

# Mike and the mechanic in Hamburg

**Having joined the IPA in 2008 Stephan West always thought it would be a brilliant idea to go and visit other countries and see how their police forces work.**

**S**tephan tells the story of his recent adventure. As I worked in Hamburg a few years ago, about 20 years actually, it seemed a good place to start. After some red tape, my colleague Mike Thorne and I set off.

So at 5am we rolled out of the garage. It was freezing; no I mean it was freezing! Well only 140 miles to Folkestone to catch the Euro Tunnel train. Oh, I forgot to tell you that the whole journey is just under 700 miles – one way. It never quite warmed up but the whole journey was dry and sunny, hitting more road works between Bremen and Hamburg than you can shake a stick at.

At about 8.30pm we arrived in Hamburg – you can imagine which body part hurt the most and when we eventually entered our accommodation at 10pm. Two questions came up: how comfortable are the beds and who the blazes had the idea to ride across? Conversation was short, as we both fell asleep as soon as our heads hit the pillow in an extremely comfortable bed at the Hamburg Police HQ training centre.

Friday 23 April, the alarm went off at 6.30am, don't say it, we thought the same. However, as we were being collected at 8am, we did get up, strangely enough not being in any pain at all.

Norbert Schoen, our contact and guide, was on the button and showed us where we could get some breakfast. After that it was to his office at HQ and the next hours went by in a blink, nattering about the differences in our systems, looking at the detention centre, public order department and meeting student officers on exchange.

The late afternoon was ours, so we went down to the river Elbe and sat in the glorious sunshine, on another beautiful day. Having to organize the evening meal ourselves we decided that we had to sample the well-known curry wurst and chips – definitely a good idea.

Saturday 24, we had a late start and made our way across Hamburg to Police Station PK14 in the centre. Leaving HQ on foot towards to train station and having permission to be in full uniform, the train journey was very interesting. Being engaged in plenty of conversation did highlight our rather rusty German, but was extreme fun. We decided to count the number of 'double

takes' by the locals but called it a day by the time we reached the train station, losing count somewhere near a 100.

Arriving at the Rathausplatz we found a local officer to point us in the right direction. He kindly insisted that we be collected and we arrived at PK14 within 30 minutes, receiving a very warm welcome wherever we went. After speaking to Stefan Homburg, we were crewed up with two different units and went out on patrol.

Like I said the job and the work is the same, the application of their law is however very different. Having discussed the differences in detail a few things stuck out, they were impressed about our uniform and could not understand that we were still unarmed, oh not forgetting to mention our body armour. We attended demonstrations, theft, public order, a flasher in the park – trust Mike to be dealing with that one – immigration problems coupled with theft.

It was quite amazing how both Mike and I jumped in and assisted, which just goes to show you can take the copper out of the country but you can't take the person out of the copper. Mike being the model for the day posed in most of the pictures, which speak for themselves I think. My most memorable moment - driving on the wrong side of the road with the steering wheel on the wrong side of the car doesn't seem right, adding myself into that and adding blue lights – well what can I say definitely great fun but wrong? Boys however will always be boys.

At 10.30pm we finished the shift and adding of course Her Majesty's free honorary half an hour. Having discussed the differences in our countries we said our goodbyes and returned to HQ with a very good insight into policing in Hamburg.



Mike with two German officers, Tina and Peter.

Sunday 25, after a decent German breakfast we squeezed out of Hamburg ahead of the annual marathon; looking forward to another 700 miles – really.

The only real bonus that day was the weather, about 27 degrees C and glorious sunshine. At 11.00pm we eventually arrived home completely shattered and once again fell into our beds, much to the relief of our families.

All in all a brilliant place to go and to meet colleagues who were extremely welcoming and happy to see us. Should any of you decide to go I would advise to take more time to get a chance to see a fantastically interesting city and its people. The time we had was much too short but, hey, we only had 4 rest-days – well if that is what you can call it. You will be relieved to know that neither of us had any aches and pains the next day when I had to be back on shift; Mike obviously had more forward planning and had managed to wangle a few days off.

Finally we'd like to finish with a phrase we heard again and again, "The English Bobby is the coolest thing – ever", which is probably down to the extremely large iconic hat!

We would like to say a big thank you to all who helped make the visit possible. We thought of listing everybody who was there but it would look like the Oscars.

Stephan West, 7 Region



Tina's Police vehicle was slightly more heavy duty...



Mike was reluctant to part with this German patrol car