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Summer 2016

THE

# RIDER'S DIGEST

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# From the editor...

**A**s Harold Wilson (who was PM when England last won the World Cup!) famously declared "A week is a long time in politics". I would have been at primary school when he said it so I can be excused for failing to register whether or not that was the case; and if I'm honest I still wasn't paying a great deal of attention when I was in my mid twenties.

My political consciousness was given a bit of a stir at the famous **Rock Against Racism** concert in Victoria Park in '78 (when I was 23) but six months later I was working as a despatch rider in the Metropolis and as I later declared in *Not so Carin' Sharin'* "My dick and my throttle hand both enjoyed exactly the same status as the whole of my brain and politics was something that I understood was bogus but I was really too busy having fun to try to understand why."

It's probably inevitable that almost forty years later, along with a diminution of the number of hormones distracting me and a greater control of my right hand when I'm riding, it's hardly surprising that my interest in politics has developed too – especially as I have five children.

Last Wednesday, June 22, I was ahead of the game with this issue and confident that it would be ready for you the reader to rave about before the end of the month; but in the last six days there has been more political drama than the average person would normally notice in six months and consequently, as I'm a bit of a political animal in my own time, everything in TRD Towers fell behind while I debated (argued

the toss vociferously) with all and sundry all over the Internet.

Yesterday I read a comment by Ian Mutch, President of **MAG** and editor of its *The Road* magazine, apologising for a comment he'd made stating that he had "made the posting in a moment of flambouyant indulgence" before going on to say "should the president of an organisation like MAG make heavily political postings on major issues as I did on a public forum?"

I responded by saying that as far as I was concerned, as he had made it on his own Facebook page in his own name, rather than in the organisation's organ, surely it was none of their business. As Clint's Dirty Harry informed his boss "Opinions are like assholes, everybody's got one" and he is as entitled to have and to express his, as anyone else is.

However, I'm sure we can all agree that it would be terribly bad form if I was to try to force my politics down your throat in this magazine, when all you're looking for within these pages is an approximation of the kind of distraction that your bike offers you; an opportunity to escape, even if just for a short while, from work, the wife, the kids, your money worries, or anything else that's stressing you, but most importantly, from the political rows that seem to be raging everywhere at the moment

This morning I was reflecting on this notion and it occurred to me that for many riders their motorcycling takes place in a separate, very compartmentalised world; which is hardly surprising when you consider what an insular activity it is, even when you are doing it with

others – and for many people that is a large part of its appeal, the way it can take you away from the rest of the world.

Interestingly there is an unconscious psychological defense mechanism called 'Compartmentalisation', which we apparently use to overcome 'cognitive dissonance' a form of mental stress that Wiki says is likely to occur if one "holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time, performs an action that is contradictory to one or more beliefs, ideas, or values, or is confronted by new information that conflicts with existing beliefs, ideas, or values" – which sounds like a reasonable description of the kind of feelings that have been splashing around the UK this last week.

The good news is that there are more than enough great articles with pretty pictures in this issue to transport you far away from any cares the world might have piled on your doorstep; so why don't you sit down and get comfortable and enjoy the ride.

## Dave Gurman

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*P.S. Most of you, if you know me at all, will know me as Carin' Sharin' Dave, TRD editor; occasionally a little outspoken but generally pretty reasonable and unlikely to abuse the readership – and overall that's how I try to keep things in the rest of my life. However, as much as this is a very comfortable skin that I've grown into over the years, not too deep inside lurks the young man in his twenties who used to spend upwards of ten hours a day tearing across London and as I said later in *Not so Carin' Sharin'*:*

*"I was always willing to make an allowance for a stranger's personality quirks. In most cases*

*my unwavering smile and ability to reason a situation through, were plenty to deal with your average petty minded tosspot. But when you find a real Victor Meldrew on the other side of a desk, he ain't as funny as he comes across on the telly. When you're confronted with someone who is so thoroughly miserable that they devote their entire energy into trying to drag every stranger they come in contact with, into their personal emotional black hole, it's hardly surprising that tempers occasionally get a little frayed."*

*Unfortunately if I get embroiled in an online argument and it all begins to get a bit bitchy and the insults start flying, instead of counting to ten before allowing the mature me to continue reasoning reasonably, I have terrible habit of opening the locked room in the back of my mind and inviting DR Dave to rip into the hapless antagonist and it's rarely very long trip from there to the gutter.*

*This happened a couple of weeks ago and there was lots of the sort of language that would be peppered with asterisks in a tabloid, before the guy – who I will admit that young Dave was being rather nasty to – obviously did a little checking up before coming back and telling me that my magazine was shit! Which was hardly any great shock given that we'd got way past the 'Name calling for beginners' stage so he was looking for anything at all to throw at me, what was surprising – or not necessarily so – was that he came back a short while later saying "Actually you might be an ignorant c\*\*t but your magazine is really good. Here's a picture of my Moto Guzzi..." Now that is what I call a compliment!*



Catch Dave from 9 to 11pm (BST) every Wednesday on [www.bikerfm.uk](http://www.bikerfm.uk)



# Riders' Lives



**Name: Kev 'Ernie' Barnes**

**What was your first motorcycling experience?**

Getting a lift home on the back of my Art Teacher's Bathtub Triumph; no idea if it was a 350 or 500 – I would have been 11 or 12 at the time.

**What is your current bike?**

Yamaha FXZ750 had 6 of them to date, plenty of go and nice and low, ideal for a short arse like me

**What bike would you most like to ride/own?**

I love a big single so it's got to be the BSA Gold Star

**What was your hairiest moment on a bike?**

Getting a big old head butt from a seven and a half ton Bedford while working as a despatch rider in '82, four months in hospital and lower leg amputation might be considered 'a hairy moment' – but hey only one cold foot in the winter is a bonus

**What was your most memorable ride?**

Last year riding up through the Highlands on the A9, four seasons in 40 miles.

**What would be the ideal soundtrack to the above?**

Vivaldi's Four Seasons fits nicely.

**What do you think is the best thing about motorcycling?**

I love riding on my own, totally selfish, all of life's niggles and worries just go away.

**What do you think is the worst thing about motorcycling?**

Being cold and wet, that's it

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

I would love to see a return of the manic two-stroke, youngsters today don't know what they missed

**How would you like to be remembered?**

With a laugh.



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# THE BOY BIKER

## "GETTING IT TOGETHER"

**L**ast time I wrote I had three broken bikes. A Gas Gas 200 two-stroke with a seized bottom end, a Suzuki DR 250 that needed a new top end and an old Ural with a terminal case of broken shock dampener.

My main priority was the DR as I use it daily for work and most weekends for leisure. I ripped the top end down in an evening and ordered a timing chain and full set of new top end bits (except the piston which was deemed serviceable after a good clean). While the engine was out I gave the frame and plastics a good clean and greased every bearing. Luckily the bottom end survived OK after the cam chain did its little hoppidy hop, but I threw in a new clutch basket, plates and springs while in there as they are a weak spot on the old air cooled 4 stroke. I also added a kickstart, handle bar risers, new bar guards, new chain and sprockets, air and oil filters.

The bike had a few teething problems at first, entirely due to my mechanical ham-fistedness and general ignorance: over tightening two bolts and mistaking the inlet for the exhaust valve clearance... To excuse the first issue, well... The time-certs I used to sort it out are used throughout Formula one engines as they are stronger than steel bolts into alloy casings!

Essentially, they're a much stronger, if not slightly more complex, way of repairing a thread than a heli-coil. Firstly, an oversized,



reverse thread is cut into the shagged hole, next, a small recess, almost like a counter sink, is cut into the first few mm at the top of this new hole. Then, using the special tool supplied with the kit, a top hat like insert is lock-tight'ed into the oversize hole. Leaving you a flush and perfectly strong replaced thread. Lovely! A fairly pleasing process overall and having the 6mm kit on the shelf will, I'm sure, come in handy.

As for mis-reading the manual and crossing over the valve clearances, this can only be attributed to sheer idiocy on my part. Luckily as soon as the engine fired up I noticed the valve rattle and stopped to investigate before anything heated up and got worse!

The DR has done me proud since, drinks a lot less oil than it used to and sounds a LOT better with a decent cam chain and repacked exhaust. The old trailie turns a few heads with decent acceleration for such an old school look and the higher bars and tighter turning circle keep it well on par with bigger bikes around town.

Next onto the Ural, really my father's area of expertise but still I can handle swapping







over a broken shock. The guys at Falcon shocks were great and although I tried to offer my I Cleenz Macheenz services in return, Robin assured me if I sent the broken one in and it was deemed manufacture issues were afoot, he would replace it, gratis. After a few phone calls and pics sent over it was decided that the type of shock we brought in the first place was not butch enough to handle Russian three wheeled iron, which spends a lot of its time on two wheels!

We put the replacement shock and its unbroken brother onto the leading link forks of another outfit and duly fitted Russian shocks back on the rear. At four times the weight and half the springiness... Once again I would be able to scare the pants off passers by taking right-handers with the chair in the air!

The Gas Gas has taken me a lot longer and I regret to type, is still, not finished. It was brought as a cheap toy for attempting to compete and maybe complete enduro races on. A new hobby which I am entirely under-skilled, under-funded and under-prepared for! Also it was in a pretty poor, fourteen mechanically moronic previous owners state under the zingy yellow surface. Evidence of poor spanning throughout and a bad case of jet washitus.

Not only was I in for a full engine rebuild including con rod and crankshaft rebalance (lots less than a new one) but most of the cycle bearings were showing wear and a case of, "well, now I'm in here" set in. The frame has been powder coated a bright orange to really clash with the yellow panels and the swinging arm, wheels and other alloy bits have been vapour blasted or polished. A new loom has replaced a right old mess and it had new consumables throughout. I am now saving for new plastics and radiators in the next few weeks. The engine

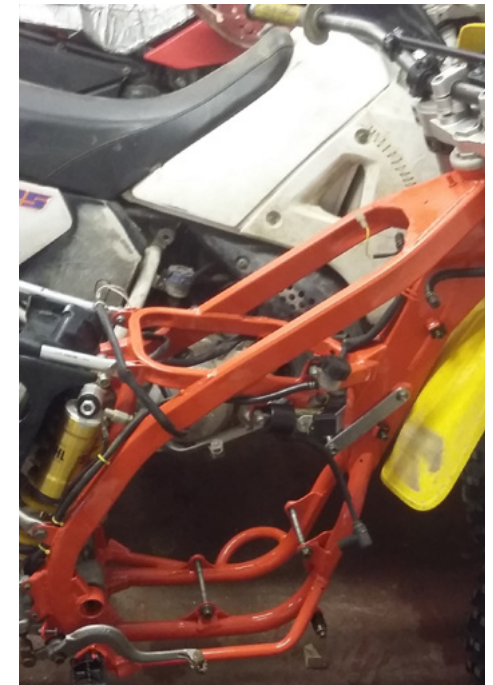
has had all bearings renewed and the crank sorted courtesy of Vic Eastwood. Amazing work and reasonable to boot.

Don't worry though fair reader, the bike will be out getting smashed into trees, dropped off ledges and filthy in no time!

As I look at the receipts (even at trade prices) my eyes water a little, and I'll never get back the hours I've spent down the shed or trawling the net. But what else was I going to do? Sell broken bikes? Sit in and watch Eastenders? Get a car? Was I bollocks!

As always guys thanks for reading and whatever project you may be losing your patience with, remember, it will all be worth it in the end!

## The Boy Biker





# THE GIRL BIKER

## "125 ADVENTURES"

**I** have turned 17 since my last column and have taken delivery of my Yamaha WR125. And where do I go on my 17th birthday? On a bike ride of course! Memories of my Aprilia rs125 came flooding back the first time I opened the throttle for a straight stretch of road – there was no acceleration!

This took some getting used to as I had been riding an R6 just the weekend before. I immediately loved that bike; it has wonderful handling and is great over bumpy roads. Plus the height would make it good at looking past cars and I could get to a destination without arm pump. The only problem is those pesky L plates! Unfortunately I failed my theory test so I will have to wait a little longer to be rid of them...

I went on many rides with my mother in May, but my lack of acceleration and top speed meant that getting past cars was always a challenge. We decided the best and simplest course of action was to lower the gearing at the rear wheel to give me a bit more acceleration, so we went on eBay and purchased a sprocket with one less tooth. Removing the wheel was an adventure, I don't think anyone had ever taken it off so everything was over tightened and seemingly impossible for me to get any leverage on to undo, I'm only female!

I have already had my first puncture too! Riding to school to an exam one morning and thinking, "Hmmm this thing is handling like a Harley, maybe I put too much air in the front."



When I got to school I discovered that the front wheel was fine, it was the back one that had a huge nail in it. That meant taking the wheel off again but at least everything was easier this time around and luckily it wasn't tubeless so the tyre company patched the inner tube and I was back out on it in next to no time.

