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Biker's guide to Wallonia

Experience The Belgian Ardennes



Picture it now. It's summer. The weather bulletin predicts hot, sunny days next weekend. Finally, an opportunity to get the bike out. But where to take it next? The answer is simple: a last-minute trip to Wallonia.

You may be wondering what Wallonia really is. To a geography teacher, Wallonia is the southern half of Belgium that borders France, Luxembourg and Germany. To a biker, Wallonia is a place where world-class motorcycle racing, turning points in European history and phenomenal Trappist beers all co-exist, connected by fabulous curves of tarmac. It is a hidden masterwork of motorcycling goodness.

It's home to places you probably know of. Take the Spa-Francorchamps race circuit, nestled in the wooded Ardennes. Or Bastogne, a key scene in the

Battle of the Bulge in the second world war. But there's so much more to discover: the Belgian Classic Trophy fought over at the picturesque Gedinne circuit; a little overgrown bunker hidden in a copse that happens to have been Hitler's home-from-home in 1940; monolithic feats of engineering lift boats in baths 100 metres into the air. And so much more.

And to top it all off, this part of Belgium is almost ridiculously accessible; just 90 minutes will take you from LeShuttle's French end to Wallonia's Western edge. That puts a trip to Wallonia in the 'hastily organised weekend getaway' category – something that won't ever be said about those lengthy autoroute slogs to the Alps.

So, when the weather bulletin delivers the goods, set the satnav for Wallonia.

Ben Lindley, Wallonia correspondent

**‘It is a hidden
masterwork of
motorcycling
goodness’**

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all routes
now at
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What to see and when to see it

**Amazing riding roads,
great race tracks, and
oodles of ‘ooh, just
look at that’ moments
– put Wallonia on your
getaway hitlist for ‘24**

A LONG WEEKEND

Three packed days of excitement ready for riding on a sunny summer weekend



Inhale Belgian frites while motocrossers streak past across the hills south of Dinant

Tournai

Download all routes now at visitwallonia.be/bike

Mons Grand Place

DAY THREE

Road Races, Odd Places

» **What to see?** A monolithic boat lift connects two canals 100 metres apart... vertically! A bunker in the woods was Hitler's home-from-home in 1940. An odd tower deep in the forest can be climbed for huge views. Discuss these wacky locations over a steak and bière in the impressive Grand Place in Mons.

» **Where to ride?** Two famous road races are on the cards today. Events at Circuit de Gedinne and Chimay Circuit treat you to a close-quarters view of some great racing – and great bikes.

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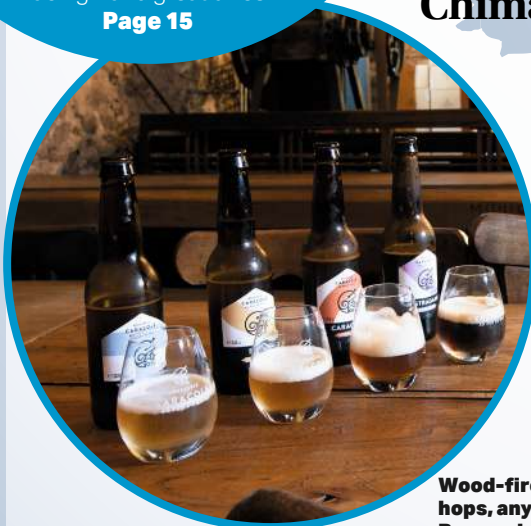
Barrage de la Plate Taille

Circuit de Chimay

Welcome to a three-day Walloon extravaganza, stuffed with famous race tracks and monuments to a dramatic history. The roads are pretty spectacular too. For the digitally minded traveller, each one of these routes can be downloaded and popped into your satnav in short order. Load up your internet surfer of choice and go to visitwallonia.be/bike to find out more.

Summer is the best time to visit. During holiday season, all the Walloons seem to up sticks and go abroad to catch their rays. This means that the roads in high summer are almost caravan-free, at least compared to your common or garden Riviera. Shoulder seasons have changeable weather, but if the forecasts turn out to be on your side, you could bag both hot sun and last-minute discount accommodation – a huge win-win.

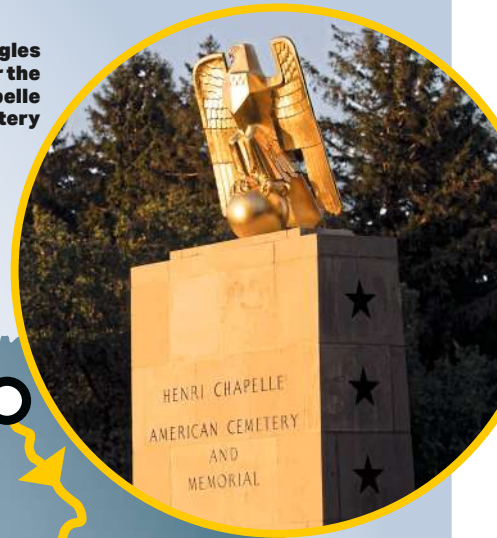
We're in Europe, mind – so that means brushing up on leftfield road rules. A favourite 'gotcha' of mine is priority to the right. Keep an eye out for unmarked side-road junctions; if there are no markings, then any vehicle approaching from the right probably has priority.



Wood-fired hops, anyone? Brasserie Caracole makes quality beer the old way

IN WALLONIA

Golden eagles watch over the Henri Chapelle Cemetery



Fort Eben-Emael

Henri Chapelle Cemetery

Castle of Reinhardstein

Spa Circuit

Amel

DAY ONE

The Tide of Battle

» **What to see?** A massive underground fortress that was considered impregnable, yet rendered useless by German paratroopers in just 15 minutes. Also, the resort town of Spa, foxholes in the woods, and castles buried in the Ardennes.

