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From the editor...

I just finished reading John Le Carré's epic Cold War spy novel "Smiley's People", in which the legendary George Smiley finally defeats his arch enemy in part by using the possibly apochryphal 'Moscow Rules' of espionage tradecraft.

WTF has this got to do with bikes?

Bear with me.

Another thing I read recently was an article by one of those advanced driving gurus who reckoned the ultimate goal was to average 60 mph everywhere - *to make progress* - without attracting attention. In this article's explanation of how to do that, I saw some synchronicity with Smiley: as it happens, the kind of mindset necessary to make safe progress involves a degree of commonality with the conduct of the spy.

They may exist, they may not, but these are purportedly the Moscow Rules [and the parentheses are mine]::

- Assume nothing. [or assume everything]
- Murphy is right.
- Never go against your gut, it is your operational antenna.
- Don't look back; you are never completely alone. [should say always look back: lifesavers]
- Everyone is potentially under opposition control.
- Go with the flow, blend in. [don't let the scameras see you]
- Vary your pattern and stay within your cover.
- Any operation can be aborted. If it feels wrong, it is wrong. [e.g. 2nd-gear mingers past a police station, like Cal Crutchlow in the Thundersprint a couple of years back]
- Maintain a natural pace. [making progress!]
- Lull them into a sense of complacency. [yes officer]
- Build in opportunity, but use it sparingly.
- Don't harass the opposition. [cagers]
- There is no limit to a human being's ability to rationalize the truth. [yes officer]
- Technology will always let you down. [more true than ever, this]
- Pick the time and place for action.
- Keep your options open.
- Once is an accident. Twice is coincidence. Three times is an enemy action. [yes officer]

Summary: the level of paranoia required to ride safely these days means that George Smiley probably would have made an excellent biker. What he would have rode is another matter entirely, but we do know that he hated driving cars...

Stuart Jewkes

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In the saddle...

Got something to say? Send it to:
editor@theridersdigest.co.uk

Hi Stuart,

Here's a cautionary tale for Love's Young Dream...

The other day I was driving back home having run an errand for my old Mum and on the way into Leeds I became aware of a sports bike two-up, in my rear view mirror, driven with gusto and weaving between the two lanes as they made their way towards the town. At the lights they stopped a little forward of me and I studied them as we waited for the lights to change. Sitting there astride his milti-coloured steed, the young man clad head to toe in leather of matching shades, with helmet boots and gloves to complete the picture.

His young girlfriend perched precariously on the pillion, in contrast wore the latest "tight-as-clingflim" jeans, lovely little designer shoes and a pretty pink anorak complete with fur trim to the hood, which flapped like a flag in a field beneath her helmet as he roared off into the distance. With scant regard for the speed limit, the approaching road works or lane positioning they were the picture of youthful exuberance! Fine whilst all goes well, but perhaps he should keep in mind that nothing says "I Love You" more than picking lumps of tarmac from your girlfriend's backside as she lies on a trolley in A&E amidst the aroma of stale drunks.

Cheers,
Nick Lojik,

That's some imagery there Nick! A very valid message of course, but then shouting 'ATGATT' at each generation's biking youth tends to trigger a similar response to asking them to turn their stereo down (it's 2015: what's a stereo?); but are grown-ups any better? Most are of course, but many aren't. Many talk, but so many don't listen. Personal responsibility is the key. Who wants to open up that can o' worms again?

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Image of the Month: closed-road racing has been going on in Gedinne, Belgium, since the mid-1940s. Check out our report on the 2015 Belgian Classic TT on page 16.

THE BOY BIKER

"WHERE WE'RE GOING, WE DON'T NEED ROADS..."

A year-or-so ago I was just starting to explore the legal off-road-roads (byways, B.O.A.Ts, U.S.Rs and many other silly names) that I knew about. I found The Pilgrim's Way in Kent and The Ridgeway out west. As if by fate I had found a weekend activity that didn't involve a dress code or hangover. With an off-road-biased bike it seemed so inviting to travel the ancient roads and paths of the land enjoying great scenery and experiencing rural UK first hand.

I bimbled and wobbled all over Kent and Surrey on my own and came to meet varied groups of other riders interested in getting their bikes muddy. Some would insist riding trails on your own was dangerous, a mistake that only took so long to catch up on them. I heard tales of being stuck with a broken bike miles from anything or anyone.

The issue for me is that the people who I know who ride off road are all much older than me. They need good notice and even then things crop up which keep the bike clean for another weekend.

My age-related mates are into the outdoors, we go walking, cycling and enjoy camping together. But none of them are really into motorbikes and when I try and guide them towards it, it doesn't work so I don't try much these days.

An elder closer friend who I know through my old man invited me on "a 3 day trail riding weekend, led by a guide, staying in bike-friendly B&Bs, riding all day"

Perfect!! What a chance! I said that I would love to join them and pay whatever necessary and when was it? and where?

"Oh didn't I say? It's in Wales"

Wicked! I had seen for myself the great riding to be had in Wales and the locals' attitude towards riders as equal countryside companions.

"In February..."

Christmas came and New Year went, I treated myself to new road-legal knobbly tires, heavy duty tubes and fitted rim locks (a simple device which stops tyres from slipping when at low pressures), and a pair of off-road boots. I learnt almost immediately that buying riding boots with the same childish fancy I do my trainers was a mistake. Yes the colours and designs look very cool and they are lightweight but motocross boots are very rigid, they leak like a sieve and only have an expected working life of one "race" season...!

The bikes were loaded and off we set for the Elan Valley Dam near Rhayader in Mid-Wales, where we would meet our guide, dump the van and start riding. Having spent a fair bit of money on maps and time getting lost in the past, the whole group thought it was well worth the money we paid to follow like lemmings over the edge through mile upon mile of legal byway.

Our great guide Mark (of Trail Riding Rhayader) quickly assessed the group of KTM-riding, Klim-clad, experienced elder riders and the gung-ho give-it-a-go lad they had brought along. He set a quick pace and an overnight stop with still more than 50 miles of trails after the first stop of the morning.

Up over snow-capped mountains, down through rivers and streams, across marshes and around farmyards we rode. Despite my efforts throwing it into deep puddles, off ledges into trees and generally abusing it, my trusty 1990 Suzuki DR 250 was always back upright and running again shortly, with broken levers and a damp air box the only small casualties. It certainly wasn't going to overheat.

The views were like nothing I had ever seen sat on a motorbike and the routes were like nothing I had ever traversed, be it on cycle or on foot. Steep twisting tracks hugging a hill with death drops off to the other side, deeply rutted paths whereby half the bike is underground and you have to ride with your feet up round your ears to avoid getting your boot stuck between bike and earth.

I did a lot of falling off that first day. In fact, I did a fair bit of falling off on the subsequent days too! The gent who had ridden behind me most of the day kindly offered some of his observations on my riding around the dinner table once we were clean and dry. For this advice, Mr Hall, I am forever in your debt: "Trail-riding is not a race; use more brakes, this will keep your feet on the pegs more; think about what you look like from behind, try and have a smoother day tomorrow" Turns out the bloke

is a very, very tasty rider AND an equestrian genius.

With those simple comments picking their line in my brain I slept well and awoke ready to have a slower and smoother day. The riding got tougher but I stayed near the back of the pack, on my toes, out of my seat and covering the brakes through everything tricky. I had been wrong to think that bendy bones and a jerky right wrist would make me a better rider than my new pals.

My initial idea of going faster than the old boys, trying to bypass years of experience and practise had left body bruised and bike battered. I was down to my last spare handle bar lever and knew the rear brake would handle no more straightening. With Mr Hall's advice I avoided bike-killing offs and only a few times did I "need to have a little rest" and lay the bike down from 8mph.

With all the great learning and riding, I have kind-of glossed over the weather. Looking back on notes and memories to draft this article I cannot stress enough quite how cold a Welsh mountain is in February. Perhaps because of my more controlled pace, we ended up still out on a mountain trail in darkness. Even colder. I pulled up for a wee and drink to find that my Camelback's drinking tube had frozen. By the time I had squeezed a few drops out (to drink and to excrete), my sidestand had frozen to the ground. My boots no-longer leaked as packed snow had formed an igloo over the fronts of them. Icicles formed on our number plates. Goggles were out of the question as each exhausted breath formed a steam cloud around your helmet. It was the coldest I have ever been and the deepest I have ever had to dig for reserves, of both energy and fuel, as I ended up having to tip the bike to 90-degrees on the petrol tap's side to get the last dribble

of fuel into the carburettor. It was the heaviest that little bike has ever been to pick up again. We made it over the last dark hill and I rolled the bike in neutral into a small but warm-looking hamlet. Another amazingly bike-friendly place to stay with drying room, heated shower room and an open fire.

A young water buffalo doesn't charge off at the front of a stampede. If they do then they stumble and end up as traction for the others. I was glad I wasn't a buffalo on that first day as I held up the group, picking up and fixing my bike. Luckily the assembled herd were more sympathetic mammals who analysed the weaknesses of the young one and nurtured him under their wing for the whole trip. Offering advice, but never giving instruction.

I haven't looked back since, I've bought a more suitable off-road machine: a Gas Gas 200cc 2-stroke, which opens up a whole load of new terrain. I am chomping at the bit to meet new riders and ride new ground. For anyone wanting to get into some off-road action, look up and join your local Trail Riders Fellowship group. You won't believe what your bike and body are capable of when working together. Stay happy out there Digesters.

The Boy Biker

Websites:
Trail Riders Fellowship
Trail Riding Rhayader

TT BELGIAN Classic

Words/Pix: Ricardo Rodrigues

Let me start by saying that unlike our (awesome) editor, I have no nostalgia for old bikes, no particular fondness for carburettors or love for the smell of 2-strokes. In fact the simple mention of 2-strokes immediately brings to mind my only day as a track marshal at a local Pocket Bike race for which I got a T-shirt and a massive headache courtesy of the ear piercing noise of the tiny bikes!

For the time between I could see past my mother's breasts - and wasn't yet distracted by others - the late-'80s/early-'90s had passed and the images of BMW K1s, Honda NRs, Honda Africa Twins and Ducati Monsters had been imprinted in the back of my young and impressionable mind.

I have also - to my great sorrow - never been to the Isle of Man TT, so when the editor rang me up and asked if I could ride down to a small village in the south of Belgium to cover a road race that only involved old - sorry, classic! - bikes and sidecars I had to say yes. If for nothing else than sheer curiosity to see what all the retro-fuss is about!

The Belgian Classic TT takes place every August in Gedinne, in the heart of the Ardennes, where for three days the roads around the village are turned into a race course and hundreds of brave riders show up to take part in the 22 races that include bikes from every decade between 1930 and 1990.

This year, a total of 420 participants signed up on bikes and sidecars from over 70 different manufacturers - take that MotoGP!

Work-related responsibilities for me and Cátia (GF/pillion) meant a late afternoon departure from Amsterdam with a long motorway ride numbing the senses. Halfway trough the trip the Vertix Raptor-I intercom I tested in Issue 189 decided that Stereo was

too much for it and reverted to Mono - again, making the already boring ride even worse.

It's close to 10pm when we leave motorway A4/E411 on exit 22 and dive into the country roads of the Ardennes; only the headlights of the Multistrada unveiling the path ahead with the beautiful, orange-tinted moon low above the horizon keeping us company. The beauty of the dark countryside setting immediately makes me forget the 300kms of speed-limited motorways.

We come around a 90-degree left turn after another sleeping Belgian village and the road turns into a racetrack! We're riding along a twisty country road surrounded by hay bales, with braking markers warning about the turn ahead. Just across the barbed wire fence a herd of cows sleeps. It's the most surreal feeling to ride here – on the Gedinne track - after all those kilometres on arrow-straight nuclear power-lit motorways.

Having travelled half the length of the track, we enter Gedinne where a few hundred metres ahead a missed turn means we're on the wrong way to the campsite. The GPS recalculates and sends us along a pitch-dark narrow road where a car would have trouble fitting. The plants that broke through the asphalt and now grow in the middle of the road are a tell-tale sign that it isn't used often. Well, I'm sort-of on a trail bike, so let me set the suspension to its softest setting and carry on along the bumpy lane!

In hindsight, I should probably have called in advance to book a spot on the only campsite in Gedinne, but a few failed attempts at getting a press bike for the coverage of the event and last-minute changes in schedule meant I forgot, so obviously when we got there it was full! Luckily the owner of the Croix-Scaille Campsite is as nice as they come and an entertaining attempt at a conversation in

a mix of three different languages resulted in a simple question: “Just one tent, two persons and a bike? OK, come with me!”. We were treated to a whole empty lot in the caravan parking area for the Multistrada and our two-person lightweight hiking tent. Perfect!

Saturday morning and the BCTT experience starts in the parking lot. Parked next to my bike is a shiny Goldwing with a custom made luggage rack hitched to the back, next to it a classic Kawasaki, a Laverda, an original Moto Guzzi V7 and a bit further afield the odd bunch of modern Ducatis. Walk for 100 metres following the sound of roaring engines and you get to the “ticket office”: two ladies working as fast they can to exchange money for the colourful bracelets that give access to the circuit; all while 20 metres behind them the bikes brake for a 90-degree turn before roaring up the hill like a high octane-fuelled serpent that for a couple of days a year destroys the quintessential Belgian countryside quietness.

I haven’t even crossed the entry line to the event and I’m already in love.

In the few minutes I spend in the queue, a thought comes to mind: this Belgian village is nothing like the one with the bird singing competition that was in the second episode of ‘Jeremy Clarkson Meets The Neighbours’. It seems not all of Belgium is boring after all!

Got the bracelet; I’m ready to go and watch the races. Except - this is a road race and the only access to the paddock area is by crossing the race track! Not a problem, just an excuse to hang around with the rest of the spectators that arrived in the last 20 minutes and wait for the current practice session to end before we can cross to the infield section, where - in good Belgian fashion - a beer bar has been set up. After all you can’t expect people to stand in the sun for a whole day without some liquid

refreshment.

A winding trail in the middle of a small forest gives access to the paddock area were a couple of hundred caravans, tents and trailers are turned into makeshift workshops.

Wherever you look there is someone tweaking, fettling or rebuilding classic two (and three-wheeled) machines that range from old BMW R80s to exotic Nortons, Seeleys, Vincents and Moto Morinis. In this company the classic Ducatis and MV Agustas almost seem vulgar.

As we arrive in pit-lane the big 500s are starting their second timed practice. The racing is divided into 27 different categories for bikes and sidecars, separated by age, displacement, engine type, chassis configuration and origin, resulting in 12x2 timed practice sessions that take all of Friday and Saturday morning. With 22 races between Saturday afternoon and all of Sunday there is never a dull moment trackside.

The scorching sun and harsh light don't make for great photography so we take our time to walk around the paddock and get a feel for the "ambiance". A motojumble, common to most motorcycle rallies, stocks dusty piles of carburettors, drum brakes, old fairings and bits of engines. Anything an unfortunate racer might need for some last minute trackside repairs, and believe me, there are plenty of those going around with some of the bikes deciding to give up even before they get to the starting line. Old machines are temperamental!

Standing to the left at the back of pit-lane is my favourite place: a mobile Italian Espresso Bar! Thank you gods of motorcycle racing for this! I love camping but the lack of espresso kills me.

Parallel to pit-lane, the start-finish straight cuts across the green hills, dividing the public camping area and the paddock and rider's camping area, a pre-fabricated hut assumes the

task of timing office and commentator booth. Hay bales snaking across the countryside mark the track and serve as makeshift grandstands for the audience.

Walking along the straight, I stop for a second and close my eyes while I feel the warm sun in my face and take a deep breath between sips of espresso, as a group of three bikes goes past flat-out, the open exhausts shattering the quiet like a fabulous mechanical symphony. I have reached Motorcyclist Nirvana, I feel so enlightened and blissful I almost start to like 2-strokes.

But let's not get carried away I am here to work - for your entertainment - so I have to try and get some half decent shots of the action and the first of the races about to start provides a perfect opportunity.

The layout of the track without any man-made stands or strictly-defined spectator areas gives everyone close access to all the racing, from walking the pit lane as the riders prepare to enter the grid to standing track-side five metres away from the action, with very few areas being off limits. Good news for the spectators, even better for photographers as we get close up access to all of the action. The TRD budget doesn't, unfortunately, cover monopod-stabilized 600mm f1.4 lenses but here it doesn't matter, as we are so close to the action my 18-140mm spends most of it's time in the middle of its range. And herein lies the beauty of this event: never for one moment do you feel like you are looking up at demi-gods and their multimillion-pound/euro/dollar prototypes. Just beautifully-kept and restored classic bikes doing what they were built for in the hands of mildly overweight middle-aged men.

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CIRCUIT ANTOINE SCHMIT
CIRCUIT de GEDINNE
32
83


CRAFTER
MA15 PNK
91
HALSALL HONDA
YAMAHA
YAMAHA
RENOLD
KONI
Jack Findlay
69
MOTOMOD
MICHELIN


DANGER
NOT TO BE OPERATED BY FUCKWITS.

Take your eyes off the track and walk around the paddock, talk to the many friendly faces working on their bikes and you could be forgiven for thinking: I could do this! Now bring your attention back to the track and look closely at the skill involved in riding those old, flimsy bikes with drums for brakes and skinny wheels on a road surface that spends 362 days of the year being used by tractors and vans. No fancy tyre warmers, no computer tune-ups, not even a paved access to pit-lane.

They may not look the part but they are every bit the skilled racer as any Marquez, Biaggi or Fogarty (not including Rossi in this list is not an accident - the man is almost at middle age and still wining in MotoGP. He might ACTUALLY be an alien!).

The chicane at the end of the start-finish line is a prime location to watch the racing as it provides the first hard braking area, generating overtaking opportunities and creative racing lines by some of the riders. It's even close to the bar so you can go for a drink in between races.

The second race of the event, the Vintage 50-200cc class, was red-flagged and interrupted due to a serious crash (which we were later informed resulted in the tragic death of one the riders). A similar unexplained crash with a sidecar during one of Sunday's practice sessions also resulted in the death of its rider. This year's event at Gedinne has had a difficult start to the racing weekend but like with all road racing, we know it's dangerous and death is an ever-present threat.

The best way to honour our fallen heroes is to make the rest of the event they loved a celebration of a life lived to the fullest in a world ever more sanitized by Health & Safety regulations and an almost paralysing aversion to risk.

Hans van Bregt and Patrick Messerli, wherever you are now, keep on racing!

Like the saying goes "the show must go on" and so it did: a permanently busy procession of bikes and sidecars all taking their shot at a win.

Part of the experience of any minor race event is walking along pit-lane while the riders wait to enter the track: sexy spandex-clad umbrella girls are replaced by the wife, son or best mate, last-minute efforts at making the stubborn machines run resort to real tools and plenty of swearing instead of fancy laptops and there is a true feel-good vibe in the air. The only thing that doesn't change much is us annoying photographers walking around trying to get "the shot".

Come Sunday and the day is no less busy with races from 08:00 to 17:30, although this time with much lower temperatures (around 20C air temp) and overcast skies.

Given we still had to ride back to Amsterdam and had early morning appointments on Monday, the plan was to watch the main races up to the 500Gr1 & 750 before leaving at 14:50, going back to the campsite to pack things up and then ride home, except things never go according to plan!

Instead, the formalities of giving back the reflective vests issued to the media took a bit longer and we were caught under ever-more-threatening skies on the infield of the circuit with no way to cross as the sidecar race had started.

Two laps in and the skies open in a massive downpour, the racing gets interesting with the sidecars starting to struggle for grip, a missed downshift approaching the first 90-degree turn almost throws a Ducati-powered sidecar against the hay but the rider manages to save it in time. We however were soaking wet, wearing only jeans and t-shirts.

We ran back to our bike as soon as the track was declared clear to cross and rode back to the campsite where the always-fun task of packing all our gear and tent in the rain awaited.

It was almost 18:00 when we finally left, certain that the weather would improve somewhere along the way allowing us to dry out for a bit, after all, just 24 hours ago we were baking in the sun.

You'll be amused to know that it didn't. It poured down non-stop for the whole 330km of the trip! Later I looked at a satellite image of the weather for that afternoon: there was a massive line of clouds covering precisely the route between the south of Belgium and Amsterdam, had we ridden 50km to the west or east of our route and we would have been back in the sunshine!

As you might remember from my previous articles my boots are no longer waterproof, the riding trousers I was wearing never were and my helmet liner was soaked from being left chained to the bike when it started raining.

On the upside I had a fantastic weekend in Belgium, met some amazing people and watched great racing; the ride back just helped making it more memorable!

