

A Customs Officer Will Call.

By Tony Eley



It was back in the days of my youth, we were still in the Air Force, and had just been posted back from Germany to the United Kingdom.

Because we were young and impecunious, over about four weekends we hired a trailer from the Services Institute to bring our belongings home.

We travelled back to the UK over 4 consecutive weekends, using the overnight ferry from Zeebrugge to Hull

I'm really very organised and on each occasion I produced a manifesto listing every item which we were carrying. The file was a very thick.

The first night or rather early morning that we arrived in Hull, the Customs officer checked every item on the list, looked at most of the items in the trailer and then ticked the list.

The next week the same Customs officer met us at dawn looked at the list, looked vaguely in the trailer and ticked the list again.

By the third week and the same Customs officer the check was even briefer.

The fourth week caused a major problem. On this occasion inside the trailer was a small motorbike. It was clearly listed on the manifesto together with the registration mark and all its details

It must have been a bad morning, the same Customs Officers saw us coming, took the manifesto from my hand, ticked it and handed it back.

For the first couple of weeks back in the UK we were busy settling in and unpacking boxes but by about the third week I thought it was time to register the moped in the UK.

I collected the forms from the post office, filled them in and discovered that I required a form V5.

I asked at the post office for the form, " You get in at the dockside" they said.

I clearly did not get the form when I arrived with the moped.

Not a problem, go down to the docks to see the Customs Officer and get the form

Early one morning on the dockside find the Customs Officer and ask for form V5 for the moped.

"I can't do the form unless I see the moped"

" You could have seen the moped ", I said, " When it was here in the trailer but you can't see it now."

"If I can't see the moped then I can't issue the form"

Impasse

The discussion became more heated and we moved steadily upwards through the ranks of Customs Officers. By midmorning I was in the office of the Chief Customs Officer in Hull who was equally implacable

" Someone must see the vehicle before we can issue a form V5. "

"You could drive it down here are we could see it and issue the form " he said.

" I can't drive it until it is registered because it will be unregistered and uninsured so I can't bring it here."

We are at a complete dead end

With little weary sigh, the Chief Customs Officer said " A Customs Officer will call you tomorrow"

I had visions of a Customs Officer mounted on an enormous black horse, the leather of his saddle gleaming in the sunlight galloping up to my front door, so I was slightly disappointed when a very junior Customs Officer in a very dirty off-white car arrived on my drive.

I conducted him to the garage to view the vehicle.

His hysterical laughter was nearly as great as mine as he gazed at the moped – old dirty, tired and very disreputable – purchased in Germany from a fellow Officer for about 10 Deutschmarks!!

With a flourish he signed the form V5 and handed it to me before climbing into his car and disappearing into the sunset