» **Where to ride?** Leap between hillcrests on the N608, with vast valley views to the south. Make sure you remember to pause at the sobering Henri Chapelle Cemetery. Then trickle through deep wooded valleys on threads of tarmac to Castle Reinhardstein.

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You can get as close as you like to Wallonia's history. Not quite sure what Ben's expecting to find



Dinant

Rue du Circuit 56

Millennium Tower

Rochehaut

Herbeumont Castle

Fastidiously restored Panther tank at Houffalize



Houffalize

Libramont-Chevigny

DAY TWO

The Belgian Ardennes

» **What to see?** Spectacular views are two-a-penny today, not least from the viewing deck at Spa-Francorchamps race circuit. See two hulking German tanks; one in La Gleize and one in Houffalize, both with strange stories to tell.

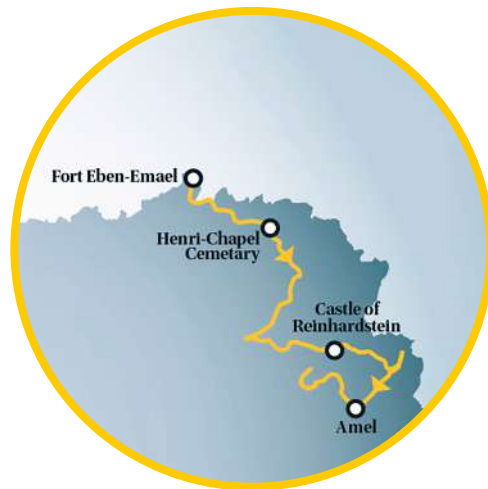
» **Where to ride?** Start with a bang on the way to Spa circuit, then the level is raised again and again. The N860 west of Houffalize, N889 east of Nassogne, and N884 through Herbeumont are best tackled after a full night's sleep.

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Spa circuit is world-class – and so are the roads that surround it



DAY ONE THE TIDE OF BATTLE



Discover underground forts, hidden castles and exposed foxholes as we trace Wallonia's border with the Netherlands and Germany

» **Direction** Eben-Emael to Malmedy » **Distance** 160km (100 miles) » **Duration** 3.5 riding hours

Start your three-day Wallonia tour with a trip deep underground. Europe's largest subterranean fortress, Fort Eben-Emael, burrows into the brow of a hill right at the north-east tip of Wallonia, with commanding views over the Albert Canal. This location was key to its defensive importance in the inter-war 1930s and made it a major objective for the invading Germans in 1940. Amazingly, 90 per cent of its vast 3.5-mile network of tunnels, barracks, turrets and stores is open to the public.

On 10 May 1940, just 71 German paratroopers landed on the fortress's topside football pitch, taking the 600 Belgian occupants by surprise. The gliders transporting them were towed by aeroplanes to 8000 feet and then glided the 16 miles from the German border. The Germans had trained in complete secrecy for a whole six months for this attack, and they took only 15 minutes to sabotage all of the key long-range guns and anti-air emplacements.

For the 2024 season, all the original lighting will be in place, thanks to a comprehensive effort to 3D-print the

Dramatic Reinhardstein Castle boasts a picture-postcard setting



© DOMINKETZ



Enjoying a quick cuppa in Durbuy



The amazing network of tunnels at Eben-Emael



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now at
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**Above and left:
cobblestones and waffles
– no mistaking where
you are...**

Stretch goal... **La Gourmandine, Durbuy**

Huge underground fortress not your thing? Order an ice cream at La Gourmandine in Durbuy instead. The cobblestone town centre is overlooked by an imposing chateau on a curve in the Ourthe river. Approach from the north via the N814 and N833 for scratchy bends that snake alongside valley-bottom streams.

