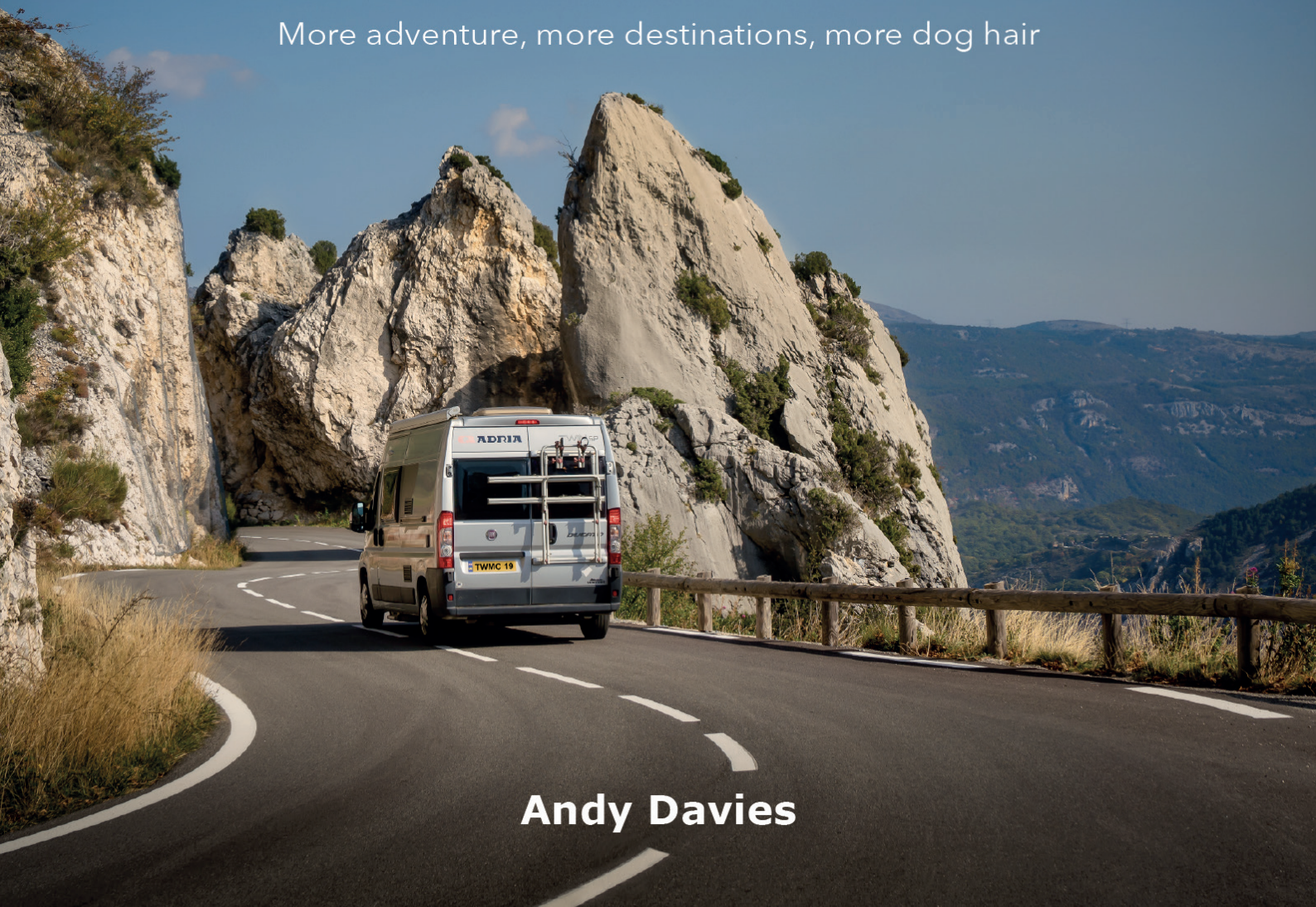


More

TRAVELS

WITH MY COCKER

More adventure, more destinations, more dog hair



Andy Davies

MORE

Travels With My Cocker

More adventure, more destinations, more dog hair

Andy Davies

More Travels With My Cocker

by Andy Davies

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Edited by John Abraham

Maps produced by Andy Davies

Cover photograph by Tracey Davies

Follow our future adventures on Facebook at
www.facebook.com/cockertravels or at www.travelswithmycocker.com

You won't have much to talk about,
if you don't go on walkabout.

