation for the tour company.

After going over the bikes and noting any previous damage, we headed back inside. I had a soda with other tourists – Daryl, Kelly and Paul – while we waited for the safety briefing. That started promptly at 6 p.m. with Jurgen and Harald doing an amazing job of going over three full pages of information, switching effortlessly back and forth between English and German. They told us that many of the bikes had just been serviced in Munich and we'd have to take it easy the first day with new tyres and new brake pads. Others would have their tyres changed during the trip at a time convenient for the rider. They covered a series of common-sense safety information (wear your helmet, keep the headlight on, don't drink alcohol while riding, etc.) and also noted that on two of the days we'd be having picnic lunches at picturesque settings. Sounded good to me!

Day two

EDINBURGH TO BALLACHULISH

We were off and riding by about 9:30 a.m. I went with the ride leader, Jurgen, as did about eight or nine other bikes (in the beginning). Our first stop out of town was simply to give directions to those individuals who were going their own way. It also gave me an opportunity to 'make a pit stop' during which I had a rather nice view of the Wallace Monument. As everyone prepared to get back on the bikes, a brisk rain began to fall. Several folks pulled out their heavier-duty rain gear, though most of us stayed pretty darned dry in BMW, Tourmaster, Aerostich, First Gear, Spidi and various other suits.

Leaving our rest stop, we headed further west toward The Trossachs and Loch Lomond. The Trossachs is a huge recreational area (camping, hiking, bird watching and such) and Loch Lomond is Scotland's largest fresh water reservoir. After riding quite a few more kilometres, we crossed over 'Weak Bridge', as the sign said, and next came to a sign which told us to 'Go Slow Now', as we approached a steep downhill grade. Scotland does indeed have great signs, but those two were my favourites of the day.

After some fairly tight switchbacks and a little toe-dragging on my part, we stopped at the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park (famous for ospreys) for a coffee. As he was backing in, Claud looked over and pointed to the front of my bike. Coolant was dumping out at a pretty fast rate. We went

to get Jurgen who said he'd never seen that on any 650. It looked like the overflow just went crazy, and he could still see fluid in the overflow chamber. Given that the bike was running OK and no warning lights had come on, we agreed that it made sense to keep going. I told him I'd find a safe place to pull over if anything untoward occurred, and I'd wait until he came back. Thankfully, in spite of the fact that the bike would puke some more coolant on several other occasions during the day, it continued to run fine and no warning lights ever appeared.

It was rather blustery for quite a while after that, especially as we rounded the Loch. It was, however, nothing short of breathtaking. Simply unbelievable scenery. On several occasions, the mountains were shrouded in clouds or mist and I've never seen so much green.

We passed quickly into the Highlands. The terrain, which had been rather forest-like up until now, suddenly became simply mountainous with few trees and much higher peaks. Off in the distance, I could see valleys between the mountains completely shrouded in mist, and mountains tall enough to have their tops completely hidden. There were very high waterfalls and the scenery just made me say "wow" over and over. Words really can't describe the beauty, and pictures probably don't really do it justice, either.

Day three

BALLACHULISH TO PORTREE

We left the Ballaculish Hotel via the bridge to Fort William. Paul had gone ahead to shoot some pictures as the riders rode across a nearby bridge. We then took a short ferry ride to the other side. Here, we picked up a fabulous single-track road – lined with free-ranging sheep and goats. Shortly after we'd joined this road, two goats darted out in front of Harald, who was leading today's ride. While he avoided both of them, the smaller one stopped directly in front of me. I honked the horn and he bolted out of the way. Surprisingly, considering the tremendous number of animals we passed today, these were the only two who moved in front of us.

We stopped to snap a few pictures of Ben Nevis, the tallest mountain in the United Kingdom. His head was in the clouds, but it was absolutely stunning. You could taste the sea salt in the air and the day was perfectly clear, except for the clouds at the top of the mountain. All day, we were surrounded by high mountains, clear of trees except at the lowest levels; there were deep, receding valleys, rippling waters and the bluest sky I think I've ever seen.

From Glen Finnan, we headed into Mallaig to catch the ferry over to the Isle of Skye. The pace was a bit quick, although not unmanageable, but I really wish I'd had a helmet camera. Words and pictures will simply never do the landscape justice. We also experienced our first tip-over of the group (at least that I know of). As Ron stopped, he didn't get his foot planted quickly enough and over he went. Thankfully, he was OK and the bike only seemed to suffer a slightly bent shift lever. At almost 73 years of age, I believe he's the oldest tourer and he's a very competent rider.