» **Where** Rue Jean de Bohême 7,
6940 Durbuy

» **Website** @la_gourmandine_durbuy

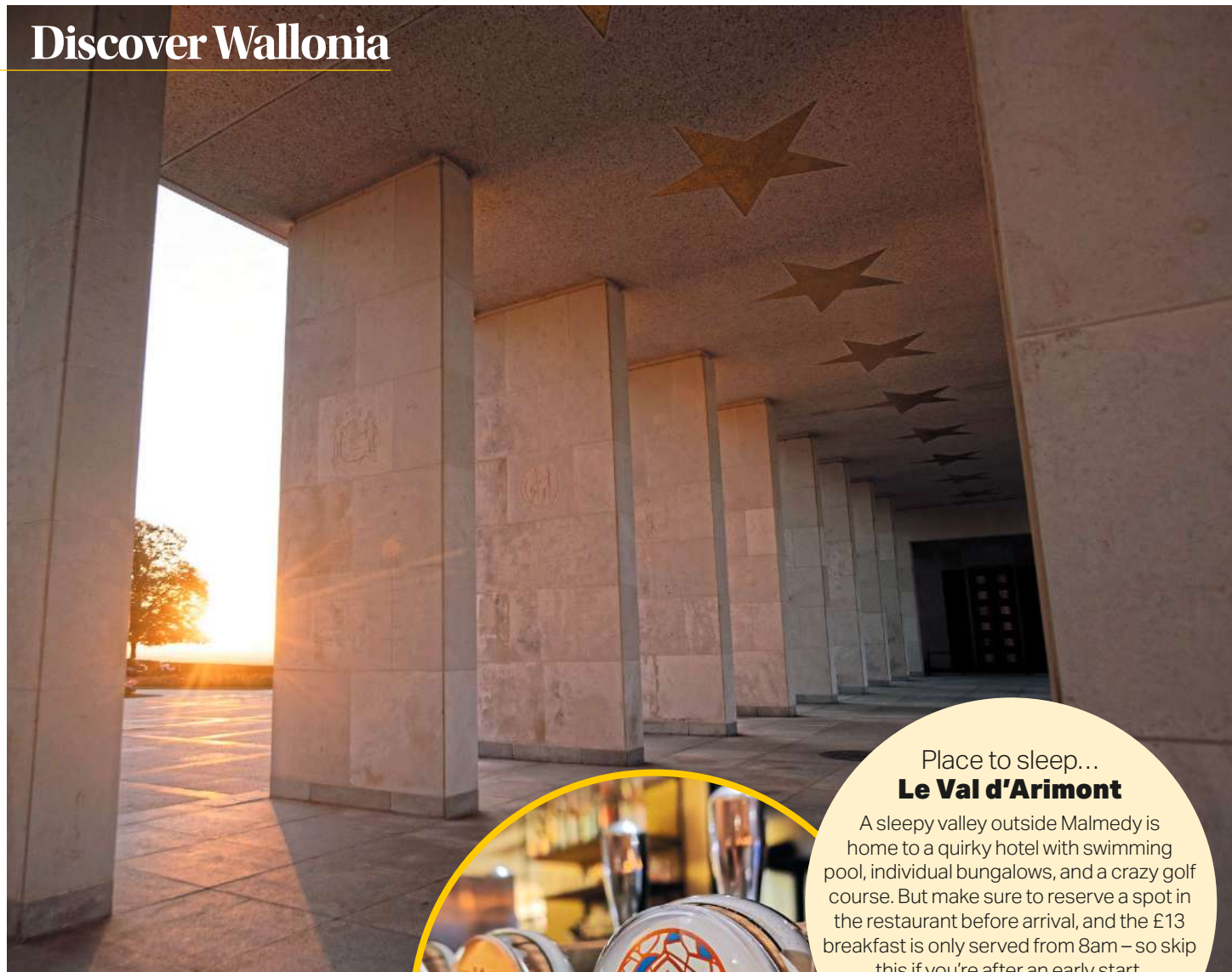
now-defunct light fittings. Visit for as long as you want: from quick, €10 self-guided visits to comprehensive eight-hour tours for the most dedicated enthusiast. The

Explorers' tour is a three-hour adventure with torches through unlit portions of the fortress.

At the entrance, you can use the lockers to secure your helmets and jackets.

Back out in the sunshine, hop over the Meuse river (we'll be crossing it again and again over the course of the next few days) and follow the N608 east. On the brow of a hill sits the huge Henri Chapelle American Cemetery and Memorial, the resting place of 7992 US servicemen. This beautiful, peaceful and thought-provoking place is open every day from 9am to 5pm.

The N629 past Lac de la Gileppe (with its panoramic restaurant) and Jalhay (look



Above: the Henri Chapelle American Cemetery and Memorial – a beautiful and poignant place

Right: If you're a beer lover, you have sooo come to the right place

for a partly hidden pillbox on the right as you ride out of the town centre) delivers us to the resort town of Spa. And, depending on how many miles you decided to walk underground at Eben-Emael, your arrival may well coincide with lunchtime. Sit in the square outside Restaurant la Belle Epoque, or try La Table de Spa on the cobbled Rue Delhasse under the Thermes de Spa itself. You'll eat well, whichever you choose.

Don't fill the boots with cheese courses just yet, though. You'll want a clear stomach for what's ahead. The rest of the day's roads are tight and technical as we trickle towards sleepy border villages made famous by action during the Battle of the Bulge. Case in point: the Route du Hargister on approach to Reinhardstein Castle. The castle itself is almost completely hidden in a river bend, majestic silver birch and beeches camouflaging steep turrets and



Photo: Benjamin Lindley

Place to sleep... **Le Val d'Arimont**

A sleepy valley outside Malmedy is home to a quirky hotel with swimming pool, individual bungalows, and a crazy golf course. But make sure to reserve a spot in the restaurant before arrival, and the £13 breakfast is only served from 8am – so skip this if you're after an early start.

» **Where** Chem. du Val 30,
4960 Malmedy

» **Website** val-arimont.be

tall chimney stacks. It's a quiet place but, if you want to play it safe, visits can be booked at reinhardstein.net at least three days in advance.

Wind on the throttle along Elsenborn

Ridge, site of fierce fighting during the Battle of the Bulge in the winter of 1944-45. Here, American troops of the 99th and 2nd Infantry held out against the German assault by resorting to desperate measures: calling in indirect artillery fire on their own positions and enlisting clerks from headquarters to reinforce the line.

Engine off, sidestand down, and a short walk will take you to well-kept remains of foxholes and bunkers at the Hasselpath Memorial Site (open 24/7). Allied soldiers held the line in horrific conditions here until retreating to the established defences at Elsenborn. Continue on through Büllingen and the Losheim Gap, turn right at Amel and trickle back towards Malmedy – tonight's stopping point. Pause momentarily at the Rocher de Falize, a Pride-Rock-style edifice jutting out into the valley below. It's a fabulous spot for a late afternoon sunbathe before dropping into Malmedy below.