My favourite part of owning a 125 is other bike riders. I am a well-experienced racer but riding on the road requires a different set of skills. When I end up on a lovely bike road (there are many near to me in North Wales!), the other bike riders like to overtake me on the big long straights. The problem is, I carry much more corner speed and follow proper racing lines! But I'm not allowed to just stuff it up the inside so I have to sit and wait until I can overtake them on exit speed, which annoys many sport bike riders and has now become my new favourite hobby. I may need to invest in a flip-up helmet because my racing one is so impractical on the road, what a shame, more shopping for bike bits for me!

Overall, I'm loving my new found freedom and the 125 is much more fuel efficient compared to the Piaggio nrg50 I was riding

previously. My only complaint on this otherwise beautiful bike is the lack of power!

Now that I have finished my exams, I plan on riding/racing the R6 a lot over the next few months and I have a trackday booked for Silverstone in June, I can't wait! Maybe I should take the 125 to get rid of those chicken strips...

## The Girl Biker



Axel Dowle Photography





Ruta Vía de la Plata

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# A View from the Group W Bench



**A couple of things have annoyed me lately, firstly I discovered I was a cis male, that is a male without the unnecessary cis bit added. Then why add it? I have also discovered that modern students who should be going to University to have their horizons and minds broadened now need a 'safe place' so this doesn't happen. So what is the point of going to university then?**

As you can guess I am turning into a grumpy old git, good fun it is too.

About a month ago I noticed the clutch cable on my lil'Breva was very light and came all the way back to the handlebar with neutral difficult to engage. Time to check and yes there were only a few strands left.

So I ride the Moto Guzzi Bellagio for the rest of the week (oh the pain) and on Saturday morning set out to fit my spare, one of Venhill's superb handmade jobs at twice the price but far better quality than OE.

Or so I thought.

An hour later it's all fitted up but as I am unable to adjust it out I assumed Venhill had made the inner too long, so I'm still forced to continue riding my Bellagio, my face was threatening to split in two.

On the Monday I order the correct clutch cable from Corsa Italiana (other suppliers are available but it would be rude not to use your mate's firm) and mention my problem on the club forum (Moto Guzzi Club GB if you are interested). Russell Glen drops off his spare

on Sunday, which I duly fit with no hassle and adjust out. The Top dollar Venhill one it turns out has an incorrect gearbox collar.

So thanks to Russell I was able to do the Dwyle Flunkers camping weekend at the Lower Lode and star as the 5:00 naked man of Sunday morning. Always pleased to give pleasure to the distaff side.

I subsequently discover that Venhill have completely changed their operation so all you old BMW, British and Italian bike owners will have to find somewhere else for your replacement cables, fortunately original equipment, where available, is so much better now (I first discovered Venhill when their replacement speedo and tacho cables cost four times that of Guzzi's but had lifetimes in decades not weeks).

Just another step in the road to the future, did I mention I was becoming a grumpy ol' git.

The following weekend I was booked into the Old Timers rally but discovered I had already arranged to go to some friends in Lincoln, Sue and Keith Nock (Lincolnshire Eagle, they make special parts for Guzzi and Keith is Nock Electrical as well) to have my Bellagio measured up and fitted with a custom three Givi box pannier frame system. Did I mention the pain of having to ride up there and back in glorious sunshine, even the A1 was fun (sort of)?

A pleasant time fitting it all and a couple of good meals with friends before saying goodbye (for a few months) to more friends as

they prepare to move to their new home in the South of France, Skiing and fine empty roads seem to be on the menu.

This weekend is the In The Country Rally at Midhurst, West Sussex, I'm especially looking forward to this as last year I got to within eight miles of it before my clutch failed, better not happen again.

Yup, fared much better this time, didn't break down at all.

A fantastic blues band on the Friday night to go with good food and beer and a band called the Glitter Bugz on Saturday night, not my kind of stuff but well liked by people old enough to remember but not know better.

Coming home there were a vast armada of crotch rockets about. I was approaching a roundabout and after my accident last October

I am still wary of these, with two of the breed coming up behind me. One overtook on the outside correctly but I lost sight of the other in my blind spot so I braked slightly and he undertook me. No danger to myself but if he was intending to do that anyway we could have collided as they both took the racing line whereas I took the correct one.

Ah well.

Ride Safe,  
**Ian Dunmore**  
An ancient Guzzista







# Battle of the Kings



**W**arr's of King's Road, Chelsea have won Harley-Davidson UK's 'Battle of the Kings' custom bike competition for the second consecutive year.

The competition was conceived for Harley-Davidson dealerships across the world to design and build their own individual customised versions of the Iron 883 model; the main stipulation being that the machine should be able to be re-created from available parts to produce a limited run of replicas available at a fixed OTR price, in the UK's case that's £12,995.

The panel of judges for the UK final included The Bike Shed founder and head honcho Dutch von Someren, Peter 'Ped' Baker, Managing Editor of a well known British weekly motorcycle newspaper, and round the world rider Charley Boorman, currently in a wheelchair following a collision in Portugal last February in which he broke both legs.

The original thirty UK entrants were whittled down to a very diverse shortlist of five by online voting and the final was held on the opening night of The Bike Shed's 2016 show at Tobacco Dock in Wapping.

The bikes' designers (known in H-D parlance as 'Custom Kings') were present, but this is where it all gets a bit confusing.

The final placings – according to Harley-Davidson's official website – are listed as follows (in reverse order of course):

In fifth place: Sycamore H-D (Leicestershire), 'Sonuvabitch'.

In fourth place: Edinburgh H-D, 'SCR4M8LER'.

In third place: Shaw H-D (East Sussex), 'The Clubman'.

In second place: Maidstone H-D, 'King Slayer'.





In first place: Warr's H-D (Kings Road) 'Urban Racer Sprint.'

However, while the first and second place bikes (albeit given different names) were absolutely clear, three of those bikes listed were not present, the judges instead pored and cogitated over the following machines:

In third place: Dublin H-D, 'Dorcha.'

In second place: Maidstone H-D, 'Trespasser.'

In first place: Warr's (Kings Road) H-D, 'Rascal Racer.'

No indication was given to the position of the two remaining finalists: Leeds H-D: 'BOOMBabY' and Reading H-D: 'Anne Marie'.

The winning bike was designed by Warr's 'Custom King' Charlie Stockwell. Also present was Warr's managing director John Warr, who was quoted on the company's website as saying "I'm really just so happy for Charlie and the team at Kings Rd. Their creativity in design and the beautiful way our custom builds are put together just stands out head and shoulders. For the 2nd year running its clear Warr's really are the Kings of Harley Custom!"

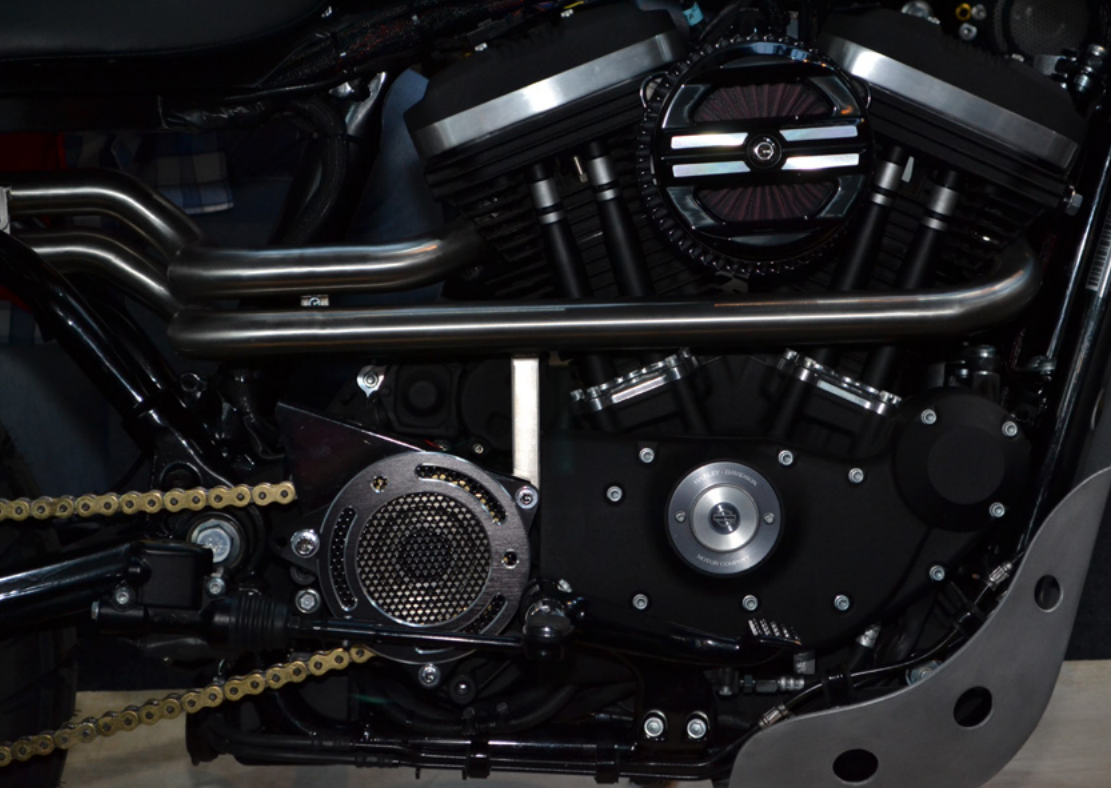
The design of this bike features an unusual half fairing finished in matt black which due to the lack of an obvious headlamp creates the illusion that the bike has not been designed for highway use, but on closer inspection a single projector lens unit is mounted behind the screen on the steering head, while the rear light has been tucked away in the seat unit. The wheels are gold and the engine, whilst mostly black features silver highlighting.

The bike is said to pay homage to the XLCR café racer that company founder Fred Warr raced in the Ramsgate Sprint in September 1960, a machine capable of 100mph straight out of the box.

Maidstone H-D's bike was designed by Joe Parkinson and is a mainly silver, flat track











inspired, street scrambler with a custom bash plate and cylindrical oil tank cobbled to the left down tube. The flat track theme continues with a number board fitted with a brace of vertically stacked projector headlamps and a pair of straight through shorty exhausts that wind their way through the frame to exit beside the knobbly rear tyre. Belt drive has been replaced by a chain and sprockets.

Dublin H-D's entry, designed by Kenny Roetsch, was 'Dorcha' (Scottish Gaelic for 'dark') is as the name would suggest largely a matt black machine, save for a pair of metallic silver exhausts. With clip on bars and an almond shaped headlight, this bike features spoke covers, a thin leather H-D 'Bobber' solo saddle and a chunk of H-D Dunlop tyre sitting just above the H-D Michelin shod rear wheel as a fender. A neat touch was the bike's barely distinguishable name in gloss black against the matt black side panels.

The bike entered by Leeds H-D was conceived by James Hope, and features a tiny black cockpit fairing, a hydro dipped gold snakeskin effect tank and rear fender, with the overall image of the bike inspired by fitness industry icon Lex 'BOOMBabY' Griffin.

H-D Reading's bike was a joint effort from Master Technician Darren Shilston, and Parts Advisor Richard Tegg. The guys were inspired by the classic Ford Model A, and it wears a pair of chunky red powder coated Harley Forty-Eight wheels, finished off by a front hub cap from a Heritage model. This sets off the candy red pinstriped and distressed tank, matt black rear fender and side panels bearing the iconic Kenny 'Von Dutch' Howard flying eyeball, and in true hot rod style, the name 'Anne Marie'.

All the bikes present featured the classic 'peanut' petrol tank of the 883, which for some remains the only distinguishing feature, as





in many cases most of the other identifying marks have been either modified or removed.

The common thread is that all the bikes, whilst being basically the same model, looked completely different, and while I liked 'Anne Marie' I have to agree with the judges that the best bike won.

The winning bike will go on to compete in the European final of The Battle of the Kings at the Wheels and Waves Festival on the 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> June at Cite de l'Ocean in Biarritz.

## Martin Haskell

**STOP PRESS:** The winner in the Battle of Biarritz was the finalist from South Eastern Europe, 'Nyx' – "the ancient Goddess of the Night, a shadowy figure of exceptional power & beauty" – by HD Athens and very pretty it is too.



# The other Dave Channel



ISBN: 9780956086303

Amazon's "Humour > Automotive" category is dominated by Jezza Clarkson knockdowns. However, for a few brief but glorious hours on the first Monday of the new decade, *The Carin' Sharin' Chronicles* hit the number three slot, offering discerning readers another kind of Dave Channel altogether.

His charming turns of phrase and effortless bonhomie stand in stark contrast to so much contemporary motorcycle journalism. Dave Gurman makes you glad that you're riding and glad that you're reading.

**Austin Vince**  
Mondo Enduro

Each story will have you nodding furiously in agreement, reaching for your pen to underline sentences that speak to your soul, and laugh out loud at life's little truths that we just never thought of in that way before, until Dave spelled them out so eloquently.

