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From the editor...

The great novelist John Updike had a respected side-gig as a literary critic. He issued a series of guidelines to aspiring critics, one of which was 'do not accept for review a book you are predisposed to dislike'.

He was referring to personal enmity between authors, but there is a direct corollary in our culture's undercurrent of tribal tendencies and its obsession with labelling and compartmentalisation - as much as any other facet of humanity - and consequently our inclination to dismiss any bike that isn't like ours. *All [insert as applicable] are shit and all their riders are [insert as applicable] and look like [insert as applicable]*. You know what I mean because you've done it. We all have.

The problem for people who get given bikes to review (which is actually a good problem to have, let's face it), is to set aside all prejudices and 'fully accept for review a bike you are predisposed to dislike'. The risk is that you might actually end up liking the damn thing and as a result your entire identity will be shattered.

This is the reason why this issue features a review of a 'full dresser' Indian Chief Vintage, which Martin borrowed for the Distinguished Gentleman's Ride back in September. The reason why we're reviewing 'a bike like that' (see what I did there?) is to bust myths, demolish preconceptions and reprogram your source code. As a result of reading Martin's review of the Chief, even this lover of high-performance premium exotica is now putting words like 'Indian' or 'Harley-Davidson' into certain online auction sites instead of the number 916.

The great master Ogri once said: 'Any bike is better than no bike at all'.

* * *

Earlier this year, The New York Times started developing the means to replace its newsroom staff with robots; that is, news-generating algorithms that, upon being fed with the necessary keywords (sex, death, money etc.) can churn out the ideal, perfectly-formed, succinct news story according to the strict template that any student of journalism will have had rammed down their throat.

I look at the mainstream motorcycle press in this country and I wonder if that hasn't already happened. Open any of them from month-to-month and it's the same, safe, seasonally-repetitive content. Part of the problem is the lack of imagination on the part of an industry that refuses to innovate and, certainly this year, limits progress to either the new placement of nuts and bolts, or *in extremis,* an engine rebore. NB: this inertia is embodied in the rise of the custom scene as a response, which is just an evolution of the inherent desire in all of us to personalise our ride (but is nevertheless one of the 'tribes' that I refer to above).

The other part of the mainstream's problem is the fear of having their freebie gravy train shut off by a marketing sector that tries to manufacture a bottom line out of a value system that cannot be quantified on a balance sheet.

On the other hand, we're here to assure you that there are still islands of quality content out there that look deeper than the badge on the fairing and look further than the 0-60 time.

The mainstream is to moto-journalism what McDonalds is to cuisine. We on the other hand are like that righteous fry-up from a proper cafe that you ride to and that recognises you when you walk in, and that serves no-nonsense real grub that tastes so much better because there is no template involved.

I've said it before in this column: more than anything else, motorcycles are a vehicle for human interaction and creativity. In this issue you'll find more examples of this truth than ever, from the ability to see potential in a pile of scrap metal, to the power of the imagination to turn that metal into examples of pure craftsmanship that no production line can emulate. Beyond that, we also document how motorcycles were a vehicle for Murray Hambro's incredible display of will in the face of life-changing adversity, which is an example to us all.

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THE BOY BIKER

"RUMBLING ONWARDS..."

In my little world (London) lately, I have noticed a larger than usual amount of people riding tricked-up quad, 'ped and motocross bikes on the roads. At first I didn't give it a second thought, just people on bikes, until I dug a little deeper and discovered a whole new world of riders.

Through friends I started to uncover a world of road riding previously unknown to me. I'm not condoning or moaning about the following findings, just presenting the case for the wider bike world to digest.

These lads and lasses use car parks and industrial estates to practise their stunting. Wheelies, burnouts, stoppies and the like are honed and polished until they are done with pinpoint precision and accuracy. All friendly and open to most, these unarranged practice sessions happen the length and breadth of the country on evenings and weekends. You just need to be in the right Whatsapp groups to know where and when to be.

With many smaller groups coming together there are fractions and splinter groups all out to get a name for themelves. Some have kicked up a stink by taking these tricks out onto public roads which has tarred lots with a very shitty brush. "Dangerous, hooligans, a hazard" are just some of the comments I've heard. Opinions from within these groups range from; let people do what they want to do for fun, hand out tough retribution to those road riding illegally, only include those who are sensible and legal.. Everyone seems to have a different view on it. Old school bikers seem to view "UK Bike Life" and other groups as a threat to the image of two wheels.

I don't see it as quite so black and white. These guys are expressing themselves creatively and enjoying being part of a movement.

I've had the resources and help to go and do trail and green lane riding since I was on L-plates. It takes a lot of foresight for an inner city lad to spend a small fortune going and getting their bike muddy. Much easier to take it to an industrial estate in outer London and enjoy a day mucking about on one wheel.

These groups are getting a fair bit of media attention, with large rideouts on Halloween getting national news coverage and VICE doing a short documentary on them last year.

Let's not get confused here with kids on stolen pizza bikes which have been the plague of housing estates for years. We are talking dedicated, through-and-through riders. These people put massive amounts of money and effort into their bikes and their sport. They ride well equipped and well maintained bikes, proud to be part of a movement. The rockers or mods of todays generation, bike life is literally life.

The few police I've spoken to about the subject all seem to take a similar view. They hope the craze will pass and die out. They cannot chase riders, particularly if they aren't wearing a helmet. And a recent death following a police incident has put most traffic officers on tenterhooks.

Watch this space, I for one cannot see this "fizzling out". Riding is in the blood. Have any of you ever simply got bored of being on your bike and jacked it in..? Didn't think so.

Enough about that, I don't subscribe to that culture. I'll leave that to my colleague Kyane on his 12-something-cc gilly'.

I don't fit into it, I prefer lone ranger rides firmly on the tarmac to clear the mind, plus I can't do wheelies. I like to stick to riding with known quantities.

The autumn has brought on a host of off road events. Finally passing my driving test and getting a van has opened up a world of muddy Sundays and suddenly I find myself in the midst of another different bike culture I had no idea existed, those who spend their weekends getting totally out of breath and bashed up in the name of fun. The enduro crowd are helpful and friendly at best and downright evil at worst. Get stuck for too long and you will become traction for the guy behind you. It's tough. It ruins my body for a good few days after, but every time I manage to blast a section without wobbling off or needing a foot to balance, I grin to myself and think: would I rather be at home watching the EastEnders omnibus?? Would. I. Fuck.

I guess what I'm getting at here is that we ought to be more open to the ways other riders get their kicks. Some plan meticulously and embark on mammoth journeys of discovery, some get stuck in the mud, some blast around the M25 at 3am. And some, the next generation, which we so desperately need if we are to keep riding and the associated culture alive, prefer to lark about on the back wheel in facemasks.

Don't feel threatened. Don't share your negative views. Just nod and remember that you too ride for the love. Because let's not forget, only a biker knows why a dog sticks its head out of the car window.

Until next time. Stay happy and keep up the comradery that makes riding the sacred and blessed art that it is.

The Boy Biker

RIDERS' LIVES

Matt Bardock

What was your first motorcycling experience?

Riding (sat in front of my Dad) on a monkey bike in about 1974 on an old tank range. I was hooked from that moment on.

What is your current bike?

I have a few, a 1966 T120TT Special Triumph Bonneville, a 1998 Yamaha R1 carb version and a 1979 BMW R100 flat tracker built by Kevil's Speed Shop [see page xx - Ed].

What bike would you most like to own or ride?

I love some of the Roland Sands creations but on balance it's either a Kenny Roberts TZ750 flat-tracker (and I'm a Sheene fan) or the JPS rotary Norton as ridden by Steve Hislop, Steve Spray, Trevor Nation and Ron Haslam.

What was your hairiest moment on a bike?

I've had a few but the latest was a big crash on the A38 on the way to Devon. I hit a block of wood in the centre of my lane through a roadwork section and was pinged over the front at 50mph. I was lucky to get away with some smashed-up kit and a swollen ankle. My Z1000 was a write-off though.

What was your most memorable ride?

Thats a hard one. I've had some great rides with the TRF over the years on my old KTM, but probably riding through the mountains in Spain/Portugal a few years back, there were amazing sunsets and some superb roads.

What would be the ideal soundtrack to the above?

Baba O'Riley by The Who - great for any ride.

What is the best thing about motorcycling?

The freedom and the fact it forces you to be in the moment.

What is the worst thing about motorcycling?

Driving standards are generally much worse and people never cease to amaze me as to the lack of awareness regarding bikes. Riding in London is just about staying alive sometimes.

Name an improvement you'd like to see for the next generation?

Every car driver should be made to do a CBT in the rain in February. Then they may get the idea.

How would you like to be remembered?

With a smile.

Not Enough Indians

2015 Indian Chief Vintage

Words/pics: Martin Haskell

September is my favourite month of the year; misty mornings giving way to fine autumn days, not too hot, not too cold, and with the leaves on the trees just starting to acquire those beautiful fall colours.

The end of the month is also when the Distinguished Gentleman's Ride takes place in cities around the world.

Fortunately, since its inception the London ride has seen favourable weather, but this year it was touch and go - just a few days earlier it was chilly, wet and windy.

Unfortunately this was the day I chose to collect my bike for this year's ride, 160 miles away in Birmingham; the magnificent Indian Chief Vintage.

By the time I got to Brum however, the clouds had parted and given way to blue sky, so I caught my first glimpse of the bike bathed in glorious sunshine, flanked by an Indian Scout and a fully equipped Roadmaster.

I've ridden an Indian Chief before, many years ago. About 50 in fact.

That one also had white wall tyres, tassels, a big screen, footboards, fully valanced mudguards and an Indian Chief's head on the front mudguard.

But back in those halcyon days I didn't have a lot of choice in where I was going, what with it being bolted to a roundabout at Dreamland Amusement Park in Margate, South East England.

It was probably my first encounter with a motorcycle, notwithstanding the fact that it didn't have a working engine, but it clearly made a lasting impression on me, as I still remember it to this day.

And the 2015 Indian Chief Vintage still has the same classic looks as that little replica I sat on as a child, but the one inescapable difference is the size.

We're all used to the phrase 'big bike', which in my experience largely depends on what your mates are riding, but generally speaking it always meant something with a higher cubic capacity than a 500.

Well, with the Indian Chief Vintage the displacement is certainly reaching towards the top end of the scale with its 1,811cc 'Thunder Stroke 111' air cooled 49° V twin engine, likewise the rest of the bike is similarly larger than life.

Despite the fact that this bike's overall length is creeping towards nine feet, while the wheelbase is a whisker under six feet, I felt right at home sitting 'in' the Indian.

The 'wet' weight of 379kg disappeared as soon as the wheels started turning, and while I'd hate to have to either pick it up or push it up a slope, the Chief felt surprisingly nimble as I made my way back towards the A5 for the journey south.

The huge gently curved screen created cocoon of calm behind it, whilst generating a modest vacuum that tried to pull your upper body forwards. But even with a few heavy showers along the way, the screen - aided by the Perspex 'elements' fitted to the outside of the thick fork legs - kept me almost completely dry, notwithstanding the fact that road spray from the hugely valanced mudguards was almost non-existent.

One unfortunate side effect of the screen however was that on single carriageway roads trucks and buses travelling in the opposite direction created a very noticeable shockwave as the turbulence hit the front of the bike, but after this had happened a few times I was prepared for it. At times on the motorway the steering also felt a little vague, but it was quite a windy day.

As you look through the screen rather than over it, heavy rain, sleet or snow could potentially be a problem, but I can't really imagine anyone riding a bike like the Chief during such weather conditions. And even if you had to, two little levers enable you to take the screen off in about five seconds, which is great as long as you've got somewhere safe to store it.

The bike Indian Motorcycles loaned me had been fitted with a Stage 1 exhaust system complete with 'fishtail' ends sticking way out behind the bike, along with an aftermarket air filter to allow the engine to breath more freely, thus apparently unleashing a few extra horses. The sound was glorious, a low but noticeable burble that turned into an extremely vocal roar when you opened the taps.

The stylists have really gone to town on this machine. I was told that Polaris, who bought The Indian Motorcycle Company from its London-based Stellican owners in 2011 had an undertaking to make the bike look as much like the 1940s Indian Chief as possible, right down to the rocker covers being designed to resemble cooling fins, along with the tan leather tasselled saddle and pannier bags. Large models feature the legendary illuminated 'war bonnet' Indian head on the front fender.

And while the overall design of the modern bike hasn't changed massively from the previous incumbents' version, the Polaris engine is all new, replacing the S&S derived unit fitted to the earlier model.

The bike was painted in an extremely tasteful combination of pale willow green and ivory, with a classy gold pinstripe separating the contrasting colours on the teardrop tank. The finish and general build quality was absolutely outstanding.

As if there wasn't enough shiny stuff on the standard model, this bike had been fitted with extra chrome bits and pieces, including teardrop shaped engraved mirrors, a pair of handlebar mounted Bluetooth speakers, footboard inserts and brake calliper covers.

The wheels were sixty spoke chromed 16 inchers, riding on fat white-walled Dunlop American Elite tyres.

Indian's Steve Cain had told me that this bike was a real head-turner and he wasn't wrong.

As I rode south through Weedon I'm not quite sure whether it was the loud exhaust note, the acres of chrome or the sheer size of the bike, but everyone was looking at me as I caused a breach of the peace.

I stopped for petrol and a coffee in Milton Keynes and three lads in the Wild Bean Cafe asked if it was my bike on the forecourt. Not wanting to go into the whys-and-wherefores about who it actually belonged to I said yes, and for the first of many occasions I was asked what sort of Harley it was.

I explained that it was an Indian and they seemed confused. I was asked if I'd converted it myself, so I told them that Indian were the original American motorcycle manufacturer, starting two years before Arthur Davidson joined forces with William S. Harley.

But while the origins of H-D's name are blindingly obvious, the 'Indian' moniker is a little less straightforward.

It was coined 118 years ago, when bicycle makers 'The Hendee Manufacturing Company' started branding their models 'Silver King', 'Silver Queen' and 'American Indian'. The latter proved so popular that the usually abbreviated name eventually became the company's primary brand name.

Indian motorcycles were first created in

1901 when founder George M. Hendee hired engineer Oscar Hedstrom to build small gasoline engines to be fitted in bikes; this took place in Middletown, Connecticut, about 40 miles from Hendee's base in Springfield, Massachusetts.

The manufacture of the bike engines was later contracted out to the Aurora [Illinois] Automatic Machinery Co., with the bike proving so successful it won an endurance race from Boston to New York City - a distance of about 220 miles. This may seem like a piddling amount these days, but we're talking 1902 here, so it was quite an achievement in the grand scheme of things.

The following year the company started manufacturing its trademark V-twin engine, and just ten years after the company's inception, Indian riders took all three podium places at the 1911 Isle of Man Senior TT.

I could go on for ages (I usually do) about the Indian 4, and all the other changes, developments, ups and downs in Indian's long and colorful (sic) history, but the best thing you can do is pay a visit to the Indian Motorcycle Company's website and have a look at their timeline.

Meanwhile, back to the future and on a now dry and sunny M25 I was filmed by no less than three car passengers on their phones, and stopping at traffic lights nearer home, a chap in a Transit wound his window down and told me that I had a lovely bike.

On arriving home, my wife - who had pronounced the Harley-Davidson Road Glide Special ugly (remember? The one I rode across Spain in issue 189 of TRD. What? You haven't read it???) - told me that the Indian was a beautiful bike. In fact it seemed to appeal to women, who obviously found the tasteful colour scheme appealing.

The next challenge for me was to try and get this leviathan into my garage, not quite as straightforward as it might sound, as my garage doors are almost a foot higher that the paved area outside, necessitating a sturdy ramp up and over the step outside.

I was concerned that the six foot wheelbase and limited ground clearance wouldn't clear the top of the ramp. Luckily by then my son, who had turned up to have a look at the bike guided me in; I didn't fancy getting stuck halfway.

As it happened, the bike made it up the ramp with an inch or two to spare, so I reversed it out again and had a couple of practice runs.

One thing you need to watch out for with these bikes - with their exaggerated mudguards and long exhaust pipes - is that you don't go bumping down deep kerbs or bouncing your front tyre against a wall when you park, as doing either is likely to result in a distinct loss of joy and an expensive repair bill.

The leading edge of the front fender comes almost halfway down the tyre, (a bit like a Hayabusa, but far more gorgeous) sticking out as it does a good few inches ahead of the rubber. Likewise, even a bit of angled rearward parking against a kerb is likely to ding the fish tail exhausts, which can also take a lump out of your leg when you're walking round the bike if you're not careful. The perils of riding a full dresser eh?

Fortunately my time with the Chief was uneventful in that sense, but having an Indian locked up in your garage gives rise to so many potentially inappropriate misunderstandings.

My daughter (who'd been unaware I was borrowing the bike) arrived home from university and looked a little alarmed when I asked her if she wanted to sit on the Indian in the garage. I suppose Fat Boy owners have similar problems.

Despite the very ornate looking features of this motorcycle, I was a little miffed to discover that whoever had last cleaned the bike clearly hadn't moved it to clean the wheels, as more than half of the chrome spokes, rim and whitewalls at the front were covered in brake dust, which my son helpfully scrubbed off, giving us a fleeting glimpse of what owning

(and riding) one of these vast machines must be like. It must take an absolute age to clean the whole thing properly.

In preparation for the big day we spent a couple of hours shining up the brightwork on the bike with a can of Auto Glym polish that had either thoughtfully or carelessly been left in one of the panniers.

I'd never really thought of cruisers as being my kind of bike, but the supreme comfort afforded by the relaxed riding position and well-padded seats of both the Indian and the Harley I'd covered 2,000 miles in a week on in May are causing me to seriously reconsider my choice of personal bike.

As I've discovered with many friends and colleagues who ride, it seems that I'm not alone in finding that the conventional riding position of most sports/touring bikes can take its toll on ageing joints; I find that my knees are becoming quite painful after about a hundred miles or an hour and a bit, but with the armchair comfort and laid back riding position of these big American V-twins I could (and indeed did) happily carry on riding all day.

Funding one might be another matter, as both of these bikes were priced at around twenty grand. That's twenty thousand pounds. £20,000. I could get three decent bikes for that kind of money…

As you may have realised from the free download you're reading, nobody at The Rider's Digest gets paid, but even my day job wouldn't stand that kind of financial burden.

I suppose having recently ridden hundreds of miles on all sorts of roads on two of the finest motorcycles to cross the Atlantic, comparisons are inevitable, but believe it or not the Harley-Davidson Road Glide Special and the Indian Chief Vintage are two very different bikes.

OK, so they're both large capacity American V-twin 'baggers', but the Harley was quite modern-looking and loaded with

techy goodies like linked ABS brakes, skinny low profile tyres on cast alloy wheels, LED headlights, a proximity alarm, satnav, stereo with iPod connectivity and a feature that shuts one cylinder down when the engine gets too hot.

'Project Rushmore' – in which H-D asked their customers how they could improve their bikes also threw up some surprising innovations, such as mounting the fork legs slightly behind the steering head to improve stability. Unless you're wheeling the bike backwards…

The Indian however, sits firmly on the more traditional side, with classic styling and traditional touches like the leather saddle and (non-lockable) panniers, along with the non-lockable fuel caps, (one real, one dummy) although it too features ABS (non-linked) brakes and cruise control.

Another big difference is the quality of ride, the Harley had air suspension with limited travel, if you hit a bump or a depression the whole thing would shake, occasionally in quite a jarring way, but the Indian felt like you were riding on marshmallow - very, very comfortable.

Both bikes also have keyless ignition, a feature I'm not really sure about, and which is quite possibly pointless. I can imagine owners might like a big bunch of keys.

A bike that can be fired up when you're standing nearby (with the fob in your pocket)

would certainly make me think twice about allowing someone to sit on the bike, knowing that they could turn it on, press the starter and ride off in seconds.

In any case, you need a key for the decidedly primitive steering lock.

The Indian has a large black on/off button beside the fuel gauge sitting on the chrome centre console on the middle of the 20.8 litre fuel tank; the large central speedo can be quickly switched between MPH and Km/h, handy for continental use.

I've mentioned the excesses of chrome on this bike, and it really does beg you to wear shades when it's sunny, which could get awkward in tunnels. Speaking of which, the reflections of the many orange street lights in the Bell Common Tunnel on the M25 danced and zigzagged across the chrome work on the tank and controls like a swarm of crazy fireflies.

The fun with the shiny stuff doesn't stop there. Footwear fetishists will be delighted to learn that you can look at the reflection of your boots in the shrouding behind the fork yokes as they sit on the comfy footboards.

But if you're thinking that this oversized scoot is about as lively as a Welsh dresser, think again. The fuel injected Thunder Stroke 111 power unit produces 119.2 ft-lbs of torque at 2,600 rpm, propelling its 379kg mass to 60mph in less than 5 seconds; this old girl can pick up her skirts and run.

When it's time to check the momentum, a brace of 300mm floating discs are grabbed by four pot callipers at the front, with a similar disc at the back, albeit with a two piston calliper, although like a Victorian lady's petticoat I never saw it. I'm sure it was there though.

I didn't really see the drive belt or pulleys either - they're under there somewhere and it seemed impolite to go looking for them - but

the transmission was smooth enough for me, gear changes only bordered on the clunky if you tried to hurry them, otherwise they slipped in smoothly enough. A multi-function LCD display could be toggled between a number of options as well as featuring a digital gear indicator.

Obviously this bike isn't designed to be hurried, but I wasn't hanging around too much on the open road, and despite pushing it as far as I dared I never managed to scrape anything on the tarmac.

So after Saturday's polishing session, Sunday morning came, and it was time to don completely unsuitable riding gear and head for the big city. I chose the same tweed jacket, check shirt and light brown trousers I'd worn the year before, but this year opted for a dark green tie rather than a cravat, which frankly had been a pain in the Khyber.

Being a little chilly I also put on a full length waxed cotton overcoat, along with a pair of steel toe capped tan dealer boots, but found that I couldn't get my left toe under the gearshift. The Indian is not fitted with a heel – toe rocker (like a Honda 90) although this is available as an option, so I had to wear a pair of brown shoes instead.

Despite wearing similarly flimsy gear 40 years ago when I first started riding on the road (trainers/jeans/Belstaff) I felt vulnerable, even though in the intervening years (touch wood!) I've only had a couple of attacks of gravity on the road.

With an open face lid to complete the picture, I set off for Southwark, a vintage 'deerstalker' lid (borrowed from Dave Gurman's father-in-law) stashed in the pannier, ready for the ride proper.

As I approached the assembly point for the

London ride, a guy on an authentic-looking Highway Patrol Electra Glide pulled alongside at a set of traffic lights, took my photo on his GoPro, and asked me if I wanted to swap bikes, adding that he doesn't often want to swap his Harley.

With a bike that was so obviously an attention seeker at one of the most photographed events on the motorcycling calendar, I couldn't resist the temptation to get a bit of 'The Rider's Digest' branding on the screen, even though I daresay it filtered me out of many social and printed media albums, along with the Distinguished Gentleman's Ride and Bike Shed web sites.

I can live with that, if it wasn't for TRD I wouldn't have been there in the first place.

This event is clearly becoming more and more popular; I can only surmise that in future years the organisers will have to either restrict numbers, call the whole thing off, or base it at a disused airfield.

As I threaded my way through a vast collection of beautifully customised bikes - hundreds and hundreds of which were Triumphs, Harleys and BMWs of all ages - I noticed that there very few Indians, I counted four or five, three of which were originals.

Of course the bikes weren't all brats, street scramblers and customs, Andy Tribble's amazing Ecomobile was there, along with TRD's Paul Blezard on a bright yellow 'feet first' creation called a 'Mk2 ComforTmax'.

The riders and pillions were mostly dressed completely inappropriately for motorcycling, but then that really was the whole point of the day, for every stuck on waxed moustache there was a real one, along with military uniforms, sharp suits, flying helmets, pipes and cravats.

The ladies were mostly dressed with a style and class from the last century, which although

it was brand new was exactly why the Indian Chief Vintage fitted in so perfectly.

After chatting with friends for a while and joining the long queue for a coffee, our attention was drawn to London event organiser Dutch von Shed as he made his call to arms with a hopelessly inadequate megaphone, but then even a decent pub PA system wouldn't have even coped.

The numbers – estimated at around 1,000 to 1,500 - then returned to their machines, some packed a fresh pipeful of St Bruno and everyone started their machines. And waited, and waited a bit longer. And then turned off their engines.