Dinner tonight? Feast at the local barbecue joint, La Charbonnade, before hitting the sack sooner rather than later: tomorrow is an intense day's ride. **Bike**

'It's a fabulous spot for a late afternoon sunbathe before dropping into Malmedy below'

THE COCKPIT OF EUROPE

Well-travelled battlefield tour guide **John Harris** navigates Wallonia's military history



PHOTO: JOHN HARRIS



This region's military past means it has long been known as the 'Cockpit of Europe', likening Belgian soil's bitter experience of battle to the ground of a cockfighting arena.

I'm a battlefield tour guide – and this rich history means there's so much for me to explore. From the Duke of Marlborough's triumph at Ramillies in 1706, to the trio of 1815 battles (Ligny, Quatre Bras and Waterloo) that led to Napoleon's downfall and on to the First and Second World Wars, Wallonia has been the scene of much fighting. The best bit for us bikers is that Wallonia is often overlooked by tourists – which means quieter roads with fewer campervans in summer.

For those interested in military fortification, the formidable forts around Liège and Namur imposed a significant delay on the advancing Germans in 1914. North-west of Liège, Fort de Loncin was pounded by artillery and is now a memorial to many of the garrison who remain entombed there after a shell made a direct hit on one of the magazines, with devastating effects. Namur Citadel, a massive fortification dating back to the medieval period, is on a height at the confluence of the Meuse and

Sambre rivers. Scaling its cobbled approach provides impressive views, and a visitor centre traces its history.

Turning to WW2, the May 1940 campaign tends to be overshadowed by the later Battle of the Bulge, but there's a lot to see in a very scenic part of Belgium. This includes Fort Eben-Emael near Liège (captured by German airborne troops in May 1940), and the Meuse crossing points around Dinant. At Brûly-de-Pesche, where Hitler had a temporary HQ in June 1940, a modest bunker survives. And a museum commemorates the impact on local civilians, who were evacuated at the time. A small museum marks the contribution of the Belgian Resistance. **Bike**

Above: The entrance to Fort Eben-Emael – the world's largest when built in the '30s

Below: '...and there's more interesting stuff over there, look...'



PHOTO: WBTP/MAREE

John's top recommendations

1815 Battle of Waterloo

Marked by a lion-topped conical monolith, this battlefield is compact and easily explored compared to the sprawling nature of 20th century engagements. It saw the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 and was described by a victorious Wellington as 'the nearest-run thing you ever saw'. There are some fascinating museums in the area, and Waterloo itself has an outstanding visitor centre.

1914 BEF

The area around Mons provides an opportunity to study the British Expeditionary Force's opening engagements of the First World War. These 80,000 men proved effective against far greater numbers and slowed the German army's advance into France. Mons is an ideal base for a tour, and the stunning architecture of the Grand Place makes a great backdrop to an al fresco meal.

1940 German invasion

I love exploring sites relating to the German invasion of May 1940. These include the Meuse crossing points around Dinant: a ruined castle overlooking the river at Poilvache provides a great view of the lock and weir at Houx crossed by German troops. The Musée du Souvenir Mai 1940 in Haut-le-Wastia has a superb collection of artefacts relating to the fighting in the area.

DAY TWO

THE BELGIAN ARDENNES



We're heading far into Wallonia's wooded south on some of the best roads the region has to offer. But not before a visit to the fabulous Spa-Francorchamps race circuit

» **Direction** Malmedy to Rochehaut » **Distance** 270km (168 miles) » **Duration** Five riding hours

Stretch goal... **101st Airborne Museum**

Looking for more military history after yesterday's deep-dive? Continue south at Houffalize for just 15 minutes to reach central Bastogne and the 101st Airborne Museum. A dramatic audio and lights show in the basement simulates what it was like to be sheltering from bombardment in the winter of 1944-45.

» **Where** Avenue de la Gare 11,
6600 Bastogne

» **Website** 101airborne.museumbastogne.com



Today's blinder of a trip won't just cover a world-famous racetrack and some proper riding roads. It'll also connect together four tanks left in place after the Second World War, each with a drama-filled story to tell.

But first, you'll need to get going. Up at the crack of dawn, dry the dew off the seat, click into gear and bee-line for the nearest boulangerie. This one will do, especially as it opens at six o'clock in the morning: Boulangerie-Pâtisserie Halmes offers delectable baked goods from its shopfront in central Malmedy. Try its Kisses of Malmedy – an irresistible almond macaron speciality.