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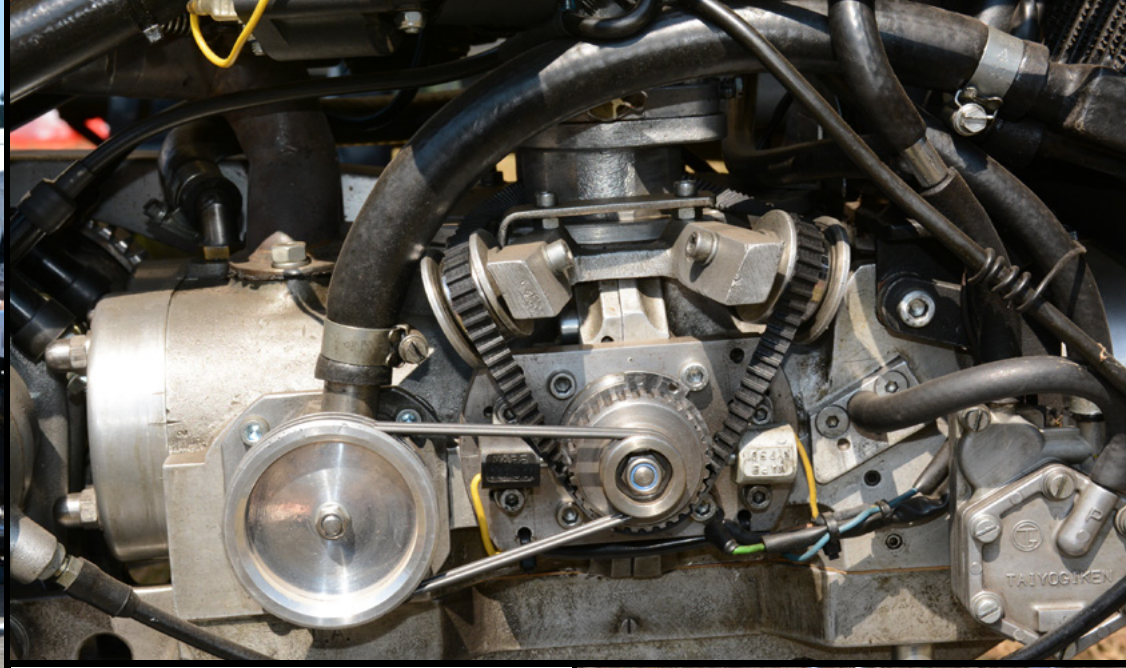


KAWASAKI
SAMURAI
1967 ≈
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Pour un enterrement
DIGNE:
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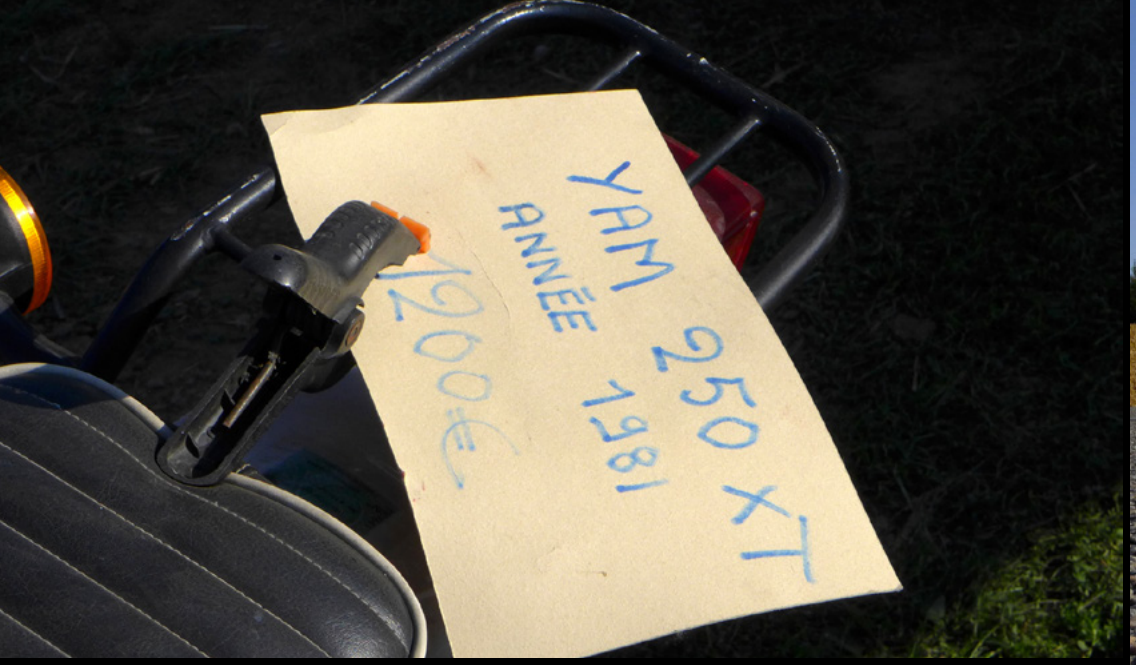
YAM 250 XT
ANNÉE 1981
1200€


MICHELIN TYRES
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SHELL


ATD

Gedinne – The History

One of the few classic racing venues to survive into the modern era, the racing in Gedinne can be traced back to the early days after WWII.

On 17th August 1947, the first race took place under the supervision of the local club "AMC Semois et Houille" on the original Gedinne-Gribelle circuit consisting of 7.5 kilometres of cobblestone roads and lanes lined with trees.

After the cancellation of the 1950 event due to organisational issues, the track was refurbished with a layer of asphalt replacing the old cobblestones ahead of the 1951 event.

The death of Belgian rider Edouard Texidor during the 1955 races led to the suspension of the event. It wasn't until 25 years later, in 1979, that Gedinne saw the return of motorcycle racing to its streets, now racing in the opposite direction and with a new start/finish location.

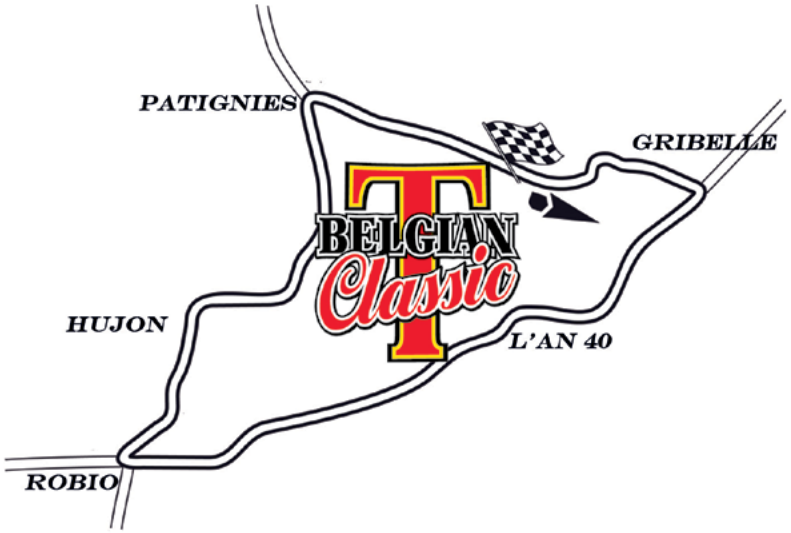
In the late-'80s the track was deemed too dangerous and from 1987 a new 5-kilometre track was designed using the old north section and the Rue De Dinant but avoiding the village centre.

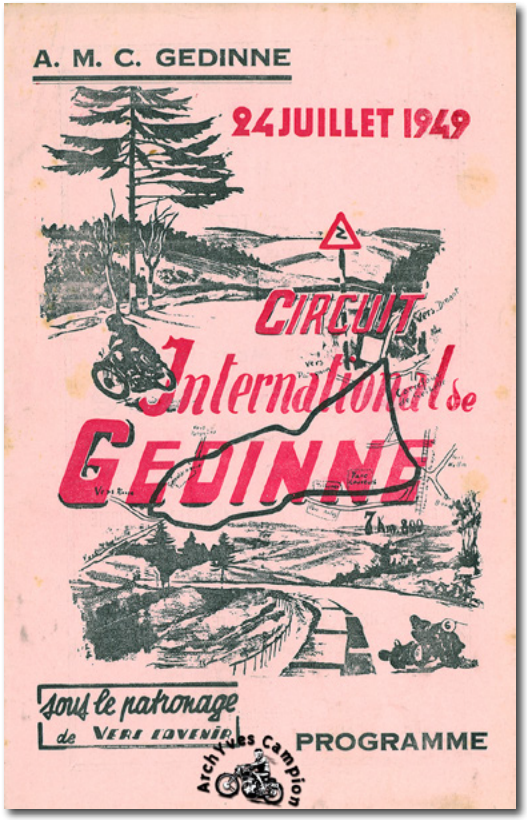
The racing continued at the Circuit International Vitesse Pure Motos in Gedinne until 2006 when a series of regulation changes dictated an end to the racing of 'modern' bikes at the circuit, with the event being replaced by the Belgian Classic TT, now on it's 10th edition.

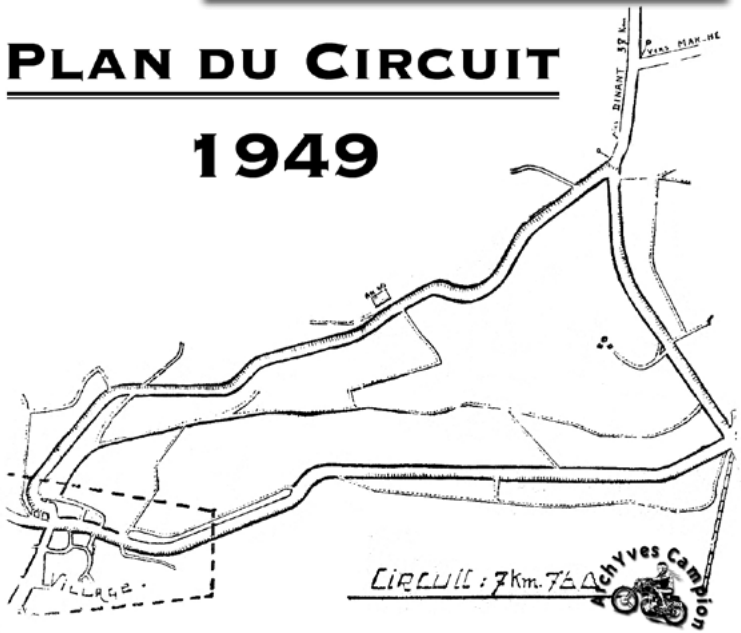
Belgian Classic TT – Practical Info

The Gedinne races are still fairly unknown in the biking community; situated 300-350km away from Calais, Amsterdam, Paris and Frankfurt they are however in the perfect location for bikers from all over Europe.

Be it a dedicated weekend trip for the races







or a stop on a longer tour of Europe I definitely recommend that you put Gedinne and the Belgian Classic TT on your calendar.

The village is small and there aren't many hotels but if you are travelling in group the rental of a vacation home is a comfortable and good value option. If you're looking for a lower budget accommodation, the Camping Croix-Scaille has very good prices, fantastic staff and simple but clean sanitary facilities.We paid 27€ for two nights, two persons, one tent, one motorcycle. This is definitely my recommended option but call in advance to book as they are often full and a bit too old-school for email.

Going on a even lower budget? You can camp for free in a designated area next to the track but there is no electricity or water, the sanitary facilities are of the portable variety, you have to pay to use them and don't include showers.

Stay a bit further from Gedinne and there is a vast selection of hotels and 5-star camping facilities less than 40km away. When you do get to the race track enjoy the fantastic event and please respect the marshals and the trackside signals. Everyone at CRMB works hard to make the event safe and keep a very special and relaxed atmosphere but for that it is essential that the public is absolutely respectful of their orders, only crossing the track when the tarmac has been declared safe and free of traffic. Have fun, watch some great racing, bring your common sense along and don't unnecessarily risk your life or the riders'.

Ricardo Rodrigues

Thanks to everyone at the Classic Racing Motorcycle Belgium club for their hard work, Migüel Parent for all the help and, Yves Campion & Martha Pannier for the classic photos and historic info on the Gedinne races.

Further info:
The CRMB's website: crmb.be/en/

Accommodation info:
en.camping.info/belgium/wallonia/namur/campsites
opt.be/informations/communes-gedinne/fr/C/91054.html

A View from the Group W Bench

So I've bought a new (to me) Bellagio which I have been told is unsuitable for touring. Certainly it had no luggage capacity at present. Then my lil'Breva goes and blows its clutch and I am left with no transport for the annual German tour.

Then whilst at Con McGarvie's funeral I spotted Ricky Barnes and his partner on their way to the New Forest with all their camping gear cargo-netted to the back of two bikes.

I remembered I've got a cargo net; I haven't used it this century but it is still hanging up in the garage so the German Tour was saved. My smallest tent and minimum clothing, but a grand time was had on those European mountain twisties. I still ache in the arms and shoulders two days later.

Whilst in Germany I talked to my friends Sue and Keith Nock of Lincoln Eagle about a bespoke Givi three-bag pannier system. No problem, quoth they.

I have owned two or more bikes most of my riding life but the only adjustment I remember making was going from my Ducati 250 to my Honda 250N. The gear change levers were on opposite sides.

Merely having the high wide bars on the Bellagio and the short lower bars on the lil'Breva means using my arm muscles in a different way, and changing from the lil'Breva to the Bella and back takes about 30 miles to gel. Once I have, both are magic and the change from *oooer* to big grin is almost instantaneous; we just gel, but until then I am wondering what is going on and not feeling too comfortable.

So on the 24th July I was due to go to a rally in Kent. I woke up and it was raining plus Radio 4 was going on about Operation Stack and the four-hour tailback in Ashworth, which I have to pass through. Nope give that a miss, do some shopping and visit the library instead. **[Ed's note: Operation Stack is a procedure the Kent police uses to accommodate disruption to cross-Channel vehicle ferry services]**

Saturday was nice and bright so I decided to drop off my two leather jackets at Dobbs Leathers just outside Northampton for re-zipping.

The A34 was clear, as was the B430. As I joined the A43 an immaculate Ferrari roared by followed by a Porsche and then an E-Type, obviously together and polished to within an inch of their lives. I got through the three close-placed roundabouts whilst more expensive exotica went by and then the satnav said 9.1 miles to the A5. Head down and enjoy - for half-a-mile until I hit the gridlock of expensive Italian and German (and moderately expensive British) sports cars stationary on the A43 as they tried to get into Silverstone.

I must have passed about two or more million pounds worth of stationary supercars playing armchairs in the road as I filtered the next four miles until I passed the turning into Silverstone and opened her up.

I got onto the A5 and for five miles it was fine until I hit another tailback. There was nothing coming my way so I rode to the front of the queue, where there was a hatchback being recovered out of the hedges with the recovery wagon across the road.

It had happened the previous night aquaplaning on standing water. Several cars had done a U-turn to go back already but I was 10 miles from my destination, wanted the leathers sorted and had the gridlock going the other way to think about.

So I had a chat with a lorry driver who reckoned it would all be sorted in about another five minutes.

He was right, and five minutes later all was cleared and the police waved us on.

Got to Rachael Dobbs' place where we had a pleasant chat. I was given a very reasonable quote and I set off back wondering how bad the traffic would be. No problem: all was clear (although the eastbound A43 was still rammed) and I had a very pleasant hoon back to my flat. I did however see a 4.5 -litre blown Bentley heading east presumably for Silverstone, now I wouldn't mind having that.

The Bellagio's suspension is very hard, especially at the rear. Nice on smooth continental roads; not so good in England. So I got the manual out and softened it all up.

I then went indoors to wash my hands and put my kit back on and came out again to see my white African neighbour Andrew arrive on his newly purchased Moto Guzzi Norge 2-valver in silver. It had only done1100 miles in nine years and was immaculate.

We talked Guzzi for half an hour until the poor bloke had no choice but to take his son Therez out for a spin on it. His wife had tried it on the test ride and already liked it.

But before he went I sold him a CARC protector to be made by my friends Keith and Sue Nock of Lincoln Eagle and membership of the Moto Guzzi Club GB. We now have our own mini branch in our block of flats.

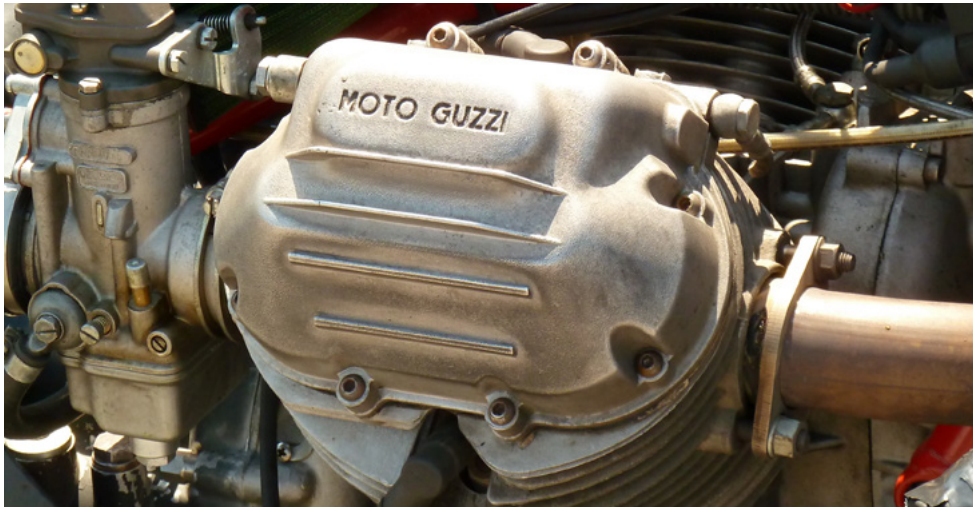
After that I took the Bella for a test ride. It's better but needs more miles to fully sort. Then the lil'Breva went shopping with me. Those beers and whiskies won't buy themselves.

Not a bad day really.

Ride Safe,

Ian Dunmore

An ancient Guzzisti



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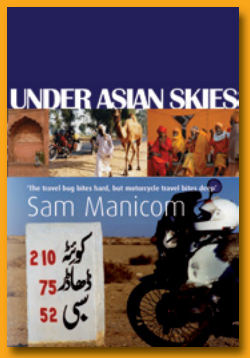

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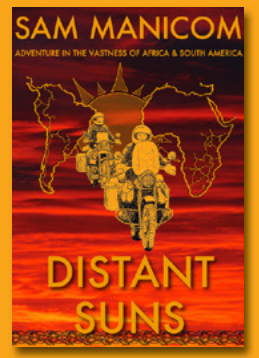

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Furneaux's Knife

[Ed's note: this is an excerpt from Jacqui Furneaux's report on her epic journey through Asia during the late-'90s with an Enfield Bullet, which was serialised in TRD during 2009-2010. This instalment starts with Jacqui dealing with customs at the Thailand/Malaysia border with her co-traveller Hendrikus, then going on to deal with something much worse than bureaucracy later on, and in the process taking her Enfield where no Enfield has gone before...]

We left Thailand on Enfields but mysteriously entered Malaysia on Harleys. At the quiet border the solitary Immigration/Customs officer didn't have 'Enfield' on his list and considered 'Harley' the nearest alternative. So frustrated was he at the lack of ticked boxes that after two hours, he waved us through without carnets and even accepted my expired British insurance documents, (vehicle cover being a requirement in Malaysia). Hendrikus had no such papers but the pleasant and hitherto patient officer let us both pass on my paperwork alone!

Heat, mist and heavy tropical rain welcomed us at Wang Kelian, our entry point in the hilly national park but the exhilaration of being in a new country made me grin all the way to Alor Setar. All was good and cheery and I had no foreboding regarding the manner in which I would eventually leave Malaysia.

It was a small town so when we lost each other, we were soon reunited. With no mobile phones, we usually kept within sight of each other in cities but heavy traffic sometimes separated us. Outside towns, if one of us felt like racing off they would wait at a visible point until the other caught up.

A cheap Chinese-run hotel provided us with a huge room containing two enormous double beds, an outdoor toilet, a balcony overlooking the entertaining street, and some rats and cockroaches which scuttled in the dark.

Malaysia was soft and agreeable with a perfect climate and good main roads. Three different cultures… Malay, Chinese and Indian provided food choices beyond our dreams. Palm trees for rubber, coconuts and palm oil grow everywhere. It is a country with everything; hills, rivers, exceptionally good diving and snorkelling on 'could stay here forever' beaches. Most villages have traditional bamboo houses contrasting with Kuala Lumpur's daringly modern architecture.

A strong Islamic influence controls the north-east but the rest of Malaysia is very relaxed although Muslim women wear shape-hiding but brightly coloured clothes and headscarves. On a stifling day at a beach, I pondered the requirement of the Qur'an that men and women should 'dress discreetly'. Fathers and children in swimming shorts were cooling off in the sea whilst mothers sat and watched, fully covered from head to toe and wrist, surrounded by non-Muslim Chinese women in bikinis. I wondered if anyone else pondered too, and imagined trying to explain the scene to an uninformed visitor from space.

Forget posh restaurants! Food stalls offer delicious noodle and rice dishes, fruit and other delights and are always worth investigating. It's also a good opportunity to stop and discuss things seen along the way and to look at the map. As I finished cramming my mouth full of fried bananas at a roadside stall, a grinning Malay motorcyclist on a Norton stopped to greet us. Easily sidetracked, we abandoned our rough plan to go to Penang and the next day accompanied him and his friends in the Classic Bike Club to join a big rally further east. So off we went with fifteen keen Malaysians on BSAs, Triumphs, AJSs, Nortons, Ariels, one English Enfield and a few brightly coloured Honda Dreams. There was even a breakdown truck! Being in the company of smiling enthusiasts as part a special group was exhilarating as was the speed which, at 80kph/50 mph. was racy for us! It was hot and sunny but I thought it was snowing when a rider's tyre repair aerosol exploded and white blobs erupted from his pannier. Hendrikus made use of the breakdown truck because of a puncture. He blamed cheap, Cambodian tubes, heat and excessive speed. No sooner was his replaced, than mine went too, so he must have been right!

We paraded in convoy through the streets of Khota Bharu, packed with cheering onlookers. The traffic was being controlled by Malaysia's King and Queen's actual guards. I felt like a queen myself, especially when we received a special mention at the evening's award ceremony.

Whilst staying in Khota Bharu I had a new seat-cover made as the tape with which I'd mended the old one was not holding it together any more.

We did some wild camping and one day I got worryingly lost in the jungle. I'd read in the paper of rubber plantation workers being

eaten by tigers in this area and sort of hoped I'd see one but as it got dark that night, I really hoped I wouldn't. Would I be safer hiding up a tree or in the undergrowth? After hours of wandering around in circles with my mini-torch, I recognised a path and got back safely without even hearing a meow.

