



## ***CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER***



Dear Knaus Club Members

It does not seem possible that it is almost a year since we were at Peterborough, where I was Press Ganged into service as Chairman, not that I mind at all. I am sorry that we had to dash off immediately after the meeting but we had a prior arrangement to visit our Son in Olney and we had 3 very excited Grandsons waiting for us when we arrived.

2013 was a hectic year for us. On 21st September we celebrated our Golden Wedding Anniversary and entertained over 60 guests at the house for a celebration weekend who very nearly filled the only Hotel in Thirsk. Sadly, this event clashed with the Lincoln Show which we were unable to attend.

Our New Year resolution for 2014 had to be to attend as many Club events as Possible and we are looking forward very much to the Peterborough show to kick start the season. After the appalling weather of the last 3 months I hope that the ground conditions improve. We sincerely hope that no Club members were affected by flooding.

The signs are looking hopeful. Our Village abounds with Snowdrops, Crocuses and Daffodils. Climbing Roses are bursting into leaf and our bird feeding stations are very well supported. All of our bird boxes are being inspected by Blue Tits ( one pair have made several viewings of the same box)

LOVE IS IN THE AIR!!!! It seems that this not only applies to the Birds and the Bees but also to our fellow members for we all wish Keren and John our most hearty congratulations on their recent marriage. As you can see from the photograph, they wasted no time in getting down to business!!!

SEE YOU ALL AT PETERBOROUGH.

Best Wishes,

Mike Bourner.

## RALLIES for 2014

1) **The National Motorhome Show**, Peterborough. Rally site open 24th to 28th April. **Last date to pre-book to be with the club April 6<sup>th</sup>. Don't miss out!**

Club AGM to be held 4pm on Saturday 26th, accompanied by drinks and nibbles. Could club officers ensure Kevin has copies of reports by 21<sup>st</sup> April so he can print handouts. Minutes of last year's AGM are available on the Knaus Owners website under Newsletters May 2013. Those attending this year's AGM are asked to read these before attending to save printing out copies.

Please send any agenda items to Andrea by 17th April at [secretary@knausowners.com](mailto:secretary@knausowners.com) Rally Marshalls---Kevin and Andrea Hamblin

2) **Lowdhams Rally Field**, Gunthorpe, Nottingham. 9th to 12th June This will give you an opportunity to browse the accessory shop and appraise the new Knaus Motorhomes. There is a regular bus service into Nottingham and local hostelrys serving food and drink in Gunthorpe village. Rally Marshalls---Kevin and Andrea Hamblin

3) **The Western Motorhome Show** at Malvern. Rally site open 14th to 18th August This will be a new venue for the Club and it is a "Western themed" show, so how about some fancy dress!!! Rally Marshalls---Bill and Jacquie Lowes

4) **End of Season Finale at Lincoln**. Rally site open 25th to 29th September. This will be our final rally of the year, and we will have a Jacobs Supper on Saturday afternoon, with the club supplying drinks. Provisional Rally Marshalls---Kevin and Andrea Hamblin

Please could members ensure that they book early for all of the Warners Events. It would be really helpful if members could let the Marshalls know when they book for these shows, to enable us to organise things.

For the Lowdhams rally in June please either let Andrea know or just turn up.

All committee Members can be contacted via links on the website

We look forward to seeing you sometime, somewhere this year, and to catching up with all your news.

A message from the Treasurer/Membership Secretary (Bill Lowes). £5 subs are due 1<sup>st</sup> April and can be paid by cheque to my home address (see back page) internet banking or at Peterborough if you are joining us there.