As I sat amidst the maelstrom a lady to my left on a vintage Bonneville asked to use my left mirror so she could touch up her lipstick, of course I obliged.

Slowly the bikes fed out onto Southwark Street, like grains of sand waiting their turn to fall to the bottom of the hourglass.

I've largely described the ride elsewhere on The Rider's Digest website, where thanks to a number of contributors including Dave Gurman, Wendy Dewhirst, Paul Blezard and yours-truly quite an extensive photo album of the London ride exists.

From my own point of view, having ridden the Indian on a mixture of A and B roads, as well as a couple of motorway stints, it was now time to find out how well-behaved it was in heavy city traffic.

But it wasn't the bike that was the problem; that was absolutely fine. A bit tight for filtering, but other than that it was spot-on.

The deerstalker helmet I'd borrowed was a tight fit, and it was a warm day. As I rode the section north of the river I became increasingly uncomfortable, and as I crossed Albert Bridge I felt the overwhelming urge to pull over near

the Prince Albert pub.

Taking the lid off I discovered I had a vivid red line across my forehead. A couple walking past stopped to complement me on the bike, and another chap crossed the road to ask me a few questions about my unusual 'Harley'…

After a breather and a chat I replaced the deerstalker with my more conventional open face lid and set off for the second half of the ride, along the south side of the river, back to the car park on Southwark Street.

One thing I had noticed about the Indian in traffic - especially when wearing completely unsuitable clobber - was the amount of heat generated by the engine. I started to get the feeling that my legs would end up looking like those columns of nondescript meat you see revolving in a kebab shop. (What is that stuff by the way?)

Back at base I queued up for a hideously overpriced burger and a cold drink, and then joined the gang from last year's ride for a chat. At this stage there was a lot more room at the car park, and everything seemed a lot more relaxed; I took the opportunity to have a wander round and admire some of the fabulous bikes present.

Eventually, when the others were heading off towards the South Bank I offered my apologies and departed to take the long way home.

After stopping off at Greenwich Park for an ice cream I crossed Blackheath and then loosely followed the Thames down through Welling, Bexleyheath, Dartford and all stations to Gravesend, ending up on Windmill Hill, looking out over the beautiful Gurudwara Temple towards the river, and feeling that life in general was good.

In reality I didn't want to get off this curious machine. I'd started off by thinking that it would be OK for a bit of fun, but wasn't a bike to be taken seriously. I once described a full-dressed Gold Wing as looking like the circus had come to town, and while there are elements of that with the big Chief, it was a lot more subtle and refined. Even with its tan leather and tassels.

My ride back to Birmingham the next day was a little subdued. I was mentally working out how late I could return the bike to Indian and ride my own bike home without hitting the rush hour.

Once again I detoured off the M1 onto the A5 as soon as I could, stopping off at Jack's Hill Café near Towcester for a mug of tea and a cheese sandwich (above, left). I parked the Indian alongside an immaculate pair of Triumph Bonneville Americas, which were rather beaten into a cocked hat on the authenticity front by the Chief.

How I savoured those last few miles, peeling off the A5 north of Nuneaton to take in the glorious views from Merevale Lane towards Bentley and Furnace End.

Then, without any trace of ceremony, I reluctantly handed this massive bike back to the very helpful guys at Indian, and got on my BMW R1100S, which felt like a 125 by comparison.

For one final thought about the difference between the Harley and the Indian, when I rode that lovely Glide to the south of Spain and back a few months ago, someone told me that they thought the Harley-Davidson was the Rolls Royce of motorcycles, and they may well be right.

But if that's the case, the Indian is the Bentley.

Martin Haskell

indianmotorcycle.co.uk/

Our thanks to Steve Cain at Polaris for supplying the Chief for review

A View from the Group W Bench

Apologies to those of you who read Gambalunga as well, as some of this will be repetitive. However it is your fault for reading the two best English language bike magazines out there.

So why do we fit handlebar protectors or bark busters?

Well firstly because they look dead cool and make the user look like a 75,000 mile-a-year adventure rider.

Secondly because they keep the rain and cold air off of your gloves making them last longer and your hands warmer.

And thirdly because if a blue van decides to undertake you on the outside of a roundabout as you are about to exit they can save you a whole lot of damage and pain.

Runnymede roundabout. I enter on the inside as I am taking the third exit; said blue van enters on the outside indicating left. I looked behind level with the second exit and he appeared to be accelerating off the roundabout at the second exit. In fact the white van in front of him had come off and as I quickly found out he was accelerating around the outside of me.

I indicated left, went to do a lifesaver and there he was now in front of me, so I straightened up but not enough and I hit the rear right-hand side leaving a yard-long gouge in it starting off almost an inch deep.

I suspect that without the hand guards my handlebar end would have stuck in, throwing me and the bike onto the van and then doing far more damage than the broken gear change lever and left-hand-side indicator lens I would end up with (plus some extraneous scratches I can live with). Certainly I might not have been able to change the gear change lever over and carry on.

Although 10 hours later when the adrenalin wore off, I started swearing, gobbling paracetamols and smoking the duty frees I had brought back with me for the last three rallies of the year. It was pretty obvious I wasn't going camping again any time soon and in fact was unable to sleep in my bed for forty nights. Add on the days and that was an accident of biblical proportions.

Oh, and people who enter a roundabout indicating left so as not to have to bother when they do turn off are everywhere, I simply didn't see this one in time.

The insurers have put me down as at fault. I disagree, I would call it dangerous driving by the blue van driver but such is life. I must get some hand protectors for my Bellagio.

The accident happened as I was on my way back from an excellent long weekend with the Mole Valley branch of the Moto Guzzi Club GB. We had stayed at the Bikers Loft in Belgium and used it as a base to visit several of the First World War graves, something it has never ever occurred to me to do. It also allowed John Twiss (Rocket 3 owner and stalwart member of the MGCGB) to lay a wreath to his great uncle who died 100 years ago and is buried at Hill 61.

We then took in the last post at the Menin Gate.

You don't get much more cynical than myself, and I hated drill and marching all though my 12-and-a-half years in the army, but the whole thing brought a lump to my throat and I found myself standing to attention without realizing it.

In between we had a wander round Ypres. There is a very interesting souvenir shop selling trench art and relics run by an Irish couple. Well worth a visit. One of us bought a bullet and was asked whether he was going back by tunnel or boat?

'Boat' was the answer.

Just keep the two parts separate and you'll have no trouble. I wonder if that is still true in the light of recent events?

A meal in the very smart hotel in the town centre was also reasonably priced, in all I would recommend a visit. But unlike Douglas Adams I like Belgium, and I would definitely recommend the Bikers Loft, Groenedijk near Oudenburg, Belgium.

I meant to do this trip on my Bellagio but a silly electrical fault sidelined it so I used the lil'Breva instead. It has a maximum speed of 91mph according to my Garmin but 110 mph by the clock and is more than big enough for continental touring unless your idea of fun is head down, bum up and ignore the countryside you are passing through.

The Breva is still my main bike, the Bellagio my retirement toy bought two and a half years early.

And even better my next door neighbor has bought my old Le Mans III off me and is spending oodles of dosh returning it to better than factory original so I now have space in my garage for a V1200 Sport 2-valver if one comes up. Unless Guzzi bring out something in the meantime that grabs my fancy. And of course the offer to try out the LMIII once it has been finished.

You know having a neighbor who is a Guzzi nut is everything as good as you might imagine.

Ride Safe,

Ian Dunmore

An ancient Guzzisti

King's Road, Kempton Park, Canapés and Crusty Bikers

Words/Pics: Dave Gurman

What does an antique shop on London's oh so trendy Kings Road have in common with a racecourse just beyond the capital's south western perimeter?

One thing they both share is antiques, although the items in the Chelsea boutique are generally shinier and considerably dearer than the assorted bike related tat on display at the Off Road Show with its associated autojumble.

Actually it's not really fair to suggest that there was nothing but rusty rubbish at the racecourse venue because as you'll see in the accompanying photographs, there was all manner of biking paraphernalia and plenty of beautiful, pristine, not to mention iconic, motorcycles in the car park, on sale in amongst the jumble and proudly displayed in the exhibition area below the main grandstand; but ultimately the sparkling crystal chandeliers and classic Broughs with six figure price tags, are in a different class altogether.

Why then I did enjoy my Saturday afternoon trip to the racetrack so much more than Thursday night's Brough beano? I don't think it can just be an issue of class, after all I'd attended the fifth annual party a couple of years back and that was delightful; and then when I met Brough supremo Mark Upham at the Alpine do in the Gherkin last September, he was thoroughly charming once again.

It might have been the canapés (which were nowhere near as much fun as the tiny hamburgers we had at the Gherkin and were definitely no match for the thoroughly satisfying bacon cheese and mushroom toasties at the Off Road Show) but it certainly wasn't the company; there were all sorts of interesting people milling around including eight times world champ Phil Read, Mike Jackson of Norton Villiers Triumph fame (I

Phil Read MBE (right)

Eric Patterson

Thierry Henriette, Mark and Matthew Upham require the pleasure of your company to celebrate their

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KAWASAKI
YAMAHA

decided to let his crap Jeremy Corbyn joke slide out of deference to my hosts, but I made a note to cross him off my Xmas card list), Mark and Linda Wilsmore from the Ace Cafe and Eric and Catherine Patterson.

Eric, as regulars who read "Shaking The Salt With Brough" in issue 165 will be aware, shattered the AMA 1350 A-VG Speed Record in 2011 on a specially built Brough Superior SS100 Retro. He had been expecting to take delivery of the first of the all new SS100s as per the invitation; unfortunately it was not to be, which must have been an enormous disappointment given that he ordered it after seeing the prototype two years ago!

Eric is also the man who puts the EGP in EGP Enterprises, his company that has put on motorcycle events at Kempton Park for over thirty years now. My father-in-law Brian is a few years older than Eric but he was a biker well into his seventies, riding a variety of classics (the last of which was a 1950 Scott Flying Squirrel) and as he has always lived in the area, he had attended many of Eric's autojumbles over the years – although the last time was probably a decade ago. I reckoned he was about due for another visit so I tapped Eric for a couple of complimentary tickets on Thursday night and sure enough Brian was well up for a stroll on Saturday.

The show was considerably bigger than either of the previous couple I'd been to and Brian told me that although little had changed since his last visit – aside from all the Japanese bikes that had become classics in the meantime – it was the biggest he'd ever seen too (Eric later confirmed that there were over four hundred stalls, plus the various exhibitors in the show).

I guess it was the sheer scale of the event that made its mark on me; not because I'm


NOMAD

unduly impressed by size but there was something striking about seeing so many bikers of every conceivable shape, size, age and variety that left me with that warm glow of bikerhood.

As I said there were plenty of nice peeps at the Kings Road bash and many of them were lifetime riders (even if quite a few don't get out on their bikes quite as much as they'd like to these days because…), I guess it's just that theirs is such a rarefied world that I couldn't help thinking that even if motorcycling as we know it – i.e. a day to day source of transport, recreation and exhilaration – was priced and legislated out of existence for the masses, they would still be enjoying their hand-built, limited-edition modern machines and eye-wateringly expensive classics every bit as much as they do today.

It's funny how seeing thousands of motley motorcyclists sorting through everything from beautiful milled aluminium rear-sets, to rusted piles on tarpaulins, back issues of ***Classic Bike***, tie downs, tools and tyres, all the while talking about classic bikes (in a remarkably wide variety of conditions) with the kind of affection that comes with nostalgia, can leave you feeling more optimistic about the future of motorcycling – but that's precisely the effect they had on me.

I'd like to thank Eric for the tickets and Brian for giving me a good excuse to ask for them. I'd especially like to thank Brian for being such good company; I count myself very lucky to have ended up with such a lovely man for a dad-in-law given that I was already sold on his daughter long before I ever met him.

Dave Gurman

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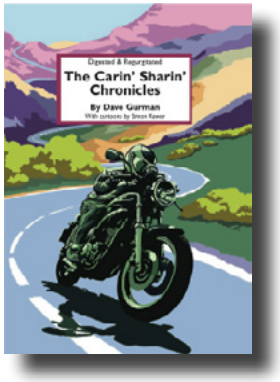

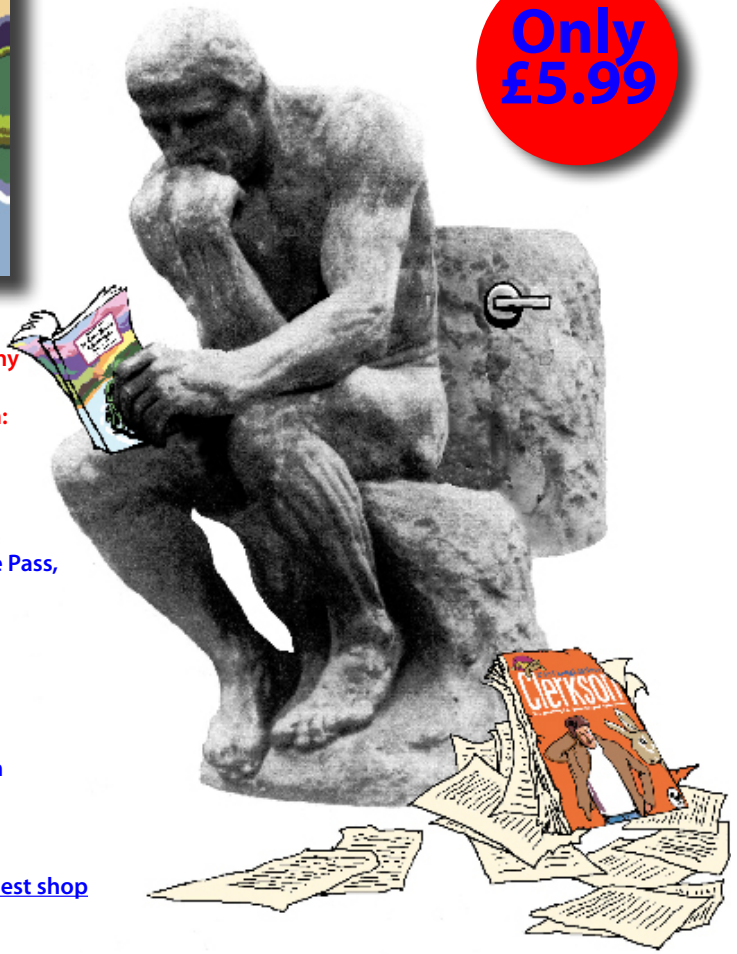

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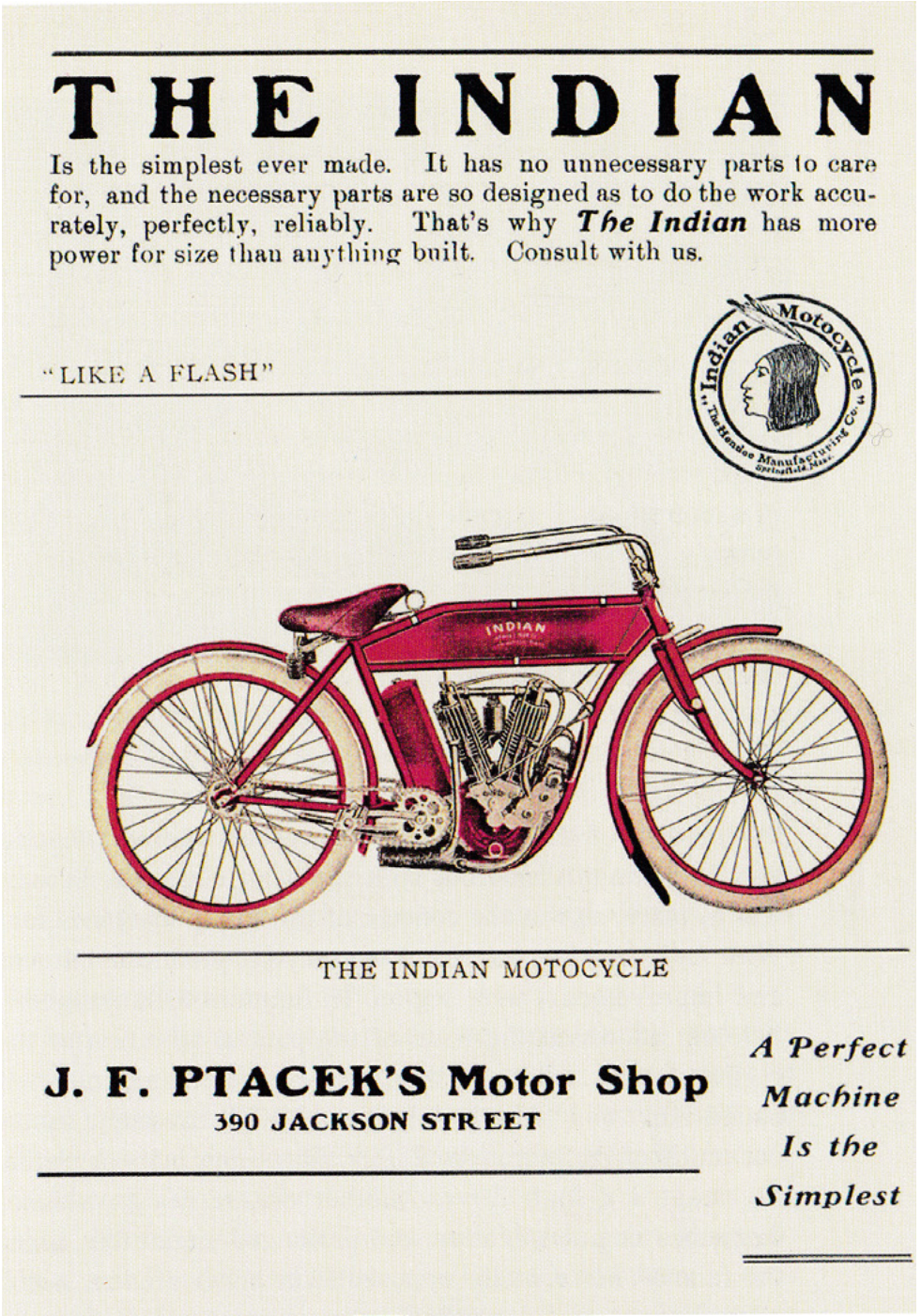
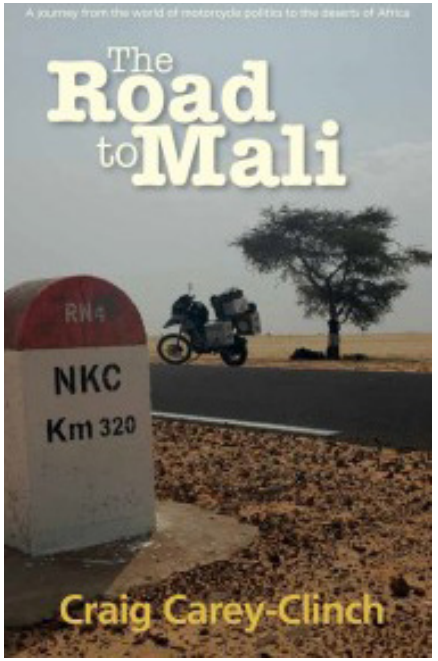


INSIDE LINE...

AMELIE SUMMERS

'To Flanders Portugal And Spain, Craig Carey-Clinch Is Drunk Again, King Simon Commands And He'll Obey, Over The Hills And Far Away...'

...after *'The Recruiting Officer'* - George Farquhar (1706)



It is not often you get to review a book as remarkable as "The Road to Mali" by Craig Carey-Clinch – published by Shuvvy Press at £9.99p.

Let's face facts. Most motorcycling 'world travel' books are total crap. It is either a tortured soul finding him/herself – no let me correct that I don't know one of those by a woman – or it is the, "had a blast as I circumnavigated the globe in a record twenty days on the latest superbike loaned to me by the, 'industry'.

This book is also crap – but only for the first section. Make sure you read pages one to fifty-eight last, start instead at page fifty nine. Here is a brief explanation of why you need to first avoid the opening.

Craig may not be known to most readers; but he is the most influential motorcyclist in the UK. His company advises both the motorcycle industry and the ACU. When it comes to UK government policy towards motorcycling he is the man to consult. His remarkable career started in MAG UK and this led to his friendship with the late Simon Milward, one time leader of the Federation of European Motorcyclists which later morphed into the present day FEMA.

Simon Milward went on to work as a philanthropist raising money on an ill-fated world tour where he met with a fatal accident in Mali.

The book falls into two distinct parts; the first being devoted to the early working life of the author and his work with MAG and FEM. Curiously the intro states: "the names of some individuals and organisations have been changed."

The reason for this becomes clear as Craig describes one of their 'allies', a Frenchman from the organisation FFMC (whose hospitality they enjoy) in less than flattering terms. There is

also a long account of a friend at one of the FEM 'demos' being so drunk that at first he falls from his motorcycle without it even moving. He manages to get on and complete his participation in the demo. This is observed by Craig who writes:

"I was having a hard time keeping up with the hangover I had, but looking in my mirror, I saw John's bike career off the road with no attempt to negotiate the curve." 'John' it seems is so drunk that he survives this and is able to join the demo again a few metres down the road.

Another passage describes a trip from Paris. "We both felt as rough as old boots and were hard in the grip of monumental hangovers. To make matters worse, we needed to be in La Rochelle that evening." For this particular journey Craig elects to ride as pillion to Milward.

No surprise as he describes the experience that led to this hangover as, "a session of alcoholic excess which I have not since rivalled." I am not sure if that is correct since much later – on page forty-five – he recounts an occasion years later.

"The hangover verged on a serious dose of alcohol poisoning." He then describes hurrying back to his tent to get his gear on.

The author places himself as being at the very core of motorcycling lobbying in Brussels in these early years. Nobody else gets a look in at all.

Milward's behaviour is described throughout in extremely unflattering terms. There is an occasion when the author and others from FEM are driven in a van across a mountain road in Spain. Milward is at the wheel and drives in an exceptionally reckless manner leading to his passengers fearing for their lives. Is this really true?

The lavish descriptions of drinking at times reminded me of 'Tory boy' William Hague recalling a youth that actually never took place. He was employed as a drayman for a Yorkshire brewery. This meant quaffing a pint of ale at every pub they delivered-to so that even as a youngster he was on a minimum of fourteen pints of beer a day. Nobody believed that.

I am not sure I believe this account either. At any event being pissed whilst riding across Europe at high speed does not sit well with a lot of preachy stuff about how he was, "defending riders' rights!"

What about freedom of the rest of us to ride roads without contending with drunk tossers?

There are detailed accounts of some of the, 'Euro Demos' that were organised in different countries at this time. Some of these caused problems with chaotic organisation leading to substantial financial losses for FEM and stress for Simon Milward.

There are tensions too inside MAG UK as Craig continues to volunteer for them having taken employment with the motorcycle industry. This also leads to tension with Simon, which takes time to dissipate.

According to the author:

"This hurt. I do not know where this rider/industry distrust came from in the first place. Perhaps it was generated by individuals with an agenda of their own. There was certainly one individual, new to MAG's senior team, who for reasons known to himself actively sought to drive wedges between myself and people I had worked successfully with for many years. His actions and duplicity were to later fuel the unpleasantness mentioned above."

He goes on to assert that in major matters of public policy there is, "barely a fag paper's thickness of difference in views between riders and industry."

I do not agree, but this has clearly been his view ever since in regarding his move from 'rider's rights' to his present work as a seamless transition.

Section two is perhaps the best of this book. He describes a motorcycling holiday in north Africa. Not having a bike roadworthy enough for such a trip he is pleased to get a nice Triumph on loan from the factory. He describes his then-partner and the woman with his friend as "girls" which did get up my nose a bit. But the descriptions of the scenery, the poverty, the ill treatment of so many humans and animals are as good as any travel writing you will find anywhere. The descriptions of tensions within the group (I won't spoil these by quoting) are fantastically funny at times.

Fast-forward a few years and a trip sponsored by BMW is put together to visit the scene of Simon Milward's fatal collision. Again, this contains some really great writing. He is very open about his own anxiety which it later transpires is brought on in large part by anti-malaria medication.

There is also a passage about another "world traveller" rider who takes his own life by hanging himself in a Casablanca hotel room to the astonishment of pals back home.