We eventually reached Penang and weeks were spent at the workshop of a Chinese mechanic where we were able to decarb and do major maintenance on our bikes, using his tools. I had a front wheel nut rethreaded due to so many removals to deal with punctures. News of our presence spread and we were featured in a local Chinese newspaper.

We were invited to another nearby rally and it was here that we met Wilf, a large and likeable ex-pat Australian who had lived there for years. His village home was a bungalow on stilts by a large river where he ran a water sports venture.

It was not to be the last time we met.

Malaysia's Chinese are serious about their festivals. At the festival of the Nine Emperor Gods at Teluk Intan, the Emperors' spirits are invited to come from heaven to earth. Devotees dressed in white (or if plain white couldn't be found, T-shirts bearing Carlsberg motifs sufficed!) went to the river to collect the spirits and became entranced with rhythmic drumming and chanting of the followers. Upon return to the hundred year-old, incense-smoked temple, they sat on nail-spiked thrones and whipped themselves whilst emitting blood-curdling cries. Blood-soaked paper money was burnt as offerings as some of those in a trance, (brace yourself) sliced their tongues with knives. They held the knife horizontally and drew it from side to side across their tongues and then beat their backs with machetes accompanied by loud chanting, bell-ringing and drumming. It was like a scene from hell. Milling about amongst this spectacle, the children of the congregation were as wide-eyed with horror as I was.

Malaysia's Festival of the Nine Emperor Gods - and a metaphor for Jacqui's journey through the region...

Whether a result of this event, I can't be sure but shortly after it Hendrikus announced that he wanted to travel on alone. I'd known it would happen one day but was devastated. He was my mentor, my partner and friend. He'd shown me everything I knew about the Enfield and how to travel. We parted amid reminiscences, hugs and tears. There were no harsh words. It was simply a parting of the ways. I went to Wilf's where I stayed and considered what to do next.

Suddenly finding myself alone with this lump of machinery, this Enfield Bullet motorbike, stunned and missing the Dutchman I'd been travelling with for the last two years, I reviewed my options. I felt I wanted to call this all off and go home but remembered I didn't have a home to go to. I could stay here as many ex-pats do and every six months, go to Thailand and re-enter Malaysia with a new visa. As it wasn't officially imported, I could even abandon the bike and travel without it.

But I was damned if I'd give up. I had to go on. I had only had short stints on my own with the bike before. The prospect of travelling solo with something that I had always had Hendrikus to help with daunted me. It needed constant attention. How would I know what to do? What would happen if it stalled in a jungle or desert or busy city as it had done before? No good waiting for Hendrikus to come and pick the bike up if I dropped it.

I taught myself how to pick the bike up myself which meant unloading it, standing with my back to it, gripping the lady's handles and using the strength of my legs to ease it up. I COULD do it! I also had enough faith in myself and the universe to be able to cope with things if they went wrong. Encouraged by this new feeling of wobbly invincibility, I rode to an Indian festival at Bhatu Caves where I saw devotees equally as devout as the Chinese, with hooks in their backs attached to ropes and chains, pulling chariots through the streets to pay tribute to Lord Muruga. I slept on the Enfield under a bridge surrounded by a sea of sleeping Hindus but luckily nobody

was hurt when I fell off during the night. The following morning, resembling a dishcloth myself, I marvelled whilst they unpacked fresh clothes, washed with bottled water and looked immaculate.

At a marina near Wilf's village, I met an Australian yachtsman who wanted crew for his voyage to Australia. "What bliss that would be", I dreamed, imagining sailing past Indonesian islands, mooring at idyllic deserted beaches, observing the wildlife, eating coconuts and freshly caught fish. Marcel was a tree-hugging vegetarian and I thought I'd be safe. My agenda was to pay half the expenses and do half the work. His was "Oh Goodie! A woman on board". My bike would just fit in the catamaran's aft cockpit (note the use of nautical terminology!) Countless weeks were spent helping to replace twin outboard engines with an old tractor engine. As he repeatedly lost his temper and kept hitting the jetty on test runs, I lost confidence and began to wonder if I was doing the right thing in entrusting my life at sea to this man. I chose to ignore the warning voices shouting "No, NO, NO!"

We didn't get on. He imagined a lustful voyage. I found him repulsive. I considered him an inept bully. He blamed me for all the delays, mishaps, disasters and general bad luck that befell the boat which, although plentiful hadn't even started yet.

He had hinted at romance, but as far as I was concerned, this was a business arrangement and there would be no fraternising with the crew. When he agreed, I rode the Enfield from the beach, along a bouncy plank onto the catamaran. I stuffed an oily rag up its exhaust pipe, massaged it with grease and covered it with a tarpaulin to protect it from salt spray.

Leaving as late in the season as we did, the current was against us and the prevailing

wind was largely unusable as it came up the Straits of Malacca 'on the nose'. Together with the sluggish old tractor engine, this meant we soon used up much of the fuel. The propeller was the wrong size and thread, demanding the gearbox to be in reverse to make any forward progress, which was a feeble three knots at best. But we were on our way and were more relaxed.

After two days of motoring along in Malaysian waters, we spied ahead what looked like a floating rubbish heap. What we saw as we approached was the stuff that "Boys' Own" stories are made of. There, in the middle of the Straits of Malacca, no land in sight, were five Indonesian men clinging to bits of flotsam and jetsam. Desperate to be rescued, but wary of letting go of the jerry-cans, slabs of polystyrene and bits of wood that had been keeping them afloat, they climbed aboard and collapsed on the deck, skin white and wrinkled from being in water for so long.

I rushed about making tea as any Englishwoman worth her salt would do. I fed them with rice which they gratefully and greedily devoured. We ascertained that they had been dumped three days previously by the skipper of a fishing boat whom they had paid to deliver them secretly to what they hoped would be a better life in Malaysia. As skipper, Marcel made the decision to deliver them the police at Port Klang, a big Malaysian port which would mean a major detour for us. But as we got to know them during the day, he changed his mind and let these illegal immigrants go on arrival at dusk. We moored for the night, next morning realising that the 'secluded' place where we had dropped them to wade ashore was between two occupied police launches!

Beginning to reap the benefit of the weeks of waiting and hard work, I loved my solo night

watches, marvelling at the starry skies which sometimes disappeared eerily, as massive tankers, the size of huge blocks of flats, loomed silently by. I hoped the tiny 23 feet catamaran was visible on their radar as we shared the busy shipping lanes around Singapore.

Marcel was a great cook and produced elaborate meals from our stores... whilst we still had cooking fuel, that is. We made an unplanned stop on an undesirous part of the first Indonesian island we came to in order to register with Immigration and buy proper charts to navigate at night between the myriad small islands of Indonesia. Everything was closed due to a religious festival, and on our return we discovered the boat had been broken into and that navigation gear, tools, fuel, money and his passport had been stolen. Three days later Marcel nearly had a punch-up with the immigration officer who tried to arrest him for being an illegal immigrant. After mediating, I asked local fishermen and navy divers for charts which they happily copied for me. We now had to go to Jakarta to collect Marcel's new passport.

On the way, we were robbed of most of our food by pirates who arrived swiftly and menacingly whilst we were in open water. They didn't board the catamaran but threatened to unless they were given our sack of rice, fresh food and beer. Marcel told them he had no money as we had already been robbed. That was the last straw. I'd had enough of constant, ferocious and very frightening storms and having to sleep with a knife under my pillow as Marcel, now convinced I was jinxed and causing all the bad fortune, threatened to cut me into little pieces and throw me overboard ("No-one would ever know…"). I decided I'd had enough of the sea. What with castaways and thieves; little fuel or food, the fear of drowning and a deranged skipper, I swore to myself that if I lived long enough to land in Jakarta I would never get on that boat again. We finally ran out of fuel amongst offshore oil-rigs and begged enough food and diesel to get us to Jakarta whereupon I threw myself on the mercy of the Indonesian Customs, dismissing their suggestion that I continue my voyage to Australia. I told them I would rather rot in an Indonesian prison, so they not only bent the rules to let the carnet-less bike in, but in conjunction with the chief of traffic police, they made new ones. The reassembled bike ashore, none the worse for its voyage, I set off with a loud 'whoop' of joy to discover Java and rode until dark when I fell off on a potholed road and begged overnight shelter on a police station floor.

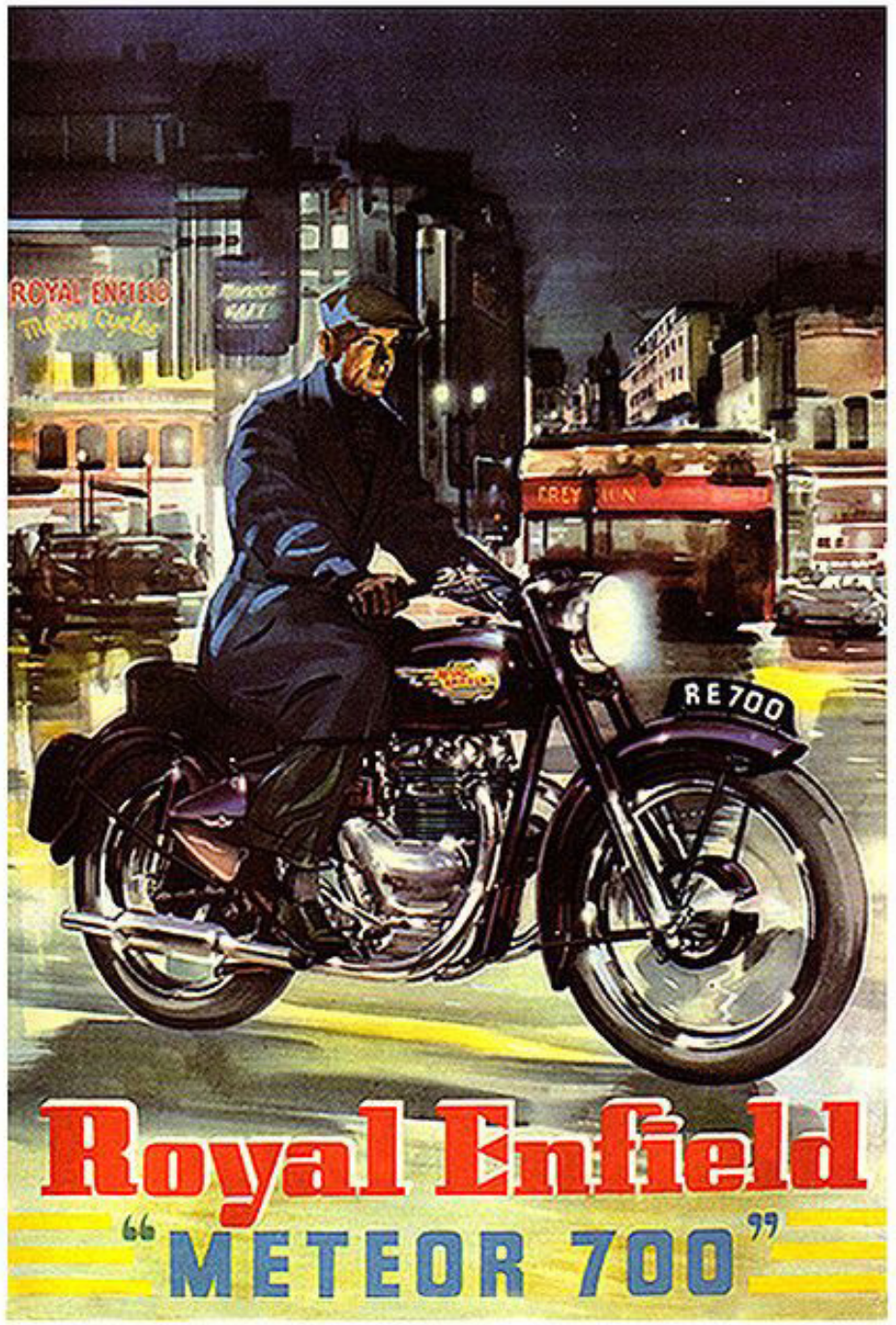
Forget the open sea…I was genuinely happy to be alive and back on two wheels on the open road.

"I'll never put us through that again." I said to the bike which, if able to voice its premonitions would have replied, "Oh yes you will, and next time it will be even worse!"

Jacqui Furneaux

Reprinted from The Rider's Digest, Issue 146 March 2010

jacquifurneaux.com



A Colourful Classic

Words & Pics: Wizzard

Around twelve years ago I had three bikes sitting in my garage – a black & silver custom Harley, a white Honda PC800 (see TRD 188), and a red & yellow BMW K1. Visit my garage today, and the same three bikes models are there – not the same bikes, but the same models. Isn't nostalgia a wonderful thing? Or is it just a case of knowing what you like and sticking to it, or possibly me just retreating into my comfort zone?

Of all the scores of bikes I have owned, the only one I have ever regretted selling was the K1, so there was always something in the back of my head saying I should buy another one, but any time a good one came up it was just a bit too rich for my wallet. An opportunity came up when I sold my immaculate old BMW R80G/S, so I started looking for a really good K1 within my budget. Easier said than done, as these bikes are now twenty five years old, and as they are pretty reliable, they tend to put on the kilometres, with the resultant wear and tear. And, like the Honda PC800, they tended to get dropped at walking pace or less.

Firstly, the history bit. BMW had always had a reputation for selling staid reliable plodders which appealed to the pipe and slippers brigade. Their bikes were well made, expensive, and repairable by any reasonably competent home mechanic (unlike modern bikes!), but couldn't be described as exciting. To change that image BMW, in 1989, took an enormous risk and produced the stunning, and very different, K1. Available in red or blue with yellow wheels, it was the red version that captured my imagination. The later black ones, beloved by the French, did nothing for me. The engine was vastly modified from its 8 valve K100 predecessor, with lightened internals, more sophisticated ECU and 16 valves.

Unfortunately, some European agreement (which is still in place in France) meant that the engine was restricted to 100bhp, but with its mega slippery bodywork it was still good for 0 to 60 mph in 3.4 seconds, and a top speed of 150 mph.

I remember visiting John Clark BMW in Dundee, and taking one out for a test. Despite the top heaviness, and tingly vibrations at high revs, I loved it. I had cash in my pocket, but not the £9700 to buy the K1, so I bought a six week old Honda CBR1000 for half the price, which was faster and didn't have the same vibration problems.

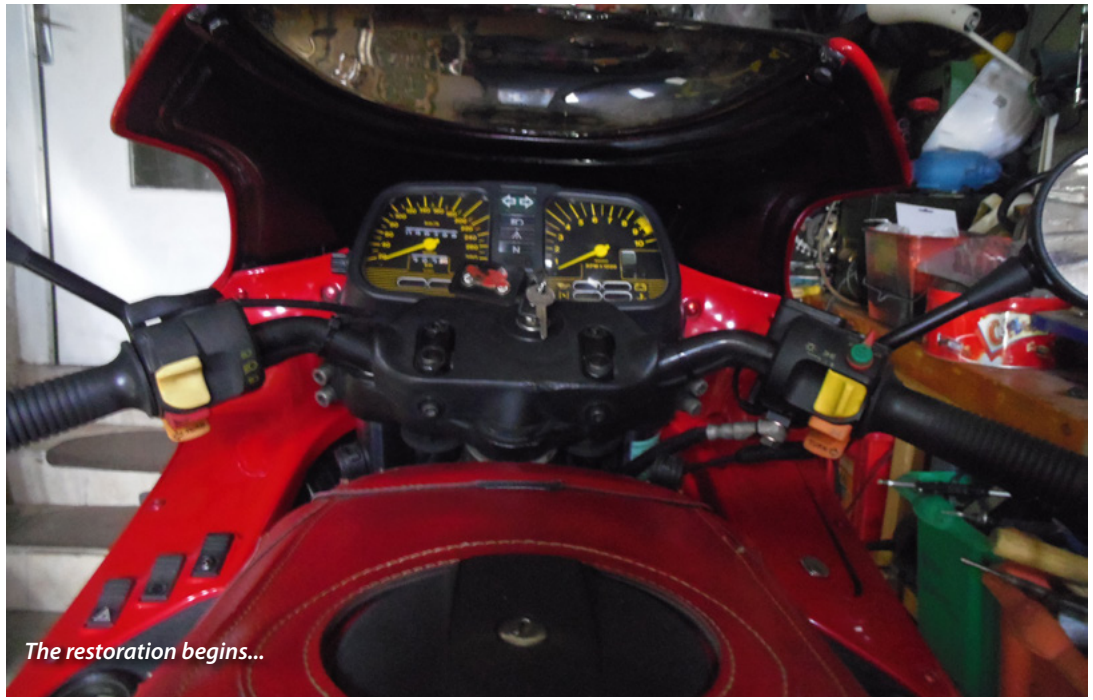
Many years later, in 1998 to be exact, I took part in BMW's 75th birthday celebrations in Berlin. One of the highlights of the trip was a tour of the factory in Spandau, which contained a small museum featuring examples of BM's finest, including a red & yellow K1. Totally smitten, I returned to the UK, sold one of my bikes, and sourced an immaculate K1 which had barely enough miles on the clock to be run in. For the next few years I used the bike at every opportunity, visiting a number of European countries, and with the only breakdown being caused by the infamous failing sidestand switch. After many adventures together, it was only reluctantly sold as I needed to fund my impending move to France.

Back to my recent search for my second K1. When I'm looking to buy something in France, there is never anything worth looking at in my area – I've no idea why, but this is true of absolutely everything I've tried to buy over the last few years. This usually means a minimum six hour trip, often a lot more, with a trailer in tow, to view a motorcycle which had been described as immaculate, one owner from new, and with the owner previously agreeing over the phone that his unreasonably high price

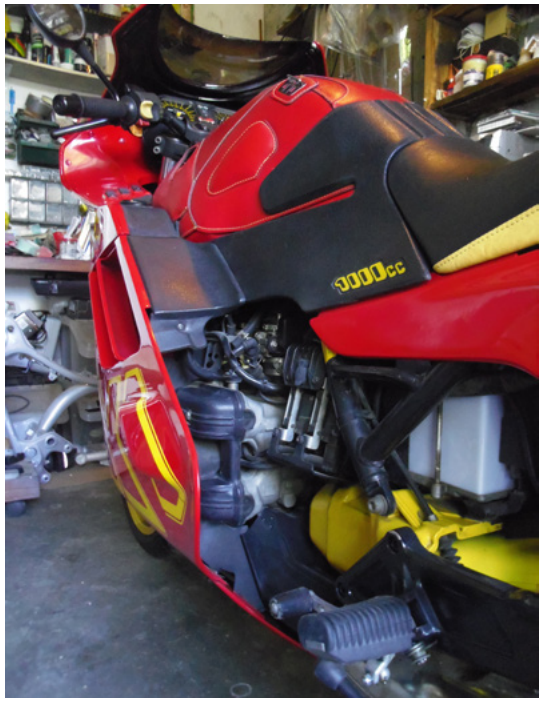
was negotiable. Finding houses in rural France is not easy, even with GPS, so by the time you actually get to see the bike in question you are usually pretty frazzled. Then comes the disappointment – a bad respray, every panel chipped, cracked or broken, a badly leaking shock, twelve year old tyres, and a long list of work to be done. And, being France, the owner has decided he would not drop his price by one cent – over here bikes will be advertised at a silly price, and stay there for months (or years), with no reduction. This is exactly what happened when I viewed the first K1 – a wasted day.

I kept being drawn back to one advert on the Net, for a red K1 which the owner had converted to carry BMW touring panniers. I didn't want the panniers, and he insisted that he had all the original panels, and had owned the bike for most of its life. An even longer journey this time, but worthwhile, as the owner was genuine, as was the bike, even if it was not quite immaculate (the standard panels which had been removed for the pannier conversion had been badly stored, and had various chips and scratches). Lots of service history, expensive aftermarket rear shock, tank bag and good tyres were all positive points, and when the seller accepted my offer, it was off with the panniers and on with the original (somewhat chipped) bodywork., followed by a slow careful drive home with it perched on my trailer.

A couple of days later when I went to take the new toy out for a run I found the battery was flat. It would take a charge, but not hold it, so that was replaced and starting became instant. Sitting on the bike, something felt wrong. On my last K1 the balls of my feet were firmly on the ground, but on this one, I was on tip toes – not a good thing on such a top heavy bike! Had my legs shrunk with age, or



The restoration begins...



have my leathers got tighter? Then it occurred to me that the rear shock is mega adjustable, and the last owner was a fair bit taller than me, so I lowered the suspension a bit. Now my feet are back on the ground as before, but, being lower, it's now a little bit harder to place on the centre stand.

It's important to test a new bike properly, so I took it out for a blast, and enjoyed it, although the front brake felt less than perfect. Approaching a sharp left hander a bit quicker than usual, I hauled on the anchors to find fluid leaking out of the master cylinder, so that was the next job – a total rebuild of the master cylinder and change of fluid. The brakes are now superb, and come as a bit of a shock if I've been riding my Harley beforehand. It's not that the Harley brakes are bad, it's just that the BMW ones are so much better.

While waiting for the master cylinder rebuild kit to arrive, I thought that it would be a good time to respray the scratched and chipped rear body panels, and then noticed that at some time in the past the rear wheel had been scratched by a careless tyre fitter, so that was resprayed as well using the correct BMW paint. At the same time a Harman chip was purchased on the Net. Anyone who has ridden a standard K1 will be aware of the tingling vibration at high revs and the infamous flat spot at around 70 mph – the Harman chip reduces the vibration, eliminates the flat spot, and gives a little more power into the bargain. I would recommend this simple upgrade to anyone with a 16 valve K series engine. I believe there is another chip on the market which gives a higher power increase, but as I've never tried it, I cannot comment.

