

Bonjour to Brexit

We must have doing a hundred miles an hour when the van behind hit us. I was driving, and my door was open. Everything jolted forwards, the impact and recoil wedging my door in the rubber strip on the side of the carriage - luckily we weren't in the van. I pressed the alarm wondering if the train would come screeching to a halt, but instead spoke to the bored guard, who said she'd be straight there. When she arrived five minutes later she explained that the driver had to slow down *because there was another train on the track...* presumably going in the same direction, as there was no further impact. The driver of the van behind had gone for a sleep in the back, like you might do on the Eurotunnel, but he hadn't left it in gear; we'd got out to stretch our legs, and when the train driver hit the brakes, the van hit us. Once we'd got him up and he'd reversed (on a moving train?), I rocked the van free from the rubber and it was like nothing had happened.

British customs had been uninterested when we left the UK, just asking where we were going and why. When I said to sell old books, they just asked "is there a market for them?". But Les Douanes were a little unhappy with our paperwork, suggesting that our document was only valid for exiting the UK and not entering the EU. So, valid for the thirty feet of Folkestone between the two border posts, then... that's two weeks well spent.

They had a cursory look in the back, "open this box please", several more officers arrived, each one looking to the others, before their superior said "pull up over there please, and let's go into the office". All five of the officers on duty, wearing pistols, handcuffs, truncheons, tasers, walked me towards their plastic shed, the CO recoiling in horror at a slug crawling up the door handle (a snail would've been lunch), and I opened it for them. They wrote the van's registration number, and my name, on the wall. Then an hour of computer-key-clicking, form-filling, passport-peering, question-crunching, floor-pacing, more key-clicking, before I realised they were looking for the tariff code for old books (these are customs officers) and told them quatre-neuf-zero-un and one of them smiled and offered me a job...

Their decision to charge us €300 VAT and a €200 spot fine for incorrect paperwork surprised me a little, and I hesitated before agreeing, at which the boss said "it's up to you, if you don't want to pay it just turn around and go home, we didn't vote for brexit".

"Neither did we".

"Yes *you* did".

I paid the five hundred, but by this time it was the end of their shift. All five of the officers involved had to sign the document, then all five of the officers replacing them had to sign too. We're an hour-and-a-half late, we have a beautiful multiple-signed document, we're five hundred euros down, but we're in Europe. Thank you Lord David Cameron, for calling, and then mishandling, the referendum.

Coming back was easy, no-one gave a toss, and no-one drove into us. Bit boring really, in the UK.