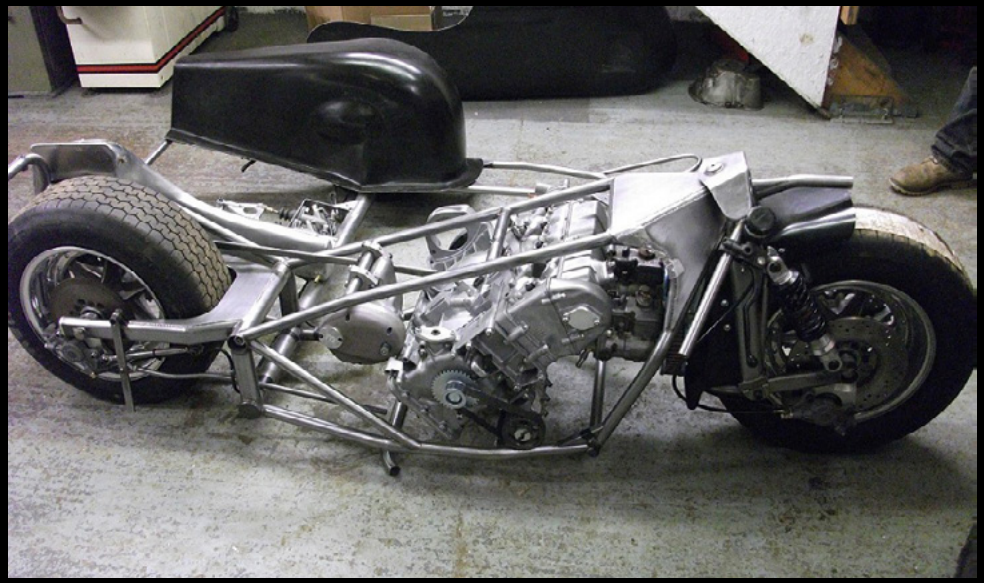
This book does all would-be long distance riders a big favour. There is no "instant happiness" to be found out on the road. It is hard to reconcile the mature man who writes this material and admits so much about his own anxieties with the moron in the first few pages. I think there is an answer contained within the book.

He met his wife after that time in his life.

Amelie Summers

Mike Richards and MREquipe

Interview: Wizzard



As a road-going vehicle I've never rated sidecar outfits as being of any interest. They seem to perfectly combine all of the disadvantages of a bike (the rider gets wet and cold, no reverse gear), with the disadvantages of a car (no filtering in traffic, full size parking space required), and all this with handling which at best could be described as "quirky".

But on the track, its a different matter. For a large chunk of my life I lived less than thirty minutes ride from Knockhill race circuit, an hour from East Fortune circuit or Ingliston circuit, and a few minutes from the infamous Beveridge Park, so I spent many happy days watching two, three and four-wheeled racing. For a true petrolhead it was all exciting, but those crazy sidecar outfits just knocked me out, my only regret being that there was not enough of them. The Jock Taylor Trophy Memorial Race was the highlight of the year, with sidecar crews travelling from all over the UK to participate.

More recently, since moving to France, I've been to watch bike racing at my local Val de Vienne circuit, and Nogaro circuit in the South West. On every occasion its been the sidecar outfits which have given me the biggest buzz.

So there I was sitting in my local bar, reading the excellent report on the Belgian Classic TT in Issue 190 of TRD (I dont have broadband at home – the joys of living in the remote countryside), staring intently at a close up of a BMW outfit, when a voice behind me said "I built that one …….and that one". It was Mike Richards, ex-bike and outfit racer, and builder of many race and championship winning outfits, who had just made the move to my area of France.

We had an interesting chat about bikes and then Mike invited me to see his workshop,

so a couple of weeks later I popped along and was well-impressed by the compact but very comprehensively-equipped workspace. with CNC lathes and milling machines, TiG welders, an enormous metal assembly table which doubles as a frame jig, a tube notching machine, and much, much more, in fact everything you could wish for when building race-winning machines. Even more impressive is what Mike actually does with these tools. The workshop shelves are full of self made alloy wheels, brake calliper brackets, and the many other parts which go into a build. Mike showed me the dry sump system for the air cooled BMW which he has designed and builds, even down to the new oil pump.

Sitting centre-stage was the latest classic BMW outfit, on its wheels and with its very complex brake system all fitted. The engine in place was just a dummy, used during the building process and about to be replaced by the real thing. Now, as in a previous life, I used to judge classic and custom vehicles at shows. I always pay attention to the quality of welding in a self-built chassis – I've seen welding so bad that the vehicle should never have been allowed on the road, yet was a show winner. Looking at the welding on this Beemer's chassis, it was absolute perfection, a work of art. If this was my outfit I wouldnt even paint it, just a few coats of clear laquer to show off the quality of workmanship.

I later related my visit to our esteemed editor, who thought there was a making of a good article in the story of MREquipe, so a couple of weeks later I was back at Mike's for some more information in the form of a question and answer session, and take some photos...

Wizzard : What got you into motorcycling?

Mike Richards: My grandfather, father and uncles were all into motorcycle racing, both solo and sidecars. My father was racing when I was born and was Welsh Champion, and his brother was Midland Champion.

What were your first bikes?

A variety of mopeds, and off-road bikes, including Yamaha, Honda, Maico and my favourite, a Fantic Cabellero 125 Enduro. The advantage of living in Wales was there was lots of common land to use off-road bikes on.

When did you start racing?

My first racing experience was as a passenger on my father's outfit, aged 14. I started racing solo when I was around 18 or 19.

What prompted the switch from solos to sidecars?

On solos I probably went too quickly, too aggressively, too soon, and fell off a bit. I was racing with people who were slightly older than me, like Niall Mackenzie, and I thought if they could do it so could I, although I didnt have the bike setup or experience. After a big off at Mallory I made the switch to outfits.

What was your most memorable race?

It was at Snetterton on a British Championship Easter weekend. There were three races per day, and I had won all the races up to this point. At the start of the next race the bike wouldn't fire up, so the marshalls had to push-start it. By the time I got going the last man was eight seconds ahead, but I went on to win the race, setting a new lap record by 2.5 seconds.

(continued on page 58)

Konig 2-stroke outfit on Mike's bench

Mike riding a BMW 750cc-powered chassis (with passenger Pete Allebone)

In-house alloy wheel-building

MRE/Suzuki 600cc F2 chassis - "one of the best bikes I ever built"

What was your hairiest moment in a race?
At Oulton Park, on a F1 1000cc Kawasaki outfit. It threw a rod, spewing hot oil which went on fire. By the time I stopped, the bike was wrecked, and I didnt realise at the time, but my back was on fire too. There was absolutely nothing left usable on the outfit after that one.

What about your favourite road bikes?
My best ever was a Kawasaki GPZ600R – a fantastic bike. I had a Honda NC30 for 17 years and sold it, and regretted selling it. I currently have a Suzuki 750, there is a GPZ600 just waiting to be built up again, and I would like to buy another Honda CBX 1000 in the future, building a space-frame Moto Martin replica chassis for it.

What would be your dream bike?
A Moto Martin CBX 1000.

How do feel about riding in the UK nowadays?
The roads are just too busy now to enjoy.

What do you think of motorcycle design and engineering today?
I looked at the Honda stand at Oulton Park recently, and thought that their styling was poor, too square and angular. Maximum power on the road is not what it should be about – Mike Hailwood used to say that 100bhp was enough for the TT. My current Suzuki has 130 bhp, but I really cant see the point of anything over 140 bhp, even for two-up touring bikes. I think the age of race rep bikes has gone.

What direction should the manufacturers be taking to attract the next generation of bike buyers?
If asked that question fifteen years ago I would have said supermotards were the way to go, but they seemed to have fallen away. Making bikes lighter is important, and electric bikes have come on a long way.

What was your working background before MREquipe?
Initially the aerospace industry (Doughty Aerospace) , then my own hydraulics company, then I moved into the world of motor racing, working as a machinist for the Benetton F1 team, the Galmer Indycar team, and Reynard Motorsport. After that I worked for Maxsym Engine Technology in design, machining, testing and development of bikes in America [Victory, Polaris, Henderson] and Arctic Cat snowmobiles.

How did the creation of MREquipe come about?
I was building my own bikes, which were winning races, so people came to me to have their bikes built, and it began from that, building bikes for top racers.

What kind of bikes have you built?
Its been 95% sidecars and 5% bikes. Mainly F2 600s, then I was asked to build outfits for classic racing. I was also building race engines, flowing heads and making dry sump systems. I initially specialised in Kawasakis, then Suzukis, BMW, Triumph Trident, Yamaha, Imps, Honda, Konig, and Norton.

What is in the future for MREquipe?
I was working seven days a week, and producing 8 to 10 bikes a year. Now rather than building to customers requests, I will build 2 or 3 bikes a year, at my own pace, and enjoy my retirement.

Why the move to France, and what do you plan to do?
I had got fed up with the pace of life in the UK, working all week, and I did like this area of France. I wanted to be able to spend more time with my partner, Mair, and build what I want at my own pace, more as a hobby. Future projects include a Guzzi outfit and possibly a chopper.

Mike riding his 600cc F2 outfit with passenger Gary Blunn at Mallory Park

During the course of our discussion we touched on a number of instances where Mike found problems with an engine, traced what caused the problem and solved it, then informed the relevant manufacturer so that it could be resolved on future models. One instance of this was the Kawasaki 1000 engine, which was dropping valves every couple of races – an expensive habit. Mike traced the fault to the valve stem and collet diameters not being compatible. A change to the valves resulted in an end to these problems. Kawasaki hadn't picked up on this issue, as the full throttle, hard on the brakes, full throttle use the bikes get on the racetrack produces different stresses to the more normal low to mid throttle usage on the road.

Mike's major racing successes, both personally and with other riders on his creations, include ACU F2 Clubmans champion; New Era F2 Champion; 36 starts and 33 wins in the 1993 EMRA championship; and eight classic sidecar championship wins in the P3 (1300cc) and P2 (750cc) classes.

For further info on Mike's ongoing work, check out the MREquipe Engineering website.

Wizzard

A big thanks to Mike for taking the time out for this interview, and for showing me round his fantastic workshop.

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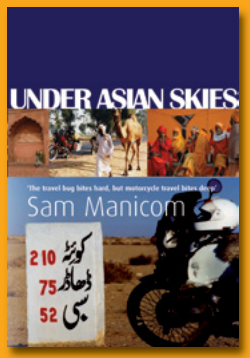

'Sam has the skills of the story teller and this book easily transports you into three years of journey across Asia. He manages to bring the sounds, scents and heat of Asia to life without wordy overkill.' **Horizons Unlimited**

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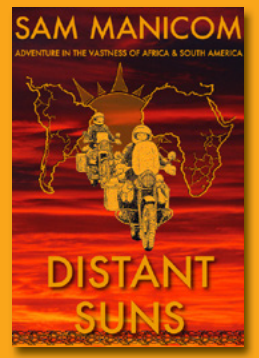

This is a great story which reads with the ease of a novel. Distant Suns has it all: love, good guys, bad guys, beauty, danger, history, geography and last but not least-bikes! A fast, easy and thoroughly enjoyable read.' **webbikeworld**

'Distant Suns doesn't just document the journey through Southern Africa and South America, Sam also describes cultural differences, traditions and lifestyles of the various countries they cross, whilst painting a vivid picture of the terrain they cross. A truly involving and enthralling read.' **TBM - Trail Bike Magazine**

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The Case of the Dastardly Clicker Saboteur!

Words/Pix: Em Alicia Sullivan

In some ways I'm just too trusting. My lackadaisical "as it should be so it is" attitude has no place in some things. The Russian proverb, "trust but verify" would be more apt, but generally that increases the amount of effort required. As the old saying goes "if you want something done right, do it yourself." I'm just full of other people's good advice.

I do try to live by my own rules, but in the heat of the spontaneous moment, stuff gets forgotten, mostly, and ignored sometimes. Without good intentions the road to hell would be a treacherous goat trail, rather than a paved four-laner without speed limits.

Whilst playing in the hills of northern Georgia on my 2013 Triumph Daytona 675R, I was made painfully aware that something was amiss. The bike wanted to fall too quickly into corners, with every one becoming a workout of mid-corner corrections; the self-doubt triggered by spending most of my available focus on trying not to fall off causing mounting frustration. Rather than dancing gracefully through the winding mountain roads, I was bouncing around like a cowboy in a rodeo. Actually, I felt more like the rodeo clown. The harder I worked the more unsettled the chassis seemed to become, with the bike pitching excessively - instead of giving other bikers the customary wave with my left hand, I could have just given them a cute little nod of the bike's nose with a decent blip of throttle like the motorcycling equivalent of making a curtsy. So classy. I might as well ride sidesaddle wearing a petticoat dress like a proper lady. Needless to say, I wasn't having much fun and began to seriously question my riding ability.

I didn't give the suspension on the Triumph any serious thought, until my nephew bought his first motorcycle and I mentioned that we should make sure the suspension is at its factory settings while he continues learning and improving his riding skills. He had ridden my CBR250R until then (and even completed an Iron Butt SaddleSore 1000 on it). We also took various measurements to dial in the correct amount of sag later. See there? Good advice. However, I wasn't exactly practicing what I was preaching, and in the spirit of "do as I say, don't do as I do" we checked over his new-to-him ZX6R and then started on mine. Yes, this suspension thing was embarrassingly overdue, since I've owned the Triumph for a year and a half already and hadn't so much as looked at the adjusters on its Ohlins suspension.

While looking over the measurements we had previously recorded I mentally kicked around possible geometry tweaks. I really didn't like the way the bike handled and something definitely could be done, but first things first. I needed a baseline, and in this case the baseline is stock. Stock everything. Out comes the owner's manual in search for factory settings. Upon reading the appropriate chapter and disregarding the prominently featured table for various riding and load conditions I located the pertinent data, the settings the bike is shipped with.

As I turned the compression and rebound damping adjusters on the forks all the way in, then all the way back out, to find the working range, I make an unexpected, but not entirely unlikely, discovery. They weren't set at their respective factory settings. Weird. I don't remember adjusting them. I would have sworn on a stack of bibles or (more likely) bet a tenner on it, that I've never ever touched the clickers. Not once. I asked hubby if he had messed around with them. He looked at me with one raised eyebrow, incredulous that I would even ask him such a ludicrous question: "Why would

I want to do THAT?" Never mind. Entirely too much trust and not enough verify. I take note of the adjustment ranges, then set them properly. I move to the rear shock. The compression is set correctly, but the rebound adjuster is turned all the way out. But it only gets worse.

Next up, the fork preload adjusters. The one on the left fork leg is where it should be. I crank the thing all the way to the other end and write down the working range. I set it to the factory default of four turns. When I get to its twin on the right side and turn it all the way to the fully anticlockwise position, it's time to get righteously angry. This bugger is two whole turns off! This is like what? A four millimetre or-so difference? Have I been riding around like an idiot for the better part of 19 months with one fork leg longer than the other? A better question is what in the hell does this do to the internals? Never mind the effect it could have on handling. I fervidly hoped that I didn't screw up my front end with my happy-go-lucky negligence.

It all came together in a hurry and started to make sense. I wasn't losing my mind after all, there was a definite cause to my riding woes. And why in the hell hadn't this been the first thing crossing my mind rather than blaming myself in a flurry of self-deprecation and assuming that I must be doing something wrong, for whatever reason? Doh! Now I was extra angry with myself for being a total moron. I should know better! With the bike's settings returned to stock, I fastened a zip tie around the left fork leg and I went for a test ride. The first few miles seemed promising, so I gave it all the hell I dared. The bike definitely felt better, almost compliant. Yeah! Much improved. Things were still not quite right, but I had a baseline to work with.

I was hitting the books, refreshing my limited knowledge of suspension setup and learning more about basic tuning. I was a girl on a mission. I separated the bike's overall handling characteristics into discrete symptoms and prioritized them by level of relative annoyance. Most were alleviated by setting sag, tweaking the geometry slightly, and playing around with damping. The Daytona and I could finally work on our trust issues and I was getting my mojo back.

Some time later, the bike started handling badly again. I immediately checked all adjusters. Sure enough, the rear compression was turned all the way in. What in the hell?!? I dialed it to its proper setting, but it left me wondering. A few weeks later I found the rear shock's rebound adjuster turned all the way in and both front fork damping adjusters a few clicks off each. Great. Once is a fluke, twice is coincidence, three times is a pattern.

What exactly was going on here? I bought the bike off the showroom floor at a dealer in Atlanta. The initial suspension setup may have been a simple oversight; botched by a distracted or hurried technician trying to get the bike ready for me to ride home before closing time. I certainly hope not, but it's not outside the realm of possibility. However, all that is ancient history and several thousands of miles ago. I was stumped, and a little creeped out. Ohlins is top notch stuff, beautiful engineering really. My R1 racebike was fitted with an Ohlins suspension and it had never given me headaches... or adjusted itself without human intervention. Surely there is not some idiot running around carrying a 17mm hex socket and a 3mm allen key in his pocket deliberately sabotaging people's suspension??

Have I made any enemies recently or is this some random act of malevolence? R6 Dude's girlfriend/wife/whomever comes to mind. R6 Dude is my R6-riding neighbor from across the street, three doors down. Well, he hasn't actually been riding his R6 since he moved into the neighborhood; it doesn't want to crank and when it does it barely comes to life, sputters in agony, just to die a few minutes later. He can't figure out why. He comes over for help occasionally, when I wrench on my bike, to pick my brain. We talk shop and he goes home. End of story. I didn't even know his name. Nor did I have the slightest idea that he was living with someone until a 5-minute conversation about a possible electrical issue in my driveway and my subsequent knock on his door, with multimeter in hand, cost him dearly one night. I could hear her yelling at him for a good long while from way down the street. She was none too pleased with him "hanging out with the skinny white chick up the street", however that wasn't exactly how she phrased it; what she actually said made me cringe and cannot be put in print, not verbatim anyway. Maybe I should consider working on my bike in the backyard? And possibly park there, too. Naturally, he didn't make contact again for a few months. Now he only comes over when the guys are out front working on their bikes, too. I do feel a little sorry for R6 Dude, whose

name I eventually learned is Ricki.

But I digress… Back to my list of possible suspects. The neighborhood kids? They like to touch things when they're looking. Let me catch the little bastards looking with their fingers, then I'll be the cool old chick with the awesomely fast motorbikes educating them in a few things, especially how they could hurt someone, possibly kill them. Maybe I won't even use swear words. I had Mr Slow, my husband, look through all of the security camera's motion-sensor triggered still shots. He found absolutely nothing of interest. A quick online survey of trusted riding buddies and racer types revealed that it is not unheard of for adjusters to turn on their own. However, this seemed a little above and beyond. One guy, whom I knew from my club racing days, blew a head gasket over this little nugget of a tale shared over a few beers and burgers at a local bike night. He loudly exclaimed, wedged between several Grade A profane terms, that he puts this in the category of attempted murder and if he caught the little prick with his fingers on my clickers...

I am still on the case to catch the bastard who has become known as 'The Dastardly Clicker Saboteur'. I hope I'll catch him before he gets me for good. In the meantime, I'm checking my clickers before and after every ride. So far none of them have gone clickety-click-click on their own.

Em Alicia Sullivan

HANGING OUT WITH THE HEROES

Ducati TriOptions Cup Round 6 @ Assen, 18-20/9/15

Words/pics: Ricardo Rodrigues

We like to do things a little different here at the Digest Towers, even when it comes to the coverage of a big event like one of the British Superbike Championship (BSB) races. We don't just get the press accreditation and shoot for the media lounge with all the big shot mag and TV reporters. We get team credentials and sleep on the garage floor during the race weekend.

The idea for this feature came as a last minute opportunity while we were finishing up issue #190 of your favourite magazine back in September (no, not that one - the one without the Lucys and Laceys!). A photo of a gorgeous Laverda on Dave Mackay's Instagram sparked a conversation that ended with a half-defined plan to meet up at Assen for the Dutch round of BSB.

If you don't know who Dave is, go back to TRD 182 and read the Editor's feature "Hey, I'm With The Team". Do it, I promise it's worth your time, to this day it's my favourite read from TRD.

So where were we? Right, Dave Mackay! The ex-serviceman turned racer/father/photographer, the ultimate cool guy

Back in 2013 he was racing at club level on his KTM RC8R, along with Luke Smith on a Yamaha R6, all passion and self-financed speed fix: unload the van, get the leathers on, race, load the van, go home. A one man band playing all instruments.

Fast-forward to the end of 2014 and a new challenge presented itself in the form of the True Heroes Racing team

The team is the brainchild of Phil Spencer, a serving Royal Navy sailor who in 2012 decided to form a racing team as a way of using motorsports to help recovering injured servicemen keep a focus on their recovery and reintegration into civilian society.

After a successful first season racing at club level with LCpl Murray Hambro (who also happens to be a double-amputee - more about that later), they were able to get visibility and sponsorship to step up to National level in the 2013 Triumph Triple Challenge, which was part of the British Superbike Championship's travelling circus. Cpl Luke Smith joined the team for 2014, then with cessation of the Triumph Triple Challenge series at the end of that season, 2015 marked their entry into the Ducati TriOptions Cup (also part of the BSB series), again with Murray and Luke as the main riders, both ex-military men wounded in combat.

The team then offered Dave Mackay an invitation to join the team as a third independent rider using his own financing - by purchasing a Ducati 899 Panigale and paying for his racing, he would gain the support of

a team structure and some of the sponsor-supplied kit, allowing him to try racing at a higher level. In exchange the team gained a third bike to work on making room for more mechanics/support personnel and a fast, experienced rider to get feedback from.

Being a racer, Dave said yes without a second's hesitation and by the time we met, the season was well underway, with only the Assen, Silverstone and Brands Hatch rounds of the TriOptions Cup left to run.

I arrived at Assen soaking-wet after two miserable hours riding through the pouring rain, to be greeted by glorious sunshine and a fantastic welcoming team. Dave collected me at the gate with my own team pass and shuttled me on the back of the pit scooter to the True Heroes Racing garage.

Far from the spectacle of the massive hospitality tents of the big teams, the True Heroes still manage to pitch a neat and comfortable set-up during the race weekend: two-thirds of the tent occupied by the three lifts for the bikes and workshop area, the remaining part a cosy dining/chillout/hospitality area equipped with everything you need from a coffee machine to satellite TV, where the guys gather to watch the races going on around them live on British Eurosport, who cover not just BSB but all the support races as well.

I have to confess this was the area where I spent most of my time. I may be useless with a spanner but I'm pretty damn good at eating and drinking coffee - you have to play to your strengths!

But I digress, let's stick to the bike stuff: the bikes are all 2015 Ducati 899 Panigale, otherwise known as the "Babygale", and good for close to 130 bhp at the wheel in current race spec.

That race spec is actually not far off from road spec, and all the bikes have to be road-registered, yet because they are sold by Ducati as race bikes for the Ducati TriOptions Cup, the warranty is void.

They retain the ignition barrels and keys, and the adjustable traction control and engine-brake control system. The ABS is disconnected, although the ABS unit itself has to be retained or the ECU complains; the Showa front forks get posher and more track-focused Ohlins internals and the rear shock is replaced by an Ohlins aftermarket option. A full Termignoni exhaust deepens the growl of the V-twin and helps raise horsepower.

After you account for lightweight racing fairings, lever guards, crash protectors, etc., that is about the extent of the modifications these bikes have.

Asking the guys about the 899, the general consensus among all the True Heroes riders is that the bikes are good, but take a bit of time to adapt to. Not just for for Murray and Luke, coming from the Triumph Triple Challenge with its 675cc Daytonas, but also for Dave coming from the bigger and less electronic-laden KTM RC8R.

Murray's bike in particular has been problematic but for different reasons: to accommodate his prosthetic legs, the whole radiator piping had to be rerouted to make way for an electrically-operated gear shifter. In testing, the shifter's high current draw burned through the original wiring loom, arc- welding itself to the radiator in the process! The first race of the season hadn't even started and the #912 bike was already on it's second loom and radiator...

I asked Dave about his experience coming from the big KTM and what the differences are

between it and the 899::

Dave: "They're quite different, The new bike is a lot revvier and has a narrower powerband making the adaptation a bit difficult, but I'm faster now!

"I also have a lot more miles on it. This bike has done - [pauses to switch the bike on and check the mileage] - 2000 miles since February, of which only about 150 were on the road, that's more than I did in two full years of club racing in the RC8!

"But the bike is good, it responds really well to small tweaks like suspension, sprockets, etc. With the RC8 I had two different sprockets for the whole season.