The ferry ride was quick and uneventful, and we went on an all-out ride to the picnic point. Jurgen had prepared a typical European lunch of salad, slaw, cold meats, blue cheese, brie, bread and a fabulous chicken curry. I swear I'll come back 10 pounds heavier... From the picnic site, you could see a very high bridge with a little lighthouse underneath.

We then headed for the hotel in Portree, to a big room with a huge bathroom in my case. On the way here, I decided to take the long ride up to the tip of the Isle of Skye.

Day four

PORTREE TO INVERNESS

Leaving the hotel in the morning, we took the wildest piece of single-track I've seen so far. It seemed narrower, hillier and more treacherous than most of the others we've ridden and the right-hand side of the road contained the only guard rail that I'd seen. Jurgen was up front, and Paul was able to keep up with him; I held up the rest of the pack. Sometimes,

Elizabeth Morrison
crosses the bridge at
Ballachulish; 1st ferry
of three; Raemoir
Lodge, best hotel; only
Nessie we saw; eye-
watering fuel prices





Ballachulish
HOTEL & RESTAURANT
CAR PARK →







Kellie Higginbotham leads Claud and Anita Jinks; memorial to the Last Clansman, hanged by the Campbells; Greytown-on-Spey, gateway to the Whiskey Trail



I couldn't even see Jurgen, but there was really only one place he could have been heading, and it was to the ferry.

The boat was much smaller than the one we rode the previous day, yet it held all the bikes plus one car. The ferry operator didn't seem sure that he'd collected the fare from everyone – Anita, a former school teacher, wondered if he might not know how to count.

The ferry ride was very brief; we barely had time to get our helmets off for pictures. The road out of this gorge was quite a roller-coaster, but not nearly as much as the way down had been. When I reached the top alone (I had thought Jurgen was telling me to stop, but he wasn't, so I was separated from the pack), Paul, Ron and Stuart were all waiting. I needed direction, and I think Ron and Stuart did as well. Paul had a slightly different problem: his clutch was slipping, badly.

Just when you think you've seen every landscape imaginable, you find that there's something else you hadn't considered. Sometimes, we were at the absolute peak of all that surrounded us, looking down into valleys and ravines hundreds of feet below. At these points, there were rarely any trees: just impossibly green grass and often incredibly blue sky. Other times we were motoring alongside some loch or river, looking up at mountains so high that their tops were covered in clouds and mist. Here, we saw everything from unbelievably lush ferns to sparse trees to stands of trees as deep and far as the eye could see. And everywhere, no matter whether it was cloudy or if we got a peek of sunshine, the shades of verdant greens were indescribable.

Getting into Inverness was relatively easy. Finding our hotel was not (thank goodness we'd made a rest stop on the way into town).

Day five

THE TOUR SPLITS UP

Wednesday morning found Harald and Jurgen working away on both the cooling problem and the charging problem on my bike. Around 10:30 a.m., both seemed better, so I geared up and headed out. Many other folks (including Paul on Jurgen's GS) had headed to the far north coast, but I didn't want to be that far out on a questionable bike, so I just rode around town.

My first stop was Cawdor Castle, where the Campbells of Cawdor resided. I normally don't stop to read the descriptions of ancient paintings, but at a quick glance, the name caught my attention and I was hooked! I have no idea whether I can trace my family back to these Campbells or not, but there have certainly been lots of that name who have lived in this castle over the years. The castle is privately owned, so here and there among the old oil paintings, sketches and tapestries are modern-times pictures of the current family, decked out in all kinds of '70s and '80s clothing in various locales. Too funny. Like the Campbells in my family, these Campbells have invested loads of time and money into their beautiful gardens.

When I told Paul where I'd been, he asked me if I knew that the Campbells were the villains of their day. I didn't, so he went on to share a common Highland expression: "Any judge can hang a guilty man. It takes a Campbell to hang an innocent one."

Day six

INVERNESS TO BANCHORY

The sun shone on us all day today, and it was another great day. We mostly rode A-roads and my bike behaved fabulously, with no coolant puking. Today's planned ride was short by comparison to some of the other days, so we had plenty of time to get in some riding prior to the picnic outside Craigallachie.

Picking up the A9 east, I was feeling pretty good about having led for a while without getting lost. Unfortunately, at the first serious throttle roll-on, my map shot out of the map bag and blew down the carriageway. Well, I certainly wouldn't be travelling on my own now!