*The Carin' Sharin' Chronicles* is extremely funny. Even from a non biker perspective, the flow of lateral philosophical thought and astute political observation mixed in with everyday life experiences, make it hugely accessible to all \*\*\*\*\*

**Harriet Ridley**  
Trinity Mirror Group

**Pete Williams**  
Amazon customer

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Motorcycle.co.uk

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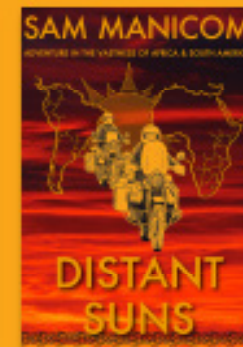


'Sam has the skills of the story teller and this book easily transports you into three years of journey across Asia. He manages to bring the sounds, scents and heat of Asia to life without wordy overkill.' *Horizons Unlimited*

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# A Tortoise In Greece





**taly, Austria, Switzerland and Scotland, maybe even Spain and Portugal, are all names that spring to mind when it comes to great motorbike rides.**

Greece on the other hand tends to be associated with either the current complicated economic situation or the idyllic views of small white and blue houses pillowed up on hillsides and framed between a turquoise ocean and a crystal clear sky.

You could be forgiven for thinking there isn't much to interest bikers there; after all most of the 6000 islands are too small for any kind of proper riding and island hopping by ferry means wasted time and schedule constrictions.

I however am a firm believer in the charms of Southern Europe as a holiday destination (living there is a different matter – which is probably why I moved further North...) so I decided to risk placing duty above pleasure and fly there on a mission to find you the best roads.

A 3 or 4 hour flight will get you to Athens from most European capitals; low cost tickets are easy to find and chances are you'll be greeted by warm dry weather.

Except... if you're me. In which case you end up flying on a not-so-cheap-because-I-needed-a-flight-on-that-specific-date ticket and when you land the forecast points to three days of heavy rain!

Fear not, all is not lost, we the Southern Europeans tend to be a bit loose with calculations, predictions and commitments so maybe the Greek Weather Institute suffers from the same problem and we might get lucky, after all, one thing we are great at is being hopeful!

It was already late at night when we landed in Athens and the taxi ride to the city centre was in itself an event with the driver refusing to



charge us the flat rate between airport and city centre arguing our hotel is outside the inner city centre radius:

- Your hotel is 40min from here, not city centre!
- Hum, no our hotel is 30min from here, see here look at Google Maps!
- No, your hotel is 40 min, I know!
- Ok, Google Maps says 30 and it's the middle of the night, there is no traffic. But ok, we'll see.
- Where are you from?
- Portugal.
- Ah, I've been to Portugal many times. I know Portugal very well.
- That's nice
- One time I was in the beach at night and was feeling sleepy, decided to sleep on the beach. Someone came and stole my stuff! That doesn't happen here in Greece! In Greece you can sleep on the beach no one steals!
- Err, I'm sorry, I guess... I never had that happen to me.
- No it happens, I know!

(Lesson 1 in Greece, they are always right even when they aren't, don't take it as an insult, it's a cultural quirk).

After a few kms of potting along at 90km/h on the empty motorway he seems to get annoyed at the fact we are tracking the trip on Google Maps, goes silent and decides to give up wasting our time and money, floors it, the old Toyota shaking and rattling at every bump doing 160km/h.

Cátia, at my side grabs my knee in fear and asks me to tell him to slow down.

Are you kidding me? He finally picked up the pace, the faster we get there the cheaper it will be

Google Maps seems to have done the trick. We got to the hotel in 30min with no detours and the meter registering only a couple of Euros above what would have been the flat



rate. To our surprise, as we get off the taxi the driver switches to friendly mode again, gives us tips on how to catch the bus the next day and even wishes us a great evening!

The next morning starts with another taxi ride, this time to get to Motorent near the Acropolis, to pick up our bike.

- Hello, can you take us to Motorent, just next to the Acropolis metro station.
- Hello, yes of course.

He starts driving, a couple of streets after - Would you mind turning on the meter?  
 - Ah, yes, of course! Where are you from? Italy?  
 - No, Portugal.  
 - Ahh, I knew! Only Mediterranean people ride bikes here! Others are afraid. Portugal, I've been to Portugal a few years ago: for the Euro Cup.  
 - Ah yes when you guys won the title from us.  
 - Yes, and I loved it, everyone was very nice. Even after loosing the final everyone was happy and celebrating with us. Sometimes people get mad but not there, everyone was having fun!

- Well I'm happy you liked it. Some people tend to take football too seriously but most of us just want to have some beers and have fun!  
 - Yes I was very surprised, loved Portugal!  
 (We get to our destination and the meter's showing 6€)

- Aah, 5€ is fine: have fun riding the bike!

(Lesson 2 in Greece, being friendly and creating some sort of a personal connection is worth more than money. My compatriot's good nature back in 2004 saved me 1€ 12 years later)

Finally on two wheels we pointed the cool little Honda CB500X north on the E75 out of Athens and head for Χαλκίδα, also known as Chalkida, Halkida or Chalcis.

(Lesson 3 in Greece, the names of the villages in Latin alphabet change according to



the disposition of whoever ordered the print of the map or road sign. There are EU guidelines on translating Greek to Latin alphabet but they haven't really bothered with them).

Two bridges connect mainland Greece to Evia (Euboea) in Chalkida. It's the second biggest island in Greece but if you ask a Greek they'll say they don't consider it an island; don't ask me why, maybe because it is connected to the mainland by the two bridges and they already have enough islands so they can make do with one less?

More importantly it's completely off the tourist radar, in fact it's a popular weekend and holiday destination for the locals. A Greek friend and fellow biker recommended it to us and that was the original idea behind this trip.

You only need to look at a couple of topographic stats to get an idea of how special this island is: 180km long (NS), 6 to 50km wide



(EW), crossed by a mountain range from North to South with peaks of 1743m (Dirfi), 1341m (Pyxaria) and 1394m (Ochi).

We have a week to ride around on the CB500X so let the fun begin!

A few kms past Chalkida our lunch stop provided us with our 4<sup>th</sup> Greek lesson: In the countryside Orthodox Lent is taken seriously. The "meat restaurant" is closed and the fish taverna only serves seafood – but not fish. If we want meat we'll have to wait until Easter Sunday!

Fortunately there was no lack of delicious choices when it comes to Greek food and after way too much octopus, squid, salad, bread, olives and feta we eventually dragged ourself out of the Taverna and back onto the bike.

Our final destination of the day was the small seaside village of Edipsos (or Aidipsos) in the northwest part of the island and even

though there is basically only one main road leading north I somehow managed to take a wrong turn and ended up on a dirt track in the middle of a forest.

Despite my pillion's best attempts at convincing me to double back onto the main road the opportunity to try the CB off-road was just too good to miss!

I consider myself a fairly competent mountain biker but have virtually no experience riding motorbikes off-road so the fact I had zero issues riding through dirt and rock trails and even crossing a small creek, all while carrying a pillion and luggage, says a lot for the little CB500X's abilities. The suspension might be basic and the Pirelli Scorpion Trail far from Enduro tires but the lightweight and utterly smooth power delivery make it as easy to ride as a large petrol powered bicycle.

Back in November when riding in Northern



Thailand (see issue 192) on a Kawasaki Er6N I got the feeling the CB500Xs my travel mates were using were much better suited to the bumpy, sometimes unpaved sections we were riding. Six months later I can confirm that despite loosing on power in the faster sections, the CB is indeed a fantastic fit.

A few kms down the forest track we eventually arrived back at the main road and kept heading north as we rode up and down Central Evia's mountains on the twisty N77. Well, at least until the road brought us close to shore again and I decided riding the bike on the beach would provide a good photo opportunity.

Turns out it was, just for a different reason! As soon as I left the dirt track and rode onto the pebble beach it started to shake, wobble and spin the rear until I got completely stuck.

*Note to self: Riding on loose pebbles is MUCH harder than on compact sand.*

It was time to get the camera out while Cátia mocked my off-road skills and cockiness. Truth be told, I was 'kinda' asking for it!

The problem was we still needed to get the bike out of there. After quite a bit of pushing by Cátia I was able to get the bike moving again and after spinning the wheel and paddling with my feet along the whole length of the beach I got stuck again trying to get out of the pebbles and onto the access road. Cátia came the rescue again and after some sweating and swearing we eventually got it back on the road!

*Note to self: Pillions can be useful at times.*

One of the perks of Evia is the fact it is mainly focused on local tourism, so instead of high-end expensive resorts you get simple, comfortable, cheap hotels in the most amazing locations. That is how we ended up waking the next morning to a direct view of the Aegean sea, having breakfast on a balcony overlooking



it before we hopped on the bike headed to a small set of islands nicknamed "The Maldives of Greece".

Lihadonisia is a tiny archipelago of uninhabited islands off the Northwest coast of Evia; a paradise of verdant vegetation and turquoise waters.

Our tourist guidebook mentioned it was possible to take a boat from Agios Georgios, however either because the book is wrong or because it was Orthodox Easter Sunday we couldn't find a boat there to take us to the island. We did however find the two next best things:

- a wild Greek tortoise crossing the road – which I decide to elect as my honorary pillion;
- a fantastic Greek guy who knew the owner of the small beach bar in Lihadonisia and immediately offered to call him on his own phone to pick us up at a nearby beach.

The trip to the island only takes 5-10min so after some time relaxing in the sun our stomachs got the best of us and we got back on the boat just in time for lunch in Agios Georgios.

Being Easter Sunday we just couldn't miss the opportunity to have the traditional Greek lunch of spit-roasted lamb! We had passed dozens of them being slow cooked in people's backyards since early morning and they smelled too good to resist!

The food was fantastic and the meal was an event in itself; a 50 year old DJ with a mix table straight out of the 90s – complete with dozens of CD's – was playing Greek music while all around us people got up and spontaneously started dancing and clapping. A fascinating experience!

Despite forecasts of rain, the weather seemed to be holding, so we stuck to the plan and after a couple of days in North Evia rode









back the fantastic N77 to Kimi, a small village in Central Evia, stuck on the mountainside facing the East Coast.

We selected Kimi as our second base of operations due to its central location and proximity to one of the most well know beaches of Evia: Mourteri. What I didn't know was that the road that leads from Kimi (the village) to Kimi Paralia (the beach) is basically a hill climb track, complete with tire barriers. Needless to say my memory became very weak and I kept forgetting stuff at the hotel, which forced me to ride back and forth between the beach and the village several times a day!

As we soon discovered, the roads around Kimi are another reason to visit Evia. They wind their way between sea level and mountain top, and the views are absolutely fantastic, while the ride is intense and engaging. Not because it's fast – far from it – but because the

conditions are constantly changing with non signaled road works and massive bumps and potholes. Occasionally the road is replaced by unpaved sections occupied by animals, there are cars going the wrong way and debris from rockfalls, so you have to maintain absolute focus on riding and leave room for last minute corrections to your trajectory in order to avoid one (or multiple) of the aforementioned hazards.

One more point in favor of the small Honda, its good ABS brakes and low power make it easy and fun to focus on defensive riding.

The weather forecast finally caught up with us and our eternal optimism resulted in a couple of wet rides as we had insisted on leaving our waterproofs at the hotel.

Riding south to Marmari the next day was when the weather became really unpleasant; cold wet and windy, which limited the fun



of riding on amazing roads that for once – at times – had good quality tarmac. From there we got onto a Ferry to Rafina and then on the road back to Athens, which we hadn't actually had any time to see before.

When it comes to touring Athens there is quite a lot you can see and even more you can miss. We had two days in Athens and for the first we were on our own.