"With the rest of the bikes it's been a case of finding the best suspension settings, messing with traction control and engine braking levels all while learning new tracks - last year the team missed Assen and Knockhill - and adapting to a completely new machine."

The guys do like a challenge, and it's noteworthy that the requirement to fit in with the overall timetable means the Ducati TriOptions Cup has less track time than the other classes in which to practice and refine set-up.

For the first race Dave decided he would run without traction control as the electronics (already running at the lowest setting) were cutting-in and slowing him down in a couple of corners. With a personal goal set of a sub-1:47s lap and a qualifying time of 1:48 it's a case of pushing hard to get that final second.

To put this number in perspective, go online and check Youtube for "Assen Motor Trackday", where you'll see plenty of people proud of their 1:55 lap. (NB the 'qualifying' lap time to enter the fast group on a trackday at Assen is 2:00)

Come the time for the first TriOptions Cup race and I run with the guys to pitlane to watch the start close up. With the pitlane garages dedicated exclusively to the British Superbike Championship contenders the guys roll straight from the parking lot to the race track - Murray making a short stop to get a team member to clip his prosthetic legs to the modified footpegs before setting off on the sighting lap.

Ater that sighting lap, the guys are standing in the starting grid, and the grid walk lasts for what seems to be seconds before we are kicked back to the pitwall, with no time for pretty umbrella girls or grid interviews.

Just three laps after the start and Murray (#912) comes back in and heads straight to parc fermé.

Unable to help Murray get back on track because he opted to skip going through pitlane, the team stays glued to the timing screens watching the race develop for the Dave and Luke.

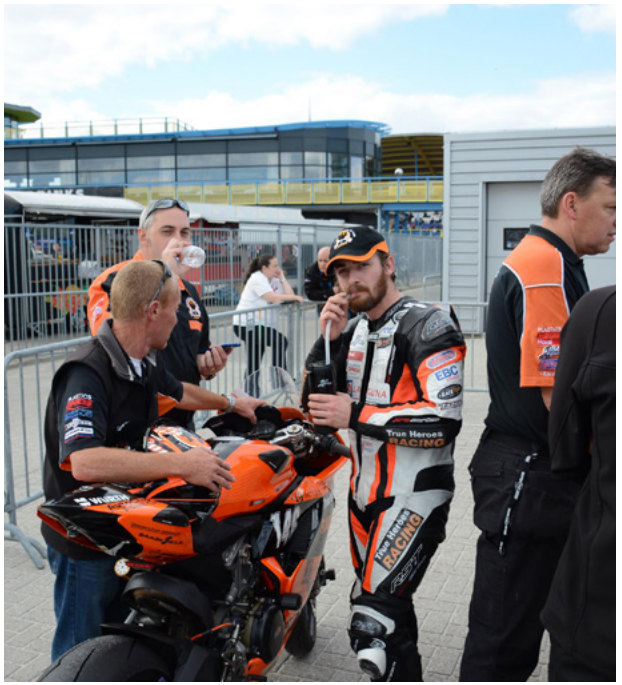
With a final 22nd place for Dave (#22) and 25th for Luke (#146), the race was a moderate success. Dave had a best lap of 1:48:226 and Luke 1:51:053, so despite some setup difficulties for Luke and not quite getting below the1:48 mark for Dave, both guys improved on their grid positions, finished the race safely and were ready to fight even harder on Sunday.

During a quick chat after the race, team manager Phil shed a light on the reasons behind Murray's frustration and race-retirement: "He keeps getting faster and coming across new problems, this time it was the suspension"

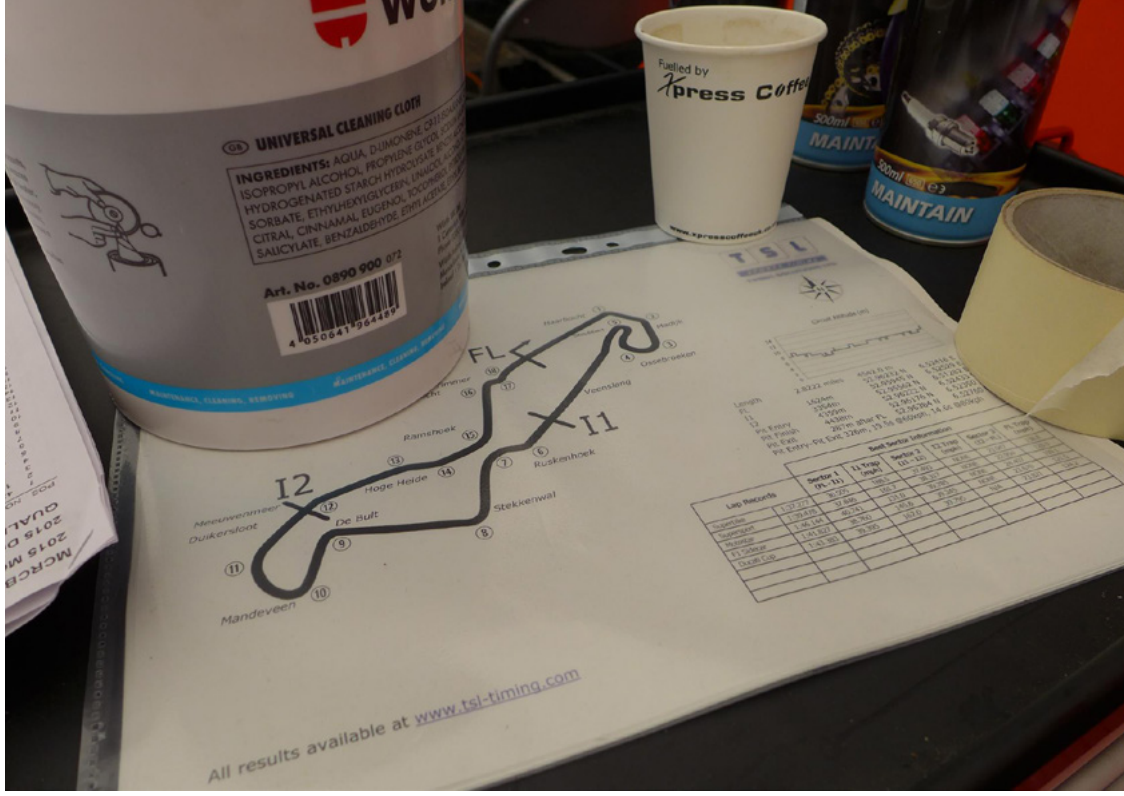
Well, I'm no racer but I'd call that the good kind of problems to have - being too fast for your setup!

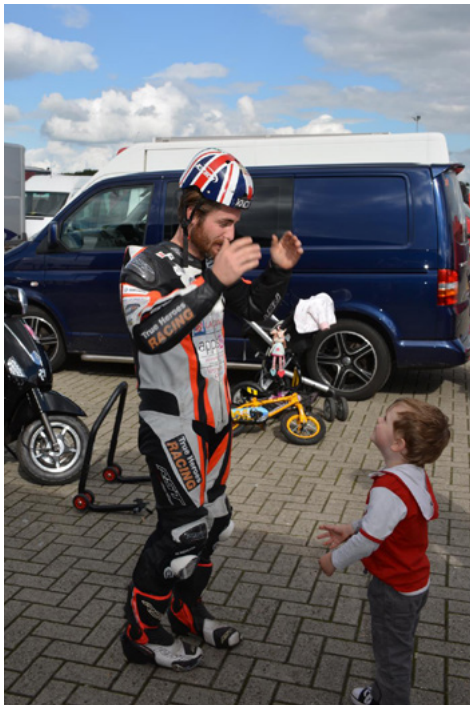
With the only race of the day for the guys done-and-dusted it's time to debrief, look

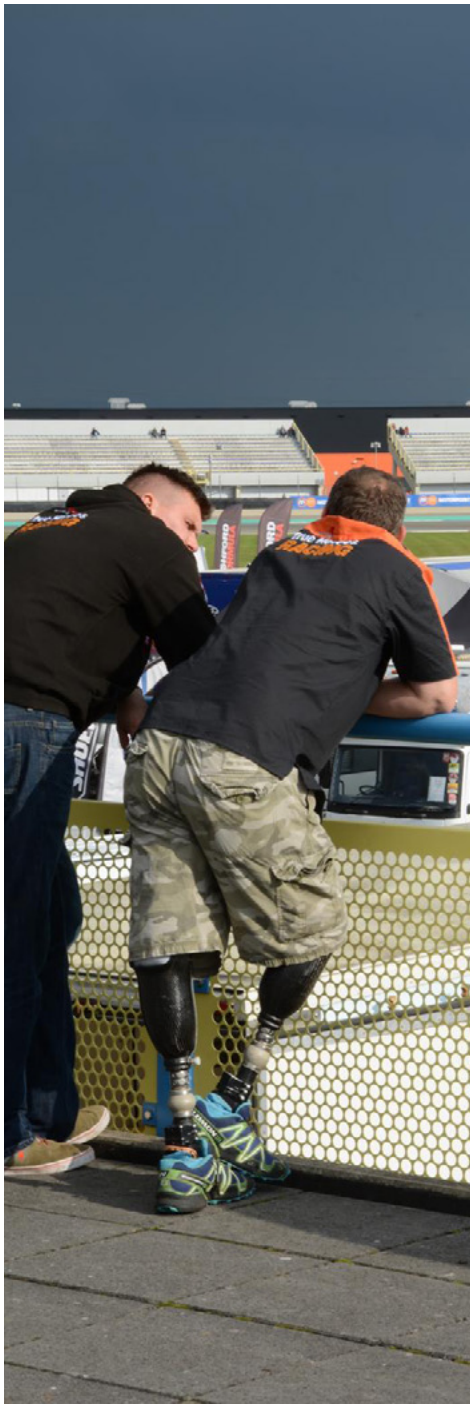
Murray Hambro on track



One of Murray Hambro's racing legs ready to be fitted







for setup tweaks that might help improve times and start getting the bikes prepped for tomorrow.

A stripped thread in the lower fork leg where the caliper bolt fits on Luke's bike, highlights one of the difficulties of racing in this class: the 899 Panigales are not eligible for racing in any of the other classes in the paddock and Ducati UK doesn't keep stock of spares trackside, so all replacement parts have to either be carried by the teams or sourced via a dealership (minimum 48-hours-plus shipping time from shop-to-track).

After asking around the other TriOptions teams, no one carries a spare fork bottom so it's time for some Macgyvering with a tap set and a slightly bigger screw. For now it will have to do.

Aside from the racing there is plenty to do: Dave's family is all here for the weekend: his wife, his 13-month old baby girl and his three-and-a-half-year-old son Conor, who is the most energetic and skilled cyclist of his age I have ever seen, from cycling in circles trying to get his knee down to towing the pit trailer loaded with tyres, to cycling the whole length of the Assen track with Dave running behind him, the kid did it all! I give him five more years before he's faster than his old man!

Everyone is busy: attending to the fans that stop for a chat and a photo, selling merchandise, taking care of the bikes, watching the other guys race, talking to the guy from the garage next door or simply getting more food on the table, there is never a dull moment.

Sitting in the hospitality area in the evening I finally get a few minutes to chat with Murray Hambro, the guy that - together with Phil- started this whole True Heroes Racing thing.

Back in December 2010 while serving in Afghanistan, Murray's armoured vehicle stepped on a pressure plate IED. He was lucky to survive but had both legs amputated below the knee.

He now wears metal and carbon fibre prosthetic legs that allow him to walk, workout (he also does competitive crossfit) and even race a fast motorcycle.

Compared to other guys around the paddock he comes off as a superbly chilled and collected guy, something you might not immediately associate with someone who went through the hardship he has.

The fact is, the guy's got a fantastic sense of humour, from the name on his leathers - "Legless" - to the disabled badge on the hump, you have to give him credit.

His chilled aura combines with the bike he rides on the road: a Harley, with an enduro bike next to it in the garage for some off-road fun. I would say it's not a bad garage for a guy that

spends his weekends on the racetrack aboard a Ducati.

A great dinner in the garage followed by drinks with the guys at the paddock bar closed the day and the moment I had been waiting for was upon me: sleeping with a trio of Italian beauties, just me and the three Ducatis and all the garage floor I could want!

OK, the floor was a bit hard, and the bikes couldn't care less if I was right there drooling over them. Still, it's quite an experience for a petrolhead to sleep in an actual race garage! Note to Phil: you guys should start marketing this as an "experience" and charge dearly for it.

Sunday morning dawned beautiful and as I exit the garage around 6am the paddock is starting to wake up: people busy getting the hospitality tents ready, others walking to the lavatories for a morning shower, a couple of riders jogging and cycling around the circuit.

We have breakfast at the garage and things slowly start to get busy in preparation for the upcoming race, the 7th of the weekend and the 2nd for the TriOptions riders.

Working on the bikes, together with the mechanics, the guys stop to chat with fans that randomly show up at the garage: a few regulars who followed the BSB to the Netherlands, a few Dutch - attracted by the orange livery of the bikes for sure. All are received with a smile, a tour of the garage and a close-up look at the bikes (they do look good in orange).

A curious group approaches the garage and starts chatting with Murray; it turns out one of the guys is Leendert Poortenaar: he is about 1.3m high and telling Murray how his disability didn't stop him from riding a motorcycle. With the help of a Dutch TV show he got a custom bike built, based around a XT660 chassis and engine with FZ6S fairings, and so low to the ground it looks like a top fuel


Profile
RACING
British Supersport Team
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dragster with the classic yellow Yamaha Racing Blocks paintjob. Definitely another impressive example of strong will and the love for bikes. (check YouTube for a video of his bike's build

I overhear Murray talking to the group: "They said if I wanted to ride a bike I would have to get a trike and roll in with my wheelchair and clip on to it, but I wasn't havin' it!"

It's from guys like these two that legends are made of!

Midway to race time, a friendly marshal stops by the tent and asks if everyone is on for today's race. There we a few crashes in the TriOptions class yesterday with everyone working round the clock to rebuild the 899s, and because the TriOptions Cup doesn't have a warm-up practice, the Marshals have to do the rounds counting who is in and who is out.

As the day progresses a few moody clouds cover the skies and the threat of a wet race hangs over the paddock.

If it starts drizzling do they go out on wets, or keep the semi-slicks? A look at the weather forecast points to a dry period at the time of the TriOptions race but who knows? Phone app forecasts are not the most reliable thing in the world...

The riders suit-up, Murray switches from one set of prosthetics wearing Merrells to the ones equipped with RST racing boots. You can feel the tension building up as race time approaches.

For the second race I go to the the paddock roof to get a vantage point where I can get some photos and watch the race, a few metres to my left, ex-MotoGP rider Michael Laverty watches the TriOptions guys before his own BSB race later on.

Dave and Luke have an interesting race, fighting closely for positions with other riders

for almost the entire length of the race but it's Murray who takes the 'win' for the most action on-track.

While running in the back of the pack a blue flag waved by one of the marshals warns him that faster riders are coming up behind. He stands the bike up to allow the group of top riders to go past, two go past but one of them (Rob Guiver) tries to fit his bike between Murray and the kerb, hitting him in the leg with the handlebars. The clip-on breaks sending Rob straight across the grass holding on to the top yoke with no front brake or throttle. By luck or mad skills the guy manages to stay on the bike, get back on track and, by holding the clip-on between his thigh and the side fairing, still finishes the race in 6th place, having set a new lap record (back when he still had a fully functional handlebar).

Check the support class highlights from Assen on YouTube for a short glimpse of the incident.

Whether you think Murray should have gotten out of the way more or it was the faster guy's responsibility to avoid the backmarker is not really important. It did make for a properly exciting end of the race and kudos to Rob Guiver for the massive skill required to stay on the bike and finish the race only losing a few positions in the process.

In true sportsmanship the first thing Murray did when we were leaving parc fermé was head over to Rob Guiver and apologise, defusing a tense moment the dignified way.

As for Dave, he finished three positions higher than in race one and with a 1:47:193s lap, way within his personal goal of 1:47s for the weekend.

Luke finished 24th, one better than the first race with a fastest lap of 1:51:355s improving almost 0.2s on his personal best.

Despite the incident, Murray also had a fantastic race, going way below the two-minute mark and setting a personal fastest lap of 1:57:753.

With the race over, the pressure was off and after the debrief the whole team gathered to dismantle the garage and pack up the gear before heading trackside to watch the last of the BSB races.

Let me tell you, it's impressive how all the kit (and bikes) fits inside the small truck, but not half as impressive as seeing Dave pack all his racing kit, photography kit, luggage for him and his family, a bicycle and the Ducati Panigale in a VW T5!

By this point I stop and ask Dave what he thought of the weekend and what his plans were for next year:

Dave: "It's been good mate, It's been good! I spent the last of my savings on that bike [pointing to the trunk of the VW T5 behind us]. I budgeted for three years in the university and spent the third year here. Next year I'll have to sell the bike or get a sponsor... [pauses as if contemplating the scenario] When I got offered this opportunity I couldn't say no. I have to race!"

It's an expensive hobby but these guys do so much more than just racing for their own selfish pleasure that I do hope they can make it work for 2016.

The words of Team Manager Phil Spencer when asked about the goal for the remaining two rounds (Silverstone & Brands Hatch) sum up the positive spirit this team is all about: "The guys get to enjoy their racing. If they come back from a session with a smile from ear to ear, then that's what this team is about!"

By now it was time for me to say goodbye to my adopted racing family and head back to Amsterdam with an urgent wish to get a track

bike! More on that anon...

PS note to self: after a long ride in the rain, do not leave your helmet and gloves locked inside the bike's panniers, in the sun, for two days...

Ricardo Rodrigues

trueheroesracing.co.uk/
ducatitrioptionscup.com/

True Heroes Racing: The Future

For 2016 the team wants to run Dave as a fully-integrated rider, then in the near future maybe even run at a higher level than the TriOptions Cup, however that requires sponsorship. Each bike costs about 15 grand to run for a season, and that is if they don't bin it - if they do it's an extra 10 grand!

Know someone who can help? The team is currently looking for more sponsorship so give Phil Spencer a shout and tell him we sent you!

by Kevin Williams

Warning about the dangers of counterfeit goods have been on the increase in recent years, largely because of the rise of the internet and online shopping which has meant that just about anyone can buy just about anything from anywhere in the world with just a few clicks. It's been estimated that no less than 10% of global trade is in counterfeit goods.

Naturally enough, motorcycling is no exception to illegal dealings in these fakes. It's big business. Trading Standards officials have seized anything from helmets to leather clothing, motorcycle drive chains, brake pads and tyres, all items that could seriously affect a rider's safety.

Back in May, counterfeit helmet seller Moortaza Walji, director of a company called BargainworldUK appeared at Peterborough Crown Court, where he was sentenced for 15 offences in relation to trade mark offences and selling unsafe helmets after goods were seized by trading standards. BargainworldUK was charged with the same offences. Walji was given a six month prison sentence, suspended for one year, and ordered to carry out 180 hours of unpaid work. He was ordered to pay £182,091 - the amount he benefited from selling the goods - and £13,145 costs, plus an £80 surcharge. The firm itself was ordered to pay a nominal £5 fine.

The motorcycle helmets subjected to safety tests failed thenbadly; anybody wearing one could have received an impact six times more forceful than permitted under legislation. Customers of the dangerous helmets were subsequently identified and contacted to make sure they were aware of the issue.

And it's been going on for years. All the way back in 2008, businessman Alan Routledge was convicted at Newcastle Crown Court of selling counterfeit motorcycle leathers via an eBay shop called Click2Buy, which operated out of two units at Tedco Business Park in Jarrow. He sold rip-off suits logo'd up with Yamaha, Suzuki, Honda and Ducati markings.

For eight years, he made an annual turnover of £400,000 by buying the counterfeit leathers from Pakistan for under £100 and selling them for around two and a half times that. Routledge was exposed when a Trading Standards officer found the fake suits up for sale on eBay and his business premises were raided. Over 450 counterfeit motorcycle leathers were found. Alan Routledge was given a six-month supervision order, a 56-day prison sentence suspended for 12 months, and a later 'proceeds of crime' hearing was due to determine how much Routledge would have to pay back.

Nor is it just a UK problem, it's global.

In June, officials in Bangkok seized counterfeit motorcycle components, including batteries that may explode and fake branded lubricating oil, worth B20 million (£380,000). Department of Special Investigations director-general Suwana Suwanajuta told a press conference that 35,228 pirated items were seized.

Last year, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement?s and Homeland Security Investigations teamed with industry and 24 law-enforcement agencies to shut 29,684 domain names that were illegally selling counterfeit merchandise online to unsuspecting consumers, including sites selling fake helmets and counterfeit DOT helmet approval stickers that can be affixed to non-approved helmets.

While China has long been the major source of fakes with over 60% in terms of value of all counterfeit goods originating there, there are other offenders - the next biggest is Hong Kong which produces 25% of the rip-offs. On the plus side, experts say that China is working to bring more fraudsters to justice, if for no reason other than to improve their image in the international business community. But there's still a long way to go.

Where do these items get sold? In the old days, it was the dodgy geezer at the local market or bike jumble and mail order. Then the rogue traders moved online, first to websites then online auction and market places like eBay and Amazon. Recently, however, there has been a significant shift to social media, which offers a great platform for showcasing the fakes on sale. Many of these sites rely heavily on positive feedback, often posted by a happy customer in the first few days after the prompt despatch of the order and long before problems become apparent.

It's easy to assume that the problem is restricted to people attempting to save a few bob by buying kit on eBay and other auction sites, and that if you buy from a reputable store you'll be safe. But it's not unknown for counterfeit goods to turn up in genuine stores, after the shop owners themselves have been hoodwinked by people posing as suppliers of the real thing. Bargain World UKs goods were being sold online through a number of retailers as well as on the company's own website.

Just how poorly does fake riding kit perform? For starters, it's worth watching a short video from the Ambulance Motorcycle Club General Secretary Ian Burrell MBE, who's a DVSA-accredited motorcycle instructor and director of Pass Bike Motorcycle Training. In it, he checks over a helmet belonging to a trainee who turned up to take his CBT.

Mr Burrell said: "The student had acted in all good faith in purchasing a helmet through eBay. Upon inspection prior to him starting the course we noticed that the helmet did not have the correct safety approvals for motorcycle use

and was flimsily constructed.

According to the trainee, the helmet listing had stated that the helmet was sold as complying with the ECER22.05 European safety standard but on inspection the helmet was missing approval stickers and internal labels. It's also alarmingly flimsily made: "it was like a washing up bowl with a visor, definitely unsuitable for use on the road". The DVSA were advised and responded by circulating a bulletin to motorcycle trainers to be aware of the issue.

But this incident occured no less than five years after BBC TV series 'Fake Britain' first reported on the problems of counterfeit motorcycle helmets in 2009. The presenters took a replica of an AGV K3 to Dainese to be tested on an anvil-type drop tester, which simulates the rider hitting their head on a kerb. A genuine AGV helmet was tested too.

First the original was dropped five times. There was little visible damage to the shell, although it should be remembered that the liner would have been compressed by each impact and would have provided progressively less shock-absorbing capacity with each drop.

Then they tested the replica. There was visible damage to the shell after the first drop. By the 4th, the shell had an extensive crack in it. The demonstrator took hold of the top of the visor opening and the chin piece and simply ripped it apart. And of course, there's no way of knowing whether the liner would have absorbed any impact at all.

Fast-forward to December 2014, where 'Fake Britain' tested another counterfeit bike helmet to destruction. Note that the impact that went through the helmet to the 'head' in the testing rig went off the scale! This video should give you an idea of just how bad these helmets are at protecting us: watch it here.

Obviously any helmet without the official stickers is a helmet we should steer well clear of, whether it's a novelty helmet like a German Army helmet or a skull cap, or if it's a conventionally styled full-face, open-face or flip front design. They're not only unsafe, but liable to land the wearer in trouble if spotted out on the road.

Fake leathers bound for the online market stall [pic: South Tyneside Trading Standards]

So what about the counterfeit leathers? Prosecutors said the leathers were "dangerous" and would not have passed safety tests. Back to 'Fake Britain'.

A year after Routledge was successfully prosecuted, the BBC's investigators found that there were still fake leathers on eBay, and bought a Yamaha YZF-logo'd suit, sold "new with tags" for £228. The site claimed two were available and four had already been sold. Worryingly 43 people were watching the item!

Shown to some trackday riders, they immediately picked up on the thin feel and light weight of the leathers - they didn't feel substantial as a proper suit should - as well as poor stitching, lack of decent body armour, no double layering in vulnerable areas, and the shoddy quality of the lettering.