Pulling over further up the road, I told Claud my map was gone. He studied his while I made a pit stop right by the side of the A9... He decided that we should continue on the A95 toward the picnic rendezvous.

Passing through a little town called Ballater, Paul caught up to us on the amazing K1200R. When I asked him how the ride was, he pounded his chest with his fist, indicating that it was quite thrilling.

Anita wanted to visit a town called Huntley because she has an uncle with the last name 'Hunley'. On the way there, we passed through the town where they manufacture Glenfiddich (actually, we passed several whisky distilleries as we traversed the Whisky Trail, and even passed the Walker's Pure Butter Cookies factory – good thing we didn't stop there).

Huntley turned out to be a really neat little town, with quite a castle. While it is in a ruinous state, you could walk through the remains and gain some understanding of how people lived hundreds of years ago.

We headed from there to Craigievar Castle, charging down more A-roads with very little traffic. This castle was far more resplendent than the last one we toured, as almost every room was still furnished in period pieces. Many of the rooms were panelled in a dark wood (stained with ox blood, naturally) and resembled the inside of ship cabins (because they were built by ship-builders, evidently).

There is apparently a ghost, the haunting of a love foiled by a watchful father. The daughter was being pursued by a boy who snuck into the castle one night and came to the 'blue room' expecting to find his love there but instead found the girl's father. They fought, and when the father had the boyfriend cornered, he offered him the choice of being run through with a sword, or jumping from a window. The boyfriend chose the leap, and fell to his death. Legend has it that his ghost haunts the castle, and last year, a guide quit when she saw something on the stairs that frightened her.

From this castle, Jurgen led us on a nice weaving ride through the countryside, which while not quite as spectacular today as it has been on other days, still lacked for nothing in terms of scenery. In short order, we arrived at our lodgings for the night, the Raemoir Hotel. What a place!



Day seven

BANCHORY TO EDINBURGH

The last day of riding. Towards the end of the day, though I was tired, I began to feel those familiar pangs that every rider feels when the journey's almost complete. I'd prayed that I'd be able to get this bike back to Jurgen and Harald completely unscathed, and thankfully, I was successful in this mission.

Friday morning's briefing included instructions for going around the Gleneagles area, where the G-8 summit is being held, so Jurgen found a route that wouldn't have us stopped and searched. Claud, however, wanted to ride over to St Andrews to scope out the layout of the town and make contact with the owner of the B&B where he and Anita would be staying during the British Open. This was great for me: near St Andrews is

From top: Luggage van at Cuillin Hills hotel; K1200S meets another windjammer; Harry Potter's train near Maillig



K1200R – NAKED MUSCLE

The K1200S and K1200R are radical bikes for their funny front ends, engines with more slope than a drunk leaning on a lamppost, and the philosophical about-turn they represent for BMW Motorrad. Yet they are also the most conventional-feeling BMW bikes I've ever ridden. Slap a Honda or a Kawasaki badge on these bad-ass 165-horse Beemers, and no biker riding them would notice.

This is no bad thing. BMW has been trying to shed the 'pipe and slippers' image its über-practical bikes have accrued over time ever since the boxer-with-attitude Rockster. With the KS and KR, it's finally succeeded, and then some.

The latter bike shows just how far removed these new K-series bikes are from usual two-wheeled Bavarian fare. No other bike maker has dared to give us an unfaired, naked bike with 140+ horsepower before. The concept is as wild as a jet-propelled SUV. Visions of riders' legs flying backwards and of pilots holding onto the handlebars like Superman flying in a 270km/h headwind probably prevented other companies from going for the title of the world's fastest naked bike. Now BMW has hit the market with the first four-cylinder naked in their long history, and takes the cake. The company says 80 per cent of K1200R buyers won't have owned BMWs before, an utterly believable prediction if the reactions that the K-Ripper promoted during my two days with it in Scotland are anything to go on. Anytime someone from outside the Edelweiss tour expressed an interest in the bike, they were generally riding something made in Japan. Their burning



question was always the same: How does it go?