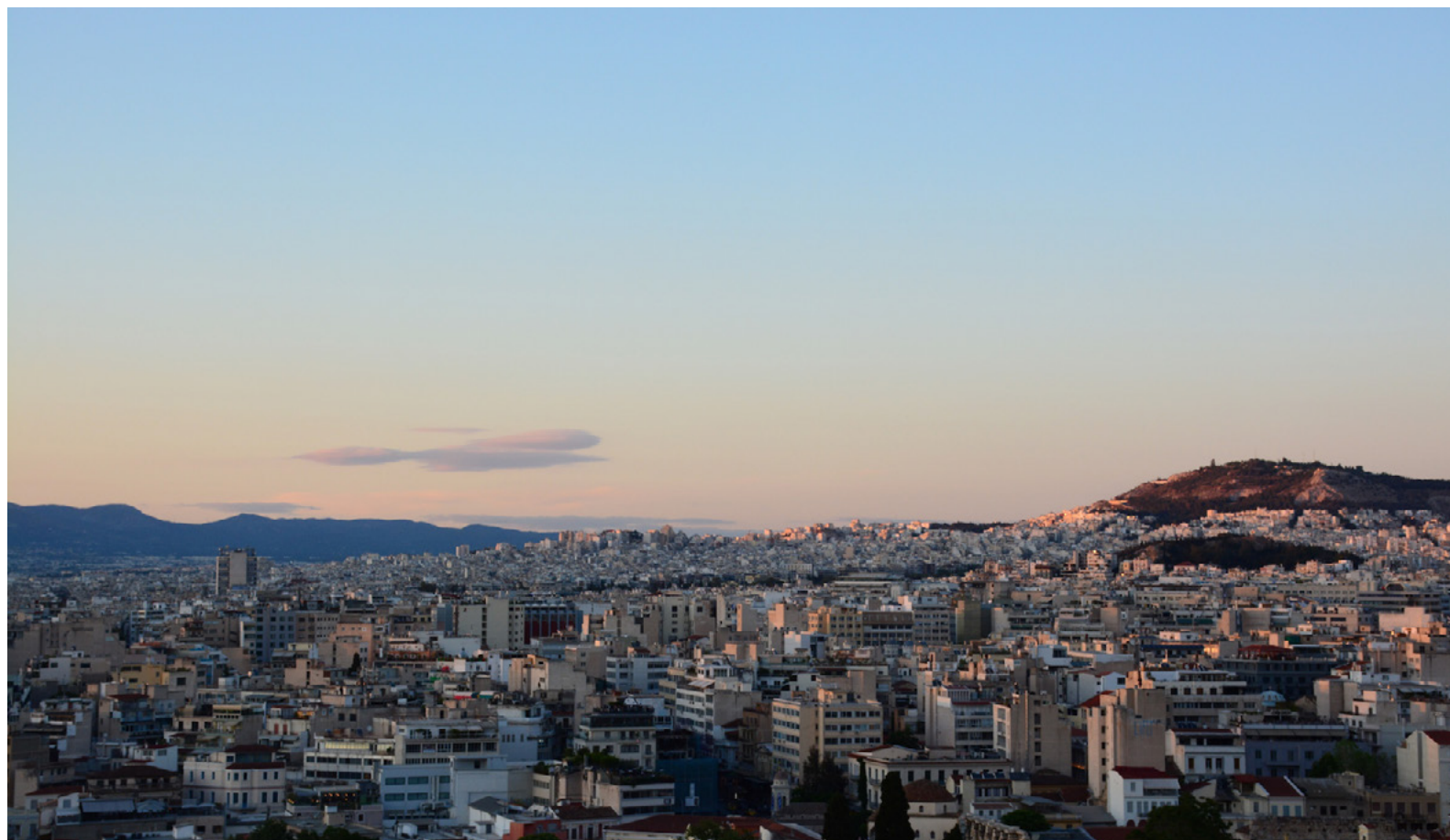
Filtering through morning rush hour traffic to return the bike was an exhilarating and nerve wrecking experience. I've ridden and filtered through traffic in several countries but I don't think I ever experienced the level of chaos and near misses the Athenian traffic served up.

Looking at the locals riding you wouldn't think it's that much of a deal, after all 80% don't even wear a helmet despite them being a legal requirement.

With all the traffic chaos in Athens you're better off on foot. You can walk the streets and small alleys, climb the hill to the Acropolis and see the sunset over the city in Areopagus Hill with the Parthenon in the background.

I'll be honest, we loved the Acropolis, the Acropolis Museum and all the other Ancient Greek sites but we're not that big into History. But after seeing the main attractions it's easy to get lost in the concrete jungle that is modern Athens.

With 3.4 million inhabitants (in a country of 11 million) Athens seems at times ugly, dirty and confusing. On our second day in the city we were lucky to have an Athenian friend joining us. His insight completely changed our opinion of the place. We got to see a whole different side of modern Athens, not the city of concrete and protest signs but a metropolis where a street corner between two ugly buildings can be turned into a charming terrace for a niche restaurant with amazing food, or where the



empty space left by the demolition of an old building can be turned into a chilled urban jungle, a quiet, cool place right in the middle of the city but miles away from the heat and noise.

I could go on about some more of the amazing little spots in Athens but if you're not bored by now and actually made it reading all the way to this point let me leave you with my one tip for when you visit Athens: go and see all the historic sites but after that head over to The Underdog and ask for their Coffee & Tonic, it's the single best drink I have ever had!

### **The CB500X**

Our regular readers will probably know The Rider's Digest opinion on the latest generation of low cost – low power Hondas, the NC700/750 in particular.

As a concept they do represent the most utterly uninteresting aspect of motorcycling: uninspired design on top of a castrated engine, wrapped in basic cheap components; a triumph of function over form, duty over passion.

Although not exactly in the same line, the CB500X shares part of the philosophy (and looks) with its bigger sister so do we hate it?

I can't speak for my colleagues but I most certainly don't. Would I buy one? No! Unless:

I needed a new or nearly new frugal, cheap commuter to go to work.

I was going to do a several month long "Adventure Trip" in which case I would take this bike with a Level 3 RallyRaid kit over a BMW R1200GS Adventure every day of the week because it's cheaper, lighter and easier to fix

I had a fleet of rental bikes.

I cycle to work every day and use my bike 99% on the road/track purely for fun. For that reason my Multistrada 1200S is a much better fit but the fact a bike like the CB500X exists and



I can rent it at a reasonable cost is fantastic.

It rides really well both on and off-road, is comfortable for two up traveling, uses what can only be categorized as almost no fuel (3L/100km) and is fast enough for everything within legal speed limits.

It was only when we got to steep mountain roads or had to make a quick overtake that I felt the lack of a few extra hp, but then again something like a V-Strom 650 or a BMW F800 would cost me 20% to 40% more – and that's without considering the extra fuel it would use. Something I have a hard time justifying. And a GS1200? That would be a whopping 100% extra cost per day!

## Ricardo Rodrigues

Thanks to:

[Motorent in Athens](#) for supplying us with the awesome Honda CB500X

Our Greek friends who helped us find the most amazing spots and sights.

The Greek people in general for their warmth, passion, friendliness and at times confusing manners.



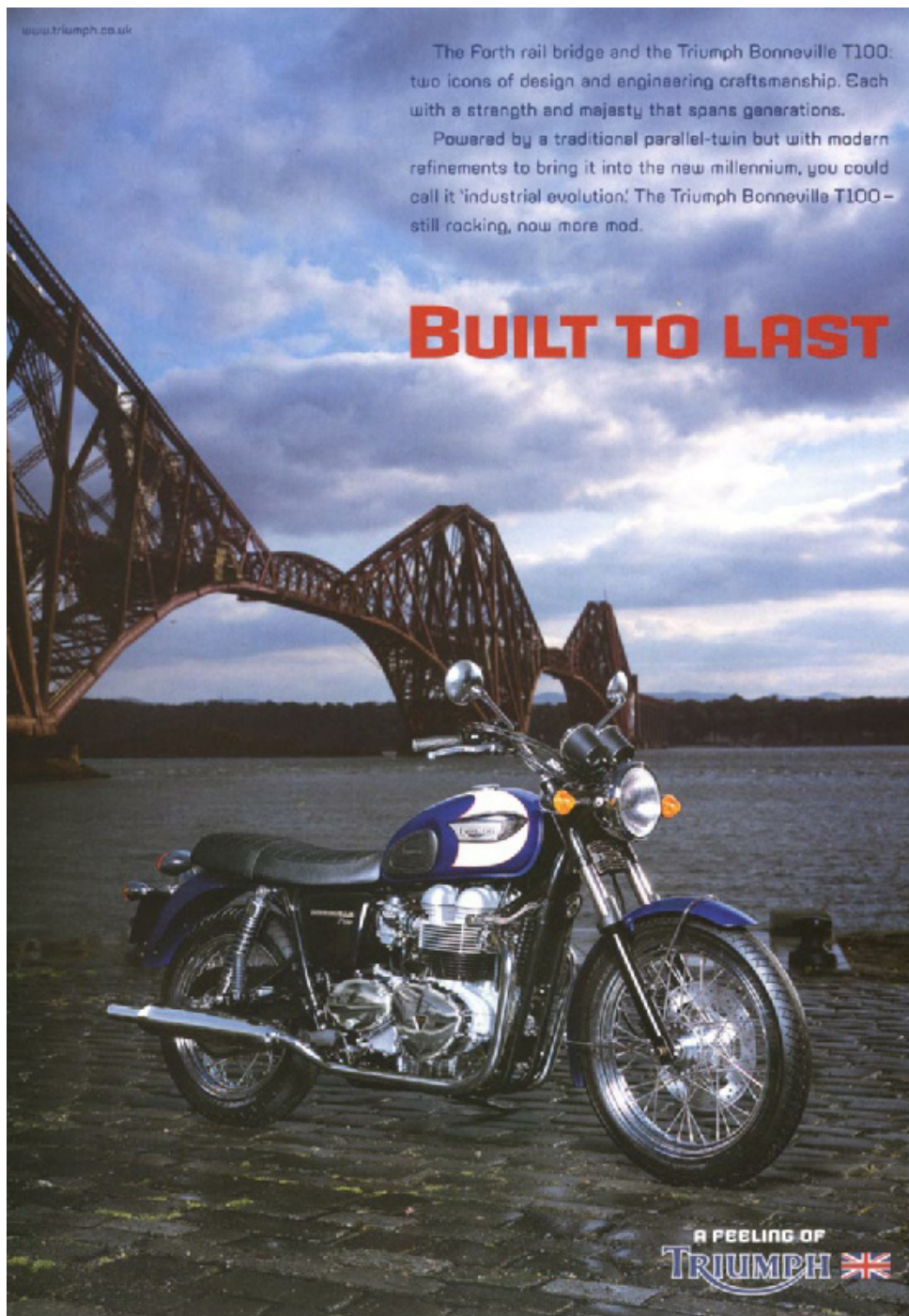



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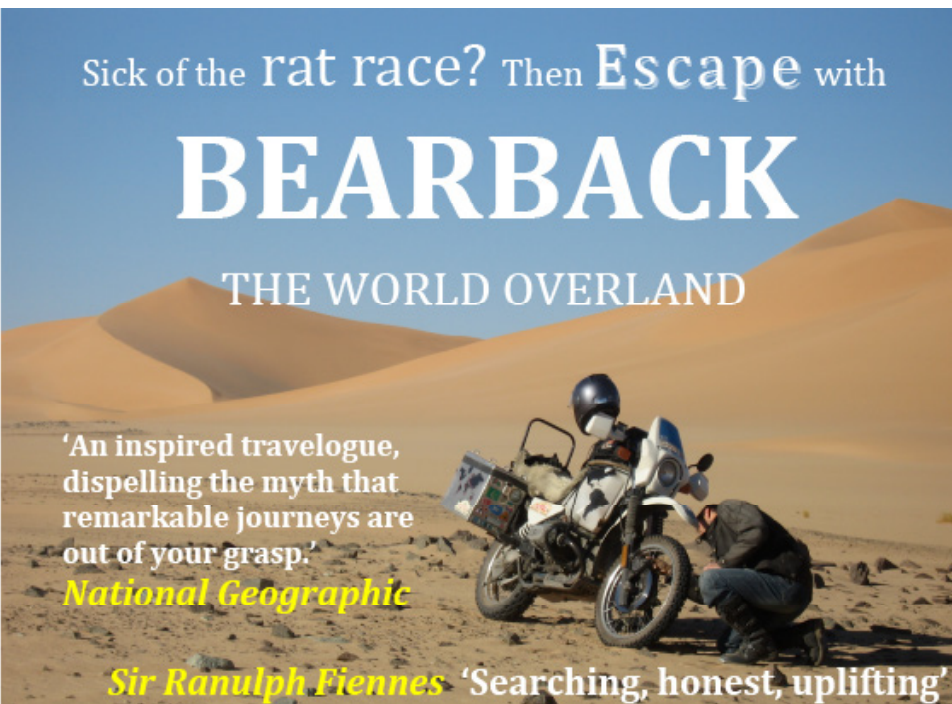
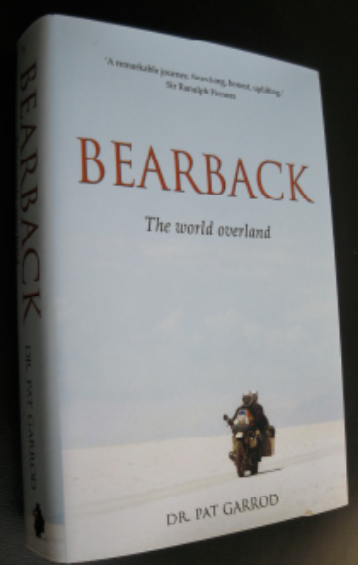
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# Sweet Lamb - Sour Memories





**It's a very ordinary Thursday morning in a damp grey Cotswolds and I have plans for a very ordinary day. The dogs are pressing themselves into the duvet and pretending to be asleep so as to avoid having to go outside to relieve their bladders in the soft morning drizzle. I make tea and toast, which sets the canine noses twitching but they will not own up to being awake while it's still raining.**

In time honoured fashion I resolve to do some actual work, things I've been putting off for a while but, as ever, I'm fairly sure I'll be finding plenty of distractions. The phone rings, as if to reinforce the point. It's our esteemed Editor, the Big DG! The last time he called he was offering me a trip to Wales – lovely Welsh Wales – to attend an off-road adventure riding press gig for a couple of days. In a state of anguished disappointment I'd had to decline as I needed to be somewhere else. I had gallantly suggested he contacted Jacqui Furneaux to see if she was available as she lives in Bristol and it wouldn't be too far for her to go. "What a good idea," DG had said, while I silently cursed my bad luck.

