

# White van man



**Richard Barr** is driven to distraction by a missing cat and a lack of sleep



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**D**ateline: Sangatte. I am surrounded by screaming children and bored-looking travellers. Behind me a stream of people are emerging from the duty free shop weighed down with large boxes of booze and cigarettes.

I am waiting with my white van to go back to England through the Channel Tunnel, the culmination of many days where sleep was patently lacking. Today started at 2am when I was on cat watch.

It's a sad story. We have (or possibly had) a gorgeous silver tabby cat called Maximus who was one of a number of siblings who came into our lives after their mother spent a rampant night with a gentleman cat who turned out to be a cad.

Our cats live mostly indoors

but occasionally are allowed out to torment the less-intelligent of Norfolk's wildlife. One night in the middle of September, the cats, all sporting collars with their telephone number and loud bells on (to give the wildlife at least a fighting chance) enthusiastically disappeared outside. An hour later, encouraged by the rattle of a bag of dried food, they returned – except Maximus.

Three weeks after he went missing, we had a call to say he had been seen in a garden a mile away from where we live.

The Barr cat-capturing strategy soon swung into action. We set up a live cat trap filled with enticing dishes of his favourite food and hung a wildlife video camera in a tree to watch what happened. It was not long before a cat with similar markings to Maximus was caught on film.

Day after day we have put fresh food in the trap and, every two hours or so throughout each night, I have blearily dragged on some clothes and driven to check the cage and inspect the card in the camera. It has caught the same cat showing interest in the food, but not going in far enough to trigger the release mechanism.

And that brings us to today. My son Nick (the pilot) is

relocating with his friend Rosie to Lyon, deep in France. It is a logistical nightmare to get them both and all their worldly goods to that far-flung city. We hit on a plan that was aimed to save him at least a day of driving.

We rented white van number one and it was loaded to the brim. The idea was that we would take it through the Channel Tunnel where they would transfer their possessions to white van number two, which he would drop off in Lyon when it was empty. I would then bring white van number one back to the depot in England and be home for tea.



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But life does not work that way. After checking the trap at 2am and 5am, I headed to meet Nick. Two hours later, I pulled up to find a very glum Nick and Rosie contemplating white van number one's flat tyre.

By the time the rental company had replaced the tyre

we were an hour-and-a-half late setting off. Then there was a leaf on the M25 which caused a ten-mile tailback. When we eventually arrived at the tunnel, we had missed our slot and had to wait more than two hours for the next train.

Sometime later we emerged into the grey light of Calais and found our way (with difficulty) to the rental company and white van number two. Then came the next headache: white van number two was clearly the baby brother of white van number one. Coinciding with a downpour, we proceeded to squeeze a very large quart into a diminutive pint pot.

Then it was a parting of the ways as Nick and Rosie negotiated the French roads and I made it back to the Channel Tunnel – only to find that I had missed the return slot and had to wait three hours for the next train.

So what better way to spend the time than telling my well-rested readers of a life in the day of a peripatetic solicitor. I won't now be home in time for tea, but I should be back in time for cat duty. Please Maximus, come home and allow a weary solicitor a little sleep. **SJ**

*At the time this article went to press, Maximus was still at large #findMaximus*