The suit was taken to Dainese in Italy for testing. Dainese make the original suits that these fakes were based on. A piece of the leather was cut out and tested on a belt sander style of machine for abrasion resistance to what was stated to be a 'European standard' although that that standard actually is, wasn't mentioned - presumably it was the CE standard for 'personal protective equipment'.

To pass, the leather must not wear through in less than 5 seconds. The fakes failed in less than 3.5 seconds and once holed they had very poor tear resistance - the tester was able to rip the panel apart simply by pulling it.

So was that bad? Well, actually it wasn't as bad as I had expected. The genuine Dainese suit lasted only slightly longer than the minimum, just 5.7 seconds, which is only 50% longer than the fake suit. I would have hoped for a much bigger margin.

It doesn't take much imagination to visualise what happens when a tyre or a brake pad comes apart at speed, or what will happen to your engine when the oil filter breaks.

But could you spot a fake tyres, a chain, brake pads or oil filter? I'm damn sure I couldn't. So would I take a chance with pads, chains, filters, tyres from eBay? No. Saving a tenner here and there simply isn't worth the risk.

So what can we do to avoid buying fake goods?

Chris Knox, defending Mr Routledge, said: "No members of the public thought that they were buying what the companies sell. No one thought they were buying an £800 suit for £250."

Whether that's true or not, Caveat Emptor applies: buyer beware! If a deal looks too good to be true, it probably is, and if you're buying a cheap set of leathers on eBay for under £250 you almost certainly can guess they're not the real thing.

Whilst the fake leathers certainly aren't trackday kit, they would still offer better protection from a relatively slow speed slide on the road than a cheap fabric jacket and jeans! The only legitimate rating for motorcycle clothing is the CE standard, which we've covered before, and if leathers or other clothing are labelled with a CE mark, they must conform to that standard.

But there's no compulsion for garments to conform to that standard (unlike helmets) just so long as they aren't sold with a CE label, and in fact most of branded leathers aren't CE-approved either. So long as no claims are made for them to be 'personal protective

No Pinlock on this brand-new visor then...

equipment', it's worth making the point that had the leathers not been made to look like the genuine Dainese leathers, they would have been perfectly legal to sell. Otherwise they are just leathers at the bottom end of the quality scale compared with better made stuff - in fact, you've probably seen similar kit on market stalls at all the big shows.

But how can you spot a copy of a branded helmet like the AGV? After all, there are genuine bargains to be had as dealers clear out old stock. The Pass Bike video gives you some good clues but here are some other points to look out for.

Weight of helmet - this is a good starting point. Manufacturers quote the weight of their helmets and so check your suspected fake against the official figures. Counterfeit helmets made with inferior materials are often significantly lighter.

Thick inner liner - helmets meeting the EU standard usually about 2.5cm (1") of dense polystyrene foam. Even if you can't see it, you should still be able to feel its thickness and firmness. Fake helmets often use less and softer polystyrene.

Chin strap and rivets - these should be sturdy and securely fastened to the shell with solid metal rivets. There should be no give.

Stickers and labels - a bit more difficult to spot, but compare with the official ones from a genuine helmet. Look for incorrect standards codes and stickers that look like they have been hastily applied. You should also find a label inside the helmet which records the manufacturer?s name, model, size, month and year of manufacture.

The way the helmet was torn in two was scary, and don't assume it'll be OK because it's got the right stickers. As I mentioned, fake US DOT approval decals are easy to find on Amazon.com and other online vendors, who claim that the 'replacement' labels are for helmets that are already DOT-approved, and you can buy a 'genuine' ACU Gold approved helmet sticker on eBay too! And there are people out there buying them. If you buy a cheap lid from eBay you really are taking a very big risk indeed.

And of course, beyond the danger to life and limb, there's a less obvious cost; you're putting money in the pockets of fraudsters rather than honest traders. As councillor Michael Clare, Lead Member Environment, Housing and Transport had to say regarding the Routledge case: "Companies like Yamaha, Suzuki, Ducati and Honda have invested a great deal of time, effort and money into building up their business and establishing a strong reputation. It is wrong for someone to take advantage of this by illegally profiting from their hard-earned success and we have a duty to take action in these cases. This kind of activity can also deliver a blow to the income of reputable local businesses selling legitimate goods, and the resulting losses can ultimately have an affect on employment."

If you do unknowingly fall victim to counterfeit fraud make sure you report it to Action Fraud at www.actionfraud.police.uk or on 0300 123 2040.

Kevin Williams

survivalskills.co.uk

Altered Images

Top tips from a pro bike photographer

Words/pics: Michelle Szpak

Being out on the motorcycle is the best feeling, and should you be inclined to, the digital camera with its instant results means that it is easier than ever to document your ride, which of course goes hand-in-hand with the sheer number of opportunities to tell everyone else about it by way of websites, blogs and social media and the 'selfie' (don't say you don't do that sort of thing because we all do!).

Being able to take better quality images of your bike can even make a difference to whether or not anyone is interested in it when you come to sell it - how many times have you, as a potential bike buyer, looked at a picture of a bike on a dealership's website (or someone's advert on a certain well-known auction site) and dismissed it because it didn't look good?

Whether you're buying, selling, looking to get more 'Likes' on Facebook or even launch a photographic career, here are a few tips to get the right results.

Location and background

Quite often we have chosen the location for a picture because it's part of our trip and we want a memory of being there; or maybe there is a group of you ('cos riding is a social thing) and you want a shot to remember the ride. Maybe you just *had* to stop as the view is awesome.

Always do a 360 check when you stop. Have you put the bike(s) in the best place? Is the background what you want, or is the best background just over there to the right?

Watch out for anything distracting to the eye. This could be a bright-coloured bin, some rubbish that someone has left behind or even some sort of sign. You might find that by moving your bike just a few feet takes the 'distraction' out of the frame and you can have a perfect image of the view (alternatively you could just pick up the rubbish...).

If you're taking a group photo, it might be a case of hiding the distraction with the people in the image (this is always a helpful trick).

If you're photographing people riding the bike or just sat on it, make sure that there is nothing funny growing out of their heads (unless it's for fun, some signs can be interesting); you don't want to get home and then realise that someone has a tree or a lamp-post growing out of their lid (see above-left).

Always triple-check what is in your frame, before you take the image. I know I mentioned distractions, but sometimes items can merge into the scene - little things like cigarette butts right in front of the bike. You may not notice a post sticking out the ground that blends in, but if you moved the bike left a fraction you could avoid it being there at all.

If you are looking for a location specifically to photograph a motorcycle then start to create ideas of which locations the bike would suit. I find that some bikes suit a more industrial environment, some look great with open landscapes (above-centre). Some suit both, but think about how you can capture that bike's personality: is it a tourer? Is it a mean-looking sports bike? Is it a cruiser? Is it an 'adventure' bike where people expect it to be in a desert instead of Waitrose car park?

All about angles

The angles are everything. I will always go the extra mile to get that shot for my clients, whether it's a motorcycle shoot or a commercial. In fact I am known for lying on the ground no matter what the conditions are like (see above!). These angles can make your image different to everyone else that is taking what amounts to the same image of the same bike, which matters enormously when selling a bike - how many blue/white Gixxers are there out there? Make yours stand out. First of all, get low. You might not be comfortable with laying on the ground, so maybe kneel instead. This angle is good for shots with one or two bikes.

Another way to be different is to get yourself a bit higher up. Maybe you could stand at the top of the hill and photograph downwards, or there is somewhere safe you can stand to photograph downwards. This is often great if you are photographing a large group and want to get everyone in the image.

Details: when photographing the tank or another part of the bike, don't just photograph it from a standing height. Think of other angles that will compliment that part of the bike.

Reflections: one important aspect with angles is that it helps you to keep your reflection out of the bike - tip: the more chrome there is, the worse the reflection can be.

Composition

Where is your subject in the image? Where you place objects in an image can make a big impact. Most people just place the subject dead centre of the frame with no consideration of whether there is a better arrangement, or what is actually interesting about the image.

Rule of thirds: many photographers will use the 'rule of thirds' to compose an image. This involves imagining a grid superimposed on the viewfinder (like the grid on the image at top-right). The main subject would be positioned where the lines intersect because it produces a more visually-interesting image. It's worth mentioning that many modern digital cameras - and even smartphone cams - have a setting where it will create a grid for you right there on the screen.

Avoid placing the horizon across or through a person, especially across their head. If this is happening, just adjust the height of your own position to compensate.

It is also good practice to make sure the horizon isn't smack-bang in the middle of the image. Use the guide lines from the rule of thirds and try to keep it in the top or bottom sections.

Cropping: get creative and only place part of the bike in the image. For example, shoot from the seat looking out towards the scenery, showing the handlebars leading to the view.

Let there be light

This is a subject that could take up this entire magazine rather than just these few pages, so I will just touch on the basics. I personally use external lighting (Elinchrom Quadra) on all my images, which suits the dramatic style that I am known-for and which allows me to shoot in any situation, but for this article we'll concentrate on natural light. Avoid midday harsh sun: any photography I do outside is usually in the morning or towards sunset as that time of day is often referred to as the 'Golden Hour' because it gives you the best quality of light and avoids the harsh bright contrasty sun at midday.

If you're shooting with your camera set to Auto it is often best to keep the sun behind you when shooting otherwise you'll end up shooting a silhouette. Keeping the sun behind you will keep detail in the sky and subject. You do need to be careful though, if you're photographing people with the sun behind you then they will be squinting at you because that sun that's behind you is right in their faces (unless they have sunglasses on or you get them to look away).

If you are photographing a rider and their bike on a bright sunny day, try to find some shade to put the bike and rider in. If you do this make sure the background is also in shadow or you will have nothing behind them in the image as there will be too much contrast between the shaded subjects and the landscape behind them.

Also, look at the bike and see where the light is falling. It is worth looking for the natural reflections that the bike generates itself; if you are shooting inside for example, and you have a door open opposite the bike, then you may find that the light is reflected in the bike in a

way which is not complimentary (usually a bright rectangle shows in the paintwork and draws your eye).

Use of Flash: if you are going to use the flash that's built into your camera (or even the tiny one in your smartphone!), be very careful as you can end up with a very flat and unnatural-looking light. It can also reflect in the bike and cause bright highlights (spots of light) in the paint work which will not compliment the image. Mastering flash takes a lot of practice so I would always recommend you work with natural light only until you're more familiar with the principles I've described above.

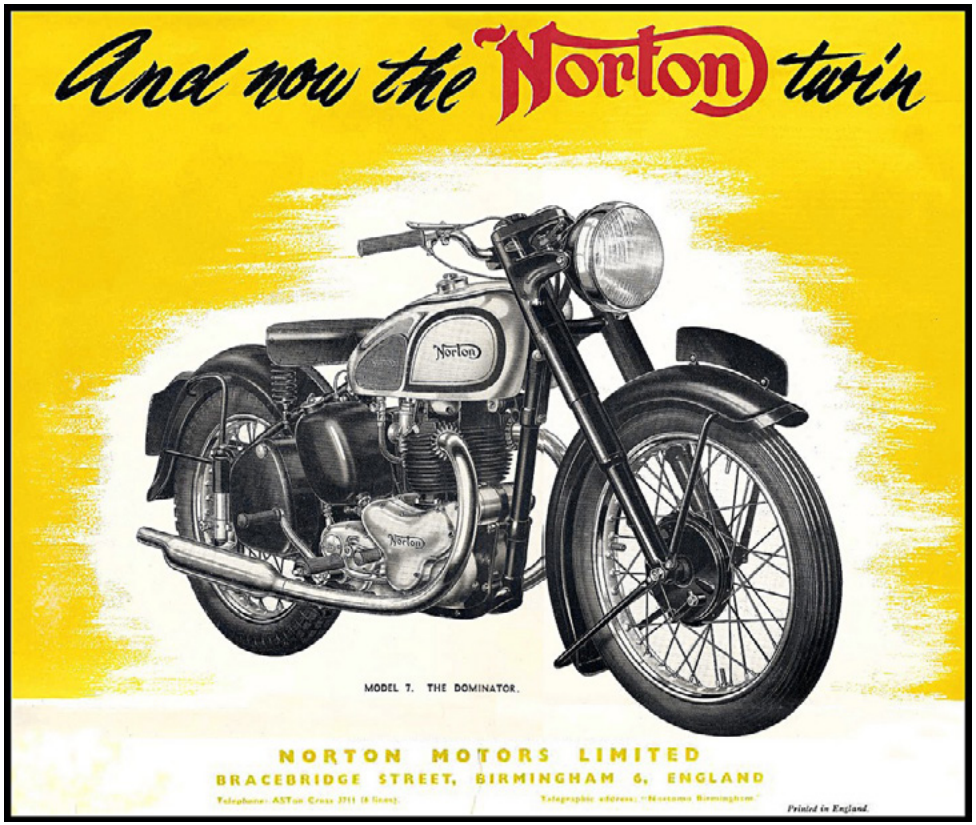
To sum up, the best thing to do is get out there and photograph. Play, get creative and use your imagination. I'm not here to insist that you need to go out and buy thousands of pounds-worth of equipment either because you can learn all the basic principles I've described above just by using your phone cam (and you can't carry all that stuff on a bike anyway).

Ask any photographer: by far the most important piece of equipment of all is your eye!

Michelle Szpak

Check out Michelle's ongoing work within the motorcycle industy at her website:
szpakbiker.co.uk/
- and on Facebook:
facebook.com/SzpakBiker/

Michelle's recent studio shoot with the Kawasaki H2R in Ramsgate Tunnels



Letter from America

One, Two, Three or Four Fingers?

In the US's Motorcycle Safety Foundation program (MSF), instructors are infamous for requiring students to use their whole hand on either the throttle or the brake. Not just one, two, or three finger braking, but the whole collection of finger-like digits; "If you have 'em, use 'em."

This is a position that generates a lot of controversy among "experienced riders" who have cultivated (politi-speak for "clung to beginner habits") a variety of tactics that involve various fingers applied at random times with an assortment of justifications with empirically inconsistent results. There are some strong justifications for the MSF position. Is this the best way to teach front brake use? Probably. Is it absolutely the only right way to use the front brake? Not necessarily.

Sometimes even more controversial, MSF instructors are not fond of the "covering the brake" habit. I believe this tactic mostly comes from a fevered need to feel "prepared," in case a piano falls out of the sky and scares the crap out of you. Newbies may want the security of nervously covering that apparatus in case they forget where the brake is, but "need" and "want" are not the same animal. In high tension situations, it is natural to want to be ready to stop. The problem is, more often than not, grabbing a handful of brake is exactly the wrong move. All of those "I had to lay 'er down" stories are examples of how poor braking tactics turn into a justification for doing something stupid. Rubber will out-stop metal and plastic any time. Besides, we all know you didn't "lay 'er down," you screamed, panicked, and fell down. One reason for breaking the brake-covering habit is to force a few moments of thought into the decision-making process. If your hand is already on the brake, you'll use it before thinking.

There are a lot of arguments on the web and in bars and every other place motorcyclists hang out about how many fingers are necessary or ideal for precise, safe rapid stops. I snagged a portion of this answer to a question from a newbie about his MSF BRC experience from a moto-discussion site; "Some use two fingers because you can keep them over the lever at all times. If your brakes are bled correctly and the lever is adjusted, you will not trap the other fingers [tell me how that works out for you if you drop the bike hard on the right bar]. How many fingers you will need in a emergency is dependent on finger strength and brake caliper strength." Another of those kids claimed, "I convinced a friend to ride with two fingers always on the break [sic] and he said the habit saved his life." When that friend drops the bike in a corner because his "habit" caused him to grab the brake when he should have been nowhere near that control, I wonder if the kid with the "great advice" will take the blame?

I think habit explains why so many riders feel the need to rest their fingers on the brake. Safety or preparedness are pretty low on the list of logical justifications for this practice. Fear is a lot higher on the list, but most riders won't acknowledge that. They began hanging on to the grip when they first started riding and haven't re-evaluated the practice since. New riders are terrified of letting go of the grip and just as nervous about taking their fingers off of the brake. Terror does justify a habit.

Obviously, some brakes and some riders are able to get all the stopping power they need from one finger. YouTube and the Web are full of guys showing off their one-finger stoppie power. That doesn't make one-finger braking a brilliant concept, or a safe riding habit. A stunt is not the same as an unplanned emergency stop. In a stunt, you not only aim for the best possible spot to make the stop, you shift your weight to maximize the pressure on the front wheel to prevent skidding, and if you screw it up it you'll probably survive to try again. In an emergency, you want to stop with as much control and power as possible. If you screw it up, you might be dead.

I'm a long ways from an MSF-fanatic, but I do think our training organization is right in teaching the four-fingered braking habit. Being the single-minded, single-task animal we humans are, learning how to use the front brake with power and confidence is life-saving. In fact, if you never learn how to use the rear brake, you're only giving up on 10-30% of your stopping power. Precise front brake operation is one of the most critical skills in motorcycling. One of the reasons for learning how to perform a skill absolutely correctly is, then, you can intentionally modify that technique when conditions change. If you never learn how to use your brakes correctly, you won't suddenly figure it out in an emergency.

Thomas Day

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The Restoration Man

Words/pics: Martin Haskell

Ever since I visited the Bike Shed's 'Event' in Shoreditch back in 2013 I have been struck by the beauty and elegance of the motorcycles created by one particular custom builder.

There, amidst a bewildering array of re-imagined bobbers, brats, scramblers and café racers stood a brace of bikes that somehow managed to capture perfectly the pure essence of the (to me) beautiful but misunderstood BMW R100 and R80; stripping away the once dowdy clothing to reveal the design classics that lay beneath - just like Cinderella, the Ugly Duckling and Sixty Minute Makeover all rolled into one.

I should add that I'm not talking about simply binning the mudguards, fitting a set of knobblies, sticking a bandage on the headers, swapping the seat for a thinly upholstered plank and rubbing off the paint on the tank with a bit of wet and dry.

I mean seeing through the 'pipe and slippers' sensibility to the true character of these bikes, and then tastefully transforming one into a lean and hungry looking street scrambler, the other a stylishly basic café racer. It's a fine line.

Polished custom pipes, black wheels and exquisite hand crafted aluminium seat cowls housing a simple round tail lamp; one finished in the blue and orange Gulf Oil livery made famous by Steve McQueen's 1970 Porsche 917 in the classic 'Le Mans' movie, the other in an elegant duck egg blue and white two tone paint scheme.

These bikes were the creations of Kevin Hill, the man behind 'Kevil's Speed Shop'- a Devon based bespoke custom house where new life is breathed into old boxers.

Tucked away behind a pair of roller shutters on an unassuming back street in Paignton, I visited Kevin on a quiet Friday morning towards the end of November. Photographer Rob Grist was busily photographing 'Moto # 3' – a newly finished Honda 250 twin – more of which later.

But otherwise there was little going on. Kevin explained that he has two self-employed mechanics working with him, but that they were waiting for some powder coating to be returned in order to continue with new builds.

Work had been going on since early in the morning on 'Zombie' – a 1993 BMW K1100LT street tracker requiring a few finishing touches before collection by its new owner.

Even this bike – the first and possibly last K-series to receive the Kevils treatment – Kev had reached places that other builders seem to have ignored.

I'm referring to the cut-outs on the sides of the fuel tank where the radiator cowling sits. Most builders seem to ignore these, but as a long term K100 owner, to me a bike looks unfinished with them exposed. Mr Hill obviously feels the same way, as he has dissected a Honda petrol tank to create a bespoke set of cowls that sit nicely in the tank voids (see page 116).

I asked Kevin about the origins of Kevils Speed Shop. "Six years ago – no, a bit longer than that now, driving a truck, I had a new BMW I used to use but I didn't want anything too nice to leave around the skip yard during the day. I always messed around with bikes, trying to make them look different since I was fourteen, fifteen years old, just trying to make it look individual, so I looked around for a big capacity bike at a cheap price, something that was metric, something you could get all the bits for".

"Back then, BMW airheads were two a penny, you pick them up in the free ads for four or five hundred quid." So Kevin found a used R65, stripped all the unnecessary bits off "made it very minimal" and 'Airhead' was created, featuring a sprung bicycle style saddle, a carefully rusted waxed tank, a pair of Avon Speedmaster tyres and not a lot else. "I was into hot rods and Americana, so I wanted to make it a 'salt flat' sort of racer type of thing."

He then decided to try and sell the bike, so he put some photographs of it on Ebay, and discovered that not only were a lot of people

Kevil's Speed Shop owner Kevin Hill

'Hero' - R80 monoshock with mini LED dash (right)

very keen to buy it, but they also wanted him to build them one.

It proved to be a 'Eureka' moment for Kevin, not believing the amount of hits the bike was getting he transformed another, and then another. Working from his garage at home he invested in more bikes, and later placed an advert on Ebay to say that he was accepting commissions.

Due to demand Kevin then started 'farming out' various specialist tasks such as wiring looms, paintwork and upholstery to local businesses, which allowed him to concentrate more on developing design concepts, something he clearly has an eye for, and which I believe sets Kevil's apart from a lot of other bike builders.

Thus began Kevil's Speed Shop. In later years the volume of work had outgrown the garage at Kevin's home, so he took on the current spacious premises in Paignton. Unique versions of BMW's R-series airheads are produced every 3-4 weeks; as well as being sold in the UK, bikes are exported around the world, and to some impressive clients.

These include David Beckham, actor Matt Bardock (paramedic Jeff Collier in 'Casualty' - see this issue's 'Riders' Lives'), and Jamie Jackson, creative designer of the 'Guitar Hero Live' game – whose newly finished bike 'Hero' – an unusual (for Kevils) R80 monoshock fitted with a nifty little LED dash, as well as tiny high visibility indicators and rear lamp fitted to the rear subframe.

Removable black mudguards complete the picture, but describing the bike in such simple terms does it an injustice. Many of Kev's café racers hid a gel battery in the tail fairing ('Hero' doesn't have one) but this bike maintains its 'stripped down' look by having one fitted inconspicuously below the gearbox.

Having seen pictures of this bike formerly wearing its traditional white BMW bodywork and touring screen, I can believe that some purists might recoil in horror at what it has become, but the transformation is nothing short of remarkable.

While there are no 'performance mods' as such, the bike is significantly lighter than the standard model; the Bing carbs have been replaced with Mikunis, which improves response considerably, and it has the latest 'Enduralast' electronic ignition, charging system and ECU, along with Dynacoils. "It looks 'old school' but it's all modern underneath – it will outperform any standard R80" Kev tells me.

The rear sub-frame is shorter, with tidy gusseting supporting the bespoke tan leather seat, but importantly the iconic petrol tank – which along with the classic flat twin engine is the key to the R series' identity - remains the same, albeit fitted with a 'Monza' fuel cap and finished in a distressed but discreet grey/green.

I asked Kevin how he interprets a customer's wishes when preparing a project. "He (Jamie Jackson -'Hero's owner) emailed me a couple of pictures of bikes on Bike EXIF and Bike Shed that he liked, and every bike he sent me was a monoshock. We've done 90 of these BMW airheads, but this is only the second mono we've ever done."

"You can make them look quite funky,

but of course we've got six twin-shock bikes in stock at any one time, R80s and R100s, you wouldn't see them - they're all stripped down into pieces, so when we need something it we just pull it off the shelf. So I thought we'd better buy a mono-shock bike."

"I came up with an idea, a list of things; we're going to put black wheels on it - all the bikes have black wheels - the tyres I picked are these Avons; twin disc conversion, flat bars; a gadget speedo touch screen dash, brown leather seat, black tank, short black twin silencers, single seat, no mudguards, very minimal."

"Then he came back to me and said that he didn't want it black, and that he'd like it a sort of grey-green colour, and that he wanted mudguards on it because he was going to be using it all the time in all weathers."

"We put the back mudguard on in such a way that he could remove it in the summer, because we'd put the tail light in the hoop on the back, instead of on the fender. So we kind of negotiated a spec."

It sounds easy when you say it quickly. But the thing I've always admired about Kev's bikes is the attention to detail. One of the first things I noticed about Kev's 'Speedster' café racer at the 2014 London bike show were the exotic adjustable levers and switchgear. (See pic of white bike with red and blue stripes)

The engines (there was a row of them on a bench just inside the entrance) go off to a specialist to be completely refreshed, vapour blasting is part of the process, along with new

shells, main bearings, new cams, valve seats and guides so the end result is like a new engine.