So now I ask him if he'd managed to get hold of Jacqui to go on the Welsh trip and he says, "Well... actually... I got the dates wrong and I was wondering if you were still interested?" I answer yes faster than a whippet chasing a squirrel, in case he changes his mind. "When is it?" I ask. "Today," he says. This is a fairly typical Digest scenario. Some would say we are chaotic, I would say we are flexible and ready to react with aplomb to any fast moving situation!

After an hour of aplomb-based negotiations and diplomacy via various electronic 'communication platforms' I have secured all necessary permits to be away from home, dog care arrangements are in

place and directions have been obtained. The weather forecast is for grey cloud all day but the sky is blue and the sun throbbing. I make good on my promise to mow all the grass at Oldlongdog Acres, pump up a tyre on the Triumph, check its oil and chuck some clothes into a throw-over bag. The only off-road gear I own is a pair of O'Neill moto-x boots that have been languishing forlornly in my office for too many years while I've been messing about turning my CCM 404e into something more like an 'adventure' machine. I evict some weapons-grade spiders from the O'Nealls and chuck them in my Overboard waterproof duffel bag, which is then strapped to the growing baggage ensemble on the back of the bike.

I am due at the Trewythern Hotel in Llanidloes by 6.30pm and as I've never even heard of the place I consult Google Maps. It suggests going through the middle of Gloucester and Newent and various other obscure back-roads with complicated junctions and turnings towards places with the kind of Welsh names that furrow your brow and make you mumble stupidly just trying to read them. I predict I'll get hopelessly lost trying that and whilst it can sometimes be quite fun and educational, I have a deadline to meet. I opt instead to use a route I know reasonably well via Worcester and the A44, which goes pretty much all the way without undue complications.

I set off, swooping down the Cotswold escarpment via the legendary (round our way, anyway) Frocester Hill and onto the M5 at Stroud. The segment between there and Worcester is despatched with no incident or indeed any interest whatsoever. The 'vintage' ('01) Triumph Sprint RS copes effortlessly with this sort riding and soon enough I'm round the various bypass links onto the A44. The road occupies a deep significance in my psyche as



it leads to my old prep-school (note to Editor: better put me down for the next Posh Boys biker event). [Note from Ed, you just ain't posh enough O.L.D. a good military pedigree just doesn't cut it these days – especially if you attended a provincial prep-school]

Despite over four decades of elapsed time, every curve, rise and dip is instantly familiar. Everything looks the same as it did all those times I sat in the back of my parents' car with an ever rising sense of despondency and impending abandonment as we neared the Gormenghastly gates of the 'establishment' – in all senses of the word. Looking back it was in fact a very good school and I had a lot of fun there, but that's not how it seemed at eight years old. However, free of all those feelings I can now enjoy what is a top biking route through some of the loveliest countryside England has to offer.

The Malvern hills loom on the distant skyline like a row of canine pre-molars ready to crush bone and sinew. The numerous yellow signs encouraging bikers to ride safely confirm that bone and sinew are regularly crushed along this way. It's not hard to see why as the road surface is good, twisties abound and are interspersed with stretches of tarmac straight enough to blast up to stupidly life-threatening speeds – even on a much abused Trumpet RS.

The A44 fun is spoiled somewhat by Leominster. Part of a bypass has been thoughtfully provided but then, as so often on British roads, funding must have dried up or a hideous thirty year planning battle ensued, and it fizzles out at a roundabout. The only ray of hope at this point is the OK Diner, a pastiche Fifties American caff that supplies a great bacon butty and, if my memory serves me well, a stonking good cup of tea. The number



of bikes outside confirms I probably haven't got Alzheimers yet but I press on into the little market town's streets hopeful of a reasonably quick exit. I flip my brain to 'city mode' and brass-neck my way past all the stationary cars and vans waiting patiently at various traffic lights and mini-roundabouts.

As if to atone for its sins, after Kington the A44 delivered a completed bypass leading to a stretch of road that forces discipline and joy into uncertain conflict as it disappears to a distant vanishing point just begging for more throttle, more speed and general whooping into one's visor. Somewhere along here the border with Wales is crossed but either there is no sign or I'm having too much fun to notice. Eventually I spot the word 'araf' on the road and slow it down in case the word Heddu appears in my mirrors.

Wales is at its golden best. The sky is cloudless, the sun is out and spring is blossoming with green lushness girdling all around. Welsh place names tease and tickle the imagination, a sign in the shape of a teapot tempts a Welsh cream tea. No time to stop, don't want to be late. Rhayader is as I remember it from a long forgotten previous visit and I stop for petrol and a cold drink. I notice an abundance of off-road bikes in windows, parked in the street and leaning on walls. So this is where the knobbly tyres all end up! I push on for Llanidloes with half an hour in hand.

The town is easy to find as it's the only one around. Through the carnage of insect viscera spattered on my visor it all looks rather pleasant. The hotel is equally easy to find and I pull into the little car park behind and kill the lusty triple. The place is so quiet and calm I feel like I'm vandalising it with my mere presence. There is no traffic, no shouting or slamming of



doors. No music blaring or sounds of vacuum cleaners from distant open windows. I unstrap my bags and walk to the front door only to find it locked. I'm starting to think I'm in a scene from The League of Gentleman but suddenly the door opens and two smiling biker-types come out. I slip in before the door closes again to find a very clean, tidy and comfortable looking place that nevertheless appears to have no staff.

I'm right, there are no staff but the owner is there with Mark 'Molly' Molineux from the off-road school, who are both charming and book me in to the room I'll be sharing with a young lad from MCN. Scrubbed and changed, I return downstairs and pass some time with Mark chatting about bikes and things, and then I ask what the plans for the evening are. "We'll meet here at 8.30 and then go out and get something to eat." It's 6.30 so I decide to get my camera and explore Llanidloes. However the camera has managed to switch itself on in my bag and the battery is flat so I put it on charge and go out with just my phone and laptop bag.

The town is an utter gem. I can't imagine why everyone isn't raving about its historic buildings and clean, wide and traffic-free streets? There's an immaculately tended park down by the embryonic River Severn with a historic stone bridge. And every third building seems to be either a pub, cafe or restaurant! I pick the Crown & Anchor as it looks the kind of place I can ensconce myself in a corner and start writing my article with a pint of best and a bag of dry-roasted peanuts. I'm not disappointed. This whole place is not just physically distant from London or even the Cotswolds but culturally and temporally a different world. I like it. It's probably too far for the unimaginative or lazy to bother coming to but that is very much their loss.



After more beer and less writing I go to meet the others back at the hotel. We head to another pub to eat and drink, and engage in the kind of banter and raconteuring that bikers fall easily into when alcohol and comfy surroundings are involved. I'm already two drinks ahead and by the end of the session have forgotten everybody's names. We return to the hotel and turn in for the night. Tomorrow we ride!

Morning arrives soundlessly through the open window. I mean it, nothing to hear but then a few soft footsteps and a car door softly closed. Are the people of Llanidloes the politest and most considerate in the world!? Breakfast is hearty, 'English' and full. And then we're off to the hills. I follow Nathan (a genuine global explorer) and the very nice, enthusiastic and engaging young lad from MCN whose name has not yet emerged from my beer damaged memory. They are both riding 'adventure' bikes with 'adventure' tyres. They carve perfect lines around the corners ahead of me, exuding confidence and competence. I follow like a galloping, cack-handed old Labrador trying my best to look smooth.

After a short while we turn into the Sweet Lamb Rally Complex, a farm posited in front of a whole landscape of grassy hills, criss-crossed with rough tracks. "Mountain lambs are sweeter," declares the sign without attempting to distinguish whether it means they are 'cuter' or their meat tastes sugary before you slather it with mint sauce. We ride on through the farmyard along a smooth gravel track. Soon we are shrouded in fine dust as we come up behind the Chaps from CCM in their van. They kindly let us past before silicosis of the lungs claims us all.

Nathan and MCN remain competent and confident whilst I am becoming acutely aware



that I'm on a heavy road bike with a slightly squared off rear tyre. We eventually reach the motorsport complex, which is a big metal shed with various teaching and machinery fixing facilities. We dismount and have tea. The sun is now very hot. More people arrive, a family with a pre-teenage boy, various serious looking off-road types in 'all the gear' and bikes are being unloaded from vans.

Craig from SWM motorcycles (and organiser of the day) asks if I'm happy to take their 650 machine for the first part of

the proceedings and I happily oblige despite knowing absolutely nothing about it or what I'm about to do. I am a complete off-road novice apart from a couple of green lane forays down the Fosse way on the CCM 404e before I started to rebuild it. I am imagining a 650 single will be reassuringly docile with lots of forgiving low end torque. I ask if I need to put my O'Neill boots on and am told not to bother, the ones I'm wearing will be fine.

Before we set off we are called to a briefing by Molly who tells us that we'll be doing basic

skills in the morning and then we'll head off round the various mountain routes after lunch. Like all the best instructors he is clear, calm and transfers a sense of confidence and safety to his charges. He tells us "We don't crash bikes or hurt people."

So off we go in a rumble of dust and bright coloured bikes, up to the training area. We are taught how to stand up and control the bike with just two fingers on each lever, round and around a short circuit. I'm six foot four inches tall and have to bend over to reach the bars if





my legs are straight. We are told to keep our legs straight but slightly bent. I'm wondering if I've heard this correctly as it doesn't make sense to me. It doesn't really help much and I find it hard to control the throttle with any finesse with two fingers on the brake lever.

Next we are taught to transfer our weight from one foot-peg to the other to see how this steers the bike. This does make sense and does help. Then we learn to sit down with one leg sticking out as we round the curves and then stand back up again on the straight bits. It's a relief to sit down as I can get some proper control over the throttle. Once Molly is satisfied we're all up to snuff we head off for a cup of tea and a rest. After this we head out to another part of the hills where there is a short loop to practice everything we've learned so

far. I am realising that I am probably the least competent or confident member of the group but am determined to keep up.

As we go round the new bit of track, which involves a fairly steep uphill section, I realise part of my trouble is that the SWM 650 is a rip-snorter of a bike. It has a hair-trigger throttle and accelerates explosively at the merest hint of movement. Unfortunately a lot of this movement is involuntary on my part. Going uphill I find myself hanging on for grim death and any pretence of two fingers on the levers is cast aside as the bike bucks and writhes over bumps and loose rocks. I nearly always manage to sneak my fingers back on to the levers just before Molly notices they were off but he catches me out a few times. We then turn round and do the circuit in the other direction.



Going down the steep bit is much easier and I start to improve, especially when I change up to a higher gear.

I'm beginning to get the hang of this just as it's time for lunch. Once off the bike and a bit relaxed I'm starting to realise I'm aching in unfamiliar places and sweating buckets. This much sun is uncommon for Wales, to say the least. We pass the time with sandwiches kindly provided by our hosts and lots of cold water. I get a chance to look at the CCMs more closely and chat to Darren 'Sooty' Soothill from the factory. After lunch I'll get to try the lowered version of their 450 Adventure bike and later on the taller one. I'm looking forward to less power and a smoother delivery.

And that's what I get. The CCM feels wonderfully together, responsive and



predictable. We head out on a long circuit of the mountain trail and I'm feeling much happier and in control. For the first time I get to look around at the scenery and take in its 'raw splendour', although I think fewer 'sweet lambs' and more natural vegetation wouldn't go amiss. We stop at the top of a hill for photos and a breather before heading down to a feature Molly calls The Widow-maker. It's a narrow, jinking track up a very steep looking hill. He tells us he'll demonstrate how to tackle it on his BMW HP2 'enduropanzer'. He disappears up the hill, surefooted as a mountain goat, turns round at the top and returns back down in complete and utter control.

"Would any of you like a go," he asks? Not me, mate! I'm just feeling confident enough that I'm going to stay on the road we're on,









which Molly has recently described as being 'very tricky' on account of there having been 'no rain for ages' and all the little stones being 'like riding on marbles'. Also, I seem to remember Sooty saying something about the CCM being worth eight grand (gulp)! However, Nathan has a go followed by the father of the little lad. Both defeat the Widow-maker without mishap and return to genuine applause from the rest of us. And then it's back to base for more tea. A couple of drone cameras are produced and they start to buzz around taking videos of us and the bikes.