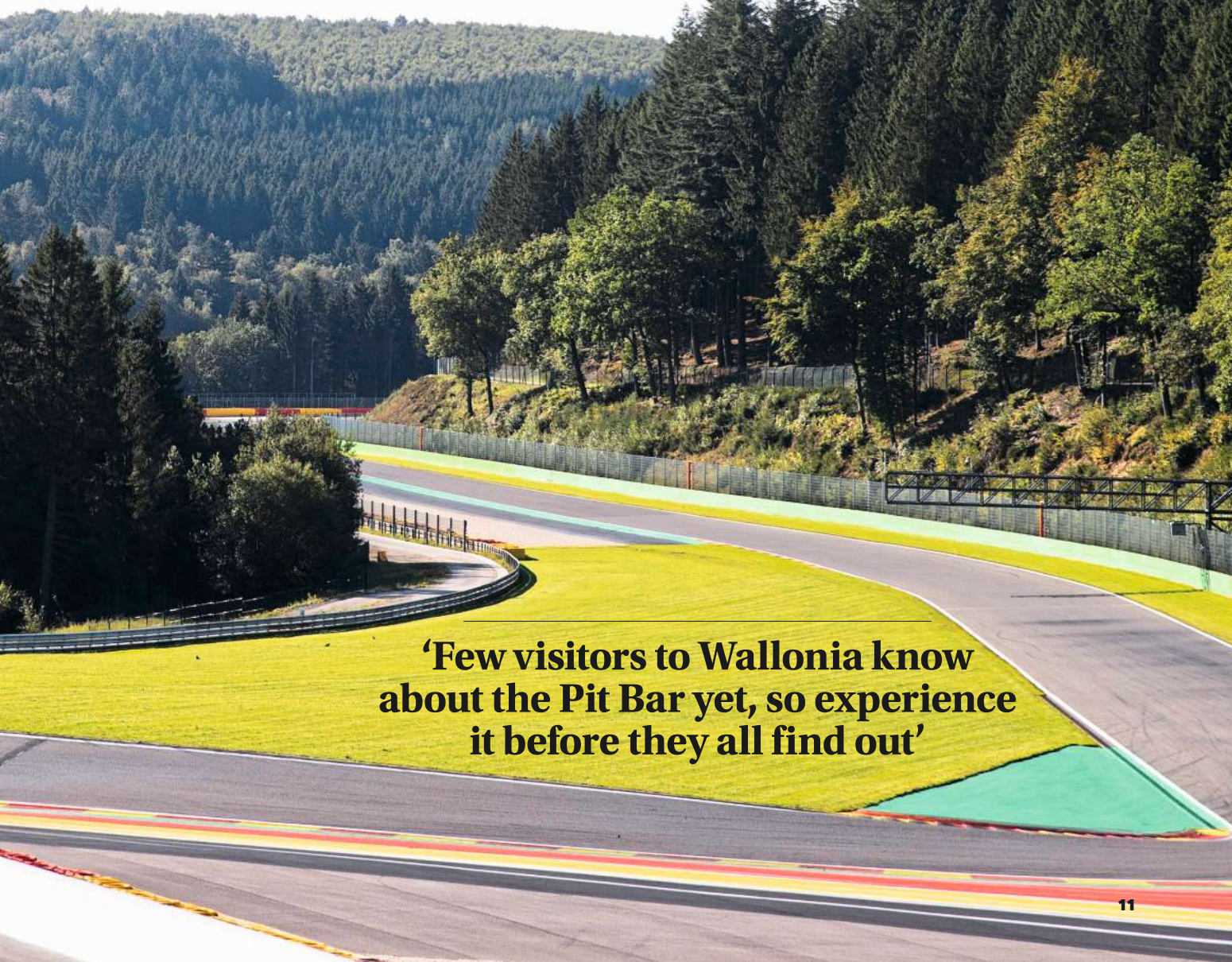
A quick blast along the top-quality N62, turn left at a mini roundabout, and you're at Spa-Francorchamps race circuit. Here's a tip: the Pit Bar and Restaurant is open from 8am on weekdays. Park up, walk under the track and take the lift up to arguably the best view of Spa you could ask for. Order a coffee and watch bikes (or cars) fly round the circuit from the viewing deck, the hot summer sun beaming on to the red-yellow track aprons. From here you can see both Eau Rouge and the Bus Stop chicane, so little wonder this is the same bar that Paddock Club VIPs watch Formula One from. Few visitors to Wallonia know about the Pit Bar yet, so experience it before they all find out.



Above: a very special destination in a very special corner of Wallonia

Below: View from the Pit Bar at Spa. Grab a coffee and enjoy the action

Back on the road, coast through Francorchamps village and wind your way up to La Gleize. This quiet hilltop village was the scene of Kampfgruppe Peiper's final stand in December 1944. A key spearhead of the German advance in the Battle of the Bulge, Joachim Peiper's combined arms battle group had left behind its supply lines in a mad rush to seize bridges on the Meuse river. Running out of fuel and with no communication possible with other German



'Few visitors to Wallonia know about the Pit Bar yet, so experience it before they all find out'

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Road planner for this leg was surely told to 'design some biking tarmac'. It's ruddy ace

Bikes are all about going places, and these places are definitely worth going to

units, Peiper pulled his group back from Stoumont to La Gleize, eventually retreating on foot on Christmas Eve 1944.

A whopping great King Tiger tank lounges in the car park of December 44 Museum (€9, 10am-6pm in summer). This is the only survivor of 135 armoured German vehicles that were left by the Germans at La Gleize. It was saved from removal by the post-war American clean-up operation by the local pub landlord's wife, who bought it for a bottle of cognac.

The fantastic tarmac of the N645 spins the route back to Trois Ponts, where a bag of chips at Friterie Bertrand and a Trois Ponts beer (secure some in the top box for

Place to sleep... **Hostellerie Le Charme de la Semois**

A cracking location right on the Semois and a few minutes' ride from Rochehaut's viewpoint. Tasty evening meals from head chef Dimitri have been recognised by the Michelin Guide since 2013. Elsewhere, expect a bumper buffet breakfast, and a strong selection of wines and Trappist beers.

» **Where** Rue de Liboichant 12,
5550 Vresse-sur-Semois

» **Website**

charmedelasemois.com

later) are essential purchases. We're riding south through Vielsalm and on to Houffalize, where a German Panther tank commands a view of the town from its own rocky outcrop. This Panther was pulled out of the Ourthe river where it fell during the

Bulge, trapping its crew inside.

Contemporary photographs on display

hit hard when you realise that it was 90 RAF Lancaster bombers that flattened this town on 5 January 1945 to block key German battle movements.

Take the N860 west towards La Roche-en-Ardenne. This intoxicating stretch of road is one of Wallonia's very best, snapping in and out of sublime corners as it traces the Ourthe river. Leaving the river behind, it slingshots you out on cambered curves through Nadrin, and then careers headlong downwards into La Roche.