Ian Dury

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Our replacement children: Rudy and Stan

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude and heartfelt appreciation to everyone who has helped me with this substantial undertaking. There has been a delightful cast of characters who have made this book possible. Most are human, but some are not.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my wife and travelling partner for her unwavering love, encouragement, and belief in me. She has had to endure my quirky sense of humour and bad habits for a lifetime, and still manages to keep the divorce requests bi-weekly. She is always amenable to my bunking off to write when I should be doing something more productive, and is probably looking forward to having me back for a few months now this is over.

Most of the inspiration for the anecdotes within these pages comes from our two canine colleagues: Ruby and Stan. Although they can't read, I'd like to thank them for being the source of twelve years of laughter, and the wellspring for much of the comedic material contained within these pages. 'Travels with My Wife' just doesn't have the same ring to it, and you will never know how much we'll miss you when you eventually shuffle off to that great boneyard in the sky.

I am also indebted to my mentor, editor, and proofreader: John Abraham, whose guidance and expertise have been invaluable. His wisdom, constructive feedback, and unwavering belief in my abilities have helped refine my work, making it better than I could ever imagine. He has already suggested a third book to make it a 'Cocker Trilogy' (maybe I could call it 'Star Paws' or 'Lord of the Twins'). However, his adoption of the Oxford comma in this second volume is a questionable Americanism, and he keeps changing 'while' to 'whilst'. I'm sure he's technically correct, but who says whilst, nowadays? Only owners of manor houses and country estates, that's who!

I would also like to thank the reviewers who have invested their time and expertise in evaluating my work. One, in particular, deserves a name check: Phil Jardine. After scrutinising my first opus, I gave him the nickname 'The Grammar Nazi'. He's old school, so I'm guessing his right eye twitched at every superfluous comma as he read this follow-up. I am grateful for his dedication to maintaining the highest standards of excellence I endeavour to achieve, searching through thousands of words for an uncrossed letter 't' or rogue exclamation mark.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to the readers and supporters who have embraced my work with open minds and hearts. Some of you even bought the first book, rather than borrowing it from a friend! Your encouragement, kind words, and enthusiasm, both in person and online, have been a constant source of motivation, and our little community is ever-expanding.

To all those who find solace, laughter, and a break from the mundane within the pages of this book - thank you for allowing me to brighten your day. My aim is to inform and entertain. If I can also make you snort milk out of your nose whilst (there's that bloody word again) reading and drinking concurrently, my work here is done.

Preface

Ah, the elusive gap between literary masterpieces! It's like the Bermuda Triangle of creativity, where time mysteriously disappears, and the muse takes an extended vacation in the Bahamas. Ok, so it's been a long time since my first book. The original volume is probably too old for Leonardo DiCaprio to take out on a date by now! However, it's not that I'm particularly lazy. I just never considered my inaugural musings would be so well received. The first book was written as a personal record of our motor-roaming adventures. Therefore, I made little provision for a follow-up. That, combined with a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic, delayed things further.