At the same time as I was doing the front master cylinder, I thought it would be prudent to check the rear brake, which revealed that

the disc was at the end of its life.. This was replaced by one for the K1100RS, which has the advantage of being drilled to match the front discs, and is lighter. The fitment of new pads throughout should go without saying, but I'll say it anyway in case anyone thinks I cut corners in my restorations.

So, with the work done, it was time to try it out on all my favourite roads. Bearing in mind that this bike was designed for fast smooth roads and autobahns, it comes as no surprise to learn that it is absolutely superb in that environment. The engine is not loud, making a strange turbine like sound, but which whips you up to highly illegal speeds deceptively quickly, so much so that you are not aware that you are doing warp speed 9 until some kind gentleman with a flashing blue light reminds you. It is very stable at speed, and takes long sweeping bends beautifully once you have learned the correct technique. Which is: choose the correct gear well in advance, brake smoothly approaching the bend sticking to your chosen line, and smoothly throttle out. This is not a bike for horsing around in! The brakes, as mentioned above, are excellent.

All well and good, but I live in a very rural area, surrounded by tiny lanes with sharp blind bends and a rough road surface. Testing the K1 on these roads produced a very different result – the very geometry which makes it so stable at high speed is a veritable hindrance on these lanes where you need a quick turn in and the ability to flick the bike over on sharp "s" bends. The tyres stay planted on the road on the rough surface (unlike my old Bandit), but rather than ending the journey with a big grin on my face I found I was sweating from the effort (and possibly a bit of fear?). I reckon I could get my Harley round the bends at least as quick, and a good rider on a 250cc sports

The rare all-black K1 that BMW built towards the end of the bike's production run from '89-'93 (pic: Ed)

The blue/yellow version

(pic: Stahlkocher/Wikipedia)

bike would leave me for dead. Country lanes are definitely not the place to play on a K1! It should be noted that it handles better as the fuel load goes down. Speaking of fuel, 50mpg is easily achievable, even when giving it a bit of stick.

The final test run was into my nearest city, on a hot summer's day, and again this was not the best environment for a K1. The engine heat which is swept away at speed on a fast road quickly cooks your legs as you wait at traffic lights, and after just a half hour traverse of the city my wrists were aching. As soon as I left the city behind and accelerated up to a comfortable, but very illegal, speed, the heat was gone and my wrists returned to normal.

Ever the good journalist, I did some research on second hand prices, which was interesting as the UK/French prices are the opposite of the norm. In the UK, £3000 will get you one with high mileage and probably needing some work (check brakes carefully as they are very expensive to replace), but £5000-£6000 should get you a good bike. In France, where bikes are usually much more expensive, 3000 Euros will buy you a lot of problems, 5000-6000 Euros will get you a good bike, and a low mileage museum piece will cost 14000-17000 Euros (yes, really!), which is probably a reflection of the future collectability of the K1. For our buddies on the other side of the pond, the range seems to be $7000-$15000.

People say you should never return to the past with a vehicle (or wife, but that's another story!) as you will invariably be disappointed. With regard to the K1 I cannot make up my mind whether to keep it or sell it. I know it's a fast appreciating classic, which is easy to maintain and cheap to run, and which provides a massive adrenaline rush when I crack open the throttle, but this must be balanced against

rural lanes, there are more and more police speed traps on the very roads which are perfect for the K1, my back is complaining more than ever, my garage is full to bursting point, and my drive consists of deep gravel making it a sod to push this top heavy bike (234 kg) around.

Only time will tell if this handsome classic is to remain within my motley collection of bikes in the garage, sit in the lounge as an ornament, or be put up for sale. If anyone reading this would like to help me make up my mind by buying my beautiful K1, and have a free short holiday in South West France at the same time, I can be contacted via the editor. The price is 5000 euros, and looking at the exchange rate at the moment that makes it a cheap bike for a UK buyer.

Wizzard

(Thanks must go to Sam at Gammas Stud (gammas-stud.com) for letting me use her stables for the photo shoot).

DOWNTIME

Words: Andy Sanson

I've been a motorcyclist since 1972 and was a long-distance courier for twenty five years. During that time I covered enough miles on two wheels to equate to a round trip to the Moon and be well on the way towards a second trip.

Bikes have been a massive part of my life. I have ridden some awesome machines and a few right sheds as well. I've pootled along in the sunshine along shimmering lake shores, over high mountain passes where the scenery has no equal and been stranded hundreds of miles from home in sub-zero temperatures and snow so deep that the road disappeared beneath it as it spilled into my boots turning my feet to blocks of solid ice. It has been a long and varied journey and it's not over yet.

But, at the moment, I don't have a bike. Courier work ground to a halt a year-or-so back while I was looking the other way momentarily. No one wants to pay you anymore. A lot of what I used to deliver began to go via other routes, initially by fax, then by email. Cut-throat companies came along, undercutting the established firms for a while before going out of business to be replaced by the next wave and so on for ever and a day. I hit a low point when I fell foul of a patch of ice on the A5 between Llangollen and Corwen in Wales a year last January and bruised my ribs so badly that I couldn't get out of bed without rolling until half way through June. Not long after that I became jobless when my last bike died under me and I couldn't afford to replace it. I sold the remains to a breaker for a pittance and I'm now in a vicious circle of circumstances that mean I can't get a bike until I earn some money and can't earn money if I don't have a bike.

I call it My Downtime, and it's a fact of my life which happens now and again, sometimes through no fault of my own, more often through every fault of my own.

Budgeting and economising have never been strong points with me. There were times when I had money but it has an unnerving tendency to slide through my hands as though it and they were made of Teflon. These periods of insolvency are inextricably bound to such times as the bike requires work, parts, insurance, tax, tyres and any amount of maintenance and repair whereupon I find myself having to either sell it and hope something will come along or allow it to sit desiccating itself into a rusted heap outside in all weathers while I watch my bank balance plummeting further and further into the red. Clearly such situations can't endure. My usual strategy is to seek menial work at the minimum wage until I've collected enough to get myself back on the road. That's all very well in an upward economical spiral and when you're in the prime of life. In the current climate and with me on the wrong side of sixty, things aren't as simple as they were. When you get to my age you find work, or at least work worth doing, to be at a premium. There is agency work to be had but this invariably means you need a vehicle to get to the venue or site. They pay you the absolute minimum they can get away with and have no obligation to make the work they give you either regular or guaranteed. Zero hours contract without the security.

I'm nothing if not the optimist. I've been in this position many times and always risen again like a somewhat bruised and battered phoenix with a black eye and bandaged wing. It does seem to be taking a bit longer this time, it has to be said.

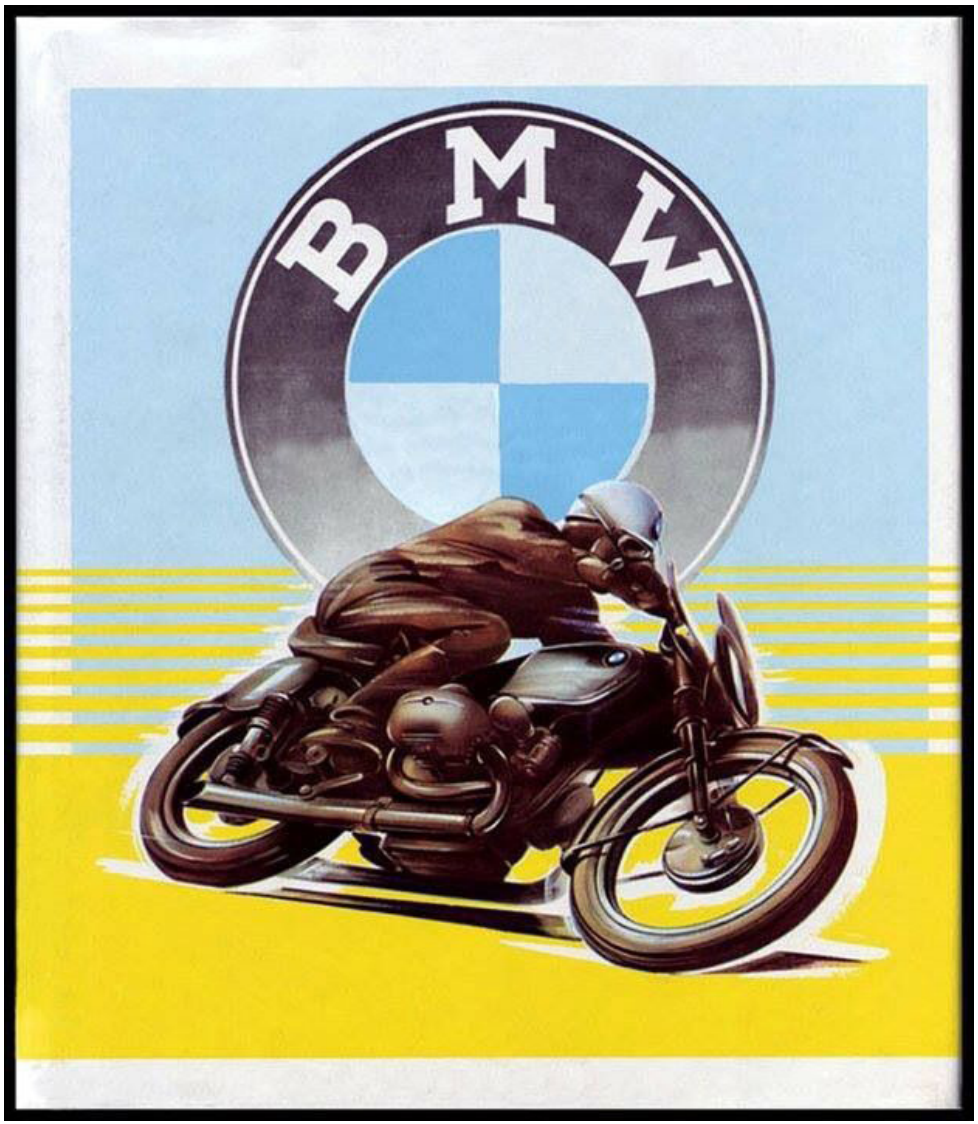
Previously I tried turning away from motorcycling for brief periods. I looked for other, less expensive ways to spend my time but it always comes round to the stark

realisation that there is nothing, anywhere in the world, quite like the feeling you get with a grunting, chugging machine underneath you, bimbling along the open road with the wind swirling around you and the horizon beckoning. The camaraderie, the freedom and feeling of belonging to something very special far outweigh the struggling and going without, but when there's a long way to go between now and that becoming reality the temptation is there to try new things. I played snooker, but that ran out almost as expensive as biking in view of the costs involved, not least of which was the huge bar bill. I tried hill walking – and I still do that, but I like to be able to get there under my own steam and not have to rely on friends or public transport. I even went along to a recruitment evening for The Samaritans but it took a matter of fifteen minutes-or-so for me to conclude that, although their work is invaluable and a lifeline for many, it was not for me. No, I had to find a way that was neither illegal nor life-threatening to any great extent, of getting myself back on the road as quickly, painlessly and inexpensively as possible.

The first time I found myself in this situation I found a courier company in Slough advertising in the Classifieds in the motorcycle press, located a one-man band in Bow (Cheers, Adam) where I could hire a bike and set off from my rented cottage on the Shropshire/Powys border with a crash helmet, a carrier bag and a heart full of hope. I had no idea where I was going to stay, how I would pay the deposit or anything or even if there would be sufficient work to make it pay. Happily things fell into place and it was a purple patch. I eventually managed to buy my own bike, find somewhere suitable to live and returned to the hills and valleys of God's Own Country some five years later with a Pan European and a whole new life. That sort of thing is unlikely to happen this time. Besides, apart from the fact that courier companies like that don't exist anymore and places to hire bikes have become as rare as hens' teeth as well, I really haven't got the enthusiasm for it these days. The glory days are long gone and will never return. The prospect of a long winter, frozen to the marrow and soaked to the skin and the ever present risk of death or serious injury along with outrageous insurance premiums conspire together to make the whole thing untenable.

No, my motorcycling days are far from numbered but when, as I know they will, things improve and I can afford to get myself mobile again, it will be under my own terms. I don't need to prove to myself or anyone that I'm an all-weather, all-year-round biker. I've done that and, frankly, no one cares anyway. Gone are the howling winds, lashing rain and tarmac like glass. Hello, days of warm zephyrs and balmy evenings, weekends away in seaside guest houses, trips to the TT and convivial rallies and get-togethers with like-minded souls. I know these times are just around the corner. I have to keep believing that or what's the point?

Andy Sanson



by Kevin Williams

I tipped into the last bend on the twisty road into town. The low-set bars put my weight over the front end of the machine, and I leaned over into the turn confident the high footrests were well clear of the tarmac as I ducked my head behind the low screen and out of the windblast.

As the 30 mph speed limit sign appeared in the distance, I rolled off the throttle and sat up, pressing the button that reconfigured the machine for urban roads. The seat moved slightly forward and down, the footrests moved forward and down too, whilst the bars moved up and back to match my more upright riding stance, whilst the entire top half of the fairing moved upwards to shift the breeze over my shoulders again whilst bringing the clocks back into my line of sight."

Far-fetched and the stuff of a parallel universe? Well, it could have been our own universe if we weren't so very conservative about the bikes that we ride.

Whilst many modern motorcycles are designed with styling (and also cost!) in mind, they still have to go round corners, some rather more sedately than others, I'll admit, but that means they all have to have some basic handling ability. And now, the relationship between the dimensions of the machine and the rider's contact points with it become important because if the rider isn't in the right position on the machine, then it's not going to be so easy or comfortable to ride. The ability of the rider to fit the triangle linking the bars, seat and pegs is paramount because it affects the rider's input into the machine. It should be quite obvious that a bike can't seat a 165cm (5'5") rider in the same way as a 195cm (6'5") rider. So what do we find with the majority of bikes on sale in 2015? That the 'rider triangle' is sacrosanct and fixed by the manufacturer, and that doesn't just apply to machines at the bottom end of the price scale either.

Car manufacturers have known for decades that it's necessary to provide an adjustable seat for the occupants, and particularly for the driver. Typically the driver's seat on a modern vehicle not only goes backwards and forwards with an adjustable back angle, but also goes up and down vertically and the seat base tilts forwards and backwards too. Oh, and the steering column is often adjustable too, for angle and reach.

Unlike the average bike where the rider has to fit the machine, cars are designed to put the driver in the best possible position to maximise their control over the vehicle and minimise fatigue. Many people think BMW go furthest in terms of making their machines user-friendly, so here's what BMW have to say on the BMW Motorrad website:

"Ergonomic considerations are of key importance to BMW Motorrad engineers when designing components and their interaction with the motorcycle. This is why BMW motorcycles are regarded as being particularly comfortable and ideal for long distances - a result of the optimum interaction between rider, passenger and bike. It starts with the seating position of rider and passenger, includes the height, texture and position of the handlebars and footrests, the shaping, hardness and design of the seat, as well as the width and shape of the fuel tank. Optimum wind protection with a low level of wind noise are also important on long tours."

Aside from comfort, BMW seem to be mostly worried about whether the rider can get their feet on the floor: "...not only the absolute height of the seat bench will determine whether the rider reaches the ground comfortably with both feet when standing, but also the shape and width, especially of the front section. This type of ergonomically optimised design of the seat in many new BMW Motorrad models means that even shorter riders will be able to stand securely in spite of the same seat height as in the predecessor model."

So what does that mean in terms of adjustability..?

"Most flat twin "boxer" models and 4-cylinder models have a height-adjustable seat. In all models apart from the K 1200 LT and the HP models, higher or lower seats are optionally available."

Note the 'optional'. If I can't find a seat position that's right for me, I have to buy an 'optional' seat that's a different height. A friend described the BMW seat options on one of the models she tried as "tall, taller, too tall". But the seat doesn't just need to go up and down. It needs to move forward too as it's lowered - think about it. If the seat only goes up and down, a tall rider and a short rider are still in the same place between the wheels. I remember riding a BMW with a custom-made Corbin seat. It fitted the owner perfectly, but she was around 7-8cm (3") shorter than me. The bum stop of the seat was a bit too far forward for me, forced me to sit too close to the tank and splayed my knees into the breeze. The strain of holding against the wind blast for 250 miles had me in tears by the end of the day.

A bit short in the leg and want to ride a sports bike? Well, it gets worse. Because sports bikes seats are usually minimally thick to start with, there's often not a lot of option to lower them for shorter riders - and even if you can, it's a DIY job with a carving knife because there

are very, very few factory options. Or you get involved in modifying the suspension, winding in the preload on the shock, dropping the triple clamps on the forks, fitting a different 'dog bone' suspension linkage or even a shorter or adjustable shock. And of course you have to bear in mind that changing the geometry of the bike not only reduces ground clearance but also changes the way the machine handles.

But this isn't just about long distance comfort or getting a foot flat on the floor. More fundamentally, it's about being in a good position to control the machine, and is a genuine safety issue. Years ago I had a trainee who kept locking the rear brake on emergency stops. I was struggling with the problem ("don't use so much rear brake" clearly wasn't working) when I looked a bit more closely at her right foot. Her shoe size was so small, she couldn't reach the pedal with her toes with her instep on the peg - so she was lifting her entire foot off the peg and braking car-style with her foot! No wonder the rear kept locking.

With different lengths of leg and arm, we should be able to make adjustments to the riding position to change the reach to and height of the handlebars, and also the foot pegs.

Take a look at the photo of the Laverda Jota (above, far left). That bike appeared in 1976, and came with a unique set of handlebars that were more adjustable than anything I've seen before or since. It's possible to alter the overall height of the bars and their forward / rearward position as well as the downwards 'droop' and the rearwards 'twist' of the grips to suit the rider.

Nearly forty years on, and what do I have on my Yamaha XJ6? Adjustable bars - or so it's claimed (above, far right) The handlebars clamps are slightly eccentric, so if you unbolt the bars, then loosen the clamps, rotate them 180 degrees and refit the bars, they're moved slightly forward and slightly higher - about 10mm forward and 5mm up. Does it make any practical difference? Not a sausage. I couldn't even feel it.

Even BMW don't do much better. The R 1200 ST is fitted with adjustable handlebar halves which can be height-adjusted in three stages by a total of 25mm (1") - not much more than the Divvie.

Meanwhile, take a look at the Diversion's pegs (above, centre). Not a lot to be done there, is there? Yes, I could twiddle the shift lever or the rear brake up and down a touch but that's about it. OK, it's a budget bike so what about more expensive models - how many actually have adjustable footpegs?

I have a memory that some early (and eye-wateringly expensive) Bimotas had the pegs mounted in a circular eccentric back in the 80s. What about in 2015? It turns out the eccentric mount is something BMW have copied on the recent (and only slightly less expensive) S1000RR sports bike. The Yamaha YZF-R1 footrest hangers can be unbolted and moved slightly to a higher position. Throw in a few Ducatis, some GSX-Rs and KTM's RC8 which do the same and that's about your lot. The tourer K 1200 LT also has optional (there's that word again) height-adjustable footrest plates "for a relaxed leg posture"... but only for the passenger; the rider has to make do with the position that suited the designer.

Even something as simple as the brake and the clutch lever have to fit riders with a variety of hand spans. There's some limited adjustment on most bikes but if you have particularly small hands? With the standard levers, some riders genuinely struggle to get a good grip. Then it's optional (if you're lucky) or aftermarket dog leg levers.

Compared with cars, we're way behind on two wheels. The riding position on a motorcycle really should be adjustable and not just by bolting on a thicker or thinner seat - or chopping out the seat foam as so many vertically-challenged riders are forced to do - or using aftermarket bars, pegs and levers.

But look on the bright side. As designers (and riders) see comfort as more important than adjustability, you can always specify hot grips. BMW say: "Warm hands are also a part of feeling good on a motorcycle. They increase the rider's capacity to concentrate and thus also enhance active safety. This is why BMW motorcycles are optionally available with handlebar grips which can be adjusted to multiple levels, in future with automatic heating function in successive models. Owners of the K 1200 RS, K 1200 GT, K 1200 LT and R 1200 RT enjoy a special luxury: these models spoil both rider and passenger

with heated seats as a special accessory... Long tours therefore become a fatigue-free pleasure for all on board."

Yes, just so long as you can reach the grips on the ends of the bars, of course.

But look a bit deeper into the problem. Both a sports bike and a tourer are pretty single-minded machines. Each style of bike excels in its own niche but isn't so happy in the other role, Chalk and cheese, from opposite ends of the spectrum. You CAN tour two up on a sports bike (I've done it but it ain't ideal) and you CAN push on at a spirited pace on a tourer (I've done that too). But it's a damn site easier to go fast on a sports bike and tour on a tourer. So does that mean you need to different bikes in the garage? Well, you could buy an 'all-rounder' but like most Jacks-of-all-Trades, they tend to be OK at just about everything and special at nothing. So let's go back to the future. To 1989, to be precise.

Yamaha's Morpho was a concept bike, based around a 400cc across-the-frame four cylinder engine. The reason for the name was the machine's ability to 'morph' to fit the rider. Not only did the seat go up and down (no bolt-on 'options' here!) but the footpegs did the same - on the move! And get this. The bars, screen and instruments could all rise up to give the rider a more upright riding posture when they wanted it.

A second version, with the original name of Morpho 2 appeared 1991 with a 1000cc engine. The Morpho 2 shared the variable riding position with the first version but added active suspension and two wheel steering.

So what happened? Well, of course, Morpho sank almost without trace; only the front suspension later appeared on the GTS1000, with active suspension only recently making it to production models. And to me that's a symptom of the conservative nature of bike buyers and our obsession with all the wrong things. Tourers will happily fit an electric cool box and a hydraulic centre stand then put up with a less-than-perfect riding position just so long as they have an electric windscreen that whizzes up and down at the press of a button. Sports bike riders will shell out extra to get bikes with huge power outputs, active suspension and traction control aids, yet show zero interest in the best performance aid there is - the human body!