Now I really am tired and aching. I've sweated so much into my helmet that putting it back on is a disgustingly soggy enterprise. However, now I'm on the taller CCM, which is basically the same as the shorter one but because I'm such a lanky streak I'm even more comfortable on this machine. Nathan takes

the SWM 650 for a quick spin and comes back whooping with his eyes wide open. He suddenly sees why I was struggling with it but is clearly excited by the prospect of taking it out on our last session. Tea slurped, soggy helmets on and off we go to the final session, drones and all.

This time we go off in a new direction to cross the little river that's been flowing gently behind the centre. Someone says it's the Wye and something clicks in my head. I've been here before. Not right here but up in the hills with a map and compass, with serjeant majors and army boots and a sodding great big rucksack, with rain and darkness and pain. I remember noticing at the time how close the source of the Wye and Severn are and how they only meet again in another country a long way from here. I cross easily on the tall CCM. I'm not sure I even get my boots wet but



there's a commotion behind me and the little lad appears, covered head to toe in water but smiling. Molly is clearly alarmed and relieved in equal measure. He says something about the 'parting of the Red Sea' and never ever being able to forget what he just witnessed.

From there we motor up to another loop and are given a demonstration of real high-speed off-roading by Molly on the Ubermoto. He goes round five times, getting airborne over a small jump near where we are watching. I just manage to capture it on my wee compact camera. We are then separated into fast and slow groups and I'm grateful to hand the CCM to someone else while I sit back and watch the fun. When it comes to my turn a predictable confluence of aggravating factors comes to pass. It goes something like this: middle aged bloke with no previous experience of off-road riding gets on a bike he has just an hour's

previous experience of, with more confidence than he has earned the right to feel, who is more tired than he realises and who then tries to ride faster than he should on a track he's never been on before.

There's going to be a lot to learn here for all of us. As I round a bend, going as fast as I think I've earned the right to, I spot a long, deep groove in the surface of the marbly track that is not exactly a rut but deep enough to hold the wheels of the bike in. I don't have time to react or the experience to know instinctively what to do. Once in the groove I realise it probably isn't the right place to be but before I can even curse I feel the bike go into a terminal bucking-wobbler and I'm slamming face first into the hard, unyielding Welsh rock and gravel.

I really do not like falling off bikes. It hurts and I'm too old for this kind of shit. I scramble up with pain in my shoulder and knee, and stab







the cut-out switch on the recumbent CCM. I'm covered in dust and I want to go home. But all that Army training, all those boarding school beatings and every damned hard, tough thing I've ever done that's made me who I am just kicks in. I pick the bike up (as easily as they claim in the brochure) dreading the thought it's broken beyond repair. Fortunately it isn't. There's hardly a scratch on it save for a new tear in the sticker on the side of the tank that was already torn before. These bikes are tough.

Just then the two local Welsh guys who seem to be helping Molly with the day's events ride up and stop. They offer me reassuring words and advise me to get my breath back for a while. It's the genuine kindness that all people who do inherently dangerous things become capable of once they too have hurt themselves. These two have probably fallen off many times on the way to being as good as they are on off-road bikes. So, as you do – as we all probably do – I get back on, thumb the starter and set off again. I gun the throttle past the waiting watchers and power on round again, this time knowing exactly where the groove is and avoiding it easily.

After a few more laps it's time to call it a day. We head back across the infant Wye towards the centre but then a decision is made to do a final valedictory lap of the mountain course. I take up station at the back as I'm aware I've been holding people up all day. I also take the opportunity to spend more time in the saddle than standing up as my arms are really quite sore by now, and the thought of falling off again is too much to contemplate. The faster riders power off leaving a plume of dust and then I notice that all the slower riders in front of me are also sitting more than standing. I feel a wry smile cracking across my face. Haha, not just me then!



Finally we are back at base with all the engines off and all the pictures taken. Molly wraps up the day with a final debriefing, thank yous and goodbyes. Bikes are loaded back into vans, emails exchanged and promises made to meet again. I pack up the throw-over bags, tighten the straps and set off again down the long dusty track towards the farm. I'm three hours ride from home. The sun is still beating down, Wales has put on its finest show for us and as I turn back on to the A44 I instantly feel the grip of the tyres on a proper road. I wind the throttle on and hold it to the limiter before changing up. Second, third – I'm doing a hundred before I know it.

I ride hard, with purpose and effect. I let nothing impede my progress despite it being Friday afternoon. I tidy up my style, ride the corners properly and find myself very quickly on the other side of Leominster approaching the pointless piece of bypass. And then I spot the OK Diner and turn in, purposely parking away from a couple of spangling, candy-flake cruisers. I walk in covered in dust and sweat and sunburn. There's a momentary pause in the noise of dining and the waitress looks at me nervously as if I'm the High Plains Drifter. She shows me to a table and I hang my jacket on the chair opposite. I place my helmet beside me and it leaks sweat disgracefully onto the red vinyl seat.

The menu is full of psuedo-Americana, which the people around me are buying into with relish. But this is Leominster. I'm riding a British bike in Britain and I'm not in the mood to pretend I'm anything but who I am and doing what I'm doing. I ask if they do sandwiches? "We do a bacon sandwich," replies the waitress. "Perfect," say I. "And something to drink," says she? "Tea, please!" She smiles and I have time to reflect on my day.





This is The Rider's Digest and we don't sugar coat things, so here are my thoughts: I didn't enjoy myself as much as I thought I would. I probably won't ever do anything like that again. I need to get fitter and lose some weight. I'm not as young as I used to be. I can see why people go off-road riding and why they enjoy it. I am very grateful for the opportunity I've been given and I liked everyone I met. I need to practice and develop the skills I learnt. I'm not interested in going fast off-road but I am interested in travelling off the beaten track. I don't like going round in circles, I like going to places to see and do things. I really, really hate falling off bikes. Wales is another country and we should treasure it. It doesn't always rain there. I've run out of thoughts so I pay my bill and leave.

Outside I find a tall man with tattoos staring at my bike. We chat while I pull on my filthy suit of armour. He tells me he has a bike at home but hasn't ridden it in years. I tell him to pick

somewhere he hasn't been before and ride it there. He smiles and promises that he will. I force my head into my absolutely disgusting helmet once more. I fire up the Strumpet RS and roar away towards Bredenbury where there is something I urgently wish to do.

At the village I pass a little building in the garden of a house that once was the Bredenbury Stores, 'famous for fudge'. A mile or so beyond I pull into a turning signed for Pencombe, the destination of my old school's most gruelling cross country run. I look back across the fields towards the buildings like Titus Groan gazing on Gormenghast for the last time, a man so different from the boy that left so long ago. The buildings are almost totally obscured behind the massive copper beech tree that I played under as a child.

I want to gather up all my nostalgia and thoughts because my old school is closing down. It's in its last few weeks and for the first time I realise I am glad it is. The idea of Public



schools is way beyond its smell-by date. We shouldn't poison children's minds with notions of privilege, superiority and entitlement. Our country has suffered and continues to suffer terribly from the aftermath of this minacious indoctrination. I want to finally put it all behind me, it's all so long ago and so irrelevant to my life now. So, without a backward glance I get on the bike and ride away without any further feelings for the place. I feel a great weight has been left behind.

At home I park the Crumpet RS in the garage next to the CCM 404e. I'm certain the last time I rode it I stood up on the pegs without any problems at all. I decide to check this out by climbing up onto the bike while it's still on its stand and, sure enough, everything is in the right place. The bars, the pegs and levers are all perfectly placed with my back straight and legs just slightly braced. Damn! That's settled it. I'm going to get this thing finished and start using it again. Not for blasting around in circles but

for going to places. Places that are hard to get to and hopefully without falling off.

In funny (peculiar) way my trip to the Sweet Lambs of Wales has brought me closer to knowing what I want to do with this bike by letting me discover what I don't want to do with it. Thank you all for that. I feel better now, more positive for the future. I go into the house with the O'Neall boots and put them back into the office where they were before, much to the relief of the recently homeless spiders.

## Oldlongdog

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# Moto Française Spéciale

[French Bike Special]

**A**nyone who read my article in issue 192 will remember that my hot tip for an investment bike was to buy a classic 'moto' from the southern side of the English Channel, so I thought it might be appropriate to follow this up with a report on a very French bike show.

When I lived in Fife in the dim and distant past, the Scottish Bike Show was important to all of us Scottish bikers. Not because it was particularly brilliant, but we used that event in late March as the trigger to drag our bikes and ourselves out of winter hibernation – a kickstart to the rest of the year if you will. Well in much the same way, the first of the bi-annual indoor events held in Limoges, my nearest city, and organised by the fine fellows at F.F.M.C. (the French equivalent of MAG), kicks off the new season of autojumbles and bike shows.

Each show has a different theme, with previous year's having focussed on Japanese, American, British and Italian made bikes; this year the focus was on French manufactured two wheelers. Most people would think that would mean that the show was held in a phone box, but they would be very wrong. Alongside all the usual suspects of dealer stands with new bikes, local club stands, helmets, leathers, cowboy boots, food (it wouldn't be a French event without endless queues for food), there was a mouth-watering display of around 250 classic and vintage French bikes.

The main hall was packed with the dealer and accessory stands, but these were interspersed with, to me, much more interesting machinery, such as the **Voxan** owners club and a large display of classic racing machinery. I like Voxans (1995 – 2009), they share some design similarities with Buell but somehow they're a bit more muscular. A name that may be more familiar to British

enthusiasts is **Moto Martin** and the marque was well represented, including models I'd never seen before.

Mention must be made of the new **Brough Superior**, looking every inch the transport that Captain Nemo would have used. It takes a brave designer to build an element of 'Steampunk' into a new bike and I will leave it up to the reader (and possibly the ghost of Laurence of Arabia) to decide whether it works or not. Parked next to this was a cracking original Brough and it was difficult to decide which was getting the most attention.

Now, as this is a French bike special I'm not going to say too much about the new bikes displayed. The **Kawasakis** all looked to be in shades of black, or black with a green bit – but I did think that the new 1000 Ninja H2R looked particularly wicked. The **Harley** stand looked a bit bare but the demo truck was outside to let people actually ride the things so they can be excused. HD Limoges had their entry for the "Battle of the Kings" competition on display. A café racer of sorts with an offset headlight in the fairing – interesting concept, but I wasn't too convinced by the way the rear sets were mounted. Others must have thought differently, as it won the French round of the competition! **Indian** and **Victory** did have a nice display of bikes, which was different enough to make me stop for a few minutes before moving on to the second hall to see the old French bikes.

Except, I didn't go straight to the French section, but stopped off to admire a display of bikes all owned by a French enthusiast I know. On a stand which may or may not have been advertising an insurance company, were his **Egli Vincent**, **Hesketh**, **Triton**, **Norton**, and **BSA Rocket Three**, all in stunning, immaculate condition. This is just a small part of his





interesting collection but they were enough to make me very, very jealous.

OK, hands up everyone who has heard of the French bike maker **BFG**? No, me neither! Production commenced of this oddity in the early eighties but petered out in the mid nineties after the business changed hands a couple of times. I call it an oddity, as it used a Citroen GSA car engine for propulsion. Hats off to the guys for ingenuity, but I have to say, the cooling arrangements at the front of some their models was just downright ugly.

Next up were some bikes from **Godier Genoud** (honest, I'm not making up these names, as one unkind person suggested after reading my last article). The two gentlemen with these surnames built bikes for endurance racing, normally based on various Kawasaki models. Their race team continued into the late seventies, after which they concentrated

on their business of selling Kawasakis and building specials for customers. The bikes on their stand were in truly immaculate condition and made good use of the famous Kawa green.

The name of **Gnome & Rhone** (1915 to 45) might be a bit more familiar to readers who are classic/vintage enthusiasts. I've always thought they combined style with good engineering and the best example I saw was a cream sidecar outfit, which turned out to be one of my favourite bikes in the show.

Fans of very early models, many of which were really just engines stuffed into pedal cycle frames, would have been happy with the turnout. The very early **Terrot**, being guarded by a mannequin wearing a gas mask, was a good example from this era, as was a bizarre three-wheeler.



Moto Martin



Moto Martin



Speaking of three-wheelers I liked a little delivery trike from **Peugeot**, complete with milk churns. It was handy for me, as some years ago I bought an identical scale model, which was missing the handlebars, so now I can make exact replicas.

**Dollar** (1925 – 39) is a great name for a bike, and they also made some great examples. I liked the R26 350cc model but they also produced models from 98cc right up to 750cc. I like them so much I nearly bought one once, but it fetched a price a bit above my budget at that time.

Regular readers will remember my little 1947 **Magnat Debon** (1893 – 1962) from last year. A lovely little bike and due to the long period of manufacture there will be a model to suit all tastes. There was a very nice early example on display, but perhaps a little over-restored for my tastes.

