

## CASTLE VALE TO DARTMOUTH CIRCUS (AREA 1)

### WALI TAYLOR

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I do not like tinned spaghetti but I do want a tin of the 2022 Heinz commemoration can featuring Gravelly Hill Interchange on the label, marking 50 years of Spaghetti Junction. I love the motorway, I use it to go to work on a nature reserve and I must have travelled up it hundreds of times. I also love how it blends with the city: a piece of Brutalism that will not be demolished like John Madin's masterworks have been.

From Castle Vale onwards the M6 is elevated and follows the course of the River Tame through the most industrial areas of Birmingham: Bromford, Washwood Heath and Aston. Junction 5 is chaotic at present as can be seen from my photo from the roof of Fort Dunlop (thank you Theresa Dolan) due to HS2-related road works.

We have all travelled over Spaghetti but underneath it is fantastic. The River Tame meets the Rea and Hockley Brook, and The Grand Union Canal, joins the Birmingham Fazeley Canal and Tame Valley Canal. And there are two nearby railway lines. It is still possible to pull a canal boat with a horse on the tow paths, as this was specified in the original design, and at one time Birmingham City Council planned to build a beach amongst the concrete pillars. Above you the M6 carries on towards the Scottish Borders, but in an elegant swoop the A38M leads on towards the city centre in a deep culvert. I leave the motorway at Dartmouth Circus as my ten-year-old van is not Clean Air Zone Compliant (my 96 year old motorcycle is!).

In the middle of the Circus (referred to by locals as Matalan Island) is a Boulton and Watt blowing (furnace) engine from the Netherton iron works. No one seems to know why it is there and it should be a tourist attraction, but I never see anyone visit it.

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