It's worth poking around the British M-10 Achilles from the 1st Northamptonshire Yeomanry that sits above the Ourthe. This was the first tank to roll triumphantly into La Roche when it was finally liberated in January 1945. Its long-term ally, an American Sherman, is clocking up tickets in the town's car park below.

The roads get better than ever from here. Highlights include the N889 towards Nassogne: the S-bends that this stretch of tarmac conjure up are on the next level, and this nine-mile blast is worth repeating if you've got the time. Another is the N865 through Herbeumont (quick stop at the 800-year-old castle ruins). Finally, the N828 and N819 between magnificent Bouillon and your evening stop in Rochehaut are also highly rewarding to navigate.

After that you'll be in need of a refreshing drink in front of a beautiful view. Good news: Rochehaut's Panorama de Frahan has you covered. Santé! **Bike**



'The local pub landlord's wife bought a Tiger tank in exchange for a bottle of cognac'



‘People are genuinely missing out...’

Three friends discovered Wallonia and loved it so much they founded a business and started leading tours there. Meet Russ, Mark, and James

Who are you?

Russ: James, Mark and I are good friends with a shared passion for motorcycles, adventure and travel. Following our own motorcycle adventures in the UK and Europe, it became apparent that more and more people are looking to enjoy the open road, exploring different places and areas – without the hassle of organising and arranging the finer details. We picked this up and ran with it, founding Kraken Motorcycles in 2022.

What is it about the Wallonia region that attracted you to it?

Mark: A lot of riders will admit that they get off the ferry or Le Shuttle and motor straight through Belgium on their way to somewhere further afield.

We feel people are genuinely missing out by doing this, and that’s why we are showcasing Wallonia’s fantastic array of riding roads, amazing scenery, thought-provoking historic sites and the famous race circuits – not to mention the superb food and incredible beers. What’s not to love about this region... and it’s all on our doorstep!

In the past two centuries alone, Belgium has seen more than its fair share of invasions, retreats, resettlings and pivotal battles. Waterloo, Ypres and the Battle of the Bulge are all secondary-school syllabus content. The undulating forest of the Ardennes is literally strewn with relics, monuments and structures depicting hard-fought battles



PHOTO: M. MCGEEHAN

Discover Wallonia

over the years. However, scratch beneath the surface and you can discover fascinating and emotional personal stories within these major events.

If you marry all this with the perfect vehicle for covering ground and connecting with the sights and smells of your environment – ie, a motorcycle – you have the perfect recipe for a series of trips to help people understand Belgium’s significance in recent history.

James: And then there are the roads...

So, what are your favourite roads?

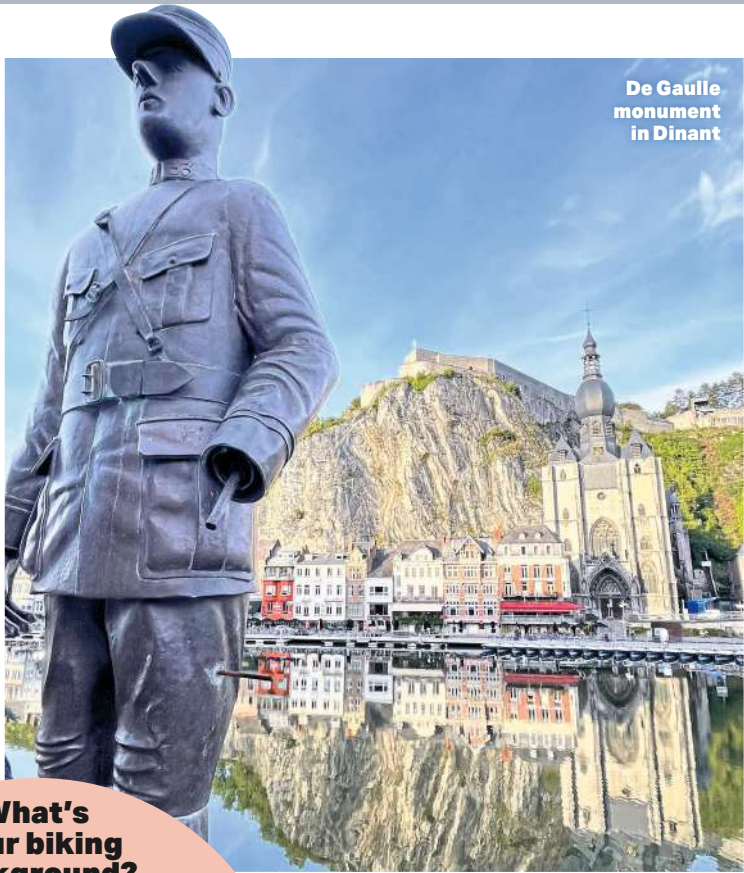
Russ: There are some very special bits of tarmac in Wallonia. Move away from the motorways and you’ll soon find yourself immersed in the smaller twisty road networks joining hidden villages and towns together.

A particular favourite of mine is the N589 heading south through the lakes towards Chimay. After a quick stop to admire the world-famous road circuit, pick up the N99 towards Dinant, followed by the N96 that hugs the banks of the River Meuse into Dinant town. This place is one of the most beautiful towns in the region – and what a ride-in it is.

James: We all really enjoy riding the short but sweet N651 (to the north-west of Liernaux) heading towards Stavelot. The N66 and N68 completes the journey to Stavelot just in time for a stop to see the Abbaye de Stavelot and the Spa Francorchamps Museum within.

But my pick of the bunch is the twisty, forested section of the N860 near Houffalize.