The answer is, fabulously well, thank you. Without the wind protection of the enveloping K1200S fairing, the R appears to amplify the performance of the well-endowed powertrain. Somewhere near Aberfoyle on the tour, I found myself engaged in battle with a local on a Yamaha R1. When we later stopped for an adrenaline-settling cuppa together, he expressed surprise at the way the KR had accelerated off the turns. Like the S, the R-bike goes completely hyper as the tachometer passes the 6500rpm mark. There's a rush of power from this engine speed all the way to 11,000rpm redline (BMW's highest in a road-registered machine) that Nick Heidfeld and Mark Webber would recognise. When it kicks, this four-cylinder four-stroke does so with a similar intensity to Kawasaki's legendary Mach III two-stroke triple. What made the Mach III such a legend? The way you could downshift

three gears, snap open the throttle, and have the bike leave you sitting on the road. Anytime the K1200R hits its straps, a firm grip on the handlebars is an instant prerequisite.

This despite the naked bike sporting one less ram-air intake for the airbox than the S. The other major difference besides the obvious lack of bodywork is the R's more conservative steering geometry. This asks a bit more of the rider's forearm muscles when lifting the bike off one footpeg and chucking it onto the opposite when carving up an S-bend, although the rear tyre, which is narrower than that of the S (180 versus 190), does help keep the long-wheelbase bike flick-able.

In the impromptu R1 'comparison', BMW's servo-assisted brakes proved capable of compensating for the K1200R's lower cornering speeds as dictated by a wheelbase that is 150mm longer than the Yamaha's. The Duolever front end certainly is a great braking aid, and performed well at all speeds above five km/h – where there seemed to be a slight wobbling when creeping the bike up to a set of traffic lights.

The K1200R kept me comfortable over two longish days in the saddle, and I love the brute appeal of its bulldog-like looks; but it's the K1200S that I'd buy first (then fit the narrower rear wheel of the R). Having the world's fastest naked bike is all very well, but there were times when a fairing is a godsend. Especially on a 165-horsepower BMW two-wheeler – a concept so alien I still can't believe what I've just written. Welcome to the real world of sports bikes BMW. Now, about that elongated wheelbase...

K1200S - SPECIAL KAY



Who'd have thought BMW would ever take on the likes of the 'Busa and 'Bird? Well, it has, with the K1200S. We shouldn't be surprised. The new M5 produced the quickest 80-120km/h time of any production car we've tested. Now the eyewateringly quick K1200S takes over as the quickest bike NZ Autocar has VBOX tested, with a best 0-100km/h of 3.4 seconds (claimed 3.2s) and a scintillating 80-120km/h of 1.4s.

The new Kay follows convention in part. It has an across-the-frame four-cylinder engine, but it also debuts Duolever front suspension consisting of two curved parallel links with a shocker in between. Equally novel: electronic adjustment of preload and

damping on the move. How cool is that?

But the novelty stuff is only part of the Kay's appeal. Its low-slung 1157cc engine packs 165 horses. And they ain't Shetlands. Here is a mill that puts the 'able' back into tractable. From 3000-6000rpm it grunts like a Sumo, pulling in top gear from 100km/h (3500rpm) as if turbocharged. All with the vibration of a Rolex, and an intake snarl that's quietly malevolent. From 6000 onwards, the goblin spirits awaken, beckoning the bike headlong to the blurry country. Where super-sport bikes are maniacal in their zone, this is more linear, but you still have to hang tight. Lightweight the Kay is not; at just over 250kg wet, she's a big bird, but manoeuvring is made easier with a decent lock. Once mobile, there's a nimble side to Kay that suggests weight is carried low. Where many bikes of this ilk feel like an immovable force when you dive into corners, this acts more like a middleweight, carving with enthusiasm and confidence, and counter-steering faithfully. It's inspiring, as hitting the brakes mid-corner doesn't upset stability or line, a design feature of the Duolever.

Brakes are servo-controlled and strong. Initially, there's little happening, but pull the lever a little more and there's wicked stopping power here, without touchiness. The rear item is excellent for emergency braking if you've misjudged a corner; you can stand on it, and with ABS, no lock up. Comfort levels, courtesy of flat bars, a well padded seat and electronically adjustable suspension, are superb.