It could be argued that the lockdown should have sped up my bookish tendencies. However, listening to the news back in March 2020, I thought it was going to be the end of mankind as we knew it, so I wondered, why bother? The weather's good, let's simply enjoy the apocalypse in the garden with a glass of Rioja and a ham sandwich, we're all going to die anyway! That's not exactly how things turned out, but I have no regrets regarding my year of lethargy. I remember a summer of warm blue skies, an alarming lack of vapour trails and road traffic noise, socially distanced dog walks, and an air of optimism for a fresh start, a new way forward where nurses were valued and footballers were not. Sadly it never happened, and life gradually slipped back to pre-Covid normality. Whatever the reason for the delay, I hope this second book amuses and entertains you as much as the first. I'm working on the principle that good things come to those who wait - and you've certainly been waiting, so it should be good.

Travelling Europe in a motorhome offers an incredible way to explore the diverse landscapes, rich history, and vibrant cultures of the continent. With its extensive network of well-maintained roads, and a multitude of picturesque camping sites and free aires, Europe is a dream destination for this unique mode of travel. Embarking on a continental trip allows you to experience the freedom and flexibility of having a comfortable home on wheels, while enjoying the convenience of exploring multiple countries at your own pace. From the fjords of Norway to the sun-soaked beaches of Greece, the options are virtually limitless - as long as you're a dab hand with a chemical toilet.

One of the greatest advantages of motorhoming is the opportunity to immerse yourself in differing cultures. By staying at campsites, you can interact with fellow adventurers from different countries, sharing stories and forming lasting connections. However, the best thing about this type of travel for me, is the freedom to discover hidden gems off the beaten track. Exploring quaint villages, sampling local delicacies, and stumbling upon charming roadside attractions are all part of the experience. Europe's diverse geography ensures that every turn of the wheel brings forth new landscapes, creating an ever-changing backdrop for an unforgettable journey - or that's what motorhome salesmen would have you believe. The truth is somewhat different, but still incredibly rewarding.

If this book inspires you, and you'd like to continue following our future adventures, I regularly blog on Facebook at www.facebook.com/cockertravels, or go to our website at www.travelswithmycocker.com. Adventure awaits, so go and grab it with both hands!



Sitting out the pandemic whilst Brian takes a well earned rest

Dedicated to my mum 1925 - 2023
always my number one fan.





Introduction



Stan watching life go by

You may have gathered from the title of this book that it has an older sibling. I'm hoping many of you have already rifled through that particular volume, chuckling at the text, and leaving behind grubby fingermarks along the way. If so, you will need no introduction to the content or characters contained within these pages. However, there are always some renegades not deterred by sequential numbering, happy to watch *The Godfather II* without ever seeing the original. These free-spirited types are willing to start a boxset on season four, hoping they will pick it up as they go along. If they just followed the rules and toed the line like everyone else, this wordy introduction would be totally unnecessary.

Now, because of their selfish behaviour, many others, who have been with us from the beginning, have to sit around idly while the rebellious few read these opening pages and catch up. So, just for the lazy contingent who couldn't be bothered to buy the first book (yes, I'm looking at you), I'll briefly recap what's happened to date before we all set off together on these three new adventures.

Our motorhoming journey began in 2017. We'd wanted one for several years, but work commitments and bringing up a family had rendered any thoughts of spending large chunks of time away from home unfeasible. After our son had grown up, we decided to cut back on work and free up a substantial proportion of the year to realise our travel aspirations. This initially resulted in a lengthy period of research on motorhomes, followed by visits to several shows to discover exactly what type of van we wanted before taking the plunge.

There is no such thing as the perfect motorhome. In reality, the Tardis is science fiction, therefore a few compromises have to be made. Smaller ones, which some people call camper vans, are almost like driving a car. They can be parked virtually anywhere and do not require a special driving licence. However, the bed in this type of vehicle shares the living space. The prospect of setting it up every evening and then stowing it away again, simply to move around inside, was impractical for us. Most camper vans don't

A fun size campervan



have a built-in toilet or shower either, while many lack genuine comfort, making them only practical for a few days away. Additionally, due to their small physical size, there is simply no space for the plethora of accoutrements required for a lengthier trip. With all these drawbacks, we rapidly concluded they were not for us and crossed them off the list.

