

France. For us it's time to say *au revoir* and make our way to Poitiers to collect the household effects for our next customer, a previous Burke Bros client who has chosen to return to the UK. We'll be loading the van and heading back to the UK and back to the depot to store their effects until their house in the UK is ready for delivery of the furniture. ■

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Luckily, access was easy this time

**"With the green light from the customs office, we're safely on our way to the customers' house"**

night heater to warm up the truck. Our accommodation varies depending on the type of move, the area of France and the weather. Sometimes, if the customer is moving into a château-type property and has enough room, they accommodate us in the property. Tonight, it won't be quite such an inspiring setting as Glenn and I will be in the sleeping pod over the van!

#### TUESDAY

Today we complete the delivery and unload the remaining items of furniture and boxes into the customers' house. We reassemble non-specialist items such as beds, free-standing wardrobes, dressers and bookcases. Another happy customer starting a new life in

France, tends to be useful as *does gauche and droit!*

We arrive on time at the property and meet Mr and Mrs Smith who are waiting for us with the key so that we're able to start unloading their furniture and possessions. Luckily, access to the property was no problem, so we're able to get the van close by and unload. Where the access to a property is difficult, the customer must always tell our surveyors so that we can make the necessary arrangements.



Unloading gets underway

This is day one of the unload and the rest of the items will be unloaded tomorrow. Tonight, we're sleeping in the van, so it's fortunate that I have my trusty sleeping bag and we've come equipped with a



Make sure someone is waiting at the property to meet the removals team



Heavy lifting comes with the job

#### MONDAY

Not a bad night's sleep but it's an early start as the boat docked at about 6am. If you want breakfast, you certainly have to be up early for it. I opt for a full English as I know it will be a long and busy day! Back to the cabin to collect my bag and then it's off to the truck to be called off the boat.

Once safely off the ship, with the green light from the customs office, we're on our way to the customers' house. We've calculated an approximate ETA of 1.30pm; Glenn calls the customer so they know we've arrived in France and have an idea of the time we'll reach the house.

As it's a seven-and-a-half-hour drive to Chamboret, Haute-Vienne, we have a few stops at French service stations en route. They're always so much cleaner and tidier than in the UK. We buy a couple of baguettes and then it's back in the truck for the last few hours to the customers' house.

I've picked up a few French phrases during the years. *"Je suis anglaise et parle un peu de*

By evening, we're at Portsmouth and have presented our barcodes to the customs office and we're good to go!

Sometimes the boat can be late due to bad weather, but fortunately tonight looks like a smooth crossing and we haven't had to wait for the ferry. We book in at the terminal and drive the van and trailer onto the boat, just taking our overnight bags into the cabin. We usually have a night crossing so that we can spend the daylight hours travelling to the customers' address. Best news of all is that there are



Blankets protect household effects

two beds in our cabin, one for me and one for my colleague Glenn. As all freight passengers travel together, depending on how busy they are, you can end up sharing with another driver. Just the two of us tonight!

We'll be off to find the restaurant next. Hope my favourite is on the menu - potato gratin and steak - and then back to the cabin for a good night's sleep before a busy day tomorrow.



The customers' possessions are unloaded from storage into the truck

paperwork to get in order in advance of the move taking place. Once this is done, we're issued with a barcode which we take with us to be able to clear customs. Preparation is key for trips to France, not just for the customers' furniture and effects, but for us too. I've got my essential items packed: a sleeping bag as the trucks have little beds in the sleeping pods over the top of the cab and enough rations to last the week. We're able to take tinned food with us, baked beans and tinned potatoes etc, as we take a gas cooker with us for the journey. Not forgetting my passport, of course!

We set off in the afternoon, leaving the Burke Bros depot and heading to Portsmouth. The drive will take about four and a half hours. We can't drive through France on a Sunday, so it'll be early Monday when we reach France.

#### FRIDAY

Mr and Mrs Smith's household effects have come into storage, while their house was being sold so we've already loaded it all into containers, and it's been stored safely in the Burke Bros warehouse. Now that the Smiths are ready for their furniture and possessions to be delivered to their new address in Haute-Vienne, it's our job today to load the van with their effects ready for outward travel to France on Sunday.

The containers themselves don't make the journey as they would take up extra room, so we load the boxes and the furniture straight into the van, covering the furniture with removal blankets to keep them safe on the journey.

#### SUNDAY

The customer and our transport office have quite a lot of

the somewhat unsung heroes of the moving to France industry, removal men are the essential element in the logistical process of moving household contents. They spend their working days criss-crossing the Continent, moving household effects into farmhouses in the Dordogne one week and into châteaux in the Charante the next.

Whether it's navigating rural roads, squeezing lorries down narrow winding village streets or moving furniture into high-rise Parisian apartments, the challenges can be many and varied. We join Burke Bros removal man, Darren Hayward, as he recalls a typical working week and offers a unique insight into how a new life in France starts for many expats making the move.

## Diary of a removal man

What goes on behind the scenes on moving day? **Darren Hayward** shares the details of a typical working trip from the UK to France



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