So, a tour de force? And how. A case of lateral thinking producing tangible benefits. The trick technology fully justifies its \$29,990 price-tag. Now if only BMW would ditch those silly turn signal activators [you obviously need more time on the bike, Doc – Ed.] – Peter Louisson



SPECIFICATIONS

BMW K1200S

Performance (VBOX tested)	
0-100 (seconds)	3.40
80-120 (seconds) TED*	1.40
Engine	1157cc liquid-cooled longitudinal dohc 16-valve inline four; 123kW at 10,250rpm, 129Nm at 8250rpm
Transmission	6-speed, shaft drive
Suspension	front- BMW Duolever; rear- BMW Paralever with electronic adjustment
Brakes	f- 2 x 320mm discs with four-piston calipers; r- single 265mm disc with single-piston caliper
Tyres	front- 120/70ZR17; rear- 190/50ZR17 Pirelli Diablo
Wheelbase	1517 mm
Seat height	820 mm
Rake/trail	n/a
Claimed dry weight	241 kg
Fuel capacity	19 L
Price	\$29,990
Smart parts	At last BMW builds a bike of which its M-division would be proud; unique front suspension works well



Kellie Castle, and I just had to visit it.

Leaving Banchory, we passed through the pretty little village of Ballater and continued south through Scotland's Devil's Elbow toward Pitlochry. The A93 is the highest A-road in the United Kingdom: at Devil's Elbow, it reaches 665 metres. Living in Arizona, this doesn't seem all that high, but it's high enough to ski. We could see the chairlifts waiting for the winter season.

At this altitude, the mountains were completely bare of trees, revealing yet more shades of green that we hadn't seen in other areas. As we continued down the pass, we began seeing trees again, though they seemed to grow in dense stands here and there with little obvious rhyme or reason.

The road down the mountain was a blast – more sweepers than switchbacks. I saw Claud and Anita get airborne a couple of times, but after my first lift-off, I slowed down just enough to keep both tyres on the ground. Still, I was laughing out loud in my helmet as I watched from a distance as Anita's helmet rose and dropped, and Stuart and Ron's headlights did the same behind me. An incredibly fun road to ride, with little to deter you from going just a little fast.

We stopped for lunch at the Moulin Hotel and Brewery in Moulin, near Pitlochry. Here we caught up to Paul, who had evidently decided to ride at his own pace after all, despite a threat to tag along with someone else because of a screw embedded in his rear tyre.

Leaving Moulin, we continued towards St Andrews. We basically bypassed Perth, but whether we took the exact route Claud had intended or not, I'll never know; I was just happily following along, thrilled about the fact that I didn't have to keep track of where we were, and that we were off to find Kellie's Castle. By the time we arrived there it was getting quite late in the afternoon, and I don't think any of us had an appetite for touring the castle (though Claud and I did walk around about half of the first floor by accident, not realizing that there was an entry fee). Ever polite, the Scottish tour guides asked us if we wanted to go on the tour, and we put two and two together and headed for the gift shop. I naturally had to have some postcards, key rings, pins, pictures, etc. of the castle that bears my name, actually spelled the 'right' way.

Leaving the castle, we were making a beeline for Edinburgh. Jurgen and Harald were expected to be retaking bikes from about 5.00 to 6.00 p.m. As we fair screamed down the M90 toward Edinburgh, I saw Harald, unmistakable in his bright yellow helmet aboard a 1200GS, overtaking us in the right lane. He gave first me, then Claud, a circle-up motion, so we fell in line, ultimately winding up under the Forth of Firth Bridge. What a masterpiece of engineering!

Pulling into the hotel, I was so relieved to return the bike unscathed, yet so sad to know that I'd just completed the last ride (of this trip, anyway) with my new friends. Harald asked, "Be honest, any damage?" and I was quite pleased to be able to answer "No."

At dinner, Amy asked me if I'd be doing another Edelweiss tour, and I assured her that I most certainly would – ideally the New Zealand tour in 2007 (because I'll probably need that long to save up), but I really want my Dad to go on that one as well.

Amy agreed with me about the value of being with other people, especially those for whom the passion for motorcycling is so deep. Hardly anyone in the group opted for a 'light' day of riding. We laughed about the mistakes we made (driving on the right-hand side of the road and the times we got a little lost).

Everywhere we went, the Scots were happy to have us as their guests, were glad that we were enjoying their country, and hoped that we would continue to have a great ride. The drivers were (nearly) always considerate of motorcycles, giving us room to manoeuvre and allowing us to stay together as a group most of the time.

But as Paul pointed out, there are no motels, so it's not like you just pack up your family and come on holiday to Scotland. There were times when different members of the group paid close to \$US15 for a lunch of fish and chips! Scotland is beautiful and very hospitable, but it's not cheap.

The R1200GS revelled in the Scottish gravel; Spooky memorial to the real Braveheart - William Wallace; Royal approval for Cardhu distillery; Moulin pub dates to 1695