On the other hand, big motorhomes have their own pros and cons. Assuming you possess the funds in the first place, they can be cumbersome, slow to drive, and difficult to park or manoeuvre. This may restrict access to city centres, secluded beaches, or other places of interest. Most require a special driving licence, and the fuel costs can be substantially higher if undertaking longer journeys. On the plus side, they are extremely luxurious and have all the modern conveniences you need for months, if not years, on the road.



The executive model for people with deeper pockets



Brian, the six metre wonder

We spent some time looking at many different sizes and layouts, eventually settling on something towards the smaller end of the range: a six-metre van conversion manufactured by Adria. Inspired by the fact that snails are self-contained - effectively carrying their accommodation wherever they go - I immediately nicknamed him Brian after the cheery-looking TV character in 'The Magic Roundabout'.

Choosing a van is a case of finding something that works for you and accepting the restrictions which inevitably come with a compromised purchase. Nevertheless, I feel our initial choice has worked out more or less perfectly. It's small enough to be relatively easy to drive and park, but big enough to be reasonably comfortable - even on longer trips. With a fixed bed at the rear (which I often use as a lounge area), there is no set-up required when arriving at a destination,



Lots of room for junk below the high bed



The table can be removed for a bigger lounge...

and a solar panel, toilet, plus shower on board means we can live off-grid practically anywhere. This negates any reliance on campsites, which takes most of the worry out of finding a place to stay. Although we'd love more room inside, I'm not sure we'll ever swap to a big motorhome (unless the length of our trips increase). For us, a van half-a-metre longer, with a larger bathroom, would possibly be the best of both worlds whilst still fitting our modus operandi. That's something we may consider in the future. However, with current trips around three to six weeks in length, Brian ticks most of the boxes for us and because we have a built-in awning, if the weather's good, we live outside most of the time anyway.

The crew of the good ship Brian consists of myself, culpably tackling the driving and the majority of the dog walking duties; Tracey, my wife, is cook, nurse, shoulder to cry on and supplier of fresh pants; and finally, our two cocker spaniel twins: Ruby and Stan. Their role on these trips is to make leftover food disappear, embarrass us in front of strangers, and to redecorate the van with muddy paw prints. Ruby, I would describe as intelligent, playful, loyal, and slightly anxious, while Stan is basically a stomach on legs with an IQ that would make a village idiot look like Stephen Hawking. On the plus side, they are the source of the majority of our entertainment on these outings and touring simply wouldn't be the same without them.

We spent more than three months haphazardly travelling all over Europe during our first three trips last year. This formed the basis of the original book, where we took Brian to France, Spain, The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Denmark. Some of the observations made during those journeys will reappear in this volume. If you haven't followed our earlier jaunts, prepare yourself for the odd sentence which could appear a bit random or even slightly xenophobic.



... or even used outside



A sneaky cwtch with my boy. (Btw, that's a shadow not a comb-over)

You will often find me admonishing the Germans for upsetting my prudish Welshness by constantly parading around Europe's beaches wearing nothing but socks and sandals. Similarly, I have been known to lambast the French for the lack of a public toilet seat (as noted in the opening sentence of the inaugural blog entry). These are genuine observations from our travels but should be taken with a substantial soupçon of sodium chloride. They are simply included for comic effect with no malice intended. Fortunately, I'm an equal opportunities transgressor believing all nationalities should be up for a little gentle teasing, including the inhabitants of my own homeland: Wales. We've all heard the jokes, but contrary to popular belief, a sheep in a telephone box is not a leisure centre, and we are definitely not all beer-swilling rugby-obsessed haters of the English. (I have it on good authority there's a man in the Rhondda who prefers football!) Personally, I'm a massive fan of our European cousins. I always look forward to a chat over a glass of red when parked alongside them. We may have different cultures, customs, and values but that's the very reason travelling within Europe is so interesting and ultimately rewarding. 'Vive la différence' I say.