Brand new clutch assemblies, reconditioned gearboxes, reconditioned driveshaft, new bearings in the rear drive, and new splines if they're more than 50% worn.

"You've got a product then that's going to last the customer another 30 years".

Like the engines, the paintwork is sent to two local body shops; the handmade aluminium tail pieces are created by a guy in Wales who works exclusively for Kev, and the bespoke seats are made by a chap who specialises in upholstery for boats - hardly surprising with the sound of Paignton's seagulls squawking overhead.

I asked Kev if they'd had any bikes brought back to be 're-imagined'.

"Not really. We had one back in a couple of weeks ago; a customer in Surrey who didn't buy it from us, he was the second owner. He just wanted a top engine cover fitted with some open filters, and some LED indicators. We'd be happy to do that if anybody wanted them changing, but once we build a bike we get some good pictures taken; we feature the bike on our website, if we can we get them on The Bike Shed, Bike EXIF and Pipeburn."

"People like the fact that the bike is featured on line, and they're all named, so if you Google 'Kevil's Quicksilver' for instance and image it, you get a whole page of pictures of that bike. So if somebody was to change it, to change the colour or whatever, it would be lost; it wouldn't be 'Kevil's Quicksilver' any more, it would be something else."

Perhaps a bit like touching up the Mona Lisa, if you'll pardon the expression.

Kevil's Speed Shop's reputation is such that BMW Motorrad UK borrow bikes from him for their trade stands at events such as the Ace Café Revival, they also commissioned him to produce a unique version of their R Nine-T café racer.

Kev also told me that TV's Restoration Man - architect George Clarke (responsible for the Jamie Jackson connection) is promising to commission a bike in 2016 when his filming schedule permits.

But aside from the dozens of BMWs Kevils have transformed, a new strand of bikes is emerging, small and relatively inexpensive Japanese models.

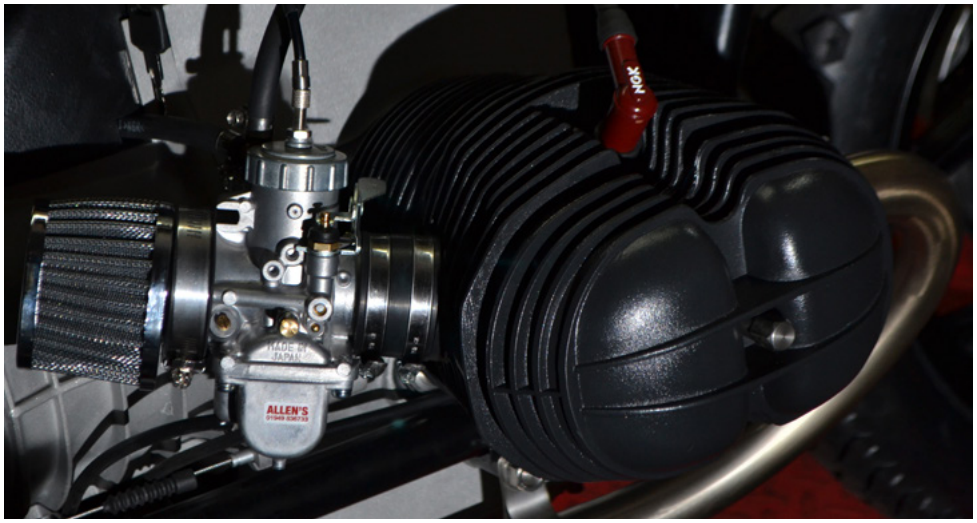
"The thing is" explains Kev, "these (gesturing towards a beautiful blue BMW – 'Capri') are great, but not everybody can afford them; I like to keep busy, and although commissions keep coming through the door we have a little bit of downtime sometimes waiting for paintwork, waiting for fabrication, stuff like that, you know?"

"So I've got some smaller Japanese bikes to do, in different styles and variants. It's about a third of the price to offer the clients, but still using my vision for design, colours and everything else."

I suggest that a lot of people who would want a bespoke bike might not have a bike licence and would have to go for something smaller first; they could be a bit intimidated by an 800 or a 1,000cc bike, maybe coming back for something bigger later on.

"That's my ideal thing you know, the fact that it gets their foot on the ladder of the bespoke custom world."

I mentioned that Bike Shed founder Dutch von Shed had stated in his TRD 'Rider's Lives' interview that kids 'can't afford high performance bikes and couldn't give a monkey's. They just want a cool bike like we did when we were 17 – and they have a limited



Examples of Kevin Hill's work at the 2013 BSMC Event

budget'. He went on to say that he wanted 'to see biking pulled back into being about people, lifestyle and fun – something for everyone to enjoy – not a high performance niche for deep pocketed middle-aged men whose kids have left home.'

"That is what you think, but realistically that (pointing to a recently finished 1989 Honda CG125 – Moto#2) is three and a half grand. What kid can afford three and a half grand for a 125?"

Two other bikes in the shop from the new, smaller 'Moto' range were Moto #1, a Suzuki 250 single, and a recently finished and freshly photographed Honda CBF250 scrambler up for grabs at a very reasonable £3,999. There is of course not another one like it. Anywhere.

Not a bad price for exclusivity.

We then discussed various design concepts at The Bike Shed shows involving knobbly tyres, no mudguards and open bell mouths, along with my long held belief that Massimo Tamburini's beautiful 916/996 Ducatis could be hung on the wall and stared at like an oil painting if the engine let go.

"That's the thing, it's always, *always* form over function, but it has to function."

Kevin Hill is an affable chap, he made me feel very welcome, and while we talked, with the shutter door open, locals, including the postman were constantly passing and saying good morning, calling Kev by name. This is clearly a close-knit community, and one that this artisan sculptor of beautiful but practical motorcycles feels at home in, and is contributing in no small way to the local economy.

"I'm basically a 'nuts and bolts' guy – I'm not a computer programmer, not an office worker, I'm half-designer/artist and half-entrepreneur. That's how I see myself, as a project manager

Standard BMW R80 monoshock donor awaiting transformation

of this place."

Having once been a member of The BMW Club, where T-shirts and mugs are referred to as 'regalia' and where letters in the club magazine start with 'Dear Sir', I can imagine Kevin Hill might not be among their favourite people.

I guess they might feel that his creations are disrespectful of all that they hold dear, and that classic R80 and R100 bikes should still be clothed in their oh-so frumpy and heavy original bodywork (I'll just remind you that I was once the proud owner of the ground breaking and beautiful R100RS) complete with mud flaps and Krauser pannier frames.

Around the world - thanks to Kev - there are more than 90 BMW flat twins that are now turning heads, being ridden, admired, loved, polished - and lusted after by people like me who can't afford one.

You can't tell me that those bikes would all now be receiving the same kind of attention if they hadn't been through Kevil's Speed Shop. I'm certain that a good proportion of them would be sitting in a shed somewhere next to a lawn mower, flat tyres and battery, covered in dust and cobwebs.

It's something I would equate with a Victorian house. Lovely in its day, but rapidly deteriorating and in danger of being knocked down and replaced with a sterile new build. Until someone like Kev comes along and fits new windows, floors, wiring and central heating, all the while keeping the original brickwork and character. Kevin Hill is indeed the Restoration Man.

Martin Haskell

kevilsspeedshop.com/

A Grand Day Out

Paul Blezard rides his HP2 to Torque Racing's open day in Cambridgeshire and samples some interesting bikes on road and trail

I recently had an extremely enjoyable autumnal day of mixed motorcycling activity and socialising. It started in Ware, in Hertfordshire at the home of my old friend Julian Bond and his wife Denise, watching the scintillating MotoGP race from Philip Island which was not just the best race of the season but one of the best of the decade.

This was followed by some unexpected excitement as Julian and I attempted to put more air into the sagging air-only rear shock of my BMW HP2 Enduro 1200 and inadvertently let all the air out instead, immediately turning my big trailie 'Boxer' into a hardtail chopper. It hasn't looked that way since the original air shock collapsed and then snapped in half, in the wild west of Ireland back in 2008. This time it was a lot less serious and we soon got all the air back in again, and more, putting me back on tippy toes to touch the ground. The HP2 is the only bike I've ever owned which makes me feel like a real short-arse!

A quick blast up the A10 and a few miles of backroad soon brought me to the smart new premises of Torque Racing between Litlington and Bassingbourn, near Royston. It's run by ace rally bike preparation guru Martin Wittering and his rally-riding partner Donna Gray. It was Martin who got my HP2 back on the road a couple of years ago, with the help of John Mitchinson of Rally Raid, who was also there with several interesting bikes of his own. They all seemed surprised to see me so soon after mid-day, not realising that I'd originally planned to be there 24 hours earlier!

I was really impressed by all the kit and equipment that Martin and Donna have in stock, although I nearly fell over when I saw the price of a Klim jacket. Sheesh! There were trail riders coming and going all afternoon, including a lady who, led by Donna, had been practising navigating with a rally road book – far more sensible to start doing it in familiar surroundings than starting in a foreign country with a myriad of other alien things to worry about!

Torque Racing's Donna Gray and Martin Wittering

The highlight of the day was a thoroughly entertaining trail ride led by Donna on her Husky 450 in company with John Mitchinson on his Beta 300 and 'big John' Duff on his KTM 450 EXC. I started on the much-modified Rally Raid Honda CB500X, which I've been wanting to ride since I first saw it at the Ace Cafe Adventure Day back in March. The modifications are all to the cycle parts because the whole idea of the machine is to make it much more off-road-capable than standard while keeping everything to do with the 471cc twin cylinder engine bog standard for ultimate Honda road-bike-style reliability.

On paper, an all-up weight of 200kgs with only 47bhp doesn't sound very thrilling compared to something like a KTM 450 or 690, but as John said, it's not intended for enduros or rallies, it's designed to provide reliable, economical transport on any kind of going. It isn't thrilling, but it is easy to ride, on both road and trail. I felt at home on the Honda straight away as we rode through the tight bends in Litlington and again, as I stood up on the extra-meaty pegs as we hit the first open and easy green lane. The thoroughly revised suspension, both front and rear, (complete with 19 inch spoked front wheel instead of the standard 17 inch alloy item) just soaked up all the lumps and bumps where the standard machine would have been a real handful.

Another squirt on the road proved the motor to be very smooth and easily capable of cruising comfortably at motorway speeds – the screen is surprisingly effective, and higher ones are available – before we got back on the dirt on some more nadgery trails. I followed Donna as she turned up the wick on the Husky 450 and the Honda continued to behave itself, never getting out of shape.

Blez on the highly-modified Rally Raid Honda CB500X

L-R: Donna Gray (Husky 450), John Duff (KTM 450), John Mitchinson (Beta 300 Cross Trainer)

Time out...

Mitchinson mid-trail on the Beta 300

A swap to John Mitchinson's Beta 300 Cross Trainer beckoned though, and was great fun. It's so light and poky it feels like cheating after the CB500X. John has actually ridden it on the road to local trials, then competed in them and ridden home! He also did the Welsh 2-day enduro on it and if I were ever daft enough to do enduros again, this is the sort of tool I'd like to use. It would be ideal for long distance trials too, although John agreed that it's undergeared for dual purpose use and he's going to put a smaller rear sprocket on it. Lord knows how it gets through modern emission tests as a two-stroke, but with electric start and autolube, it's got all the modernities that popular trail 'strokers' of the past lacked. I swapped back to the CB500X for another loop of the nadgery trails, but this time switched off the ABS, enabling me to slide the Honda's back end around with impunity. Having got fully warmed up, I got the hefty twin performing more like a pukka trail bike, if not a full-on enduro. I also had a go at some tricky steps down into a dried up stream, and up some more the other side, which I was very pleased to 'clean' in both directions, while John demonstrated the more extreme capabilities of the Beta 'Cross Dresser' as he calls it, on some very steep and wooded banks.

I also had a go on Donna's Husky 450, which I enjoyed, and the other John's KTM 450 EXC, which felt just like my own poor neglected specimen, which has been gathering dust in my garage for far too long. On the ride back to Torque Racing I opened up the CB500X on a long straight and I've no doubt that given enough room it would top the ton on a German autobahn, as John claims. Far more impressive is his claim of 70mpg, backed up with the fact that while riding one across the Australian outback in company with a Suzuki DR650 the

Mitchinson and his CB500F-derived flat-tracker

Honda twin consistently required only 75% of the fuel needed by the lighter single. Honda actually claim the CB500X will do 80mpg!

It would be really interesting to compare the Rally Raid machine with both a Honda Dominator and with Honda Transalps old and new. I suspect it's actually closer to the off-road ability of the original Mk1 Transalp (one of which I owned and had a host of adventures on) than the more recent Transpals, which have become very sanitised and 'roadified'. Of course, one key aspect of the latest CB500s is that, unlike the Transalp, they are all legal steeds for A2 licence holders, which explains that modest 35kw (47bhp) output.

The CB500X is also cheap as chips at only £5,499 OTR for the standard machine, with even cheaper deals to be had and low-mileage second hand examples available for little more than half that, which means that it's possible to put together a nearly-new Rally Raided CB500X for no more than the cost of an A2 licence-restricted BMW F700GS. I'd like to do that comparison too, as well as one with my own rip-snorting 105bhp HP2 which, although it actually weighs no more than the Honda, actually feels a lot heavier. An old BMW R80GS 'airhead' would make for an interesting comparison too, since it actually has very similar power and weight. I also wonder what RTW author Sam Manicom would make of the Honda, after 250,000 miles on 'Libby', his trusty R80 GS airhead. Another interesting comparison is with Elspeth Beard's 1974 BMW

Mitchinson and the Rally Raid CB500X

Blez's problematic HP2 (left) and the Yamaha Serow (right)

R60/6, which she rode around the world in 1982-84 and recently put back on the road. It is rated at just 40bhp, with a standard weight of 210 kgs and even the more powerful 750cc R75/5, claimed to be capable of 110mph, only had 3bhp more than the lighter 471cc Honda. Even the R80GS Basic which has been Elspeth's main steed for the past 15 years or so, (in preference to the heavier R1100GS that she had for a while), has no more power than the R75/5 – it is also rated at 50bhp. In any case, the Rally Raid CB500X's long distance dirt credentials have already been proved twice over: last summer experienced rally rider Jenny Morgan (who first had the idea of modifying a CB500) rode the first 'Level 3' Rally Raid 500X conversion some 12,000 miles across the USA and back on the famous TransAmerica Trail while, as mentioned earlier, John Mitchinson himself rode another CB500X thousands of kilometres across the Aussie outback in company with a bunch of more conventional dirt bikes.

For the ride back down that first and last easy open trail I swapped back to the Beta 300 and thoroughly enjoyed being able to just let it rip with no need to worry about where the front wheel was going because it just floats out of almost any kind of trouble. Brilliant. But you wouldn't want to ride a 'Cross Dresser' to the Pyrenees, something which would be not only eminently do-able but thoroughly enjoyable on the simple but very effective Rally Raid Honda twin. And then you could ride it in an Austin Vince Pyrenees-Up trail navigation event. Now there's an idea!

After returning from our entertaining trail ride we were treated to some excellent chili con carne and rice made by Donna Gray's mum. Warming and tasty. Not long after, some more trail riders turned up, two of them on KTM

'Little John' Alleman and the Torque Racing KTM '701' special - note the seat height


A selection of serious rally bikes at Torque Racing

690s. I got chatting to one of the 690 owners, George, and mentioned that while I'd owned a KTM 640 Adventure I'd yet to try a 690. He kindly offered me a ride so I took it for a quick blast up the road and was mightily impressed. It felt both smoother and a lot more poky than my old 640 and though I didn't take it off road, I'm sure it's better on the rough stuff too. Felt much lighter than my HP2 as well, which I offered young George a go on in return, but he declined. I took the opportunity to make use of the jetwash kindly made available by Torque Racing and gave the old girl her first proper clean for ten months...

The other KTM 690 refused to re-start after its jet wash and had to be taken in to the Torque Racing workshop for some resuscitation, which actually turned out to be quite an operation. Torque Racing proprietor Martin Wittering and his merry men finally succeeded in reviving it for the relieved owner. It's always been a complete mystery to me why KTM have never offered an Adventure version of the 690, despite their success with the 640 Adventure and the 620 Adventure before it (which I tested twice in the late '90s for Trail Bike Magazine).

It's even more puzzling when you recall that KTM's competition department used to offer a rally-racing version of the 690, just as they'd done previously with the 660 racing version of the 640.

The lack of an official KTM Adventure 690 was one of the catalysts behind the creation of Rally Raid Products by John Mitchinson and there were two RRP-equipped 690s at Torque Racing. Seats on this type of machine do tend to be on the high side though, as 'Little John' Alleman demonstrated for my camera on a rather special 690-turned-701. As you can see, his feet dangled a good foot off the ground even when straight. As we discussed though,

John can't be any shorter than the late, great Gaston Rahier, who was a 125 motocross world champion for Suzuki three years in a row (1975,76 & 77) before winning the Dakar rally twice on a horse-high BMW (1984 & 85) which he practically needed a ladder to climb on to. I reckon 'Little John' is probably taller than both Dani Pedrosa and supermoto and supersport king Stephane Chambon (whom I once had the privilege of racing against in an International supermoto race at Montlhéry).

In any case, John, who is mysteriously also known as 'Jarvis' hasn't let his lack of height stop him from being a despatch rider, or from racing motocrossers, in the past and he's owned everything from a Suzuki GT750 'kettle' to a Honda XR400 and a Ducati Monster before settling on his current Yamaha XV950. It's always surprised me that the manufacturers, especially the Japanese, (who are not noted for their tallness), make so few machines for short riders. And as far as I'm aware BMW is the only major manufacturer to offer lowering kits for its machines as a matter of course. One of the best trail bikes for the short of shank is Yamaha's long-running Serow, and one of them appeared at Torque while I was there too. CCM's new GP450 is the only trail bike over 250cc I can think of which is available in a seriously low version as an official manufacturer's option. (And I've recently had the pleasure of riding a GP450 the length of Scotland, on and off road, but that's another story!).

As Martin Wittering was locking up after a long day he confirmed that my battle-scarred BMW HP2 is still worth a lot more than I paid for it back in 2007 and even made me a tempting offer which involved a kitted out KTM 690 and some cash.....Hmm. The sun was rapidly disappearing over the horizon as I set off home on the old Beemer via the A505 and the A1.

The Rally Raid stand at the Ace Cafe's Adventure Day, 22/3/15
(L-R) John Mitchinson, Jenny Morgan and Paddy Tyson

As it ate up the miles with ease I couldn't help thinking 'I do rather like the old girl, despite all the grief she's given me'.... a KTM 690 would definitely be better on the dirt, but would it be as good as the HP2 on a motorway?

Somewhere near Hatfield a couple of big road bikes tucked in behind me and followed my every move as I 'made progress' through the Sunday evening traffic. After we passed South Mimms and the M25 the traffic thinned out and they both came past after I moved into the middle lane but I tucked in behind them and we had a bit of 'cat and mouse' friendly rivalry making our way between the gummed up tin boxes all the way to Hendon. I nipped back in front when they missed the slip road which by-passes the roundabout where the A1 joins the Watford Way but the lead rider pulled up alongside me as I waited at the traffic lights near Hendon Central. He was so far below me I said "I feel as if I'm as high as a horse up here! Have you had that lowered?" to which he confirmed that he had. Another 'shortarse' undeterred from riding a big bike. Good for him. Both riders came past again as we headed west on the North Circular but I sneaked past them when the gaps between the cars tightened right up for the roadworks which are currently suffocating the A406 for several miles either side of Neasden. 'Not bad going on a big ol' Boxer doubly handicapped with wide 'bars and Barkbusters' I thought to myself.

I decided to stop off at the Ace Cafe for a bite to eat, and as I waited to turn right at the lights and cross over the North Circular, those same two bikes pulled up alongside me again – great minds think alike! Once inside we had a brief chat while I waited for my Ace Café sausage sarnie to arrive and they were both surprised to discover that the HP2 was a production BMW rather than some sort of customised special. I was happy to tell them that I do most of my road riding on big scooters, especially in town...

Most of the folk at the Ace that night were car buffs and the car park was full of blinged up BMWs, AMG Mercs, Audis and even the odd Corvette. Several of them had their bonnets open to show off engines lit by an array of blue lights more suited to a disco than an engine compartment if you ask me, but what do I know?

All in all, a thoroughly enjoyable and convivial weekend, combining all manner of motorcycling from vicarious on-screen MotoGP to real live trail riding on four different machines and road riding on all types of going, from empty minor back roads to grid-locked major highways. Thanks again to everyone who made it possible: Julian & Denise Bond, John Mitchinson, Martin Wittering and Donna Gray and everyone else mentioned.

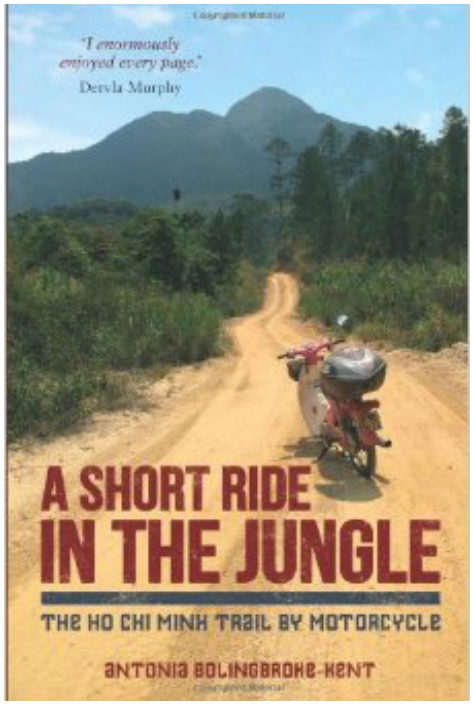
Paul Blezard

Rally Raid's website
RR's CB500X and -F conversions
Torque Racing's website

MOTOLIT & CULTURE

by Jonathan Boorstein

Les Motardes



Travelers's tales go back in time to primitive epic poetry. Just ask Jung or his follower and popularizer Campbell. The trip, the quest, the journey is an integral part of folklore and mythology.

How much of those old stories may be true is not obvious. That most of them involve male travelers is. Who were the earliest women travelers? Surely not Helen of Troy, who may have traveled from Sparta to Troy – and perhaps to Rhodes and Memphis as well – but it was not even as a tourist. She was either a bribe or a narcissist, if not both.

As far as I can tell, among the first recorded women travelers was Gudrid Thorbjarnardóttir, also known as *Vidforla* – the Far-Traveled or the Far-Traveler. (Vidforla would make a neat name for a motorcycle as well.) Shield maiden turned Christian convert, her travels between 1000 and 1030 A.D. took her first from Iceland to Vinland – now Newfoundland in Canada – and then from Iceland to Rome – then the Papal States in central Italy. Gudrid Vidforla crossed the North Atlantic eight times in longboats powered by oar and sail. She was known for her skills at diplomacy and at judging people. It may have been Vidforla who decided that the Vikings had no future in Vinland.

She was married to Thorstein Eiriksson, the son of Eirik the Red and the brother of Lief (the Lucky) Eiriksson. She accompanied Thorstein to Vinland to find his other brother, Thorvald, who was the first European to die in the Western Hemisphere (he was killed by natives who were less than amused by Viking raids). By her second husband, Vidforla bore the first European child to be born in Western Hemisphere: Snorri Thorfinnsson. Vidforla seems to have married as many men as continents she visited. To be fair, there may have been a third husband somewhere along the line, while there was definitely not a third continent.

Her traveler's tales are told in *The Vinland Sagas* (*The Saga of Eirik the Red* and *The Saga of the Greenlanders*). Nancy Marie Brown's book, *The Far Traveler: Voyages of a Viking Woman* (2007), deals with the archeological research verifying much of her story. It's rather a good read, but more suited for those interested in Vikings or archeology than, say, motorcycles. Two contemporary women writers, Margaret Elphinstone and Heather Day Gilbert, have recreated Vidforla's life in *The Sea Road* (2000) and *God's Daughter* (2013) respectively. I've read neither book and so cannot review either one, though I can note their existence in passing.

The motorcycle adventure riders in this biennial round-up of women writers are certainly latter-day *vidforlas*, even if none of them quite follow in Gudrid's footsteps. Whether they are also latter-day shield maidens is well beyond *The Digest*'s usual scopes of inquiry.