## Random Ramblings from the Road (by Mr Grumpy)

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Mid-January and we are heading south through France in search of Spanish sunshine. I'm finding the scenery very boring. Yes, it is gloomy and has been pouring with rain the whole way which does not help (swollen rivers and waterlogged fields indicate that it is not only the UK that has been suffering weather misery), but it is more than that. I realise that for hour after hour we have been passing through an industrial farming wasteland – not a hedge in sight, not a bird in sight, just mile after mile of serried rows of cereal seedlings waiting (like all of us) for better weather. It used to be said that the EU Common Agricultural Policy was designed to benefit the 'small French farmer'. I can only assume that nowadays it has been amended to benefit large scale French farming conglomerates. I suspect there isn't much talk of subsidies for 'environmentally sensitive farming' in France (as in the UK). A few weeks later I wondered if my perceptions could be backed up by facts, and was amazed to find that they could. Google rapidly confirmed that 33% of France is under arable cultivation versus 25% in the UK – quite a significant difference when you factor in that France is twice the size of the UK. (One of the things the EU is good at is statistics!) I also discovered that 58% of Denmark is under arable cultivation - although we have met some delightful Danish people on our travels, I don't think I am keen to visit!

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As we approach the Spanish border the weather starts to improve and as we climb up the N121A towards Pamplona it actually stops raining! This is a winding but very good road up the valley of the Rio Bidasoa and across the mountains which extend from the Pyrenees westwards across northern Spain. It passes through some wonderful scenery and it rapidly becomes clear that there has been a vast amount of rain here also. The river is in full spate and waterfalls cascade from the sides of the valley. From UK news bulletins you would think that it is only the UK that is suffering bad weather. In fact a review of news archives reveals that there has been exceptional weather - storm, floods, snow and ice (and deaths) - across a swathe of Europe from Portugal, Northern Spain, France, Italy and Central Europe as well as the UK. I wonder if those unfortunate enough to be directly impacted by the terrible weather in these countries also look to blame their governments (or their agencies) for their woes rather than accepting that exceptionally bad weather can defeat the best laid plans? We have not been suffering alone.

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Somewhere south of Pamplona we realise there has been a dramatic change – green, verdant and soggy has given way to straw coloured verges and dry dusty fields. It is almost as if we have gone through a crack in the space time continuum – it seems like another planet but at the very least we have broken into another climate zone. It is as if the weather systems rushing across the Atlantic get pushed north of the mountains. Do the statistics back up this impression? Yes they do – the average annual rainfall in Santander and Biarritz just north of the mountains is between 40 and 50 inches/year whereas in Zaragoza and Soria just south of the mountains (and just about anywhere else in Spain on a line south), it is between 10 and 20 inches/year.

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Why are Spanish roads so good and so empty? The fact that Spain is about twice the size of the UK with 70% of the population is a plausible explanation for the latter but not the former!

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## Random Ramblings from the Road (cont)

As we journey through Spain to our final destination on the coast just south of Alicante our impressions from previous visits are confirmed. Southern Spanish towns and villages generally appear disorganised and unattractive, with some notable exceptions including some of the hill-top villages. Parts of towns and individual buildings are stunning, such as the Moorish inspired old town of Teruel and the wonderful tree-lined avenues of Barcelona which show-case the brilliance of Gaudi and his contemporaries. A major reason for the predominant unattractiveness is that the kindest description I can think of for the 'style' of post-civil war Spanish architecture is 'utilitarian block-house'. Thank goodness that some modern exceptions to this style are appearing, notably the magnificent City of Sciences and Arts in Valencia and the bizarre Guggenheim Gallery in Bilbao – even though the latter was designed by the Canadian-American architect Frank Gehry and the Spanish architect of the Valencia complex is currently being sued by the city of Valencia because the roof of the opera house (which forms part of the complex) is falling apart. Maybe the Spanish should stick to blockhouses.

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One of the delights of staying in Southern Spain in the winter is the availability of fresh locally grown fruit and veg, and if you buy them at the frequent local markets (which are still thriving and part of normal life) they are ridiculously cheap. For example, 3 large heads of broccoli were available at the market for 1 Euro as well as fresh peas, broad beans, lettuce, radishes, peppers, courgettes, strawberries, tangerines, oranges and lemons at similarly attractive prices. Tesco seems like a distant bad dream! Amongst these vegetables are piles of artichokes from the endless fields of the things from Valencia to Alicante and down into Murcia. Why? Despite giving several chefs the opportunity to convince me otherwise, Mr. Grumpy has concluded that it is completely impossible to turn them anything that is possible (let alone enjoyable) to eat, so what does happen to them?