Many people - myself included - aren't keen on the ever-growing complexity of modern bikes which increasingly make decisions for the rider. But surely Morpho put the rider at the very heart of the bike in the most visceral sense of the word.

But perhaps there's a glimmer of hope. Morpho isn't totally forgotten: Check out this webpage.

Kevin Williams

survivalskills.co.uk

The 4-Points Challenge

Words/Pix: Andy Havill

Do you ever think about childhood cancer? It might seem like an odd opening question but chances are you answered in the negative, because until it's your family that's affected, until cancer gets up close and personal, most of us have no reason to think about it. Until you walk onto a children's cancer ward and see all those kids undergoing treatment, treatment that in many cases will make them feel much worse before they have any chance of getting better, most of us will have no comprehension of what those kids are going through every day.

But I'm going to ask you to think about it today, because I want to tell you about one of those kids. In March of 2014 we lost my nephew, Alex Read, to osteosarcoma at the age of just 14 years, and it was that loss that inspired this trip. It was that loss that has also inspired so many of my family and friends to do whatever they can to raise awareness of the different forms of bone cancer that affect children all over the world, and to try and raise what cash we can to help with the research. If you'd like to read Alex's story, and I'd recommend having a tissue handy, then you can find it here: www.alexreadstory.blogspot.co.uk/

In the meantime, if you'd like to read a story about five daft old codgers bumbling their way blindly across France on a variety of motorbikes, then read on.

I wanted to use my bike to raise some cash for BCRT, and whilst 'LEJOG' (Land's End to John o'Groats) is an obvious route, I live in France so I thought "why not go from the southernmost point of France to the most northerly?". It's roughly the same distance as LEJOG after all, but then I thought, "that's too easy, why not take in East and West too and make it properly interesting?"

So that was the plan. I checked the map and reckoned on roughly 3,000 miles if I stuck to the back roads, I can't see any fun in motorways or dual carriageways on a bike, and to make it a "challenge" I decided I could do it in ten days, because I couldn't see why anybody would sponsor me to amble around France in my own sweet time. It needed to be doable at legal (-ish) speeds, but difficult enough to warrant a donation or two. So far, so simple.

But there's an expat bar close to where I live

(L-R) Robert, Graham, Andy, John, Bryan

with several regulars who ride, and in fact we try to get out and burn off a tank full of petrol at least once a week around the back lanes of Normandy, so of course as soon as they heard about my plans they formed an orderly queue!

This left me with a bit if a planning dilemma, as I wasn't planning on doing any. I was just going to pack a bag, sling a leg over my old Harley and head west, then north, then east, and then south. Well it made sense to me. I could easily find a bed en-route, I was even going to strap a cheap tent to the back, "just in case".

First to join up was Robert Patrick with his 1975 BMW R90S, who quickly vetoed the tent idea, closely followed by our jovial barman, John Hayter with a Yamaha Diversion 900. Then, to keep the fleet interesting, we had Graham Austin; now Graham is one of those lucky folk with a choice of bikes in the garage so we weren't sure which bike he'd be on, and to be fair I don't think he knew until he started strapping the luggage on. We were just praying he wouldn't bring his Velo Solex, and luckily for us he turned up on a BMW R1100S. Last but by no means least we had Bryan Davies on a Honda VFR1200. Bryan is a regular visitor to our little corner of France but lives in Yorkshire, so he'd be making the trek down from there to join us at Dunkirk.

We organised a BBQ/planning meeting and we all agreed that heading west first was a good idea, so we settled on a departure date of June 14th. Then we ate too many burgers and drank some beer, no point spoiling the trip with too many details...

So that's the planning done: five old men, ten days and 3,000 miles on back roads - simples!

Day 1 (Sunday 14th June 2015) - St Pierre to Morlaix - 342.5 miles

A slightly later start than planned, getting away around 9.30am from the bar in St Pierre. We hadn't expected so many folks to turn up and wave a tear-stained hankie. We were coming back after all, or was that the reason for the tears? Only three of us setting off today, John & Bryan will be joining us en-route.

Eighty miles into the trip and Robert had a rear wheel puncture. "Well golly gosh", we thought. "That's a good start", or something along those lines anyway. We re-inflated it and it seemed to hold air, but as it had gone down once it was pretty obvious the nail in the tyre had pierced the tube, and 20 miles later it was flat again, so out with the nail and in with a can of Tyreweld, and would you believe it? It worked!

Of course Robert rode very sedately and with appropriate caution until he'd decided it felt like it was holding, so ten miles down the road and he's up to his usual pace. I should probably mention here that this is a man who tends to factor two on-the-spot speeding fines into every holiday budget and the roads of rural Brittany are pleasingly free of Gendarmes. We made it across to the most westerly point around tea-time, and though there seems to be some debate about where exactly the furthest point west is, we took advice from the locals and settled on Plage de Ruscumonc near Pluarzel.

After a couple of photos it was an easy ride to our hotel at Morlaix where we were "delighted" to discover that it was the chef's day off, and of course we hadn't eaten since breakfast. No problem though, as the manager then informed us that they had a Boeuf Bourguignon special on the hob, unfortunately there were six other guests who had eaten the twelve portions he'd prepared before we got to

Looking for the hotel in Deauville...

the restaurant. He came up trumps with some gammon steaks after that but Robert expressed our profound disappointment at missing out on the Bouf so eloquently that a free round of beers was offered as compensation. When we were presented with the bills next morning it turned out that the beer had been free all evening, and people say he talks too much...

Day 2 - Morlaix to Deauville - 289.3 miles

Amazingly, this morning, admittedly only the second morning of the trip, Graham, aka Captain Slow was up and ready with bike keys in hand waiting for us. Ahead of us was a fairly easy run across northern Brittany and on to Deauville, so there was time for a bit of sightseeing along the coastal routes.

While discussing beer discounts with the hotel manager, Robert had managed to discover that the only place in town to buy a new tube for his bike was closed on Mondays. He had however looked on t'internet and found that Daffy Moto in Caen were open on Monday afternoons. So we had a plan: Caen by 5pm because they shut at 7pm. How hard could it be?

Would you believe not hard at all? We had a lovely day the day we went to the seaside, we even had time for a coffee stop overlooking the Barrage de Rance near St Malo.

OK, we did lose sight of Robert 20 miles from Caen - I did mention the speeding ticket budget didn't I? But no problem, he had a map from the hotel manager's printer, and I knew where the shop was as it just happens to be next door to Caen Harley Davidson. Somehow we got there ten minutes before he did, but he claimed that was because he'd stopped for 15 minutes to wait for us before deciding we must have taken a different road.

Half-an-hour later and we were on our way again, with Robert's bike now sporting one of the few replacement parts he's fitted since buying it new in 1975, although as a true Yorkshireman he did try to negotiate a trade-in price on the old tube. After all, it only had the one hole in it.

Oh, and Deauville is a pretty place. I saw it

all several times as I was riding at the rear, and both Robert and Graham "knew" where the hotel was - well we found it eventually...

Day 3 - Deauville to Dunkirk - 275.8 miles

And then there were four.

John joined us on this morning, having ridden up from St Pierre to meet us just as we were leaving Deauville, so you can add 100 miles to today's total for John. No worries though, he can cope.

We followed the coastal route all the way today as it makes navigating so simple - keep the sea on the left and the fields on the right and you're doing okay. It was a lovely clear day but with very strong winds blowing in off the sea. It takes a lot to blow a Harley off course though.

Obviously we found time for a coffee stop and an ice cream stop, where Robert informed us that ice cream is just one of those things he has to have when he's on holiday, a bit like speeding tickets I guess.

We did "enjoy" a sight seeing tour of Calais though as they'd decided to close "our" road and the diversion would have taken us down a motorway. We weren't having any truck with that though, why take the easy option when you can wind your way blindly through the suburbs?

Arriving at our hotel in Dunkirk around 5pm we were expecting Bryan to be waiting for us fresh off the UK ferry, but a text message informed us that the ferry had broken down and gone back to Dover and he was going to be at least another couple of hours. So we headed off to the most easterly point at Bray Dunes for a photo call. It's incredibly difficult standing there now to imagine what it must have been like when the Dunkirk evacuation was taking place up the coast from this quiet

seaside town.

Back at the hotel and Bryan arrived in time for the after dinner beer(s), so now there were five...

Day 4 - Dunkirk to Han sur Lesse - 209.6 miles

We headed from the most northerly point in France towards the most easterly. Take a look at a map: if you draw a straight line between those points very little of it is in France. Instead it passes through Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany, and so did we.

It was the shortest daily mileage of the trip but probably the hardest day, as this area along the border of France and Belgium is very industrialised, with lots of towns to pass through and lots of chances to get separated at traffic lights and busy junctions. Obviously we were well prepared, (stop sniggering at the back). Robert was leading the way with detailed (-ish) directions and I was bringing up the rear with a list of towns we should be passing through. Each time we got split up we would all head for the next town on the list and meet up on the outskirts. It did lead to what for me was the funniest moment of the whole trip though - Robert's "please keep up" speech. In a genuinely funny parody of everything that's best about Monty Python we were treated to a heartfelt appeal to "please keep up" in a long drawn out speech that used "please" as every third word. Except that Robert didn't say "please", I'm not sure The Rider's Digest would publish what he did say, but it starts with an F, yes, definitely a capital F! I say chaps, I think he means it. Bryan had arrived with a helmet cam to record our progress, but sadly it was turned off at the time of the speech. A missed opportunity there.

Anyway, after that we "ahem, kept up" and ended up in Han sur Lesse for the night. It was a long and difficult day for not much progress, but the roads get better from here and tomorrow is another day.

Day 5 - Han sur Lesse to Wissembourg - 261.4 miles

Tomorrow was indeed another day, a very wet day. We set off in the morning in heavy, persistent rain. Well, I guess we'd had it easy up until now.

We had a beautiful day's ride through some fantastic scenery and on some great biking roads. I do have to question the Belgians' love of cobbles though; do they not realise you can make roads out of non-slip materials? Definitely on the list for another visit with more time to explore though.

It's a strange thing following along behind a group leader, as you sort of abdicate responsibility for where you are. At one point I was cruising happily along the Mosel Valley taking in the scenery when I suddenly realised all the cars had German number plates. "Ah", I thought, "we must be nearly there then".

Indeed we were, and when we popped back over the French border at Wissembourg we were only 20km from the eastern point.

Robert had led the way up to this point, as he'd very kindly offered to sort out the first half of the route and I was very grateful to hand over the responsibility - just as well really because nobody else was offering.

Of course after the now famous "please keep up speech" I did feel the need to point out that from now on they'd no longer be chasing a 60 year old man on a 40 year old BMW but a fat old man on a Harley, how embarrassing would not keeping up be now..?

Day 6 - Wissembourg to Pontarlier - 246.4 miles

"Wait a minute, it's stopped raining.

Guys are swimming, guys are sailing"

Well they're riding bikes actually, but you get the idea.

We did a quick 20km down the road to Lauterbourg, the most easterly town in France, for a photo call, then we headed south.

Today we headed to Mulhouse. When we first started planning this trip, I thought a day (or at least an afternoon) off the bikes at the halfway stage would be a good idea. Having missed out on a visit 20 years ago due to a looming ferry deadline, I had promised myself that the next time I was in the area I would definitely visit the famous Schlumpf classic car collection in Mulhouse, so this seemed like an ideal two-birds-with-one-stone opportunity. However, the sharp eyed among you will have noticed that Mulhouse is not the final destination at the start of the day. We were in Mulhouse by lunchtime, with plenty of time to find some digs for the night and to visit the museum in the afternoon. Several circuits of the city centre later and we discovered that there was a music festival in town and every hotel for a ten-mile radius was full. Damn!

Time for Plan B then: we dropped down from Mulhouse, skirted round Belfort and headed south through the mountains. Lots of steep climbs and hairpin bends were just what we needed after the traffic of Mulhouse city centre. Maybe I'll try again in another 20 years?

We finally pulled up in Pontarlier, about ten kilometres from the Swiss border, after what turned out to be one of the most enjoyable days riding so far.

Day 7 - Pontarlier to Pradelles - 310.1 miles

Does biking get any better than this? We

ran parallel with the Swiss border for much of today, with fantastic roads and stunning scenery.

Eventually we pulled into Le Monstier, a small town/large village in the mountains, but with two hotels to cater for the holiday season so we know we'll be OK; except that the owner at the first hotel said that of course there were no rooms to be had because of the rally. We've no idea what he's talking about but we have a quick squint at the map and decide to head 20 miles north-west to Le Puy because a town that size will have lots of hotels, right? We rode half a mile up the road from the hotel, round a bend and into the middle of a stage rally, with cars, vans, pit crew and people everywhere. It must have been the one week of the year when Le Monstier is busy. Then as we rode into Le Puy we saw a tethered camel grazing on the first roundabout, where a poster told us the camel belonged to the Vazatta Brothers circus., For once, the circus was in town *before* we got there.

We headed straight to the local Ibis hotel where we were informed politely that there would be very little chance of a room in town because, guess what? There's a music festival on.

It was time for an executive decision: we would go south by taking the direct road south from Le Puy, rejoining our route at Pradelles, the next town on our list, then take it from there. This decision was based solely on my lifelong belief that "summat'll turn up". We rolled into Pradelles at 8.55pm and knocked on the door of the only hotel in town, which appeared to be locked up. Of course they had five rooms available, and would we like to put the bikes in their garage across the road? Oh, and while you're parking the bikes would you like me to make you a reservation at the restaurant two doors down? That'll be the restaurant with the cheap, plentiful, delicious food and a panoramic view of the valley below will it? Told you summat'll turn up...

Spectacular scenery at Le Puy

Day 8 - Pradelles to Thuir - 254.9 miles

More amazing roads today. In the morning we dropped down through Mende and stopped for coffee at St Enimie before running down the Gorge du Tarn to Millau, although the 30-plus-degrees heat was a bit much in bike gear. Robert asked if there was a view point for the Millau Viaduct and of course there was, obviously at the top of a very steep hill, featuring lots of very tight hairpins with lots of clutch slipping required, except that Bryan hasn't got a clutch lever on his VFR - oh how he laughed. Still, probably easier coming back down eh Bryan?

From here we ran down the valley and under the Viaduct, and kept heading south using only the yellow roads on the Michelin map - the ones with the green squiggly lines along the side of them. We eventually stopped at Thuir for the night, and guess what? Yep, another music festival, but this time there was room at the Inn and we dined al fresco with a jazz quartet for entertainment.

Day 9 - Thuir to Albi - 295.2 miles

Today was the final compass point. We were very close this morning as it was only about 40 or 50 km away. If only we could find it...

There is a famous pass called the Prats -de-Mollo that is used on the Tour de France and runs over the Pyrenees into Spain, and the furthest village south is about 10km off this road.

We had a rough idea where it was but we couldn't find a sign for it, and we were convinced we'd already passed the turn off and the only

road we'd passed going in the right direction was a brand new bridge with no signs at all. So we went to have a look. After two kilometres the "road" narrowed to a goat track, I was pretty sure at this stage that this was not the road we were looking for but Graham had told me ages ago that he'd looked on Google Earth and the road to the southernmost point was a gravel road, so who knows? We pulled up on a hairpin with just about enough room to turn the bikes. I looked across at Robert and nodded towards the ascent, and he grinned back and shrugged his shoulders, which I took to mean "why not?". Why not indeed? So we headed about another seven or eight kilometres up this potholed, rock and gravel-strewn goat track with the hairpins getting ever-tighter, mainly because from that point on there'd been nowhere wide enough to turn around. At the top we came to a set of imposing iron gates with a sign that said "PRIVE" in very large letters and only a dirt track leading further uphill to the side. But at least there was room to turn the bikes around. It was what is known to bikers the world over as a bloody good laugh, and when we got to the bottom Bryan did say it made the Millau ascent seem easy. If we'd had the time I think Robert and I might have gone back up for a second blast .

But we still had a village to find, and luckily a nice French lady pulled into the lay-by where we sheltering from the sun and gave us directions. We'd been less than 2 miles from the road we wanted when we'd turned around convinced that we'd missed it. Doh!

So we made the southernmost point, took the photos and headed north again, stopping off at the previous night's hotel on the way to return Roberts room key...

I was trying to push on a bit today so that we'd have a shot at getting home in one leg

The Vienne river at Chinon

Journey's end (at 11 o'clock at night!)

the next day, but in the event we'd wasted too much time "playing" in the mountains and had to call it a day at Albi. It's going to be a long day tomorrow...

[Just a little postscript to today: I checked the map later to discover the first "road" we'd taken was actually a "Grande Randonee" - a public footpath in English!]

Day 10 - Albi to St-Pierre-sur-Orthe - 426.6 miles

We knew it was going to be a long ride today. I figured it was at least 350 miles but that was too close to home to bother stopping another night. In the end, after two official detours and one "ahem" unofficial detour we covered over 400 miles. Luckily when we have the detours, official or unofficial, we can always rely on John's "prat nav" to get us back on course, but you wouldn't want to follow one all the time would you? Where's the fun in that?

No worries though, it was a lovely day and as we knew it would be a long one we tried to keep to "interesting" routes as much as possible; after all, if you've got a long stint in the saddle there's no point dying of boredom. Better to have to keep moving around and stay entertained.

We stopped for a coffee about 3pm and decided that as we obviously weren't going to be home in time to eat tonight we might as well eat now, and home-made burgers with real chips hit the spot - none of your frites this time, we'd accidentally stumbled upon an English bar.

We settled into the ride after that until we pulled up again in Chinon in the Loire valley for another brew.

Leaving Chinon sometime after 8.30pm, we headed for home, and it was one of those glorious evenings you get on a bike

occasionally where you're chasing the setting sun. It was a bit chilly for the last hour after it had gone down though!

We arrived back at the Homme Vert at St Pierre at 11.12pm, still buzzing from a great day's ride, and rushed into the arms of our loved ones. Well, okay, we rushed into the loo first, I told you that last hour was chilly, and we are getting on a bit...

Epilogue

We covered 2891.6 miles altogether, which was shorter than I expected to be honest. I thought we would cover 3,000 minimum and when everybody said you can't do that in ten days and stick to the twisty routes we had to prove them wrong. We could have made it a whole lot easier by sticking to the main roads but where's the fun in that? Anyway, this was meant to be a "challenge", so why not make it challenging?

Most days we didn't stop till after 7pm, and some were later as you've seen, but there was always time for a good meal, a few drinks and a serious amount of mickey-taking in the evenings, although we did have waiters sweeping up and stacking tables around us more than once.

Of course any trip like this is going to throw up mechanical issues, and there were a couple of seized joints, but that was just Bryan's hips. The man is in constant pain, but he never mentions it, in fact he went so far as to tell us that he never mentions it every time we stopped!

Robert had the puncture on the first day but apart from that minor hiccup we had no problems. Well, except for Robert's bike needing oil on a regular basis and doing a fair impression of the Red Arrows on full chat, and except for Robert's bike hitting false neutrals - "apparently" BMW in 1975 used to fit at least two neutrals for every gear in the box. The trouble was, every time it hit a neutral, the engine cut out, usually just as he was braking for a downhill hairpin, which was interesting to watch from behind. I never knew he could tap dance.

The only other "problem" we had to stop for, was to occasionally pull up and re-attach Robert's luggage. Can any body spot a theme developing here? Mind you, the poor bike has suffered 40-years'-worth of a Yorkshire maintenance regime: "if tha's nowt stopped wurkin lad, I'll not be wasting brass molly-coddlin it".

Oh, and we obviously held him up a bit - it was the first holiday in living memory when Robert came home without a single speeding ticket. Lucky we didn't "ahem, keep up" or we'd all have had one!

Finally, please don't forget the reason for our trip: when we set out to do this we had no clear target in mind for the fundraising as we just wanted to raise as much as possible for BCRT, but having covered 2891.6 miles we thought it'd be a nice idea to try for £2891.60 .