The gimmick, or rather question, for Antonia Bolingbroke-Kent's ***A Short Ride in the Jungle: The Ho Chi Minh Trail by Motorcycle*** (2014) is just that: what happened to the Ho Chi Minh Trail? As a producer for the BBC's *World's Most Dangerous Roads*, she found herself looking at the route for an episode. The trail had once been the world's deadliest road – a mix of remote and rugged terrain littered with exploded and unexploded bombs – but was now disappearing, swallowed by regional development. One section had become part of the Ho Chi Minh Highway, a very different sort of road for a very different sort of traffic.

Bolingbroke-Kent quickly found out that while a great deal had been written about the Second Indochina War in general, very little had been written about the history of Truong Son Strategic Supply Route (to use the Trail's proper name) in particular. It began as a footpath in the mid-1950s. "A paragon of ingenuity and bloody determination, at its peak this twelve-thousand mile transport network spread like a spider's web through Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia; an ever-mutating labyrinth of roads, tracks, communication lines, fuel pipelines, command centres, supply bases and waterways" (p.18).

Thanks to local motorcycle wrangler Digby Greenhalgh and his company, Explore Indochina, Bolingbroke-Kent was outfitted with a hot pink Honda Cub C90, dubbed "The Pink Panther", with the earworm an optional extra. (Greenhalgh also provided the vehicles for *Top Gear*'s Vietnam special.) With a well-travelled teddy named Wirral and an emergency bottle of gin, she was soon on her way, the first woman, as far as she knows, to tackle the Trail alone on a 25 year-old-moped.

Her question meant that she has to go beyond the motorcycle adventure travel book checklist of set-pieces and interesting characters. The book ultimately crosses genres with advocacy journalism. Bolingbroke-Kent had to juggle history, politics, and analysis along with the usual inward and outward journeys that good travel books have. It gives *A Short Ride in the Jungle* more depth than just a narrative about going two thousand miles from Hanoi to Saigon in six weeks, including four engine breakdowns, three countries, and one highly dubious border crossing before ending up at the gates of the Reunification Palace, might have had on its own. And that list doesn't include several set-pieces of her covering some very rough terrain on what is very much an urban bike.

Her synopsis of the overall history of Vietnam since World War II is basic and falls into that odd academic category of "not wrong".


[thepursuitzone.com]

This isn't where, say, a reader would learn that British troops were responsible for returning Vietnam to the French in 1945 following the Potsdam Agreement, a military action that was complicated or hindered (depending on the point of view) by both France and the United States.

In contrast, she goes into considerable depth and detail about the bombing raids on the Trail, both the bombs that did explode and the bombs that didn't, which are known as unexploded ordinance or UXO. Indochinese living and dying with the aftermath of Agent Orange and UXO are both a theme and a topic of *A Short Ride*.

Bolingbroke-Kent fires off several rounds of statistics. Some 15% of Vietnam's land surface is covered with UXO. However, Laos has the record for the most bombed country per capita on earth (p.102). The saturation bombing cost $2 million a day for some 580,000 flights which dropped more than two million tonnes of bombs on Laos (p.101). The planes – B52s – are referred to as the "ultimate symbol of cold blooded, mass killing" (p.96).

The bombing was popular with President Richard Nixon's core constituency, the so-called "Silent Majority", which was neither. Nixon was well aware the bombing was not accomplishing anything, though the "Zilch" memo – kind of the smoking-gun on this point – wouldn't be released until earlier this year (2015). It would require someone a lot more cynical than either Bolingbroke-Kent or me to suggest that Nixon may have bombed Laos in order to win an election, not to win a war.

The issue that Bolingbroke-Kent addresses however is the cost and mechanics of clearance of UXO. UXO, she points out, doesn't just kill or main, it also disables social and economic development. Her political points do not stand in her way of noticing that villagers see the scrap as useful for canoes, ladders, planters, cow bells, and anything else they might need around a farm. She even gets to detonate one herself, under careful supervision.


[theitinerant.co.uk]

She covers the use of the dioxin, Agent Orange, as well, which can affect people's DNA. She adds, "To this day the Dow Chemical Co and Monsanto still claim that Agent Orange is harmless" (p.113). Dow and Monsanto make similar claims about GMOs.

In case there was any doubt about Bolingbroke-Kent's opinion of the conflict, she writes, "If I had been a young American in the sixties, I would probably have been one of the thousands marching on the White House, yelling for the War to stop. I am against everything the conflict represented: foreign imperialism, the death of six million Indochinese, Agent Orange, the blanket bombing of neutral countries" (p.130). I'm not sure that Laos or Cambodia can actually be considered neutral when both allowed one side or the other to use their territories in the conflict, but that certainly doesn't justify using a strategy as pointless as saturation bombing.

Regardless, this is where Bolingbroke-Kent brings *A Short Ride* into the realm of advocacy journalism. While she skirts the issues of war crimes and war reparations – if she used either term, I must have blinked at the moment – she clearly thinks the United States is not doing enough to clear the UXO it dropped the first place. "The Americans still spend millions of dollars every year combing the jungles of Indochina for fragments of lost combatants, far more than the relatively small sums they spend on UXO clearance" (p.105), she writes.

Elsewhere she writes that the annual UXO budget is $9 million, adding that it's far less than what the US spends on finding its war dead, a number she claims not to know. In the context of a mainstream or academic review that would be a red flag to check every single one of her facts and figures. In 2014, the year *A Short Ride* was published, the US budget to remove UXO in Laos alone was $12 million (a record high). The budget for finding missing soldiers in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam (which would include Laos and Cambodia) was $100 million, covering considerably a

lot more territory and divided between two agencies, both known for inefficiency and incompetence. Supposedly the two agencies are to be combined into one efficient one. (No comment.) The first figure may not have been available when the book went to press, but there is no reason why the second figure or its 2013 equivalent could not have been included.

Parenthetically, I only fact-check something if it reads funny. Most of the time it turns out to be nothing more serious than sloppy writing. There is a very high level of integrity among motorcycle adventure travel writers. Regular readers of this department may guess what I think of the level of writing qua writing. I'm not sure why Bolingbroke-Kent skipped a number that takes one minute to find on the Internet.

In her progress down the Trail, Bolingbroke-Kent found an even larger story, one that seriously affects a greater number of people for a greater amount to time. Here she is a horrified witness, not an advocate of any particular action. What she found was the ecological pillage of the three countries in the name of economic development.

What was marked on her GPS as a small track she found to be a highway for illegal logging (p.181). She notes dourly that "road building and logging often go hand in corrupt hand in Laos" (p.123). Russian-built dams threaten further ecological chaos. Hunting, if not poaching, has led to the decline of the once widespread Indochinese tiger (p.174). "Their demise represented so much deforestation, global warming, soil erosion, loss of habitat for countless species, the resettlement of powerless minorities. And the only people it benefited were a few sickening corrupt individuals" (p.182).

"I wanted people to know what was really happening in Laos; how whole villages had lost their homes so the tourists could play golf in Luang Prabang; how the nice garden furniture they had just brought at their local furniture store was made from wood illegally logged in Laos; how their gold wedding ring could have come from this plundered land; how people here are still being sent to re-education camps and being murdered for speaking out against the government" (p.248). I wonder what Bolingbroke-Kent would think of Elizabeth Becker's *Overbooked: The Exploding Business of Travel and Tourism*, in which Becker addresses some of the same issues, but in the context of Cambodia, among other places, and with some specific recommendations for change.

Obviously the book is more about place and politics than people. The people she does meet more or less support her argument or her observations. *A Short Ride* is surprisingly lean for a book this dense with fact and detail. There are people who dropped bombs – two US Viet Vets whom Bolingbroke-Kent seems to like in spite of herself – and people who defuse bombs. People who defuse bombs for a living are unlikely to be dull though they may low key. Nevertheless one certainly made quite an entrance as well as an impression: "[A] chrome-laced chopper sputtered into the yard, its rider… [a] wild-looking man of about fifty, [who] wore a battered open face helmet, large goggles and a dust-streaked waistcoat bulging with pockets. His right forearm was black with tattoos and a large machete was strapped across the handlebars. Most impressive of all was his resplendent Wyatt Earp moustache, which could have stopped a covey of cowboys at 30 metres" (p.211).

In terms of the more usual concerns in motorcycle adventure travel, Bolingbroke-Kent wrote, "I may have been alone in the jungle, but I always had the Trail" (p.304), adding that when she had to leave the Trail: "it felt like the soul was missing from my journey" (p.310). She was more afraid of letting herself down than being killed and doesn't think the trip changed her in any fundamental way, although she does feel a bit more confident about facing life's difficulties, which is both realistic and refreshing.

Also refreshing was her keeping her snobbery about non-adventure travelers down to a dull roar. She seems to have some of the same issues with backpackers that other adventure travelers have with people on package tours. In addition, Bolingbroke-Kent also avoids the arrant twaddle of all-you-have-to-do-to-live-your-dream-(trip-)is-do-it. What she did when she lost her sense of humor after one incident of sexual harassment too many will be as gratifying to the reader as it undoubtedly was to her.

A Short Ride is more a travel book which just happens to involve a two-wheeled vehicle than a motorcycle adventure travel book (where the vehicle is more front and center). As Paul Theroux, at this point the dean of contemporary travel writers, said recently in *The New York Times*, "[A]t its best the travel genre has always been difficult, not a hilarious romp but a painful journey of discovery; these days there are fewer gourmet meals and cupcakes, less luxury, fewer colorful natives and jollifications, as the planet gets meaner, smaller, more populous and (for many) nastier, more in need of witnesses" (12 November 2015). That sums up what Bolingbroke-Kent is trying to do here, and for the most succeeds.

Recommended for those interested in serious travel narratives as well as women's motorcycle adventure travel; those interested in Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia; those interested in UXO and ecology; and those interested in politics, the Second Indochina War, and, of course, the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This is a book to be read actively or critically, if not dialectically; but not passively. Not recommended for those who like simplistic narratives or those given to earworms.

Most motorcycle adventure travel books are less of a polemic and more of a memoir. The best combine in some form an inward and outward journey, but even a relatively straightforward narrative of a trip can be fun. As Mary Karr, something of an American expert on the art of the memoir, noted recently in *The Times*: "Obviously [a good memoir] has to be the most interesting version of you, but it's not about peddling some highly polished version of yourself to a gullible public… Narcissism is the bacterium infecting all bad writing" (8 November 2015). Sadly, too often motorcycle travel books provide the narcissism without the polish.

In the case of the next two women riders, the inward journey is more important than the outward journey, making the books more like conventional memoirs, but ones that just "happen" to involve motorcycles. Or do they? As Lily Brooks-Dalton commented in her memoir, *Motorcycles I've Loved* (2015), "A motorcycle is a vehicle of change, after all. It puts the wheels beneath a midlife crisis, or a coming of age saga, or even just the discovery of something new, something you didn't realize was there. It provides the means to cross over, to transition, or to revitalize; motorcycles are self-discovery's favorite vehicle" (p.33).

It's not a point with which Linda Crill would be likely to disagree. Her ***Blind Curves: A Woman, a Motorcycle and a Journey to Reinvent Herself*** (2014) is categorized as a memoir, though it turns out to be as much a self-help book as a travel narrative through

North America's Pacific Northwest. The inward journey is how she recreated her life as a single person. The self-help angle is her recipe to answer the question "what now"?

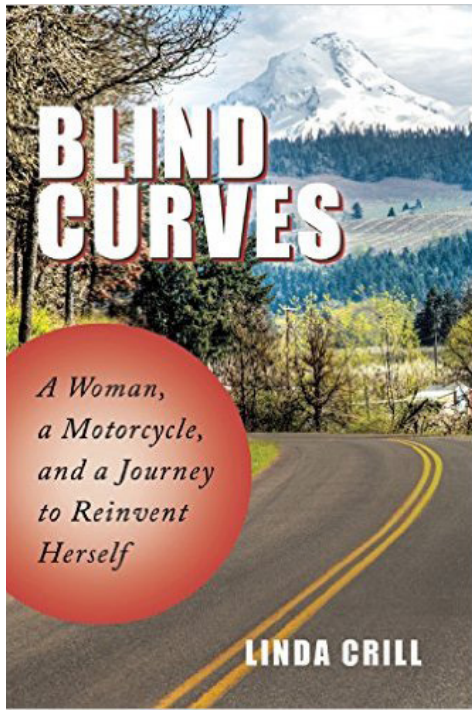
Crill is a speaker and consultant whose specialty is how to manage change. With such clients as Citicorp, Goldman Sachs, and Marriott International, it's little wonder she's lectured in such places as London, Frankfurt, and Hong Kong (as well as New York).

For 18 months after her husband died of cancer, Crill coddled herself with the aid of a willing group of enablers. Feeling stifled and fed up, she wanted to do something different. "There are many acceptable activities for a widow, but learning to ride a motorcycle wasn't on anyone's list" (p.1).

What was probably a whim turned serious when she bounced the concept off Ron, an old friend, who not only rode a motorcycle, but also needed a second woman rider to save a ten-day tour his friends and he were planning to take in a few weeks.

Even with such transferable skills as skiing and riding a bicycle long distances, four weeks was a tight deadline. Worse, her learning curve was both internal and external. "I was a greenie and not a noise polluter" (p.55). Nevertheless, she tracked down a weekend beginner's riding course, checked into a local hotel, and set herself to pass the course to get the automatic motorcycle endorsement without having to pass a test at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

After she flunked the test part of the course, she decided to take the DMV course every day until she passed. She also had to get used to her new identity as a rider as well as the male reaction to a woman in leathers. "I was experiencing how a woman dressed in full leather also commands attention. I noticed the inches added to my figure, but these men saw



something different" (p.53).

Getting her license forms the first part of the book. It includes a lot of explanation of riding techniques clearly aimed at non-riders. The rest of the book deals with the trip itself, with Ron and two other riders. It's almost a classic example of taking motorcycle lessons to past the test so the biker can then learn to ride.

En route, she learned the dynamics of group riding; both hand signals and "the wave"; what a RUB or Rubbie is (her friends and she, since riding is only a part of their identities, not their entire identity); the significance of waffles, or skid marks, on leathers as well as scruff marks on the big toe of the left boot (she decided to wear the marks proudly and never polish the boots); and basic bodging with duct tape and bungee cords. She began to notice the differences between different sub-cultures of motorcyclists: the squids and the retirees;

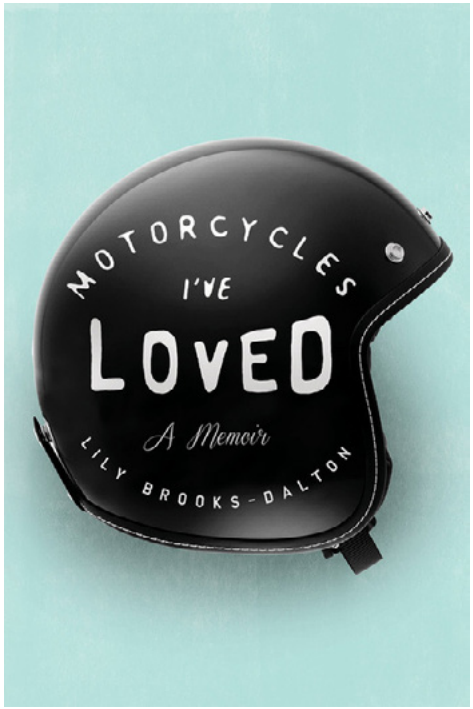
the Harley guys and the Beemer boys. She even picked up a *nom du motarde*: Roadrunner, from the Looney Tunes cartoon character.

About half way through the trip, she found that "motorcycle routines that had been overwhelming were now automatic" (p.224). After five week of intensive flooding, as it's sometimes called in the social sciences, "My motorcycle and I were becoming friends," she noted, "We were becoming symbiotic extensions of each other" (p.98).

Most of her preparation for the trip went into learning motorcycling and not about the Pacific Northwest. Understandably and by necessity. It does weaken the last part of the book, which a mix of travelogue and her new-age self-help self-actualization recommendations, all of which she does take seriously since she attended the Maui Writers Conference for a few years.

The result is a book that's more about learning to ride the ride than the ride itself. Her fears and tales of becoming a motorcyclist are fun and precise. They may bring back some good and some painful memories for experienced riders. And in some places the travelogue does come to life as in a chapter dedicated to exploring the California redwoods.

It other places, her story is undeveloped. She mentions the return of her "battle" to "manage" her "aversion to extreme heights" (p.92), but nothing further is made of it. At a wine tasting Crill and her friends are served Cheese Doodles along with other snacks. They're told the Cheese Doodles go well with certain wines, but she didn't report which wine. Yet the first wine they're served is a sauvignon blanc, one of the wines that goes with Cheese Doodles which are *gougères* reconstituted as an American junk



food. And I cheated; I looked it up. Crill does have to answer the questions she raises even if she doesn't go for the jugular as a professional like Bolingbroke-Kent would. (What wine goes with potato chips? Would spicier nacho chips go with a Gerwürztraminer?)

Her basic self-help message is that people should break away from conventional choices, open the doors labeled "not me", and head into the unknown or take that "blind curve". The notion of the blind curve not only informs the title of the book, it is mentioned about a dozen times in the text, or about once every twenty or so pages, in case no one got the point. The advice is hardly new. It just ignores the realities of employment and other commitments. Not everyone has the wherewithal to take six or so weeks off as well as pay for lessons, leathers, motorcycle rentals, and food and lodging just to take that "blind curve".

The book has both illustrated and unillustrated editions. I read an unillustrated edition.

Recommended for those interested in women and motorcycling as well as those who like tales of self-reinvention. As a *de facto* widow(er), I could relate to a lot here. Not recommended for people with a low tolerance for self-help self-actualization tracts.

Brooks-Dalton went through a similar arc. "Over the course of three years and four motorcycles, I learned a little more about who I was looking for: a woman who has power and knows how to wield it, who knows when to hold fast and when to give way. A woman who is independent, resourceful, and strong enough to ask for help if she needs it" (p.236), she wrote at the end of ***Motorcycles I've Loved: A Memoir*** (2015) as if it were the conclusion of a university term paper or master's thesis.

And she's aware that it takes more than motorcycles. "Transformation takes sweat and tears; it can't be bought with a plane ticket or an admission of love" (p.3).

Feeling lost after three years of wandering around Europe, Asia, and Australia, Brooks-Dalton ditched her boyfriend to return home to find herself and to find her parents were moving to Florida. About a year after she returned, she rediscovered motorcycles. As a child, she rode on the back of her father's bike.

"Almost as soon as I started riding motorcycles, I became eager to learn how they worked" (p.78), she noted, adding "Like all great romances, these machines made me see myself and my surroundings with fresh eyes; they made me want to know more and be better" (p.124).

Her fascination with Newtonian physics and motorcycle mechanics forms and informs the metaphor structure of the memoir. Each chapter is titled and centered on such principles as force, matter, or friction and applies that principle to her life and her motorcycles. She applies the science of speed to understand her own velocity. Especially with men, from ex-boyfriends to a troubled and troubling brother to her father to a close friend of her father's and hers to various male riders and mechanics. It's not that she doesn't relate to women – her mother, for example – but they're very much in the background.

Brooks-Dalton started with a Honda Rebel 250 – a good choice for a beginner, particularly one short in stature, and more "bike" than many are willing to give it credit for – and wound up with a Honda Magna. Her experience with a Harley man with attitude (is there another kind?) may or may not have led to her observation: "[S]quabbling over one's preferred make of motorcycle is infantile. Either it runs or it doesn't; either you ride it or you don't. If you want to ride a Harley, then buy one. If you want *everyone* to ride a Harley, then move to Daytona or shut the fuck up about it" (p.70-71). Regardless, she might have done better to stick to the Rebel.

When she returned home, she also returned to school, ultimately earning a degree from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. To celebrate, she took a trip to Florida with her father, which forms the heart of the book as well as why it qualifies as motorcycle travel. Until this point, she seems to have been a more or less glorified commuter (said he about whom much could be said the same at best).

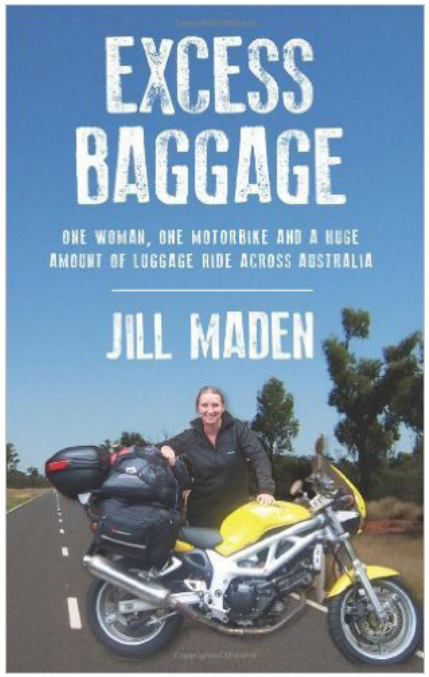
At the end of the trip she was ready for what comes next, whatever it is. "For a while this had been motorcycles, but there's a whole world of fascination out there, an endless supply of mind-blowing possibilities. I had put the Magna on the market by then and I was


[lilybrooksdalton.com]

ready for the launch – still unsure of where I was headed and what I would do when I got there, but aching for the challenge" (p.233). Unlike Crill, for Brooks-Dalton motorcycling, however catalytic or cathartic, was a flirtation. not the beginning of a long-term relationship.

Brooks-Dalton is a serious writer who perhaps takes herself a bit too seriously; but didn't we all when we were in our twenties? She sustains the conceit of applying mechanics to life quite well and the travelogue at the end is an affecting set-piece. Most of the supporting characters do come to life, especially her father and an old friend of his – perhaps a father figure himself.

Motorcycles I've Loved can be legitimately recommended for those interested in women and motorcycles but also for those who like to be the first to spot and read new talent. Brooks-Dalton has the talent to go somewhere as a



writer, but whether being an author will prove to be as short-lived an interest as motorcycling is impossible to predict. Not recommended for those who find twentysomethings self-centered and self-indulgent.

It's something of a critical commonplace to say that if an author cannot inform (the human condition), he or she can at least entertain. Sorting or avoiding the implicit premises behind that statement is a bit like crossing a field littered with UXO, so let's just say that both Jill Maden and Michèle Harrison are both at the entertaining end of that scale.

Although the arc in ***Excess Baggage: One Woman, One Motorcycle and a Huge Amount of Luggage Ride Across Australia*** (2013) is how Maden got her groove back, describing the book in terms of an inward journey and an outward journey would be pushing it. Maden is not given to serious reflection and what reflection she does indulge in is on the nose and on the surface. On the other hand, her seven month jaunt up and down the east coast of Australia does cover relatively unfamiliar territory for motorcycle adventure travel riders, even those going around-the-world.

This wasn't Maden's first trip to the continent and she planned to return. An inheritance following a break up with a boyfriend and her dream business as a massage therapist going bust turned the plans into an immediate reality. To help extend her budget, if not expand her worldly experience, she arranged to house sit for a couple of Australians for part of the trip. This is the first time I've encountered that idea in a motorcycle adventure travel book and it's rather a good one, even though that and her background as a masseuse led to the longest non-motorcycling set-piece in the book: the house-sit from Hell.

Once in Australia, she bought a yellow Suzuki which she loaded up with camping equipment, clothes for four seasons in two color ranges, and, yes, even the kitchen sink, albeit the small collapsible kind used for washing camping dishes. She's not devoid of a sense of humor. This "excess baggage" made the bike top-heavy and difficult to maneuver. Not only was she afraid of dropping it, but also skittish of riding on gravel or crossing gutters, making petrol stops dicey. "This fear of uneven surfaces was starting to make me a hazard to other road users" (p.64).

The other "excess baggage" was her sense of failure due to what happened with her business and her boyfriend. Helping her push past it are the two motorcycling set-pieces, both virtual races across east coast against time, rain, flooding, and high winds. Despite rather flat writing, Maden generates quite a bit of suspense with the first race, using riding statistics to help quicken the pace of the run.

About 50 pages could be cut from the book to the benefit of the tale – "excess baggage" of a different sort. Graham Field comments somewhere that a trip starts when the traveler rides down the driveway and off to the adventure. So does a good motorcycle travel book. In Maden's case, that's when she was already in Australia. Everything else relevant could have picked up in passing. And was as well which made many pages redundant.

