

150 Eurotunnel Shuttle Overture



Did you realise that the twenty-one stars represent the member states in an eventual European Union?

Some of our members were lucky enough to be among those who obtained complimentary tickets for an early shuttle crossing. Two cars, each with five passengers made the journey. These are the impressions of four of the passengers. They may help you to decide whether or not to make the journey.

From LEO WRIGHT

Impressions of Eurotunnel Overture: Thursday 20 October 1994

Given the enormous demand from shareholders and organisations like ourselves, as reported at the meeting at Eurotunnel on 17th October, we were extremely lucky, owing to cancellations, to get complimentary tickets for two cars.

We had never thought of the Tunnel as merely another crossing. Much more interesting and attractive would be Liverpool to Lyons or Birmingham to Bonn in the comfort of a TGV.

As a Channel crossing I have had a very long prejudice in favour of boats, large or small. But now that the ferries have become very large, more like a floating (while they float) supermarket and, at peak times, are as crowded as Selfridges' Sale, with fewer sober people, I approached the Tunnel experience with an open mind.

When the Tunnel is open to the public we would not have to call, as we did, at St. Martin's Plain for tickets, but drive straight on at Exit 11A from the M20.

Driving on to the Shuttle is easier than into my garage. The journey was as smooth as a TGV, so that we didn't even notice the start. Everyone preferred to stand or stretch legs away from the cars

and, chatting, we barely noticed the mere thirty minutes of the crossing.

Once on the French side one could continue by either of two motorways or two TGV lines or by Motorail.

The return journey was not so entirely uneventful as "an electrical fault" (we were told) held us up for twenty minutes just short of Folkestone. Teething troubles.

The Shuttle crossing is, if you like, a non-event, but, for a mere thirty minutes, that is what it should be.

I will certainly use the Tunnel, if the price is right.

From SYBIL STANDING

The telephone rings:

"Will you be available to-morrow?"

Will we!!

Tomorrow found us waiting on the corner, hardly believing our good fortune; in we get.

In no time at all we are at 'Le Tunnel'; a quick visit to duty free, show our passports and drive on. Messages flash up and come over the tannoy to tell us what to do for our safety, the metal shutters, to divide three to four cars, go down and its for the off.

It is France before you could say "Passports".

To Calais to find a parking meter; it takes both francs and British currency, we scrape around for the correct coins, they roll back to us. After a while a French lady notices our predicament and explains that parking is free for the lunch hour.

Appetites satisfied we look in the shops, many of which are, fortunately, closed, and head for the countryside. The drive is beautiful.

Back to passports, more duty free and 'Le Shuttle'. We are on the bottom tier this time which is not as smooth as the outward journey. There is a slight delay, just a hiccup, which delays us by half-an-hour.

Yes, I would go again and London to Paris sounds marvellous, but, the Hoverport is only a twenty-minute walk and, better still, the Ferries only fifteen minutes.

Comments from JEREMY COPE

1. The architecture, particularly on the English side, was quite good.
2. The ride over the rails was very smooth and made one realise how much upgrading our ordinary railways needed.
3. The outward trip ran efficiently and comfortably. However, on the return trip there was an engine failure and we were stuck in the tunnel and were nearly forty minutes late on our return. This gave us a much better test of reactions to possible problems of tunnel travel; one of our party admitted to feelings of discomfort and this was also true, I believe, of one of Joan Liggett's party. This represented 20% in numbers under circumstances when, I guess, some of us treated the breakdown as another diversion.

4. The loading and unloading arrangements seemed little different from surface crossings. It makes me resent having to show a passport to go into Europe and that there should be the differences in taxation that impel us to load up with booze.

Comments from SHEILA COPE *Reservations about the Tunnel.*

1. No apparent security checks (bombs, etc.) Presumably random ones are made.
2. A car breaking down in the shuttle corridor whilst loading must hold things up as there is no way of by-passing it.
3. Unpleasant if a car in the same section is full of drunkards. On a boat one can walk away.
4. Breakdown claustrophobic, especially when the air supply switched off. (balanced by a lack of seasickness).
5. Preliminaries, i.e. going through controls, same as for the boats.
6. Boring – like going through London underground with no stations.

Advantages:

1. Quicker if no breakdown.
2. Speedy getaway.
3. Remain with car and access to possessions.
4. Smooth ride – easier for those with physical handicaps. No stairs to climb.

If we, the Copes, were to summarise our views, as infrequent travellers, it is that the Tunnel crossing is not much quicker than by ferry. It is possibly easier but not worth paying a premium. It might have great benefits if the tunnel gave access to high-speed train travel over Europe at reasonable prices as an alternative to motor transport.

We did find the day to be very interesting and we much enjoyed France.