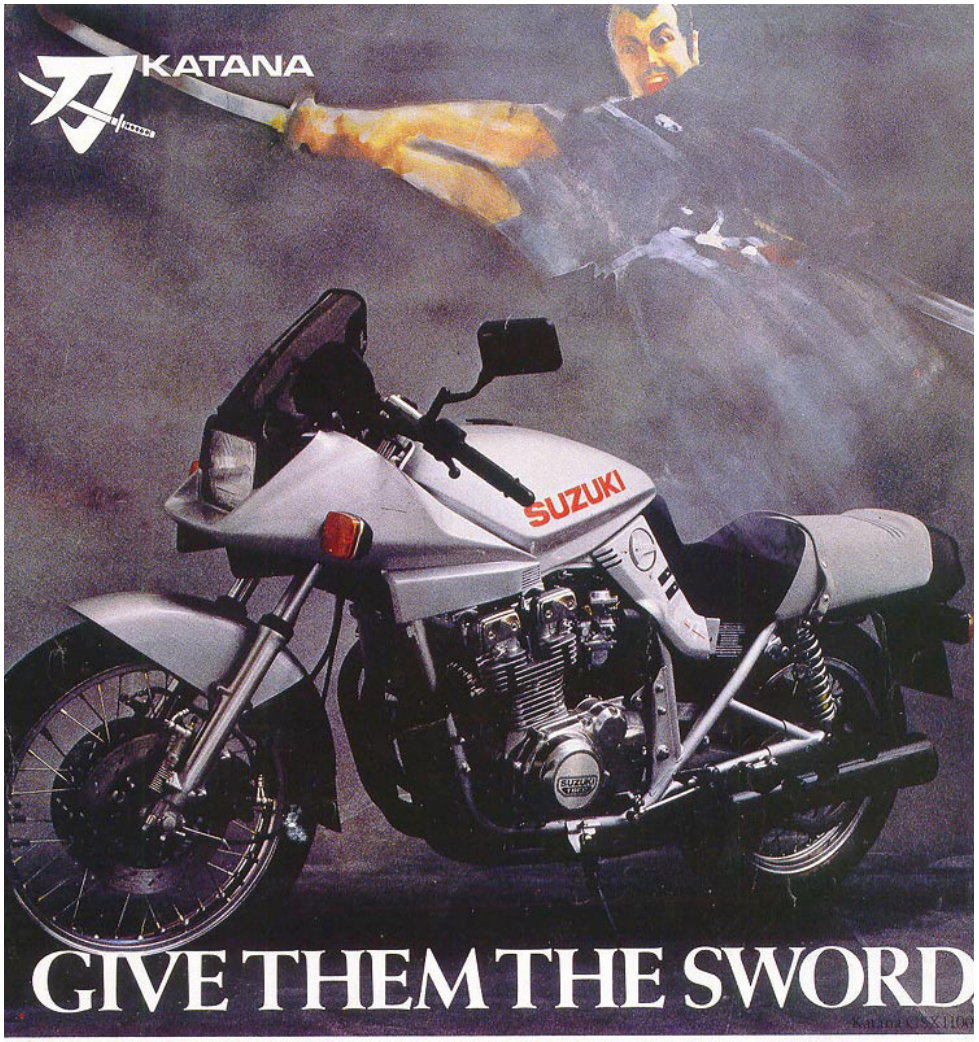
As I write this we're up to £2409.18 so far, which means we only need 483 people to read this article and donate £1 each and we've made it. Please, be one of the 483 - in the last 20 years there has only been one new drug approved for treating childhood cancers. This research is desperately needed, and it's needed now.

Andy Havill

Make a donation here: justgiving.com/4-points-challenge/

Also check out our Facebook page where there's a video of the trip: facebook.com/pages/4-points-challenge-for-BCRT/338278523040036

- or watch the video on YouTube: youtube.com/watch?v=UuPcYk8znbs



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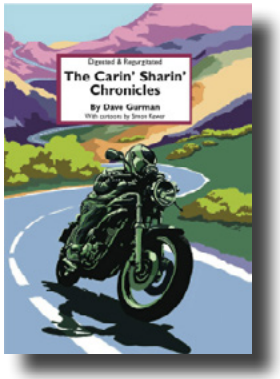

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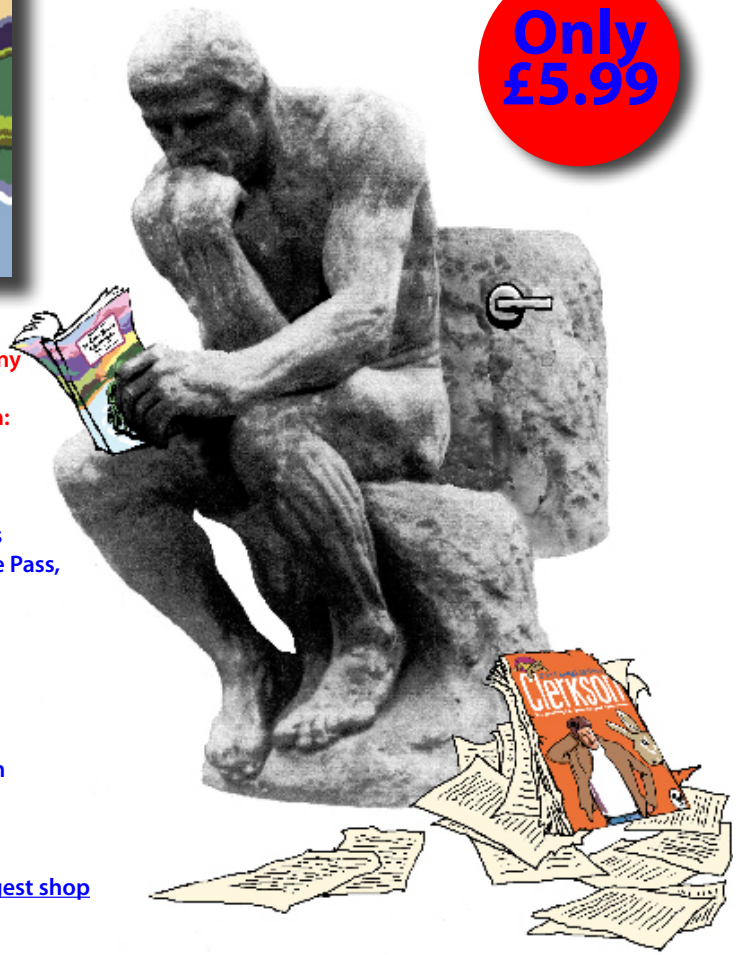

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Letter from America

Peer Pressure

Not for the first time, in a conversation with a guy about what to buy for a first motorcycle, I was told, "I can't buy a 650. All of my friends will make fun of me. They say anything under 1200 is a 'girl's bike.'" Ignoring the opportunity to say, "all cruisers are girls' bikes," I had to marvel at the fact that a 50-something-year-old guy was still worried about what other people said about his stuff. One of the core attributes of being cool is not giving a damn what other people think. So, the moment you begin to worry about peer pressure, you have no hope in hell of being cool.

I told this poor sap a joke/parable that my old Texas friend/mentor/critic, Karl, had laid on me 40 years ago in an attempt to put a similar situation into perspective. A guy rents a hooker and a room. He comes out of the bathroom in his birthday suit and she laughs at him, saying, "Who are you gonna please with that little thing?" He says, "Me."

Ok, I'm done. There you have the story of my life at its best. When I am on a roll, knocking down personal obstacles in Pareto Analysis Order, being the best me I can pull off, feeling as good as I get to feel, that parable has been my guiding light. It's my Sermon in the Motel Room. Peer pressure makes smart people dumb and dumb people boss. If nothing else about this useless marketing scheme something to avoid, I'd think it would be that fact.

At the end of another MSF (Motorcycle Safety Foundation) class, when my co-instructor and I were marveling at how driven-by-fashion some of our older students were, I asked, "Why doesn't peer pressure ever tell people to do the smart thing?" That evening, I was blessed with the wonderful opportunity to get to spend a few hours with my brilliant grandson, Wolf. He and I explored that idea a little further and decided that, on the whole, we're both satisfied that peer pressure serves a perfectly useful purpose. Since it is always wrong, the instant we can identify peer pressure for what it is, the logical move is to go in the exact opposite direction.

Wolf might be the least outside-motivated person I've known in years. My wife and I do about 90% of our clothes shopping second-hand. Like my motorcycles, I'd just as soon someone else take that 50-90% value hit and deal with the break-in hassles. When Wolf was a little guy, he was just as happy to go toy or clothes shopping at our favorite second-hand stores or assorted garage sales as he was with a Target gift certificate or cash. Now that he's older, he would just as soon wear his clothes out than shop -- anywhere. While we talked, we watched the University of Michigan's consistently uncool, spoiled, and distracted children of the 1% babble into their iPhones and preen in their designer throwaways and marveled at their uniformity. Style is the commercial mutation of peer pressure and it makes people do some pretty amazingly stupid things.

The end result of that day of evaluating the cause and effect of peer pressure I came to the conclusion that I am happy with the fact that peer pressure is so consistent. Consistency is one huge gaping vacuum in everyday life. There are almost no absolutes in this world, outside of the obvious fact that Karl Rove is on the wrong side of every issue. Finding another absolute truth has terrific value. Since peer pressure is always wrong, I just have to pay attention to what the marching morons are saying and do the opposite. When I'm faced with pressure sales tactics, I close up my mental shop and end the conversation. When faced with peer pressure, I cultivate a predictable reaction: if the mass of humanity thinks south is the way to go, I'm going north; or, maybe, northwest. (You can rarely go wrong putting a little west into any journey.) As a personal hero once wrote, "The fact that an opinion has been widely held is no evidence whatever that it is not utterly absurd; indeed in view of the silliness of the majority of mankind, a widespread belief is more often likely to be foolish than sensible." Bertrand Russell

That reaction to peer pressure resistance often makes me look gutless. When I was riding with a group of off-road guys a while back, their willingness to barrel around blind curves and over hills amazed me. I have spent at least 300,000 miles of my life riding and driving dirt roads and I do not trust going where I can't see beyond my stopping distance. I have lost a few friends to oncoming and parked traffic, livestock and wildlife, irrigation-flooded farm roads, and large farm implements on rural roads and I have a serious allergy to meeting a combine or a road-grader at any speed. By the end of the day, I was taking up the back of the pack, putting my usual half-mile between the nearest bike and me. I'm not that fond of eating dust or limited maneuvering space or visibility, so my options are either ride point or trail far in the distance. I have no idea what the group thought of my riding skills (other than my disappointing performance in deep sand on the WRX), but whatever they think, I had fun. I made me happy.

Not that long ago, a BRC student asked how I could reconcile my "safe following distance" recommendations with the "formation requirements" in a group ride.

"Easy. Don't do group rides."

She thought that was a terrible suggestion, since riding in a group was her whole reason for owning a motorcycle.

I answered: "I don't want to be any part of a 'rolling bowling pin' configuration and every year there is at least one local incident where one cage takes out a pack of motorcyclists."

I told her my minimum motorcycle following distance is often a half mile and if that fouls up the formation, I'm good with everyone passing me or going my own way. I am my own peer and nobody puts more pressure on me than me.

Thomas Day

geezerwithagrudge.blogspot.com

minnesotamotorcyclemonthly.com

2015 Brighton National Speed Trials

Words/Pix: Martin Haskell

I've commented before in TRD about the things that us Brits do as a hobby. Some play in bands, others dance, while some are consumed by playing with balls of different shapes and sizes.

But there are a great number of people who cram thousands of pounds worth of kit, machinery and tools into a trailer or a van and travel all over the country (and in some cases the world) in an effort to go a bit faster than everyone else.

Most don't succeed, but it doesn't stop them trying.

Then there is the need to choose where and how they do this; maybe on two, three, four or more wheels, sometimes on tarmac or cinders, mud or grass, often in a unique layout, frequently in an oval, and occasionally in a straight line.

The latter is true of Brighton National Speed Trials, a fairly unusual event in that a local authority seems to be happy to close off a public road and encourage people to beak the speed limit in pursuit of fun. Sorry, I meant 'engineering excellence'.

The event, thought by many to be Britain's oldest running motor race, traces its roots back 110 years to 1905, when it was known as 'Brighton Motor Trials', as speed wasn't really a factor in those days.

Indeed, less than 10 years earlier Walter

Arnold of East Peckham in Kent was the first person in the country to get nicked by the rozzers for exceeding the 2mph speed limit in towns by a heady 6mph. The police interceptors used a bicycle to apprehend the cad.

The general idea of the speed trials is that drivers and riders of various machines should try to cover a quarter of a mile from a standing start against the clock, in an effort to break the magical 10 second barrier. Top speed is also a factor.

But to focus on that alone would be a disservice to the wonderful characters, sights, sounds and smells of the paddock.

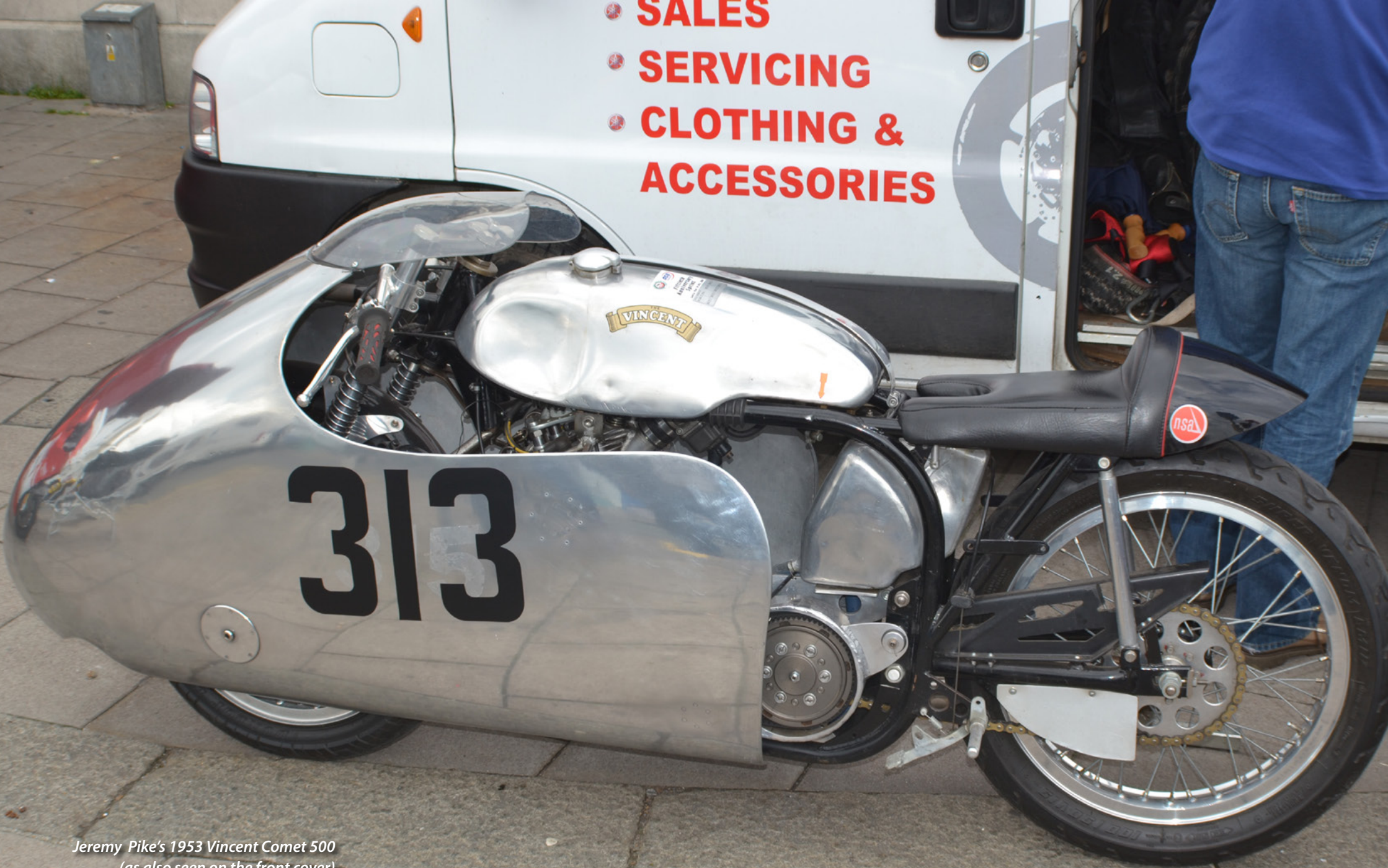
Wandering around between runs, it's easy to spot the machines that look quick, but it's just as much fun to observe the blithe spirit of the guys tinkering with machines that will provide more entertainment than awe, and before anyone objects, it was pretty well mostly guys.

Looking through the souvenir programme, I spotted a few girls' names on the list of car drivers, but for the bikes it was almost a totally male preserve with only Jayne Glover - riding a Triumph Daytona (11.18s) - representing the ladies.

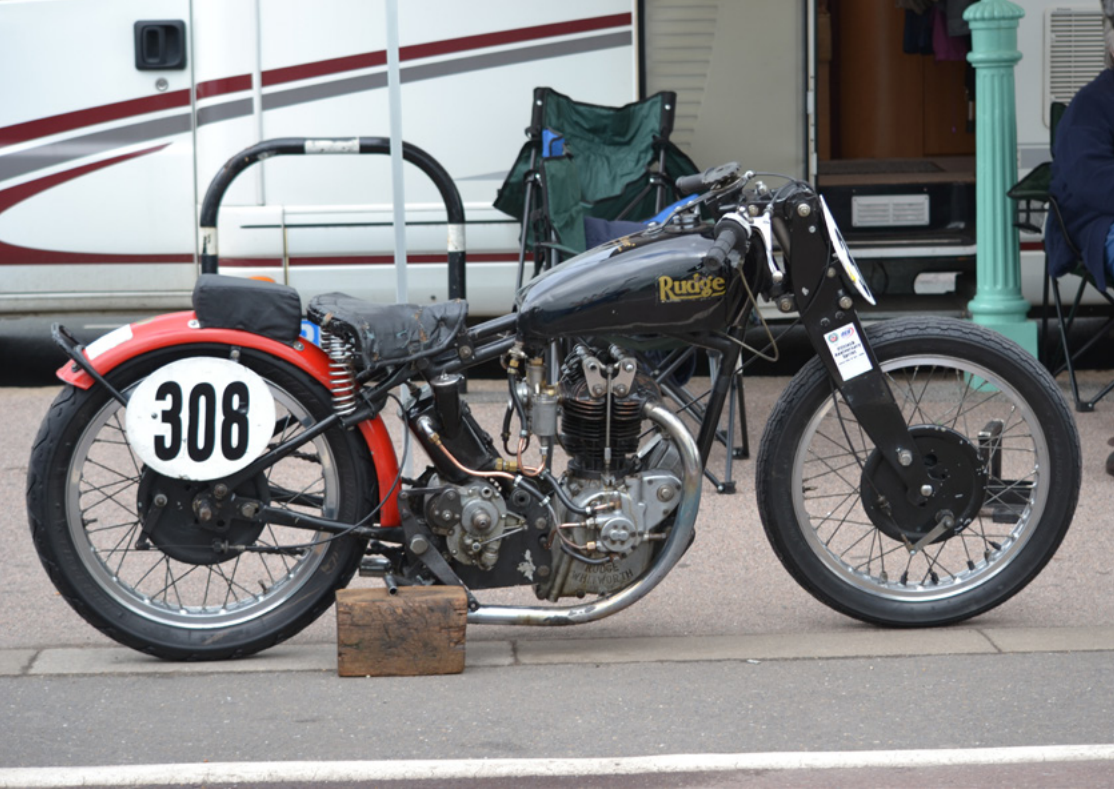
Among the machines that caught my eye were a bike that used to be a Honda CX650 Turbo, but gone was the 'white goods' bodywork, leaving a cool-looking café racer with exposed plumbing and a few bits and bobs that I didn't really recognise.

There was also a stretched out Ducati 916 Biposto, fitted with a 996SPS motor and a stretched Monster 900 swing arm sporting a long set of wheelie bars, while at the pointy end a pair of Monster 600 fork legs at an alarming rake sat astride an Aprilia RS125R front wheel.

continued on page 114



Jeremy Pike's 1953 Vincent Comet 500 (as also seen on the front cover)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87-year-old Frank Clarke and his '36 Brooklands Norton/JAP

Dave Glover's incredible Ducati 916 dragster - note the 'squish' on the rear tyre as it loads up under acceleration

The rider and owner Dave Glover had previously achieved a standing quarter of 9.9s at 144mph, but the best he would see at Brighton was 10.29 seconds. Maybe the tide was coming in or something.

While Dave's Duke sounded sweet and was by no means slow, there were a considerable number of machines on both two wheels and four that were either bouncing off the rev limiter or sounded as rough as a bag of nails.

Occasionally runs for both bikes and cars ended just past the start with a deathly silence, while others coughed and spluttered towards the finishing post, their high teens or low twenties times displayed for all to see on timing displays and a giant TV screen.

There also seemed to be a need for many of the riders and drivers to do a burn out just prior to the start, which was of course intended to warm the rear tyres and aid traction.

I can't say I really noticed that taking a few weeks'-worth of wear off your rubber improved times, but it certainly improved the spectacle, not that you could see much of it for a little while afterwards.

Among the super/turbo-charged low-slung streamlined and stretched-out machines, equal numbers of vintage singles, triples and twins also made fairly rapid progress towards Eastbourne, and mostly without making a song and dance about it, with a fair few riders of a similar age to their mounts.

In the paddock the support team facilities ranged from well-equipped motorhomes with awnings and a crew of liveried supporters to solitary souls perched on a camping stool in their leathers with a 3/16" ring spanner and a pair of long nose pliers in their hands.

I found the categories of entrants in the programme a little confusing.

Wearing number 25 was a British Racing Green Morgan three wheeler (see TRD 172 for a full test report) which was classified as a car, while further along the seafront a fantastic (street-legal) creation that looked like an unfortunate incident between a Honda Blackbird and a John Player Special F1 car was categorised among the motorcycle pages as a

'three wheeler'. Hmm.

Also in that category was David Woodard's lilac coloured 'Suzuki Superside' 1500cc kneeler (see page 111); but changes to the Brighton National Speed Trials rules and regulations dictated that passenger Darren Saunders' place this year was taken by a collection of lead weights, despite the pair of them having competed in previous years.

Speaking of previous years, I spotted 87-year-old competitor Frank Clarke topping up the oil tank on his relatively youthful 1936 Brooklands Norton/JAP (complete with a huge fishtail exhaust) with a beautiful-smelling drop of Castrol 'R'.

After a spot of bother on his first run when the JAP refused to start, Frank managed a perfectly respectable standing quarter of 18.01 seconds for the second run.

Mike Wade meanwhile was opening a biscuit tin full of spare clutch rings for his 1947 Ariel Red Hunter before achieved a best time of 16.29s, while just along the seafront David Harvey was making novel use of his paddock stand to lean his 1971 Honda CR350 (14.11s) on its side to adjust the timing (see page 110).

Two other machines to stand out were Martin Murray's 1970 Vespa 90 Super Sprint, which at a best time of 14.09 seconds made its way down the strip almost three seconds quicker than a 1967 Lambretta SX200 ridden by Max Aldous.