» To find out more, or to get in contact with Russ, Mark or James, head to krakenmoto.co.uk.



De Gaulle monument in Dinant

PHOTO: WBT P. MAREE

What’s your biking background?

Russ: My dad and uncle both raced grasstrack, so they always had bikes. I got my first motorbike at the age of six but I didn’t go for my road licence until I was 27!

James: Aged 10, I was hooked by a ride around a friend’s field on a Suzuki JR80. Later, a trip to South Africa gave me the adventure spirit.

Mark: I’d be given a ride around the garden by my brother until I was able to reach the controls. Then the lawn turned into a track: the worn grass showed the route all summer long.

A tour company run by bikers, for bikers



Famous circuit is popular with Kraken guys and clients alike

PHOTO: M. MCGEEHAN



PHOTO: M. MCGEEHAN

What’s your current motorbike? And why?



» **Mark:** After a succession of Honda Blackbirds, my wrists told me it was time to take a load off. So, now it’s an Africa Twin DCT. Love it!



» **James:** Yes, it sounds a bit clichéd, but you can’t question Honda’s reliability. My current steed is a VFR1200X Crosstourer.



» **Russ:** I’ve recently moved to a BMW R1250GSA from the Honda Africa Twin Adventure Sports. I love its ride and comfort.

PHOTOS: J. GIBBS, M. MCGEEHAN

Place to sleep...

Martin's Dream Hotel

This swanky bed-renter in the old town of Mons is actually a former chapel: if you're lucky, one whole side of your room might be taken up by a stained-glass window. Private off-road parking keeps motorbikes away from prying eyes, and it's a few minutes on foot to the Grand Place.

» **Where** Rue de la Grande Triperie 17, 7000 Mons

» **Website** martinshotels.com

Château de Freÿr, on the banks the Meuse, Dinant. The gardeners sure earn their keep

DAY THREE ROAD RACES, ODD PLACES

Follow the French border to uncover quirky breweries, classic road races that exist out of time, and an authentic family chocolatier just down the road from Hitler's temporary HQ in 1940

» **Direction:** Rochefort to Mons » **Distance:** 290km (180 miles) » **Duration:** Five riding hours



'The road that flows beside the sleepy Semois is replaced by proper switchbacks'

Point de vue 'Le Jambon de la Semois'. You'll want to stop here for a bit because... well, just look at it

Grass banks, straw bales, the whiff of hot oil – the Belgian Classic Trophy at Gedinne is old-school cool

Best to start today with a clear head: the morning's roads are special right out of the gate. The soothing N945 that flows beside the sleepy Semois river is over before you know it, replaced by proper switchbacks and steep climbs that require commitment and focus.

First stop, a curious metal tower erected deep in the forests that border France. The Millennium Tower lets you climb 60 metres (200ft) above the surrounding trees – not recommended for those even faintly perturbed by heights. But the views are worth it on a crisp autumn morning, with red and golden foliage as far as you can see. The tower is unmanned, and there's no charge to climb it.

Take the opportunity to explore a network of roads (tarmac or easy dirt) that cross the forest, slotting you back

into society just in time to trip over the Gedinne race circuit. Look closely, and black-and-white street kerbing tells you that these roads are appropriated for proper racing (read more on page 18).

After lining up on the start-finish straight, wringing the throttle and making *brap-brap* noises, let's get on with the journey. Reconnect with the Meuse river from Day One and point the bike towards Dinant. Stop at Brasserie Caracole in Falmignoul to see its wood furnace in action and buy a crate of Nostradamus brune for later (World Beer Awards Bronze, and a knee-wobbling 9.1%).

Dinant itself is possibly Wallonia's most eccentric town. Massive saxophones line the central bridge over the Meuse, while on the eastern bank a church with a bulbous, rounded tower is completely overshadowed by a hulking cliff that supports a huge medieval fortress. It's all a bit acid-jazz, so take it in leisurely with a coffee and sandwich overlooking the river at either La Capsule or Solbrun.

Refreshed, cross that bridge o' saxes and turn south again on the west bank of the Meuse. This is the perfect post-lunch route, with a calm, gently curving N96 providing top views of crazy locals tightrope-walking over the river between the cliffs above you.

At first glance, Brûly-de-Pesche is a charming village nestled comfortably far from anywhere consequential. And yet it was here that Adolf Hitler based himself in June 1940 to oversee the final days of the Battle of France. His purpose-built bunker survives, and is open to visit between February and November.

Space in the panniers? Not for long. Fill up with chocolate by the kilo from the widely lauded Pralines de



PHOTO: GODIN _ JONATHAN _ BELGIUM



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Stretch goal... **Mahymobiles**

The great red shed that houses this amazing, 300-strong vehicle collection lies 30 minutes north-west of Mons, making it a well-worthwhile stop on the return to Calais. It's open from April through September – check the website for opening days/times, which vary.

» **Where** Rue Erna 3,
7900 Leuze-en-Hainaut

» **Website**
mahymobiles.be

Chimay just ten minutes from Brûly. Then it's straight on to the second road-race circuit of the day.

You can't miss Chimay's start-finish straight. There's a bloomin' great footbridge over the track with a Chimay brewery logo plastered up there. Once you've found your bearings, following the circuit is painless, thanks to well-used red and white kerbs pointing the way (head to page 18 for more info and events).

From Chimay, take the N589 to Cerfontaine. The crinkled, wooded Ardennes is now in the mirrors, and ahead is pure cruising country: gently rolling roads ideal for a Harley Fat Bob or BMW R nineT. Thunder northward past Cerfontaine and over a major hydro-electric dam, and look left to see locals whacking golf balls at floating holes bobbing far out from the shore.

