

## **You can get there in the end – then you can start!**

by Brian Dodd and Stewart Haigh

The year was 1997.

Brian *“fancy doing this race in France. You start in Paris by the Eiffel Tower and run to Versailles? We could go without our wives to keep the cost down”. There’s a sports tour company who organise coach travel, hotel and race entry. We can’t go wrong”*.

Stewart *“Sounds good – let’s book”*.

All we had to do was turn up outside Leeds Railway Station at 4:00am for the coach pick up. Brian’s son was volunteered to get up early and drop us off at 3:30am – just to be on the safe side! The hour came but the coach didn’t. Frantic looks through our paperwork to allay our fears that we shouldn’t have been at the bus station – we were in the right place and at the right time. Must be running late! 5am arrived and our spirits were diminishing – had we been conned? Our confirmation letter gave a telephone number for the company – but they didn’t open until 9:00am! 5:30 and all hope had gone. Phoned to wake up Brian’s son again to come and collect us. We weren’t happy and Gavin didn’t look overjoyed. All we could do now was hope to get our money back!

We arranged to meet at 9:00 to ring the company. Phone answered! Told them the issue and we weren’t happy. The reply was – *“but the coach pick up had been changed to 3:00am – it was on the letter they had recently sent”*! Neither of us had received one! We wanted our money back – NOW! The guy said did we still want to go? He would ring us back – and did about 10 minutes later.

*“Good news, I can get you on Eurostar if you can get down to London”*. No was our reply – we would have to drive and then there’s the problem of parking for a few days. He said he would have a look at other options and called back a few minutes later. *“Good news – he could get us on the 13:30 from Ashford in Kent, bad news is there’s only 1<sup>st</sup> class available on the outward journey”*! We decided it was bad news for them, not us!

As the clock was now approaching 10am – could we make it to Ashford in time? *“If we can’t make, it you’ll have to pay for the petrol”*. Agreed! Car packed and off we set non-stop to Ashford. We parked up and ran to the station with just a few minutes to spare to collect our tickets. Phew! Ticket man *“the train’s running about 40 minutes late!!!”*

We enjoyed our First Class seats as we sped to the Gare du Nord. The hotel was just a short walk away and we checked in before the coach party arrived! Beaming smiles! Our return train on the Monday was 12 noon, the coach party departed at 6am! A win win situation!

We had got there in the end – all we had to do now was enjoy Paris for a couple of days – and get to the start line on time! We arrived early ... to stand in the hot sun for about 2 hours. It's a staggered start and a large field!

Brilliant course takes in the banks of the Seine followed by a long ascent up to an observatory then down through fabulous woods to beautiful Versailles. Give it a try!

Brian Dodd and Stewart Haigh, June 2020