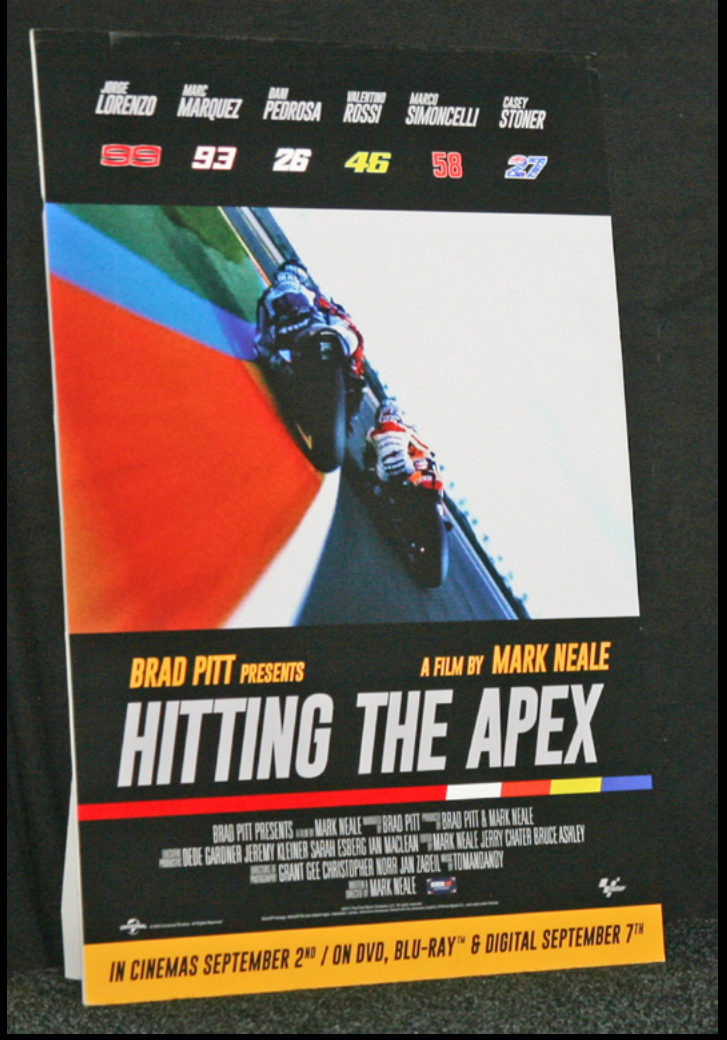
With a brace of turbocharged Hayabusas piloted by Craig Mallabone and Roger Simmons respectively topping the charts at 9.2 and 9.51 seconds for the quarter mile, there were plenty of riders present who knew that their machines would not be taking the top honours.

But from the buzz and generally relaxed atmosphere in the paddock, I got the feeling that this historic and well organised meeting was for many a good excuse to get their bikes and cars out to see what they could do, and to (in many cases) legally top the ton on the public highway.

The layout of Madeira Drive lends itself to this event, even with the mid-level terrace in a state of disrepair and closed to all and sundry, viewers up on the main road get a birds-eye view of the proceedings, while shelling out £15 for a programme gets you access to the paddock area and if you don't mind waiting for an hour or so, a decent view of the start line.

The next Brighton National Speed Trials takes place on Saturday 3rd September 2016, for further details and complete listings of competitors and results visit brightonandhovemotorclub.co.uk

Martin Haskell



HITTING THE APEX

Paul Blezard travelled up to Silverstone to see director Mark Neale's new film about the gods of MotoGP, which was premiered at the 2015 British Grand Prix.

Many readers will know of Mark Neale from his previous films about MotoGP, starting with *Faster* in 2003 and followed up by the much less well known *The Doctor, The Tornado and The Kentucky Kid* **in 2006. His last was *Fastest* back in 2011 (covered in TRD 168), which he made at the same time as *Charge!* about the first two electric TTs.**

All of the above four films were helped by being narrated by Ewan McGregor, whereas *Hitting The Apex* takes things to an even higher level in the Hollywood celebrity stakes since it is both narrated and co-produced by Brad Pitt, (of whom more later).

I really enjoyed *Fastest*, but *Hitting the Apex* is even better. It's a direct sequel, but covers more riders, in more depth, over a longer period of time. It looks at the personal history and the highs and lows of six MotoGP racers across the 2011, 2012 and 2013 seasons: Jorge Lorenzo, Dani Pedrosa, Casey Stoner, the old 'GOAT' Valentino Rossi, the young buck Marc Marquez and the maverick, controversial and tragically ill-fated Marco Simoncelli. Despite the fact that I watched most of the races of those three seasons I discovered lots of things I never knew before, both about the racing itself and about the riders' personal histories.

For example, I never realised that Casey Stoner was an Australian dirt supremo long before he ever went near a tarmac circuit – he once won 32 races, and and five championships in a single weekend – at the age of twelve! Nor did I know that Marc Marquez's MotoGP career would have ended before it even began if he had not had a successful eye operation following the Moto2 practice crash at Sepang which ended his 2012 season.

I learnt a new respect and admiration for Dani Pedrosa, as both a man and a rider. I knew he was the 'nearly man' of MotoGP of the past decade, in the same way that Randy Mamola was in the 1980s, and Kevin Schwantz might have been in the 1990s if Wayne Rainey hadn't had his career-ending accident in 1993, the year that Schwantz won. But whereas Mamola only ever won thirteen 500cc Grands Prix, although he was runner-up in the championship on four occasions, Dani Pedrosa has now won 26 MotoGP races and come second in the championship three times. When he clocked up 332 points in 2012, it was more than any rider has ever scored without winning the championship (taken that year by Lorenzo). Pedrosa's luck seems to have ended when he moved up to MotoGP in 2006, having won two 250cc championships in a row, and the 125s the year before.

I knew the diminutive Spaniard had had quite a few injuries, but when you see them all listed in Hitting the Apex, the catalogue of broken bones and other bodily damage practically fills the screen.

It's amazing he's won as many races as he has, and racked up so many points. There's no doubt that Pedrosa's child-like dimensions give him a triple advantage over his rivals, since his featherweight 51 kilos help with both acceleration and braking and his small body provides less aerodynamic drag, but as is pointed out in the film, there are disadvantages too, when it comes to wrestling MotoGP bikes left and right and hanging on to 240 horses. I only met the late great Mike Hailwood once but we had a discussion about whether or not little Bill Ivy was big enough to get the best out of a 500cc Grand Prix bike; Mike thought not, but 'little Bill' (125cc world champion in 1968, who died, tragically, in 1969, when the Jawa 350 he was riding seized at the Sachsenring) was no smaller than Dani Pedrosa, and in those

(L-R) Valentino Rossi, Dani Pedrosa, Jorge Lorenzo, Casey Stoner, and the late Marco Simoncelli during the 2010 season

days the 500cc GP bikes had less than half the power of today's MotoGP monsters; mind you, I still think there should be an overall minimum weight in MotoGP for bike and rider combined, as there is in Moto3. The most astonishing thing about Pedrosa, as shown in the film, is that he has emerged from all his trials and tribulations so sane, sanguine and well-grounded. After all he's been through, you could forgive him for being completely bitter and twisted.

Marco Simoncelli was at the other end of the MotoGP rider scale from Pedrosa, in both size and temperament. To call him 'larger than life' is a bit of a cliché, but it's true, as is the fact that he was bigger than most of his fellow MotoGP competitors and wasn't afraid to throw his weight around, often controversially, on the track. I always used to think that his hairstyle alone, along with the outsize helmet required to contain it, must have cost him a few milliseconds every lap. But you couldn't help liking the guy, for his undoubted skill on the track and his antics off it. Simoncelli's forceful riding style made him a controversial figure in the 250 class and he didn't change it when he arrived in MotoGP. It cost Simoncelli a ride-through penalty, and a lot of points, when he knocked Dani Pedrosa off at Le Mans in 2011; it cost Pedrosa a broken collar bone. We see the incident in *Hitting the Apex*, and while Simoncelli was at first defiant, it marked the start of a calming down in his riding style and he was genuinely contrite about knocking Jorge Lorenzo off at Assen a couple of months later. They both remounted to finish, but Lorenzo was understandably furious at the time.

I actually saw and photographed Simoncelli in action at the 2011 Sachsenring round and he looked smooth and fast. There's a really poignant moment in *Hitting the Apex* where Lorenzo talks about the fact that Simoncelli had changed his riding style after the Assen incident and seemed to be finding the key to riding smoothly and fast, just as he himself had done a few years earlier after some painful 'win it or bin it' antics in his first season of MotoGP.

There are many ironies about Marco Simoncelli's untimely death at Sepang in the penultimate race of 2011. He'd survived so many reckless crashes unscathed, yet was killed by a terrible combination of his own tenacity and bad luck. If only he'd let go of his No.58 Gresini Honda when he first lost control of it, he would've slid off to the outside of the bend and almost certainly survived unscathed. As it was, he fought it, the tyres somehow gripped and he bounced back into the path of Edwards and Rossi....and then his helmet was ripped off. A freak accident. As Colin Edwards says in the film, Simoncelli slid right out of his field of vision, and he was looking ahead when the bike and rider slid into him. Simoncelli's father reminds us that the Sepang circuit had been the place where he clinched the 250cc world championship in 2008 and the official MotoGP leaderboard abbreviation of his name, SIC, coincided with that of the Sepang International Circuit. I was astonished to see that there's a flame in his home town of Coriano which lights up every Sunday for precisely 58 seconds. With two poles and a second place to Stoner already under his belt, I don't think there's much doubt that Simoncelli would soon have won his first MotoGP. A terrible loss to the sport.

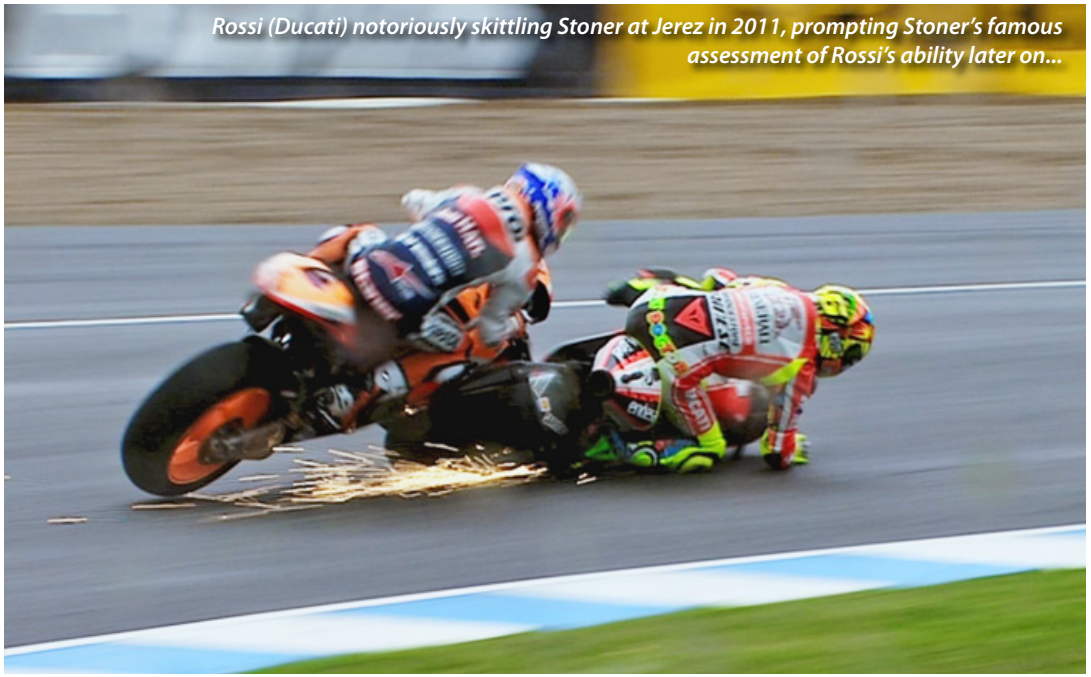
Casey Stoner retired from MotoGP of his own volition, when right at the top of his game. We already knew he was a completely different temperament from most of the two wheeled gladiators when he took himself out of the sport for several months in 2009 to get to the bottom of his chronic fatigue problem, eventually diagnosed as lactose intolerance (as related in *Fastest*). Not only did he come back to win his home Grand Prix at Phillip Island, but he was the only rider to win a MotoGP at Philip

2011: Stoner (now on the Honda) leading Lorenzo, Pedrosa and Andrea Dovizioso

Island in the whole 800cc era from 2007-2011. And of course he won Ducati's only MotoGP crown in 2007. No other rider seems to have been able to get to grips with the MotoGP Ducatis in the way that Stoner did since, not even Valentino Rossi.

Rossi of course famously moved from Yamaha to Ducati at the end of the 2010 season while Stoner went back to Honda. In *Hitting the Apex*, we see not only the notorious incident in which Rossi inadvertently took Stoner out at a wet Jerez early in the 2011 season (see right), but also the interesting aftermath. While Stoner was stranded at the trackside, Rossi remounted to finish an amazing 5th, but went straight to the Repsol Honda pit to apologise to Stoner at the end of the race, whereupon Stoner famously said 'Your ambition outweighed your talent'. In the film, Rossi admits that, with his helmet still on and earplugs still in place he didn't catch the barbed remark, while Stoner points out, (not unreasonably) that if you don't even have the grace to remove your helmet, then it's not much of an apology...

That little contretemps didn't stop Stoner from storming to his second world championship and he was well in contention for the 2012 championship until his crash in practice at Indianapolis. Despite tearing the ligaments in his ankle, Stoner still managed to finish fourth in the race, but then elected to have surgery on the ankle, which put him out of the next three races, and out of contention for the championship. I suspect that most MotoGP riders would have postponed the surgery until the end of the season, but Stoner had already announced, back in May, that he would be retiring at the end of the year. Whatever you think about Casey Stoner's personality, no-one can deny his breathtaking talent as he demonstrated emphatically with



Rossi (Ducati) notoriously skittling Stoner at Jerez in 2011, prompting Stoner's famous assessment of Rossi's ability later on...

2011 MotoGP World Champion Casey Stoner

his swansong win at Philip Island. I dare say Marco Simoncelli's death might have had some bearing on Stoner's decision, but I suspect that his retirement was more to do with the fact that, according to him, he wasn't enjoying his racing any more. With a beautiful wife, a young child and no need of the money, some would say that he has a more sensible perspective on life in general than most of his MotoGP rivals. It might surprise some of our older readers to realise that although Stoner was only 27 when he retired from MotoGP, Mike 'The Bike' Hailwood was no older when Honda's retirement from Grand Prix motorcycle racing in 1967 forced him to do the same. The difference is that I don't think we're ever likely to see Casey Stoner make a comeback to bike racing at the Isle of Man TT at the age of 38...

While 2011 was the year of Stoner's second MotoGP championship, 2012 was Jorge Lorenzo's. We'd already seen him snatch Rossi's crown in *Fastest*, with his first triumph in 2010. *Hitting the Apex* will certainly do no harm to the Spaniard's reputation. In addition to being indisputably the best rider in the world on his day, he comes across as a perceptive and thoughtful young man. He talks about the fact that it wasn't until he'd had several big crashes that he finally realised that he wasn't invincible and that he had to treat MotoGP bikes with a bit more respect – and fear – than hitherto, if he was going to win a championship. On his way to winning two in three years Lorenzo became a byword for high speed smoothness and precision, but in *Hitting the Apex* the most memorable sequence concerning Lorenzo is the one that covers his turbulent time during the 2013 Assen weekend. We see him just touch the white line in wet practice and get chucked over the bars at high speed; the accident didn't actually look too bad, but

Valentino Rossi and Jorge Lorenzo

he collected a broken left collar bone which everyone assumed would put him out of the race. Incredibly, Lorenzo flew to Barcelona and had the collar bone pinned the same day, then flew back in time to be passed fit for the morning warm-up less than 48 hours after the accident. Amazingly, he clenched his teeth through the pain to come 5th. As brave as a lion – Lorenzo el léon.

By this time of course there was a new and very quick kid on the block: Honda's replacement in the Repsol team for Casey Stoner, Marc Marquez. Already a champion in both 125cc and Moto2, he became the youngest ever winner of a premier class race when, having just turned twenty, he won in Texas in only his second ever MotoGP race. He also crashed a lot, but unlike poor Pedrosa, Marquez just seemed to bounce as if made of rubber. And he had the luck of the devil. You have to hold your breath in *Hitting the Apex* when you see his Mugello practice crash from several angles; at some 300kph it was one of the fastest get-offs ever recorded, and he missed the concrete barrier by inches, but was still fit to race. The following month he was flipped off his Repsol Honda like a rag doll in a practice accident at Assen which actually looked much worse than the one which broke Lorenzo's collarbone the day before, but he got away with little more than a severe shaking and a sore toe and bounced back to come second.

Contrast that with poor Dani Pedrosa. Both before and after Assen 2013 he was leading the championship, from the injured Lorenzo. Then at the next round, in Germany, he had a massive highside in practice which, in contrast to Marquez, broke his collarbone and put him out of the race. Pedrosa actually managed to come fifth at Laguna Seca before the break was properly diagnosed. But the cruellest luck came at Aragon when his impetuous young team-mate bounced off the back of his bike and left the track. Pedrosa looked to have got away unscathed until the next corner, when his Honda threw him over the high side as soon he opened the throttle. It turned out that Marquez had cut his traction control wire when he

MotoGP sensation Marc Marquez - how different would it have been if Casey Stoner hadn't retired the year before?

Nine-times (so far...) world champion Valentino Rossi - the GOAT?

made contact, rendering the 240bhp RC213V instantly unrideable. Meanwhile Marquez regained his composure, rejoined the track and promptly won the race, and a few weeks later, the championship!

In *Hitting the Apex* we get a close-up of the severed cable and of course Honda took steps to protect it better afterwards, but it was too late for Pedrosa's championship. That crash also brought home just how crucial the software is in taming the monstrous power of MotoGP motorcycles. Without it, even the 'brutal' two strokes of the 500cc era were purring pussies by comparison...

So which of the six riders haven't we discussed yet? Ah yes, Valentino Rossi. The greatest survivor of them all and almost certainly The Greatest Of All Time (hence, 'The GOAT'). As Mark Neale said after the screening of *Hitting the Apex*, Rossi has been at the top since before he made *Faster*, from the end of the 500cc two stroke era – his first premier class world championship was the last year of the 500s in 2001 – through the 990s, the 800s and back to the 1,000s. Four eras of Grand Prix racing! No-one has ever stayed at the top of motorcycle racing for so long. It still seems incredible that until he broke his leg at Mugello in 2010 Rossi had not missed a single Grand Prix. The nine times world champion just seems to have an unquenchable enthusiasm for the sport. Even after the 'dream team' of Ducati and Rossi turned out to be a marriage made in Dante's Inferno, Rossi hung in there. Even after his great friend Simoncelli died, freakishly, under his own front wheel, he came back for more. And when the second season with Ducati proved no more fruitful for him than the first, he was not too proud to go back to Yamaha, even if it meant playing second fiddle to the prince-turned-king Lorenzo. I didn't think it was possible, but if anything my respect for Valentino Rossi has increased after watching *Hitting the Apex*. One of the most fascinating revelations in the film is the way it demonstrates how much Rossi's riding style has changed over the years, but particularly since he returned to Yamaha. His whole stance on the bike is different. Intriguingly, Mark Neale told me that it was Lorenzo's dad who first brought his attention to Rossi's change of style, pointing it out in still photos "but then we had to find film to match his comments"!

As in *Fastest,* some of the most entertaining footage in the new documentary comes from the devoted Rossi fans in his home town of Tavullia, from the guy who runs the Rossi fan club to the hilarious pair of old priests. One gets the impression that everyone, the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker, could give you a blow-by-blow account of every single one of his races, and all his trials and tribulations with the Ducati. I thought it was telling that one of them says "Even when he was really down, he never bad-mouthed Ducati".

And even though, knowing the result, one has more than an inkling of what's coming, there's still a wonderful build-up, with on-track footage intercut with the simultaneous and then tumultuous scene in the local bar, as it erupts in ecstasy as Rossi wins at Assen in 2013 – his first victory since Sepang in 2010 when still with Yamaha at the end of 2010. Mark Neale told me that the in-bar footage was actually shot by 'Enrico the builder' on his mobile phone. "We still didn't have a deal to make the film then, but it meant people were relaxed in a way they wouldn't have been with a film crew in there. One of the priests reveals that he set the church bells ringing, in jubilation, and then went to the bar to celebrate and forgot all about them so their automatic system kept them tolling for hours!

The Pitt Connection

You might think, with his decade-long track record, that Mark Neale would have had no trouble finding the finance for *Hitting the Apex,* but you couldn't be more wrong. Mark admitted that if he hadn't managed to get Brad Pitt on board at a late stage in the proceedings, the film might not have been finished, or if it had, it would not have been nearly as good, for want of time and money. So how did he get Mr Angelina Jolie involved? Did he have a direct introduction? "No, I didn't know him at all, but I knew that I needed someone with real clout to get the film finished and to get it properly distributed. It's so hard dealing with people like Universal. I thought, "I need a really big powerful friend" so I just phoned his office, and emailed him and called again. It took a long time – two years from when I first wrote to him in April 2012. I didn't get an answer until August, but that was just to say that he was interested and 'to keep him in the loop'. He knew about *Fastest*, but he was very busy and I had to get a three-hour rough cut together to persuade him to actually come on board." However, once Pitt was on board, he was very 'hands on'. "It was really hard work. Brad wouldn't leave it alone until he was happy with it but it would not have been much good if I'd had to finish it without him. His involvement gave me six more months to work on the film."