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In the midst of this abundance, why is it that when you go to a Spanish restaurant you are served meat (just about anything), fish (anything), and rice, but other than the odd mushroom and tomato in Tapas, and the occasional limp lettuce leaf garnish, there isn't a b"\$\$&\* vegetable in sight!

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The Murcia region has been called the market garden of Europe. There is barely an inch of the wide coastal plain that hasn't been irrigated and cultivated, either vegetables or orange and particularly lemon trees. Indeed, the scenery of much of Southern Spain is dominated by what those EU statisticians call 'permanent crops' - trees to you and me! Wherever you go there are olive, almond, orange or lemon trees, often as far as the eye can see. Apparently 9% of Spain (mainly in the South) is given over to permanent crops – that is a lot of trees! The equivalent figures for France and the UK are 2% and <1% respectively (and <0.1% for poor little Denmark). The demise of the apple, pear and cherry growing industry in the UK is apparently nearly complete.

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## Random Ramblings from the Road (cont)

The abundance of citrus trees leads to a perplexing moral dilemma: when driving along a deserted country lane between trees laden with plump, juicy wonderful smelling fruit, it is difficult to ignore the pressing requirement to acquire the wherewithal for the perfect G&T, but when is it acceptable to scrimp the odd lemon?

1. Trees behind an open mesh fence,
2. As above, but branch dripping with lemons hanging over or through the fence
3. No fence, just a ditch
4. An 'escapee' isolated lemon tree sitting in the middle of nowhere, next to the road
5. One or all of the above, but fruit lying on the ground around the tree

(No step ladders or mechanical aids allowed)

Answer: Any of the above – I did say it was a deserted country lane! (Disclaimer: If you get caught by the police or a gun-wielding farmer, I didn't actually tell you to pick them, did I?)

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Finally, we tear ourselves away from the dry and sunny south and start the long journey home, this time taking the southern route north-east along the Spanish coast towards Perpignan. Temperatures are gradually dropping, there is some rain in the forecast and north of Barcelona the scenery starts to change. Vines and deciduous trees appear, the grass on verges turns green and there are rivers rather than dry river beds (not really surprising as the back-drop is now the snow covered Pyrenees). In fact up on the Costa Brava it is not only the look but also the whole feel of the place that is different as we are now in Catalonia – they even have their own language. It is a bit like Wales, only with better weather, over twice the population and one of the best football teams on the planet – ok, not much like Wales at all! The difference in climate is confirmed by the absence of the hoards of overwintering Germans, Dutch and Scandinavians who dominate the campsites further south.

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We stop for a couple of nights at Estarlit on the Costa Brava (as Mrs Grumpy has fond memories of the place from holidays there when she was a child back in the days when Franco was a young man and the policemen wore silly hats). I had never been to the area before based on the belief that it was all high-rise package tour territory. Well I was wrong – some parts are very nice and we will come back for a longer visit outside the winter months.

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If you have been affected by any of the above, or would like to take issue with the views expressed by Mr. Grumpy, the Editor would be delighted to hear from you.

(March 2014)



**A news sheet for the Knaus Owners Club in the UK**

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The Club website

[www.knausowners.com](http://www.knausowners.com)

Is where Kevin Hamblin would be happy if you could e-mail your experiences to him for others to share.

There is also a Discussion Forum where you can post questions or put up subjects for discussion. Why not log on and see?

Thank You.

*Items for the Newsletter are always required. Don't be shy – tell others about your experiences*

## NEWS FROM MEMBERS

This is the embarrassing photograph referred to in Mike's chatter!



And these are some of the motley crew of guests....