Following neatly on from the MD, the next company was co-founded by one of their ex employees, Jules Escoffier. He set up **Koehler-Escoffier** along with Marcel Koehler in 1912. Best known for their 500cc singles and 1000cc twins, the company was purchased by **Monet – Goyen** in 1929 and closed in 1957.

The **ABC** marque had me wondering for a while as I had always thought of this as being a British company, but it appears that other companies with the same name existed in both France and Germany. The British bikes were produced mainly by Sopwith of aviation fame. The Paris based company was part of the **Gnome & Rhône** Group and produced the ABC marque under licence from Sopwith.

There were many more obscurely named models that caught my eye, but no article about French made bikes would be complete without mentioning the name of **Rene- Gillet** (1898 – 1957). Known for their strength and



*Brough Superior*



*Moto Martin*



*H-D Limoges' cafe racer build*



*British iron*



*Citroen-engined 'BFG'*



*Gnome & Rhone sidecar combo*



reliability, they were used by both the police and the army. They specialised in 1000cc and 750cc engines but they also produced 500cc and 350cc models and the company was well known for its endurance racing exploits. This happens to be the first French bike that impressed me many year ago when I spotted it a a show, when I thought that it looked like a leaner version of a Harley WLA750.

Much as I enjoyed seeing all these perfectly restored bikes something was nagging away at the back of my mind so I took another quick look and realised what it was. There was more chrome and nickel plating than the average Harley custom show and that takes some doing. Apart from making photography difficult, I'm pretty sure the bikes had only a fraction of the shiny stuff when they rolled out of the factory, so I have to say that there were many bikes that appeared to be over restored. Plus, there were some colours and shades of paint which were far too vibrant to be period correct.

As I was about to leave the hall, I saw a crowd craning their necks to get a view of a couple of bikes. Spotting a small gap I squeezed in to see what all the fuss was about, and found two examples from the latest French company to put a new machine on the market. **Midual** was not a name I'd heard before – but a bit of research revealed that the company seemed to only be known for a strange 875cc roadster concept bike that appeared in 1999 powered by a flat twin with cylinders running fore and aft, rather than the more familiar sideways approach employed by BMW.

The latest model uses a 1036cc flat twin engine producing 106bhp at 8000rpm, which isn't a lot of power compared with the keen opposition in the roadster market, but perfectly adequate for squirting around French lanes. Fuel is contained in the alloy



Terrot



Dollar



Magnat Debon



Gnome & Rhône



ABC



Rene Gillet







while the faux tank houses a cluster of old style gauges, which reminded me of some 60s/70s cars I've owned in the past. All the right names are present when it comes to suspension and braking (Ohlins forks and shock, Brembo brakes). Wire spoked wheels and the leather knee pads give a period look to this quirky roadster, which I'm sure people will either love or hate – this is a bike which begs an opinion!

Oh, I nearly forgot to mention the price of this interesting new bike - 140,000 euros. Yes, you are reading that correctly, there are four zeros after the number fourteen. In sterling, at today's exchange rate, that's about £115,000.

And with that shocking piece of information, I rode home in stunned silence wondering what on earth has happened to the original concept of cheap form of transport for the poor man in the street.

## Wizzard





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# sympathy for the diavel





**L**ook, before you start, I know it's a (an?) XDiavel, but to my eyes it's a leap forward from the Diavel, which is still available. The two bikes look similar, even alike to the untrained eye. Until you put them side by side.

I just feel a bit sorry for people who've bought a Diavel at considerable expense, which is by no means either old or any kind of slouch because the general consensus seems to be that the new kid in town – the XDiavel – is better.

It's a bit like working for months on a custom (sorry, 'shed') build, burning midnight oil, giving up your social life, loads of money and even the skin from your knuckles, and then you take your amazing creation to Box Hill only to have someone park something bigger, better and newer next to you. I sympathise, I really do.

So, anyway, let's get the history bit out of the way.

The Ducati Diavel (pronounced 'de-ah-vul' I'm reliably informed) first broke cover in late 2010 at the Milan show, and to quote the late Val Doonican "I never knew just what it was and I guess I never will."

The original concept was commissioned by Ducati's then design chief Pierre Terblanche, who charged British born Californian designer Glynn Kerr with drawing the initial sketches. I can't help wondering what the design brief was. Perhaps "make it look like an angry alien ant-type gorilla thing on steroids" – you get the drift.

Some way down the line (these things take time you know...) the concept bike was created, and my money is on the finished item not looking a whole lot different from the one made from clay and wood. It created quite a stir when it first appeared, I can recall

perplexed looks at the Diavels first London show, with a general feeling of puzzlement and bewilderment amid the many smiles.

It was certainly unlike anything I'd ever seen. The bike looked incredibly muscular, beefy even, with a faired LED headlamp sitting just ahead of huge black shoulder shrouds housing air scoops for the twin lateral radiators.

There was certainly something of the silverback about it.

The main frame was Ducati's trademark trellis, forming a cage around the rear cylinder and fuel injection gubbins of the 1198 Testastretta engine (I'm not very technical).

The pegs were pretty much where you'd expect them to be on most bikes, kind of in the middle, just below the swing arm pivot, and the bars were narrow.

The plumbing was very visible, with the coolant hoses proudly displayed on the port side, while starboard the thick exhaust headers twisted and turned like a pair of black swans performing a mating dance, before uniting to join a brace of exaggeratedly flared end cans. Or perhaps cones.

The wide, low seat sat atop a tailpiece that swooped upwards, housing a pair of vertical LED rear light strips, leaving those behind in no doubt they were following a Diavel.

Oh, and then there's the back wheel, sporting 240 section rubber, and attached to the rest of the bike almost as an afterthought by a chunky single sided swing arm, with drive by that mucky invention of ancient Greece, the chain and sprockets.

Bringing up the stern was one of those peculiar mudguard-cum-numberplate holders similar to those seen on the BMW GS, with a bikini-like gap between it and the hugger, leaving a sexy exposed chunk of Pirelli Diablo Corsa II.



I'm assuming by now you already know what a Diavel looks like, as I can't really imagine you could work that out from my description.

It's naked, but it's not a sports bike. It's almost a cruiser, but not quite. The forks kick out a bit like a chopper, but they're not that long. And Ducati even produced a set of panniers to go on the back, which looks as odd as a Ferrari towing a caravan. But there's buggery all protection from the elements, so I suppose it can't even be a tourer.

And with a 62" wheelbase and rather limited ground clearance it's certainly not a scrambler.

So while you ponder just what the Diavel is or isn't, I need to tell you that the XDiavel is completely different.

It's not really for me to say if it's better, I haven't ridden the original, but I spent a weekend with the new XDiavel recently, so I can tell you all about that.

Gone is the 1198 motor, superseded by the larger Testastretta DVT 1262 with variable valve timing. But this new engine has been tuned to produce torque lower in the rev range, and is even a few horses down on the original model, not that you'd notice, I can assure you.

The chassis and bodywork is all new too, with the tank and seat swooping in a stylish flowing curve. The trellis frame is still there, but using the engine as part of the frame it's made its way forward, sitting below the tank in place of those big scoops, the radiators having changed into a single one mounted





behind the front wheel. The headlamp nacelle has disappeared, along with the exposed plumbing.

I could go on for ages about all the changes, but what I really want to talk about is living with the XDiavel.

It all started when TRD Editor Dave Gurman arranged a ride out to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the launch of The Rider's Digest retail magazine. That event took place at Jacks Hill Café in Towcester in the spring of 2009 and the plan was that we'd all head back up there for a little get together.

Dave then mentioned that he would be riding a Triumph Bonneville America (furnished by Jack Lilley Triumph) to the event. This of course inspired me to try to get something a bit special to arrive on.

Thinking back to the London Motorcycle Show in February I remember being impressed

while sitting on the XDiavel, so I decided to try to arrange a test ride at short notice. It wasn't particularly easy to get hold of one though, Ducati UK's press office told me that both of their XDiavels were booked out.

Theresa at Ducati's central press office in Bologna very helpfully called me to tell me (in a beautiful and beguiling Italian accent) that they couldn't help me, and advised me to contact my local dealer, Laguna's Performance Centre in Ashford, Kent.

So that's what I did, initially by email and then phone, explaining the whole process to Manager Steve Watts, who listened intently before checking a few legal and technical issues involved in test riding one of their bikes. Steve then agreed, and we arranged that I would collect the bike the following Saturday morning.

When I arrived the whole forecourt was



covered in bikes of all shapes, sizes, colours and religions, but there in the midst, ignoring all that was going on around it, stood the XDiavel, looking mean, magnificent and cool. Very cool.

After introducing myself to Steve (or Mr Watts, as his staff referred to him) and producing the necessary documentation required to ride an expensive motorcycle away, I was given a guided tour of the bike and shown the various riding mode settings, before riding off towards the A20 to get to know this description defying motorcycle.

One of the first things I noticed was that Steve had helpfully left the bike in 'sport' mode, which was probably not the most suitable for traversing the concrete roads and junctions around south Ashford, so I pulled over and switched to 'urban' mode, which while not exactly slow, was a lot more sedate, even for a 156hp motorcycle.

The riding modes control aspects of the bike's performance by combining ride by wire, Ducati Traction Control (DTC) and Bosch ABS cornering systems.

Once out on the open road, free of one way systems and traffic lights, I switched to 'touring' mode (which can be done on the move so long as you remember to close the throttle) and the whole feel of the bike changed, becoming a well-rounded and comfortable machine capable of passing slower moving traffic with ease while remaining long-legged enough to stay in the saddle for hours.

But that's when things start to get confusing. Unlike the original Diavel this bike has a feet forward riding position, a broader saddle and wide pulled back bars, making it feel like a cruiser.

But looking forward there's really not much to see.



Beyond the bars there's a big open space where you'd normally expect to see some kind of screen and a pair of clocks; the necessary information is provided by a smartphone sized TFT (it stands for Thin Film Transistor) LCD (that stands for Liquid Crystal Display) dash with an additional slim pod above the handlebar with a row of warning and information lights. OMG.

In fact, from the saddle it feels a little like a supermoto at times, with the vocal but not intrusively loud exhaust note escaping via a pair of mean looking slash cut pipes that barely extend from the sculpted collector box tucked into the gap in front of the rear wheel.

But any such thoughts of it being a nimble track bike are quick to disappear when taking tight turns, as I discovered for the first of several occasions when peeling right onto the bridge at Abridge Road from Ongar Road, heading for Epping Forest.

While not really being a major problem, the 30° rake of the forks and long wheelbase can make low speed manoeuvring a somewhat relaxed affair, with such turns taking a little longer than a more conventional bike.

But the person who chooses an XDiavel is not going to be someone who wants a conventional bike. This machine is clearly one that you've got to want; as far as I'm aware there is nothing else like it, with little available to compare it to. Except maybe the Diavel.

It's almost as though there was a late night drunken party with a Monster Dark, a V Max and a Night Rod Special and nobody really knows who the father is.

The riding position is infinitely adjustable, the glossy brochure I was given states that there are 60 possible ergonomic configurations; the forward mounted pegs can be unbolted and moved forward or back, and there are a number of different handlebars available



without the need to change or adapt cables or mounting blocks.

There are also four different saddles available, the main variations as far as I'm aware seem to be for the pillion perch, which is little bigger than an upturned flat iron, with a token (but essential) backrest to stop your nearest and dearest falling off the back if you use the launch control.

Did I mention the launch control? Thought not.

I wasn't tempted to try it out, as I didn't have a private drag strip to hand while I had the bike, but it gave me visions of Simon Kewer's excellent cartoon (which regular readers of TRD will know) of the pillion girl trying desperately to hang on to while losing her false teeth and several other personal items.

For those with bigger cojones than me (especially when riding somebody else's £16k bike) the Ducati Power Launch (DPL – sorry about all the acronyms...) involves pressing the DPL button on top of the right handlebar controls, choosing one of three settings using the 'menu' control on the left cluster, (presumably: 3.'slightly bonkers', 2.'bit of a nutter' and 1.'totally mental') all of which turn the dash display a menacing shade of red as a kind of warning that all hell is about to be let loose.

You then engage first gear and fully open the throttle before letting the clutch out. The Bosch IMU (yeah – I know... 'Inertial Measurement Unit') then helps you to get rapidly away from the mark without the rear wheel spinning or flipping the bike over backwards. I don't think it controls the likelihood of your pillion ending up on their arse at the traffic lights though.

I didn't try the launch control, mainly due to the slightly menacing warning in the brochure









that the DPL system "is to be used exclusively on straight, flat sections of track where the surface offers premium grip." It also advises that it "should not be used in an inappropriate place." Yes. I wimped out.

I did try the 'sport' mode though.

This was on a fast section of dual carriageway at the national speed limit officer, with a few roundabouts thrown in just to make things interesting.