Recommended for those interested in motorcycle adventure travel in Australia as well as those interested in the motorcycle adventures of women riders. Her love for Australia and Australians does shine through and she continued her adventures motorcycling around Oz in *Slow Rider: Australia on a Postie Bike and a 125cc Motorbike* (2015). Not recommended for those who like a bit of polish with the prose.

In 1997, dissatisfied with her life in general and her work in particular, thirtysomething Harrison quit her job and toured India for a year on a Royal Enfield 500cc, having been told the subcontinent is "really in your face" by a friend in a pub.

Stories of people riding around India on an Enfield is practically a sub-genre of the sub-genre of motorcycle adventure travel memoirs. Whether Harrison was aware of that is unknown. What is known is that it was love at first sight. "[The Enfield] glistened against the shabbiness of the store with its metallic grey/green paint-work, its chrome finish, its elegant teardrop shaped tank and its old fashioned looking engine. It was as if it had just come out of a Second World War film set". She quickly dubbed it "Big Thumper" (above, right).

Almost twenty years later, Harrison published her adventures in ***All the Gear, No Idea: A Woman's Solo Motorbike Journey Around the Indian Subcontinent*** (2014). The title is meant to be as flippant as is the overall tone of the book. She bought Thumper in Delhi, where she also had a Punjabi made up, and soon set off on the Grand Trunk Road.

Her 17,000-mile adventure included Goa, Ladakh, Kashmir, and Rajasthan as well as Nepal and Bhutan ; her adventures went from raves to war zones [Ed's note: Harrison further describes her side-trip into Nepal in TRD 189]. She encountered a wide range of people across the social economic spectrum, from aristocrats planning weddings to middle-class people complaining about technology to beggars, including one who tried to throw her front of a train. She also crossed paths with a surprising number of Israelis and Australians as well as one traveler with whom she eventually raises a family.

The narrative reads as if Harrison strung together all her best dinner-party stories about

the trip into chronological order. She's more a raconteur than a writer. The pattern is set-up, punchline, segue and the tone is kept light and tight, now flip, now breezy, rarely serious. Cold, she spent the night curled up "with a small clay pot filled with burning coal placed between my legs to keep me warm. The people here called it a "Winter Wife". I would have liked a whole harem" (p.27).

Her anecdotes do give a nice glimpse of India in the late nineties. She plays well with others and it pays off in interesting encounters. There's no depth here, let alone an inward journey. It's light, easy reading at its best – I used an app on my mobile.

Recommended for those interested in motorcycle adventure travel in India in general and by Royal Enfield in particular as well as those interested in women's motorcycle adventure travel. It's entertaining and well-written. Not recommended for those seeking insights into India as a regional bully and heavyweight.

Of course, women traveling long distances overland by motorcycle is nothing new; it's a least a century old as three of the next four women riders prove.

Peggy Iris Thomas's motorcycle adventure travel book might have lost to time were it not for the efforts of Gordon May, a motorcycle adventurer in his own right. Thomas rode a BSA Bantam around Canada, Mexico, and the United States in the early 50s and published her adventures in *Gasoline Gypsy* (released a year later in the UK as *A Ride in the Sun*). May was so besotted with Thomas and her book that he dubbed the BSA Bantam he rode from Manchester to Cairo in 2010 "Peggy".

May's ongoing gimmick is to ride vintage motorcycles on long overland journeys. His first book, *Overland to India* (2008), covered his trip to Chennai on a 1953 Royal Enfield. His second trip on the 1952 Bantam was published a few years later as *Overland to Egypt* (2012). His current project is Manchester to Saigon on a 1941 Matchless G3L – very much the sort of motorcycle that may have accompanied British troops when they occupied Vietnam in 1945. May's adventures will have to wait since, as a male, he does not qualify for inclusion this time around.

I'm not certain when May first discovered Thomas, but he did more than just name his Bantam after her, he brought her back into print as well as uncovered as much of the rest of her life story as he could. His adventures in biographical archeology are related in *Overland to Egypt*. It would have been nice to have that as a preface or an appendix in ***A Ride in the Sun or Gasoline Gypsy***, as he titled the 2012 reprint of the 1953 book.

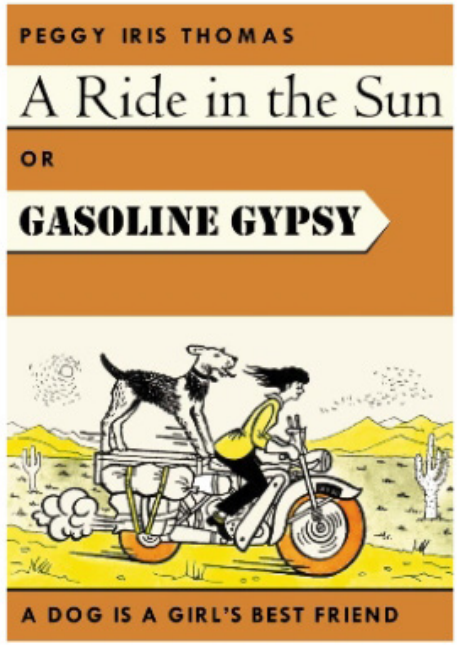
The gypsy in question took her Airedale, named Matelot, on the back of her Bantam, named Oppy, from the letters on the license plate. A duffle bag holding her clothes was dubbed "The White Elephant". The playful tone captures her charm and complexity, a persona that is as much a period piece as the narrative of her 14,000-mile journey itself.

It took 18 months, in part because Thomas had to stop here and there to earn enough money for the next leg of the trip. In addition to filing articles about her adventures in a motorcycle magazine, she worked as a secretary, a fruit picker, an assembly line worker, and even a carhop. She also appeared as a contestant on a television quiz show to try to win some prize money to help pay her way. She was unsuccessful, but, at a guess, the appearance may have led to her publishing her adventures in the US before the UK despite being a very British traveler and writer.

En route, she camped out in parks, swamps, and vacant lots, at least in the States. Of designated camping grounds, Thomas noted of such routine amenities as taps, tables, laundries, and hot showers as "being a bit too civilized for the great outdoors" (p.21). She endured gales, sandstorms, earthquakes, and thunderstorms as well as insects and reptiles. And worse: Matelot getting lost. However, it should be pointed out that Matelot was hardly the first British tourist in New York to lose his way.

Thomas also knew how to make an entrance and an exit. She entered the US with a bang when her rucksack slipped against the exhaust pipe and exploded. Her exit from Mexico – part of a larger serio-comic set-piece – was marked by her typewriter being literally deep-sixed in the harbor at Veracruz.

She endured the Mexican approach to



vehicle repair; the language barriers of Cajun French; and becoming an added attraction at a motorcycle race. She met a fisherman who didn't like fish and the third wife of Erskine Caldwell, a then world-famous writer (to be fair, he's still in print).

Caldwell's work mostly depicted a realistic, unromantic view of the American South, racism and all. Thomas claimed to have read many of his books. She had many more encounters with African-Americans than would be usual for European or European-American travelers of the period, regardless of mode of transport. Was it coincidence or did she seek them out?

Otherwise, Thomas's view of the continent seems to have been filtered through what is now called "the media". In Los Angeles, she had to ride past Ciro's and The Brown Derby, movie star hang-outs in the late 40s and early 50s, even if she can't afford to stop and go in. The Empire State Building in New York looks just like

it does in film to her. Mexicans fare no better. "We soon reached the town of Jacumba, which wasn't only Mexican in name but full of border atmosphere and colour as well. Mexico itself was only a few miles to the south, although there was no actual road leading across the frontier at this point. The streets of the town were crowded with real Mexican types – dark and fierce of face and wearing enormous straw sombreros. They squatted in the shade along the pavements. Why this painful-looking position didn't cut off their blood circulation after a couple of hours of crouching I have no idea, but I suppose they learn the habit young. Anyway they squatted contentedly on their haunches, buried beneath their outsize hats and gay-coloured blankets and looking for all the world like extras from a Hollywood Mexican melodrama" (p.71).

Yet one of those Hollywood-extra Mexican very much came to her rescue.

Thomas was unflappable, unstoppable, and unconventional. Her story is a delight and May deserves full marks for bringing it back into print.

Recommended for anyone interested in women's travel or travel in North America in general and in the mid-twentieth century in particular. Not recommended for anyone allergic to dogs.

In ***Grace and Grit*** (2012), William M. Murphy stepped further back in time to outline and highlight the stories of some of the earliest women motorcyclists to take long distance trips around North America. The riding adventures of Della Crewe; Effie Hotchkiss and her mother, Avis; and the Van Buren Sisters occurred before the US entered the Great War. That the war was raging in Europe both formed and deformed all three journeys.

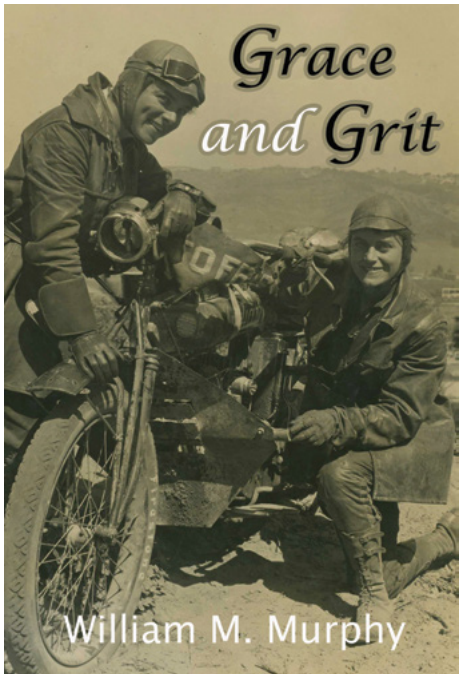
The book falls casually into four parts. The first few chapters set the context for the motorcycle trips. Then Crewe, Hotchkiss, and the Van Burens get a section each. Murphy it turns out is as besotted with the period as he is with the women he profiles. Here in the States the period between the 1890s and the 1920s is often called The Progressive Era, because of the all the social and technological advances in made its thirty or so years.

For Murphy, it's more about "Victorian girls breaking all the rules" and their direct or indirect involvement with suffragette movement. But while that early feminist note is important, the context of what riding or driving was like more than hundred years ago forms the focus of the first few chapters. Murphy never met a vehicular tangent he didn't like.

He notes that the Metz Company produced the first motorized bike in 1898 – about thirty years after the first steam velocipede and five years after Frank and Charles Duryea built the first automobile in the States. Of course, Indian's founding in 1901 (as Hendee) gets a mention as does George Wyman's transcontinental motorcycle run in 1903, the first by any motor vehicle. Murphy couldn't resist adding that 1903 was the same year that Missouri and Massachusetts became the first states to require people to get a license to drive a motor vehicle.

Cross-country riders had road and weather conditions to deal with as well. Before the first World War, Iowa had the worst roads in the nation. Credit cards were still in the future, but traveler's checks were common. Murphy indulges in a brief tangent about the history of the traveler's check as well.

He also covers other long distance trips of importance, usually, but not always by women. There's Anita King, an actress better known these days for her cross-country drive than



for her once-hot film career. Bessie Stringfield, the Motorcycle Queen of Miami and former dispatch rider, gets a few paragraphs as do Linda Dugeau and Dorothy Robinson who founded Motor Maids, an organization of women motorcyclists. He brings the context up to date noting in passing that women riders constitute 15% of all motorcyclists in the US. Not mentioned by Murphy is that the industry sees female riders as having greater growth potential than male riders.

The first woman rider Murphy covers is Crewe whose planned around the world jaunt was derailed by the outbreak of World War I. Had peace reigned she would have followed the first man to circle the globe by motorcycle by about a year (see *Globe Girdlers Six*)

Crewe quickly revised her route to North America only, but including stops in such places as Cuba and Panama. Instead of an Airedale, she took along a bulldog named Trouble and went for the pun. "I hope he'll be the only Trouble I'll have," she told the *Hutchinson News*. Unlike Matelot, Trouble may have ridden in the sidecar attached to Crewe's Harley-Davidson.

Her zig-zaggy route took her from Waco, TX, to Chicago and then New York. A ship took her to Jacksonville, FL, from where she rode down toward the Keys and started to hop from Panama (where she had been before) to Cuba, Nassau, and Jamaica on steamships operated by the ubiquitous United Fruit Company. She toured each island in turn on her Harley and was celebrated by a motorcycle club in Panama. Ultimately, she disembarked at Tampa, FL, and rode back to New York. Murphy could find no corroboration that Crewe took the Lincoln Highway to San Francisco as she announced she would to the press.

Murphy laments how incomplete the records of Crewe's life are. He had no such problem with Effie Hotchkiss, who wrote up her adventures some years after the fact for her family. Like Crewe, Hotchkiss used a sidecar for her five month cross-country journey. Unlike Crewe, she didn't bring a dog. She brought her mother, Avis. If Effie is to be believed, her mother sat in the sidecar and tatted her way from New York to San Francisco (for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915) as well as the trip back east.

It was something of a trip of her lifetime, since she didn't continue with motorcycles. Instead she married a man she met on her trip and moved to his ranch in Oregon, mother Avis still in tow and perhaps still tatting away.

The best-known and probably the star attractions are the Van Buren sisters who were consciously trying to raise awareness not only for women's equality, but also for the National Preparedness Movement, drumming up support for the United States to enter the

Great War. Specifically the Van Burens wanted to prove that women could ride motorcycles and so could serve as dispatch riders for the military overseas. Motorcycles had already been used by the American military in border skirmishes with Mexico and women were already serving as dispatch riders in Britain (see *Red Horse, Ready Rider*).

The sisters – Augusta and Adeline, better known as Gussie and Addie – were media-savvy patriots and progressives. They claimed to be related to Martin Van Buren, the eighth president of the United States. They started their cross country trip on the Fourth of July, and not just because it was Independence Day. There was a major motorcycle convention in New York, which would help give them a proper send-off.

There was no stop too large or too small for the Van Burens to meet with local civic and business groups, hold a press conference, or somehow try to raise awareness of their intertwined causes. As a result this is the best documented of the three trips Murphy highlights. However, he could not validate the oft-told story that the Van Burens had been arrested for dressing as men. More likely, they were just stopped, politely questioned, and then let go to go on their way.

Despite opposition from pacifists, anarchists, isolationists, and some Irish- and German-American activists, among others, the United States did enter the War, but women were still excluded from serving. Gussie Van Buren did not give up the fight. She went to get a pilot's license and campaigned for equal rights in the air as well as on land.

Murphy is an engaging writer. While it's clear he's done his research, his enthusiasm leads him to take an uncritical, if not Disneyfied, view of the period and his subjects. To be fair, this is a popular history, not a scholarly one. Nevertheless, a proper index would have useful. The maps are excellent and the reproductions of period photographs are above average.

Recommended for those interested in the beginnings of long-distance motorcycling in general and by women in particular as well as those who are fascinated by the pre-war era. Not recommended for those who have issues with anything American.

Jonathan Boorstein

BITZ

TomTom Rider 400 Satnav

Review: Tom Stewart

For decades I've been navigating on two wheels for by the age-old method of studying a map, memorizing as much of the route as possible, and slipping a map with key instructions into a tank bag's map pocket while hoping that it didn't rain, not least because my tank bag rain covers are opaque.

Then in March this year, and with a fairly complex 150-mile journey ahead, I slipped my TomTom app-equipped iPhone into the map pocket (along with a small external USB power supply unit) and again hoped it wouldn't rain. It did, heavily, and the shortcomings of this method became all too apparent, eg. phone soon shifts to rear of map pocket and out of eye-line, can't use iPhone's touchscreen without removing glove, and the waterproofing issue.

With September's two-up trip to Circuit Paul Ricard for the Bol d'Or already indelibly inked into the diary, in May I treated m'self to a 2013 Triumph Trophy. One of the Trophy's options is a CNC-machined GPS mounting bracket, designed primarily for Garmin Zumos.

I already knew that my phone's TomTom app worked well, so a rummage through eBay revealed a compatible Ram ball mounting along with a waterproof female Ram-mount iPhone case. With the phone drawing power from a 12v accessory socket inside the fairing's weatherproof storage bin, and with it bluetooth-paired to my Interphone F3MC intercom, this set-up would have to do.

Then, shortly before departure, the offer of a £320 TomTom Rider 400 for review came in. The 400 is the middle model of the three in the new Rider range. It's waterproof, glove-friendly and its Ram mount fittings (right) are compatible with my recently-fitted dash-top ball (or a conventional tube handlebar). And with TomTom's PR chap* also agreeing to include the £65 anti-theft kit, it was a no-brainer.

While awaiting delivery I realized that the TTR can be powered by the USB cable supplied, but when mounted on a bike it draws power from its dedicated dock, which in turn has to be wired (bare-ended wire supplied) into the bike's loom. Ooh. Electrical job. Cue mild anxiety.

When it arrives I have the Ram mountings fitted in no time, and then deliver bike, satnav and wire to my local *mécanicien* Fabrice**. In an hour or so he has it correctly wired so that volts are supplied to the satnav only when the ignition is on, (ie. not directly from the positive battery terminal and earth).

The TTR slots onto its dock easily and securely, with a reassuring click when fully located. However, the new Android-based interface is completely different from the iPhone's current TomTom app (soon to be updated), and my TomTom car unit. I can barely do anything useful, except switch it off and on. As a result I become anxious, and with departure imminent I even contemplate reverting to iPhone navigation, or at least

taking the iPhone case with me, just in case.

I download the TTR's PDF user manual, but, rather than frantically scrolling through its 129 pages, I instead burn midnight oil familiarizing myself hands-on and eventually figure out the basics – most importantly, how to set and store destinations.

We set off for Portsmouth. Fortunately I know the way, and, to my relief, so does the TTR. Furthermore, I'm getting in-helmet audio guidance via bluetooth. Phew.

Having disembarked the ferry at Caen, the next destination entered is our overnight stop at a remote hamlet (Tour-de-Faure) some 674kms southeast. The TTR can be set to avoid toll roads and motorways, but due to time, distance and a very gloomy weather outlook, I choose the fastest route.

Many hours later it's still raining. We've encountered thunder, lightning and high winds, but navigationally we're still on-course with not far to go, notwithstanding one frustrating issue.

I'm satisfied that the TTR itself is fully rainproof, but the touchscreen is sometimes (not always) sensitive to water droplets, (despite it being mounted behind the Trophy's huge screen), and the display can become very confused for several minutes at a time. Thankfully it's only the screen that goes wonky as voice guidance continues unaffected. Trying to wipe the screen dry only serves to confuse the display still further, and so prolongs the issue. Over time I learn that if left alone it sorts itself out, even if it's still raining. Weird.

Unlike some smartphones, the TTR's screen sensitivity – and it really is *very* sensitive – can't be adjusted, but provision to make it less so in wet weather would be a very worthwhile improvement.

At the start of our return trip via the Route

Napoleon, I felt I ought to try out the TTR's Plan a Thrill function. This identifies twisty or very twisty and/or hilly or very hilly routes.

As we were already in a hilly area with fabulous winding roads I didn't know what to expect, but when we were soon directed off an already sinuous road onto what was little more than a single-lane farm track, I was less than impressed.

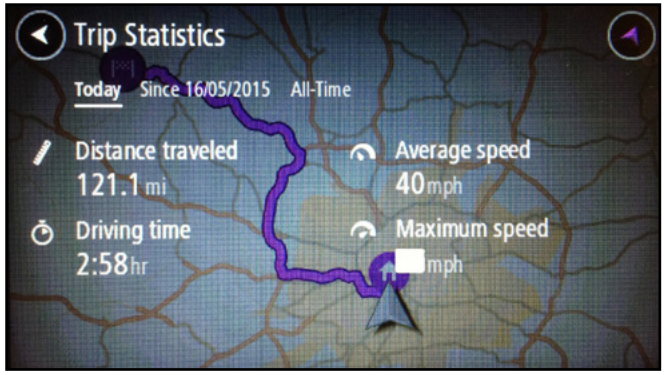
Like an app that sits in your phone but never gets used, I've no need of Plan a Thrill. Any route's fun factor is surely dictated by the locale's geography and topography, and not by software, however smart.

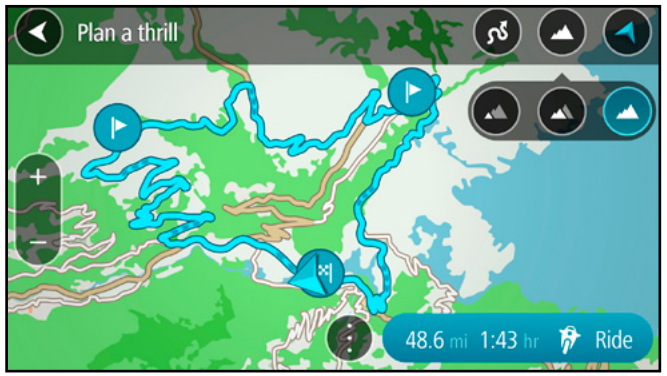
Back in the UK, and with data roaming charges not applicable, I've since tethered the TTR to my iPhone's personal hotspot (or PAN, Personal Area Network). This allows the TomTom to access the internet (via Apple, Android or Windows smartphones). Fortunately this seems to have little or no effect on the phone's battery status, but for longer trips I keep the phone topped-up via the Trophy's aforementioned 12v socket.

Anyway, the tethering provides real-time traffic and speed camera info as well as calculating how long any delay or delays might take. And if there are hold-ups ahead then the TTR may suggest and display an alternative route, and ask your permission. Now this can be useful.

While heading south on the western section of the M25 recently, the TTR pointed out that there were serious jams on the M4 ahead. With slight apprehension I accepted its suggestion of riding an extra 13 miles on the M25 and A3, and yet I arrived home 17 minutes sooner than I would have done had I stuck with the original M4 route into town. And I avoided traffic hell. Good eh?

Note that the 'connected' info displayed is





additional to speed limit and camera warnings, long-term road works, rest areas, petrol stations, parking and any entered en route stops already stored in the TTR's 16GB memory. It also displays all the usual info, eg. remaining journey distance, journey time and time-of-arrival. And there are multiple further functions including a choice of 14 voices, trip recording, trip statistics and hands-free call answering.

When an incoming call is received, (with intercom, phone and TTR all paired), the screen displays the caller's identity and gives the option of accepting or rejecting the call via large green/red on-screen buttons. TTRs don't support voice control as the on-bike environment is usually too noisy for it to work effectively, and that's fine by me.

Another handy aspect is TomTom's MyDrive. With the app installed on my iMac and the TTR connected by USB, I can route plan, input destinations, purchase additional maps and install updates to the TTR via my (or a PC's) web browser.

And the £65 anti-theft kit? As the saying goes, 'it won't stop a determined thief', but if you can't be doing with taking the TomTom with you every time you leave your bike, then it's definitely worth having.

According to Trip Statistics I've now covered just short of 2,600 miles with the Rider 400. Initially I found the user interface less than intuitive, and it's taken me a long time to fully get to grips with it – a process that's still ongoing.

Bluetooth pairing was a bit hit and miss, but now that the TomTom, phone and intercom have become familiar with each other they all pair-up swiftly and reliably. That said, all this technology certainly adds time to pre-journey faffing, so it's not for every trip, or for everyone.

As mentioned, the map display can be thrown by light drizzle, heavy rain, or not at all, but more often than not the TTR is a useful and comforting travelling companion, and I almost don't know how I ever managed without.

Tom Stewart

THE DETAILS

TomTom Rider 400

Dimensions: 136.8 x 88.4 x 30.5mm
Actual display size: 96 x 54mm (glove friendly touchscreen, landscape or portrait view)
Screen res: 480 x 272 pixels
Weight: 270g
Battery: rechargeable, up to 6 hours autonomous operation.
Waterproofing: Protects against any wet-weather conditions (IPX7)
Connectivity: Bluetooth, USB 2.0 & micro USB ports
Memory: 16GB internal + SD card slot (card not included)
Mounting: RAM kit, charging dock, power lead
Other features include: Preloaded pan-Euro street maps (45 countries), lifetime map & speed camera updates, audio instructions (via in-built speaker or bluetooth to headset), custom POIs/waypoints/favourites, trip planner & trip log, winding & hilly roads routing, petrol stations/parking, trip recorder/trip statistics, incoming hands-free calling, MyDrive Connect (for PC/Mac route planning, software updates)
RRP: £319.99 + £64.99 for anti-theft kit (recommended). See TomTom UK website for further info.

Thanks to Julien Speed at Starfish Communications for arranging the review sample.

Thanks also to Fabrice Gregoire of London SW18 5SB (07971 821136, motardltd@gmail.com) for the wiring job.

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