# BACKWARDS THROUGH FRANCE

*Posted on June 9, 2008 by Eddie*

**Category:** Observations

I'm on my way to a series of meetings in Valence in the Rhone valley. Sue and I lived there for seven months in the mid-eighties while I was getting to grips with the French language. I'm making this trip by train, rather than flying into Lyon airport and thought I'd make some observations on the differences between the two modes of transport.

Firstly, the view from the train is far better - all too often all you can see from a plane is the tops of clouds or a vague green or blue below you. (One exception was the amazing view that I had flying into Belfast ten days ago, where I could see bits of England, the Isle of Man, Scotland and Northern Ireland all at once.) On balance, the ever changing French countryside is far more interesting than what you can normally see out of aeroplane windows. One great delight when you are on the TGV is watching the motorway traffic which seems to be at a standstill compared to the *grande vitesse* of the train. Of course, in England, the motorway traffic would be literally at a standstill.

The movies aren't so good on the train - in fact there aren't any. This is worse than flying with one of those American airlines who think that one screen and no-choice of movie is adequate for 2008. Then again even with a choice of twenty movies in any one of six languages, I never seem to be able to find anything I want to watch.

The leg room is better on the train - I can drop the seat back tray to place my computer on and still be able to breath - you can't do that on many flights.

I'm going backwards. My preference is to see where I'm going, not to see where I've been and going backwards makes me feel slightly queasy. I've never had to sit facing backwards on an airline - not even the funny one in the Sahara that was using Russian military planes ad the passengers had to walk up the tank loading ramp at the back to get on board.

I didn't have to go through Heathrow. The new international station at St Pancras is a delight and while the Gare du Nord and Gare de Lyon are hardly paragons of comfort, they are far better than Charles de Gaule airport. Any trip which avoids both Heathrow and CDG has to be a good one, so the train wins it for me... even without the wonderful view of Burgundy which is opening up behind me as I type.