We're on the home straight now, closing in on the beautiful old town of Mons. But just before you get there, take a detour down the N552 to see something truly extraordinary. A huge concrete construction rises 100 metres into the air, with concrete counterweights hung to its sides and two boat-size baths suspended in between. This is the Strépy-Thieu boat lift, Wallonia's equivalent to four of Scotland's Falkirk Wheels. And, impressively, a public road runs right around the contraption, providing epic views of its underbelly and inner workings right from the seat of your motorcycle.

Dispatch the Mons ring road and follow signs for the Grand Place. Ride right to its centre and collapse into a chair at Le Ropieur or La Cervoise. Time to raise a glass at the end of the trip. Has it only been three days? **Bike**



Canal locks? Meh.
You'll be wanting
the Strépy-Thieu
boat lift



Riding through the
amazing Rocher
Bayard on the
approach to Dinant

PHOTOS: CHIPPY WOOD

ROAD RACING IN 2024

From the red-yellow run-off at Spa-Francorchamps to the hay bales of Gedinne, Wallonia is awash with great road racing

MARC BOSSROY/METTET SUPERBIKER © DIM



Superbiker
- it's as mad
as it looks

RACE ONE

Mettet: Superbiker

All change at the Jules Tacheny Circuit: the Superbiker is in town. The track is altered, combining tarmac and off-road sections, skids and jumps, for what is perhaps the greatest supermoto event in the world. More than 400 riders typically compete, egged on by heaving crowds. Oddball and brilliant (superbiker.com).

» When 4-6 October 2024

RACE TWO

Chimay: Open Trophy

A smorgasbord of class-based racing, from bang-up-to-date BMW S1000RRs, to modern supertwins such as Aprilia RS660s and Yamaha R7s. Stay on for the new Youngtimer category, featuring superbikes and 600s from the 1990s. There's a classics bash the weekend before as well. Do 'em both...

» When 27-28 July 2024

**Jules Tacheny
Circuit
Mettet**
(circuit-mettet.be)

**Circuit de
Chimay**
Chimay (circuit.be)

From the modern championships held at Mettet and Chimay, to the vigorous throttle-wringing of antiquated machinery at Gedinne, Wallonia's four famous circuits let hooning Walloons compete on all kinds of machinery.

Circuit de Gedinne is like a mini Goodwood Revival without all the pomp and spotted bow ties. Classic bikes only at this 3.15-mile track, with up to 42 motorcycles trying to elbow their way to the front of the pack. It shares a lot in common with Irish greats like the Tandragee 100, but there are hardly any straights to contend with.

Next comes Mettet, which saw its first motorcycle street race in 1927, and by 1933 it was a full 5.3 miles in length. Today, it has evolved from being a national road racing mecca into its own purpose-built circuit: the Jules Tacheny, named after the Belgian world-record-breaking racer and official FN factory team rider.

At close to 100 years old, Chimay is one of the longest-running circuits in Europe. It used to be blindingly fast: Barry Sheene pulled off a 134.5mph average speed before newer safety measures put the brakes on. But even today Chimay is a quick trip between the Belgian hedges.

And, of course there's always the legendary Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps, with its Eau Rouge spectacular. Even if no racing is slated here, trackdays run regularly on weekdays – and you really need to ride Spa to understand how much of an elevation change there really is.

Pencil these six races into your diary for 2024. Each one would make a cracking event around which to hang a tour with some like-minded mates. **BIKE**



Trad' sidecar
shenanigans at
Chimay, too...

VANNESTE

RACE THREE

Spa: The Bikers' Festival

This terrific event (previously the Bikers' Classics) has changed in recent years into more of a celebration of any and all machines built between 1939 and 2000. Get involved by booking on to a trackday, and buzzing around Spa on suitably original machinery. Check online for updates to the itinerary (bikersfestival.be).

» When 10-11 August 2024

Spa-bulous: it would be many folks' vote for the world's most iconic circuit, and with good reason



CHIPPY WOOD

RACE FOUR

Spa: Belgian Grand Prix

Racing on four wheels is always slightly anticlimactic, don't you think? Where are the wheelies, the last-minute saves, the peg-to-peg sprints to the finish? But at least that mainstream competition everyone calls Formula One gives you a reason to visit Spa-Francorchamps – and it is *really* worth a visit. F1 ain't cheap, mind.

» When 26-28 July 2024

Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps
Malmedy (spa-francorchamps.be)

RACE FIVE

Spa: Endurance World Championships

Off the back of two 24-hour epics, this year's endurance race at Spa will be a spectator-friendly eight hours. That's just enough time to eat two picnics, drink five cups of coffee, and watch 200mph motorcycles attacking Eau Rouge in the dark. The date's already confirmed for 2024, so get booking.

» When 6-8 June 2024

Circuit de Gedinne
Gedinne (crmb.be)

RACE SIX

Gedinne: Belgian Classic Trophy

In the '70s, some well-travelled Walloon nicknamed Gedinne the Belgian TT. And he wasn't wrong: this is road racing as it should be. A triangle of sleepy public roads are closed off, lined with hay bales, and razed across by legions of raucous, pre-1972 bikes. Frequenting by Brit racers too.

» When 23-25 August 2024



Fabulous old-school capers. We approve

Proper bikes, between the bales on real roads – what's not to like?



BOTH PHOTOS: JOHN STANLEY

in collaboration with

Le Shuttle

**'Wallonia
is a hidden
masterwork of
motorcycling
goodness'**



© Chippy Wood

VISITWallonia.be
The Ultimate Belgian Getaway