At the Q&A session after the Silverstone screening Neale was keen to emphasise that Ewan McGregor, the narrator of all his previous bike racing films, had not fallen out of favour. "Ewan was great and Brad and I would both have been happy for Ewan to narrate again and Ewan is still a great supporter, but Brad got so

Producer Brad Pitt meets Rossi in the Yamaha garage


Colin Edwards (centre) at the film's Silverstone premiere


Hitting The Apex director Mark Neale (right) with commentator Gavin Emmett

involved, it made sense to have him narrate it, and Brad has helped to take it up another level, hopefully." Pitt's narration is fine, apart from his American pronunciation of chassis, which sounds very odd to a British ear (or a French one!).

Asked about the budget for *Hitting the Apex*, Neale's answer was illuminating. "Whatever the budget, it's never enough. We had a budget of a million dollars for *Faster* [back in 2003] and we had less than that for this one. But some of the technology has got much cheaper. For example, we had to spend a lot of money shooting slow motion on film for *Faster,* which was really expensive." Now it's all digital and superb high definition slow-mo comes as part of the Dorna package. Neale pointed out that there were fifty-four days of shooting (in addition to the practice and race footage) and five thousand hours of editing – "and it would have been nice to have more". Another thing which Neale was able to save money on was translation, since he did it all himself! Being fluent in French, Catalan and Spanish was a big advantage when he first got involved in Grand Prix and he's now good enough in Italian to translate the Tavullian dialect of Rossi's home town fans as well!

Colin Edwards was at the Silverstone première of *Hitting the Apex*, sitting in the front row of the audience and I thought afterwards that it must have been painful for him to see his involvement in Simoncelli's fatal accident replayed right in front of him. But at the end of the Q&A he led a round of applause for Mark Neale, which was great. Bearing in mind that the entire MotoGP 'circus' was set up in the Silverstone paddock only a few hundred metres from the screening I was surprised that so few of those directly involved with the sport actually bothered to turn up. There was just a handful of paddock bikes parked up outside and most of the audience were MotoGP fans rather than participants. I gathered that the riders had all been sent DVDs in advance, because Mark Neale said that Dani Pedrosa had described Hitting the Apex as 'educational'.

It occurred to me afterwards that Ben Spies, the Texan rider who was WSB champion at his first attempt in 2009, and winner of that 2011 Assen MotoGP in which Simoncelli unwittingly took out Lorenzo, was noticeable by his absence from the film. So I mentioned it to Mark Neale in an email and I think his reply is interesting:

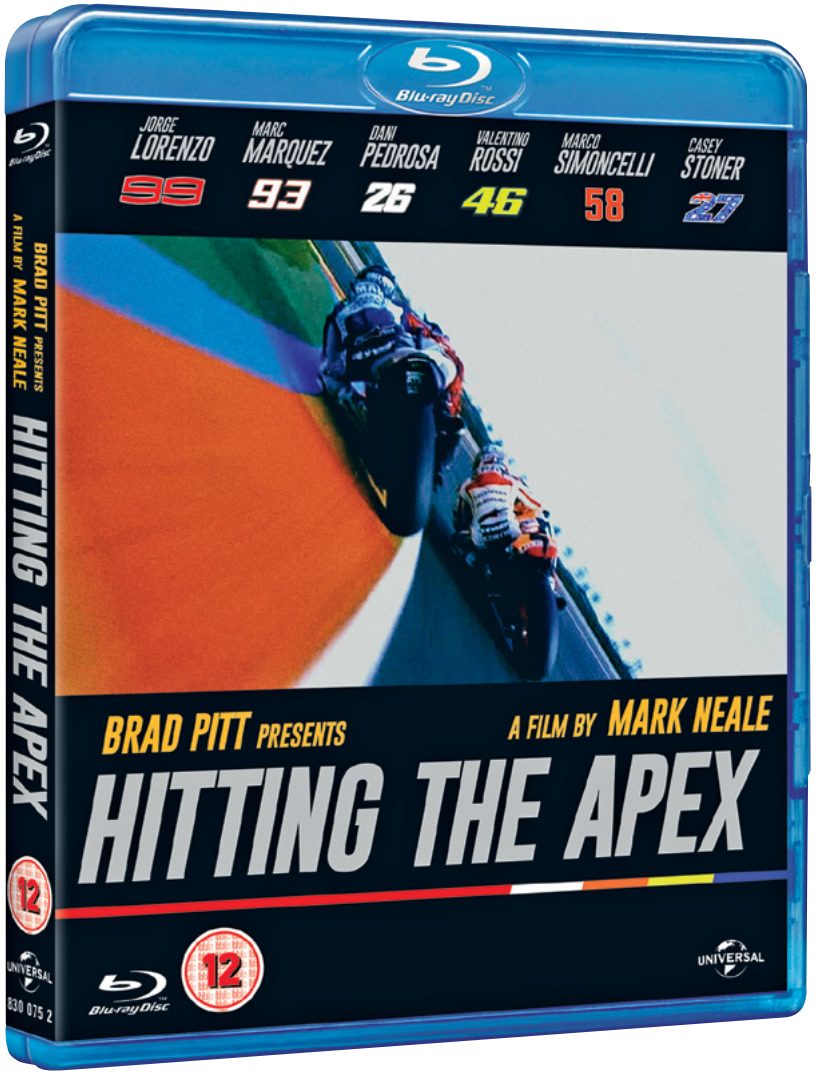
"Spies, Crutchlow, they could both have been in the film if their 2013 seasons had played out differently. We looked at including them, but this film does not claim to be an exhaustive or definitive account of the years covered: it's the story of six fighters – above

all of six characters whose stories connect strongly and drive the narrative powerfully. That's the thing: it had to work as a film. Spies was a special kind of outlier. He deserves a film of his own really – his career was so amazing and ended so awfully." [Spies was forced to retire due to injuries sustained in a series of MotoGP crashes].

I should add that another great thing about *Hitting the Apex* is the perspective you get not only from the riders, talking about themselves and their rivals, but also from the managers, technicians and commentators who work with them at close quarters every race weekend. And Dr Claudio Costa – the man who set up the Clinica Mobile long before Valentino Rossi was even born, and who finally retired in 2014, after 37 years. It's amazing to discover that Costa actually helped to save Geoff Duke's life when, as a 16 year old back in 1957, he dragged the British world champion and his Gilera clear of danger after he crashed at Imola! Costa's expert comments on the riders and their injuries adds another dimension to the film.

Dr Costa wasn't the only non-racer to retire from MotoGP in 2014. Watching *Hitting the Apex*, I was reminded how much I miss Toby Moody's expert commentary and comments on Eurosport. I don't really understand how BT Sport managed to hijack MotoGP coverage from the BBC/Eurosport dual arrangement of the previous decade, but the fact that even the British Grand Prix is no longer available to watch on free-to-air television is nothing short of a scandal in my opinion. I imagine that a big pile of money had something to do with it, but if I were a MotoGP sponsor I would be very unhappy about the dramatic loss in viewers since the BBC stopped showing MotoGP.

When we were chatting after the screening, Mark Neale said "No-one saw Marquez coming



so quickly. I thought Rossi would do something more like what he has done this year, but in 2013."

It somehow seems appropriate that only a few hours later Valentino was standing on the top step of the podium at Silverstone, having won his second race of the season and leading the championship. At the time of writing, he's still in front and looks like a good bet to win his tenth world title. I hope he does, but after watching *Hitting the Apex* I shall be cheering for Dani Pedrosa as never before.

And remember, even after twenty years in Grand Prix racing Rossi is still two years younger than Troy Bayliss was when he lifted the World Superbike title, and then beat the best in MotoGP a couple of weeks later when he stood in for the injured Sete Gibernau and won the last race of the 2006 season at Valencia on the 990cc Ducati. So Vale's probably got a good couple of seasons in him yet!

Hitting the Apex got a nationwide screening in 80 cinemas but for one night only. It's available on DVD of course, and Blu-ray and Digital HD. The film is over two hours long, but I wasn't bored for a second and I can't imagine that anyone with red blood in their veins would be either. But don't take my word for it, watch the excellent two minute trailer and decide for yourself if you'd like to see the whole thing. Hell, you can even buy it in a 3-film package with *Faster* and *Fastest*. Anyway, I urge you to see *Hitting the Apex* wherever you can, but the bigger the screen the better. You will laugh, you will cry, and you will hold your breath. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

Paul Blezard

hittingtheapexfilm.com/

View the two-minute trailer

MOTOLIT & CULTURE

by Jonathan Boorstein

The Bike from U.N.C.L.E.

I had no plans to see the summer's would-be hit, The Man from U.N.C.L.E. I'm tired of "reboots" that are ironic or irrelevant to their source materials. However I accidently caught the Comicon trailer and was delighted with the costumes and the motorcycle. The costumes were a little too spot-on 1960s – but then again they were back in the 60s in this sort of film as well. As for the motorcycle, it's a Metisse Hammer MK3 Scrambler, and I wanted to see more of it.

The conceit of director Guy Ritchie is to reboot a television spy series from the 1960s as if it were a European spy film from the 1960s. Joanna Johnston's costume design is fantastic – more *Vogue Italia* than Carnaby Street for the women and more Milan than Savile Row for the men. Oliver Scholl's production design has a wicked range and humor. Daniel Pemberton's derivative score is also pitch perfect for the period. Toss in some good cinematography and some late 60s/early 70s split-screen editing and you have an homage to European trash cinema: in this case, the high-style low-budget thriller. The preoccupation with style keeps the film loose and louche: elegant, entertaining, and so-so. Ritchie never misses the target, but rarely hits the bull's eye. The film keeps moving even when it fumbles.

The script concocted by Ritchie and Lionel Wigram makes the movie more a buddy comedy between Napoleon Solo (Henry Cavill) and Illya Kuryakin (Armie Hammer) than a typical spy caper against the machinations of T.H.R.U.S.H. that was the plot of any episode of the TV series. The McGuffin for how Solo and Kuryakin met and came to work for the nascent U.N.C.L.E. is a small atom bomb built by some not-so-former German Nazis and Italian fascists.

Solo is now an art thief turned CIA operative to avoid serving a long prison term (see another classic 1960s TV spy series: *It Takes a Thief*), though he retains his taste for women and well-tailored suits. Kuryakin is now a KGB strong man given to psychotic fits and an upmarket working-class wardrobe, rather than being an enigmatic European with black turtlenecks, grey suits, and long blond hair. But he does get to ride the Metisse MK3 Scrambler.

Things that work more than balance the things that don't. Characters who speak in foreign languages, speak in that language. English subtitles are provided. The opening sequence – probably the best part of the film – in which Solo has to help the daughter of a Nazi rocket scientist from East Berlin escape in the hopes that she will lead him to the villains and their atom bomb mixes film noir with early Bond with Trabants rather than Aston Martins. It also provide the "meet cute" for Solo and Kuryakin who is trying to stop them. For those who find the concept of a high-speed chase with a Trabant hysterically funny, other period vehicles include a Ferrari, a Jaguar D-Type, and a proper Aston Martin DB MKIII (what James Bond drove in the novel, *Goldfinger*).

There's a neat visual gag about discussing international secrets in a public place. And Solo sitting in a cab of a truck enjoying a sandwich and some wine while Kuryakin is chased by their mutual enemies has comic charm and the aural in-joke of the original iconic *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* theme being played on the radio. There is a funny bit of business about what Solo does before some knock-out drops take effect. Funnier still is a torture scene featuring a not-so-repentant Nazi and an electric chair with wonky wiring. The final commando raid and chase scene is fast, quiet, well-edited, and features the Metisse Scrambler along with a neat dune buggy.

One of the major things that don't work is showing a scene twice. Ritchie will either repeat the scene from another angle to show what he thinks the audience missed (usually clear from the action or the dialogue) or first show the scene missing a key word or phrase and then again with the line included. This nervous tic not only is annoying in itself, but also substitutes pointless surprise for suspense.

Right: actor Armie Hammer liked the Metisse Scrambler he rode in the film so much he bought one straight from the factory - seen here on the right with Metisse's Gerry Lisi.
Metisse are now taking orders for this version of the Scrambler called the 'Hammer MKIII' - more info at their website here.

Worse, it undermines Alicia Vikander's performance and purpose in the plot.

Solo and Kuryakin are both under orders to kill each other if necessary, but with the exception of a fist fight in a pissoir, little, if anything, is made of that, squandering an opportunity to ramp up the stakes as well as the suspense. The homoerotic subtext is upfront and unfunny, particularly in the pissoir. The buddy-buddy chemistry never takes off; the audience accepts it rather than believes it. Instead there are two pretty boys striking poses and exchanging attitudes. It also makes the resolution of the atom bomb secrets a non sequitur. There are no character arcs that would lead to that resolution – or any other for that matter.

Hugh Grant all but steals, if not saves, the film with an amused avuncular authority as Alexander Waverly. Stopping him is Elizabeth Debicki as the villainess with the evocative name of Victoria Vinciguerra (well, evocative for those of us who remember our Latin or Italian). She is playful, purposeful, and poisonous. Vikander is sexy, sensible, and secretive despite Ritchie's best efforts to keep her down.

Neither Cavill nor Hammer are as good. Cavill does better, with a prissy delivery that conveys something of someone who would rather be doing something else, but will enjoy what he is doing for what he can get out of it. To be fair, his American accent sounds less constipated than it did in *Superman*. As for Hammer, he does a good job riding the Metisse.

The Metisse itself figures in the final off-road chase sequence involving a jeep and a dune buggy as well as the motorcycle. It's a mixture of live action, tiled stills, and CGI, keeping the view on the action and making clear where the different parts of the chase are in respect to other parts.

Hammer, who has been riding dirt bikes since he was a boy, did as many of his own stunts as he was allowed. Whether the other stunts were executed by a stunt double or a digital double is not clear. Both the Metisse and the dune buggy are consistent with the era, but are not exactly authentic to that era. As for the Metisse – a marque best-known as a favorite of Steve McQueen – it features a fully reconditioned original 650cc T6 Triumph engine, a reconditioned original Triumph four-speed transmission, a BSA drum brake, and twin upswept chrome exhaust pipes with bandaged heat shields. Metisse is building a limited batch of 300 for those as impressed with the results as Hammer himself. The marque's website states he now owns and rides one (see previous pages).

Toward the end of the film, Waverly says "For a special agent, you're not having a very special day, are you?" Somehow we didn't get a very special film either.

Jonathan Boorstein

BITZ

Garmin Zumo 390LM Satnav

Review: Martin Haskell

I love a good satnav, and by and large the Garmin Zumo 390LM – "designed by bikers for bikers"- is a good one.

I'll avoid the temptation to end this review there, and instead state the obvious:

You've got to want one. Most smart phones have some kind of satnav device built in, mine (on a Moto G2) has Google maps which will work on a voice command, and has traffic updates and detours – just so long as you have a signal, your battery can take the strain and you can bear the roaming fees if you're in foreign parts.

So once you've established that you want a satnav, indeed a motorcycle satnav, the pocket sized Zumo comes in a rugged plastic case that looks, well, 'rugged'.

The sunlight friendly 4.3" touchscreen can be prodded while you're wearing gloves and is waterproof (to IPX7 – whatever that means), although it has a speaker on the back so if you have it in an exposed position it might end up sounding like a dalek in a heavy downpour.

Luckily it also has Bluetooth, so you can listen to the commands in private in your helmet without showing everyone that you don't know where you're going.

Being too tight to buy a fully fledged helmet Bluetooth thingy (especially as the Zumo was on loan) I shelled out a tenner for a Mocreo Molink Clipper and used my iPod ear buds, but the sound quality was reminiscent of a 1970s transistor radio. This seems to have been down to the Garmin, as my phone sounds crystal clear through the same device.

In the Zumo's box you get a few yards of wiring for both bike and car, a simple but functional car suction mount and a RAM mount to enable you to fit it to most bikes with a little imagination.

You will need an intermediate 'Meccano' level of mechanical skill to fit it.

As the name would suggest, a RAM mount – for the uninitiated - consists of two balls of different sizes (quite common I'm told) and a bit in the middle which comes in different lengths, which is also quite common. Mine is a medium length, which works for me.

As my 2003 BMW R1100S doesn't have any available exposed handlebar I clamped it onto my mirror arm, after wrapping a piece of mountain bike inner tube round it first. My son will kill me when he finds out.

The instructions recommend hard wiring the fused power lead to the battery, although I wired mine into a BMW accessory plug, which I was later glad of.

The Zumo clips into a cradle on the mount and picks up power via two tiny studs on the back, but there is no security tether, so when things get a bit bumpy there is always the worry that it might fall off and get run over by a passing steam roller. It's tough, but I suspect it's not that tough.

If you're using it in a 'cage' a cigarette lighter lead plugs into a small USB port on the back.

The bottom of the unit also has a 3.5mm jack socket and a slot for a micro SD card for extra memory.

This satnav has its good points as well as a few bad ones; on the good side it tells you the speed limits on most roads, as well as your speed. When you enter a stretch of road that plays host to either fixed or mobile speed cameras you get a bong. Not that sort of bong.

It also bongs if you exceed the speed limit, but if you like to live dangerously I believe you can turn that feature off.

There are a choice of route options - i.e. fast or curvy roads, off road and shorter distance. The English voice commands are unsurprisingly delivered in three English voices, 'Kate', a slightly bossy female newsreader, 'Emily' - a mature Felicity Kendal soundalike, and 'James' - who sounds a bit like the late Viv Stanshall on Tubular Bells.

Inputting your destination can be a bit clunky, to facilitate the 'glove' facility the letters are grouped into sections of the alphabet, which tests your memory of English lessons at primary school, but once you've put the details in you can go back into the memory to recall addresses.

Like every other satnav I've used, it has the slightly annoying and sometimes confusing habit of instructing you to turn right or left at bends, but at least if you miss a turning it doesn't keep babbling on about 'route recalculation' like the one fitted to the Harley I rode to Seville and back in Issue 189 of TRD.

There are various user friendly accessories you can buy for your Garmin Zumo 390LM, like tyre pressure sensors, a traffic app to avoid the jams and for those who don't have a diary or eyes it can tell you when to clean your chain (what's a chain?) get new tyres and change your spark plugs. It will even tell you when

Martin's mirror mount (note the cutting-edge vibration damping material)

you need to refuel, if you don't know how to operate a trip counter.

All good fun if you're into that sort of thing, but for me the best feature was its innate ability to tell me where to go, which is always handy for a satnav.

Importantly, it passed the 'Barbican Test'. This is a simple way of telling you whether your satnav is any good or not, as every other one I've used goes into meltdown as soon as you get to Appold Street, (in London) but the Garmin easily took us straight to the car park entrance.

The 390LM did have one or two wobbles though. One morning I set off only to hear a run through of the full repertoire of voice commands. Of course, I turned it off and turned it on again and it was fine.

The Garmin can be removed from the mount in a split second, which is a bit worrying if you're in the Wild Bean Café paying for your petrol, and the RAM mount clamp is also vulnerable to theft when the bike is parked; all you need to do is loosen the large plastic knob and the clamp is yours. I think if I was keeping it I'd swap that for a Nyloc nut. It could also do with a plug in the wire near the head mount to allow you to remove it.

The downside of hard wiring this unit to your bike is that you have to make sure you switch it off, likewise as soon as you clip it to the mount it switches on automatically, and however inept you are at navigating nobody needs a satnav ALL the time.

As mentioned, I plugged mine in via my accessory socket, which came in handy late one Saturday night after I'd been to the Adventure Travel Film Festival at Mill Hill during the day, and then a on to gig at King's Place in King's Cross that night.

After the gig had finished I headed towards

Old Street filtering in stop start traffic, and no doubt inspired by the thrill seekers at the film festival my bike just died. I tried pressing the starter but I just got that clicking that told me that my new battery had given up the ghost.

My bike has electric brake servos, and at tick over, with lights on, constant use of the brakes and the satnav drawing power straight from the battery the alternator clearly couldn't cope.

After pushing the bike between black cabs, pizza scooters and boy racers I tried calling my recovery provider, but as they wouldn't be able to get to me for at least an hour and a half I unplugged the power lead and sat on the kerb pondering what to do while stranded in Central London.

Eventually the battery had recovered enough to crank the engine and I was back in business. The Zumo got me home with its own battery power, but I can't help feeling that if I'd hard wired it I'd still be sitting there waiting for a van.

So there it is, it works well and does exactly what it says on the box. You get lifetime maps, and a USB lead so you can update it via the Garmin website. All for an average retail price of £250. If you want one, it's probably one of the best, but unless you're totally confident of your bike's ability to charge it, fit some sort of switch in the power lead.

Martin Haskell

Hard-wiring it in on a R1100S means doing this...

THE DETAILS

Garmin Zumo 390LM

Dimensions: 13x9.4x3 cm.
Display size: 9.4x5.6 cm (10.9 cm diagonal)
Screen res: 480x272 pixels (WQVGA colour TFT with white backlight)
Weight: 270 g
Battery: lithium-ion rechargeable.
Expected battery life: up to 7 hours.
Water Rating: IPX7 ["Withstands incidental exposure to water of up to 1 metre for up to 30 minutes" - in other words, it's rain-proof. Good job in this country!]

Other features include:
Preloaded street maps with lifetime map updates
Built-in memory: internal solid state
Accepts data cards and microSD™ card (not included)
Custom points of interest.
Waypoints/favourites/locations
Trip planner and trip log
Tyre pressure monitor system available with individual sensors sold separately
Twisty roads routing: yes
External power supplied to device power cable should be capable of up 12 V (typical) and up to 1A. Zūmo device power consumption is 5 V/2A..

RRP: £349.99
See Garmin UK's website for further info.

Our thanks to Natasha Winslade @ Stature PR for arranging the review sample.

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