As I've already used the words 'bonkers' and 'mental' so I shall just state that you need to have had a dental check-up, be wearing clean underwear and possess the ability to follow that simple but meaningful instruction from bus conductors (remember them?) and "hold very tight please..."

Accelerating quickly in 'head down/arse up' mode on a sports bike is one thing, but

there must be something about the human condition that programmes your DNA not to expect your eyes to be forced back into their sockets when you're sitting with your feet forward and holding onto a pair of wide bars.

Let's just say that I was glad of that sculpted 'tractor style' seat, into which my chuddies were squashed with some not inconsiderable force.

This bike is rapid, trust me.

After a few miles and a minor nervous breakdown I managed to regain control of my faculties sufficiently to return the XDavel to 'touring' mode, wherein I was able to continue riding in a more useably brisk manner.

Which is exactly how my ride to Jacks Hill was. From where I live in Kent the obvious route would have been up the A2 to the Dartford Crossing, and then round the M25 to the M1

before taking the A43 over to Towcester, but that would have been a bit boring. So once I'd crossed the water I headed across country through Aveley, Hornchurch and Romford before heading off to Epping Forest via Havering atte Bower. From there – purely in the interests of balance – I surrendered to the M25 as far as the M1, taking the slip at Markyate and making the rest of the journey on the A5.

I'd allowed myself plenty of time, envisaging the necessity to stop and rest my aching knees (a problem I'd had on standard configuration bikes before I took up yoga) and possibly top the tank up.

But I actually found myself with plenty of unleaded and in danger of arriving at the cafe unfashionably early; my planned improvised tea break at the Super Sausage at Potterspurpy was somewhat scuppered by the fact that

there was a long line of traffic queueing up for a nearby boot fayre, and apart from that the café was already rammed with bikes, which is great, but I didn't fancy queueing up for half an hour for a cuppa.

So I made do with a handy roadside picnic area near Plumpton End, where my sustenance consisted of an extra strong mint and a swig of water from the emergency rations in my back pack.

Taking the time to sit and stare at this curious machine from a slightly rotten picnic bench, I thought about the refined features, such as a literally brilliant LED headlight, and the red backlit handlebar controls, very posh. Then there was the clever electronic steering lock, which operated in a manner similar to central locking on a car. The bike also has 'keyless' ignition, which I really can't understand





the need for or the advantages of. Don't let any strangers sit on the bike when you're standing close to it...

Suitably but unnecessarily refreshed, I climbed back on the bike, and rode the last few miles to Jacks Hill Café, where rows and rows of motorcycles of many different persuasions lined the parking area, including a bizarre four cylinder BSA two stroke.

Almost immediately the XDiavel drew the attention of several riders, many of whom seemed puzzled by my explanation that it was completely different to the Diavel, but we've already covered that.

A Diavel arrived a little later, but despite the fact that there were by then spaces on either side of my machine, the rider parked about as far away as he could have; I suspect he just pulled into the first available space [not X envy then? – Ed]. This of course was a shame, as it

would have been interesting to compare the two side by side.

Other members of the TRD crew then arrived, along with several friends and even a couple of the editor's fellow presenters from BIKERfm. We then went inside, taking up several tables, and ignoring all the warnings about cholesterol levels tucked into huge breakfasts, despite it being almost lunchtime. (I didn't eat again all day, honest!)

We stayed there beyond closing time, not really noticing the decreasing number of bikes out front, so unable to get another cold drink the last stragglers repaired to The Folly Inn, a beautiful thatched pub a few miles south, where the big Ducati continued to attract attention.

Eventually after saying our goodbyes I headed home down the A5 and as a precaution topped the tank up, at which point, using the

menu control to scroll through the various information displays in order to zero one of the trip counters, I noticed that despite making good pace on a mixture of fast open roads, motorways and urban plods, the XDiavel was returning almost 60 miles to the gallon, supposedly giving it a tank range of around 200 miles!

This bike seems to have been designed to deal with two separate issues that riders of a certain age sometimes have: I spent more than six hours in the saddle that day and could have carried on for many more, the riding position is very comfortable without isolating the rider from the elements in the way that cruisers often do; and in contrast to many bikes with feet first pegs and a big V – or in this case L – twin engines, this bike is quick, lithe and slim, with a 40 degree lean angle. And as long as you're not trying to ride in and out of cones it has pretty refined handling too.

But what else would you expect from a Ducati? Were there any down sides? Not really. Minor things.

With the XDiavel wearing Ducati's first ever belt drive, finding neutral was easy enough, although I found it difficult to engage first gear without a noticeable clunk, even though the rest of the changes were truly slick.

And when it was hot the bike sometimes took a few turns of the starter motor to get it going, which I suspect is down to the fly by wire and fuel injection systems. These also made low speed riding a bit of a jerky affair initially, but you soon get used to that.

And if I'm perfectly honest, although I loved the styling of the bike, if I was parting with sixteen grand I'm not sure I would be delighted with matt black paintwork.

Which is where the XDiavel S comes in – at a premium. High gloss paintwork, black fork

legs. Diamond machined wheels, gloss engine paint with machined highlights, posher brake callipers and loads of other anodised and machined bits and pieces. Oh, and a daytime LED riding light.

But the extra bling makes it worth the extra two and a half grand. It would to me anyway.

As with most modern motorcycles finance options and PCPs (gawd, another acronym – 'Personal Contract Purchase') mean that you could ride the XDiavel's posher sister away for just £189 per month, once you've paid your deposit and accounted for the optional final payment. (Your Ducati is at risk if you don't keep up with repayments etc...)

When I eventually returned the magnificent machine to Laguna's Performance Centre, I sat on the wall waiting for them to open and once again I took the opportunity to study the bike.

I still didn't really know what the XDiavel was. And despite one's free spirit and need to stand out from the crowd, we still like to categorise things, don't we?

A little later, as I stood in the shop eyeing up the shinier XDiavel S, I asked Steve Watts what this enigmatic machine is, explaining my confusion between naked, super motos, tourers, cruisers and sports bikes.

The answer he gave was simple: "it's whatever you want it to be". Ah, right. OK then.

## Martin Haskell

Thanks to Steve Watts at Laguna Performance Centre ([www.laguna.co.uk](http://www.laguna.co.uk)) 01233 665520 for the loan of the XDiavel.



# BE HEROIC



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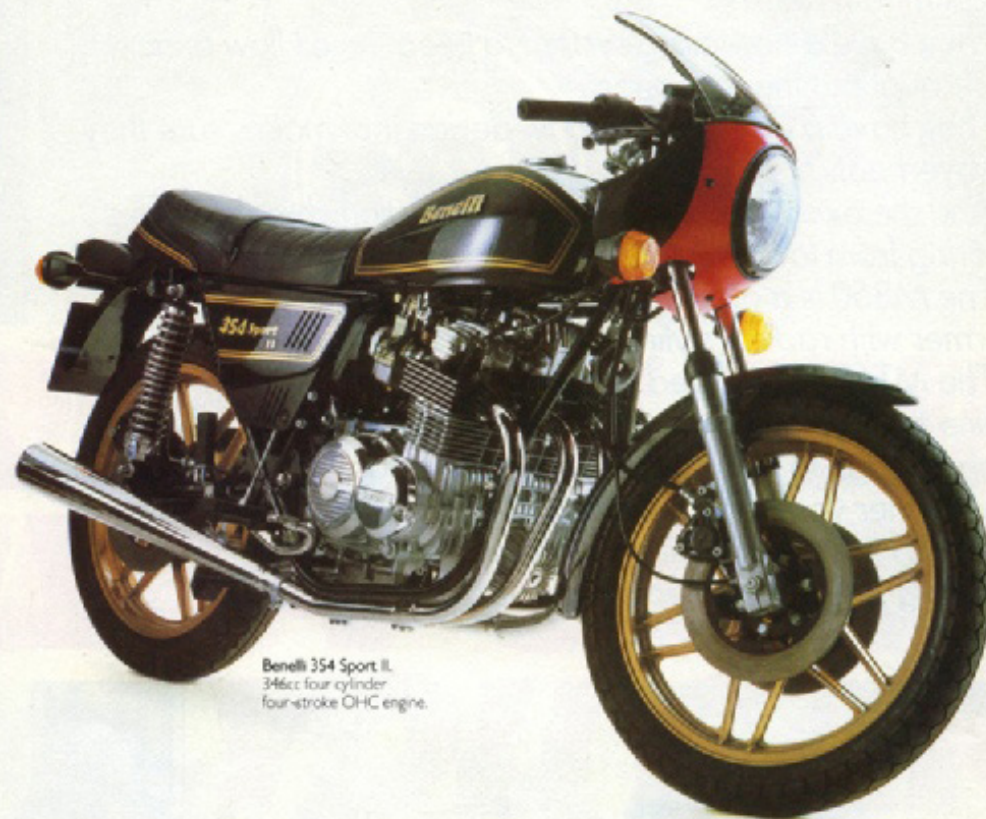
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RIDER EQUIPMENT



# The Benelli Brothers never made ice cream.



Benelli 354 Sport II.  
346cc four cylinder  
four-stroke DHC engine.

If you came from the sort of family the Benelli brothers came from, you wouldn't make ice cream either.

There were six brothers. And all of them had one interest in common – motorcycles.

In 1919 Giuseppe Benelli designed the first Benelli motorcycle engine which made its debut at the very first Milan Trade Fair.

His brother Giovanni was the Technical Director who supervised its production at the Benelli factory in Pesaro, Italy, founded in 1911.

Tonino Benelli was the famous racing motorcyclist who rode the first Benelli racers, winning the Italian Championship in 1927, 1928, 1930 and 1931. Domenico Benelli, Filippo Benelli and Francesco Benelli helped found the factory and manufacture the Benelli racers and small road bikes.

The Benelli brothers' team effort brought success with a string of international racing victories and achievements which were instrumental in developing the design and performance of Benelli motorcycles.

Today the Benelli range includes 14 models from mopeds to superbikes.

You'll find some rather special features throughout the Benelli range, from the integrated front and rear braking system on the bigger bikes to a neat device to prevent the engine being started when the side stand is down. The 254 is the only 4-cylinder 250cc bike in production and, of course, Benelli pioneered the 6-cylinder engine.

It's a big change from the earliest experiment when a 75cc Benelli engine was mounted on the fork of a bicycle frame.

But the biggest change of all is that the entire Benelli range is now available in the UK, with a developing network of specialist dealers.

It's the new breed of bike with the traditional Italian flavour.

**Benelli**  
The Italian Alternative

Benelli Concessionaires Ltd, 361/365 Chiswick High Road, London W4 4HS. Tel: 01-995 4651



# CAFE

CAFE OPEN

## Back To Jack's





**W**hat with aborting last summer's Grand European sidecar tour in favour of a car (albeit the first four wheeler I had owned in twelve years) and then postponing the TRD Grand Anniversary Get Together on account of unseasonal weather conditions, it seemed like after four decades of year round riding – including at least half a dozen as a courier in London – I was in serious danger of losing my credibility as a 'real biker' (whatever that might mean in this day and age?).

However when I woke early on the Saturday of the rearranged weekend and opened the blinds on brilliant sunshine and a clear blue sky, I felt entirely vindicated for deciding to put the event back by a fortnight because those two weeks had seen a decidedly Arctic April mellow into a marvellous, marrow-warming first week of May.

I rode the Frankenscooter – complete with its abundance of scratches, duct tape body repairs and the roughly ripped off section bellow my right foot – the few miles to Jack Lilley's Ashford showroom and rode off again shortly after on a lovely shiny Triumph America. All the way home I was congratulating myself on my connections and relishing the opportunity to bask in biking glory when I rolled into Jack's Hill cafe on eight hundred and sixty-five cubic centimetres of gleaming Hinckley hardware.

Wendy was mucho impressed and posed happily on the bike before we set off. She's been perfectly content on my Burgman ever since we met six years ago but she was really looking forward to her first trip on a shiny new 'proper bike' – she'd particularly fancied a Triumph because they've been her favourites ever since she rode pillion on her dad's Speedtwin.

However once we hit the road, it was immediately apparent that Wendy was



nowhere near as relaxed as she usually is on the back of the big Suzi. The combination of a comparatively tiny seat with no reassuring topbox (not even a cissy bar), plus a pretty heavy rucksack, made her hang on to me in a manner that I quickly realised had a lot more to do with mortal fear than amorous affection, so I pulled up on the hard shoulder on the M4 slip road and asked her if she was OK?

It was obvious just looking in her face that she clearly wasn't so I asked if she would prefer

to make the journey on my shitty old scooter and the instant relief that flooded into her eyes told me everything I needed to know. We joined the M4 for two short junctions, then ran around the M25 for a few more miles and in no time at all we were back at Jack Lilley. Wendy kept apologising but I reassured her that there was no point in having a fun weekend away if it wasn't.

We pulled into a garage to fill up with petrol for the haul up to Leicester but someone

pointed out that there was water running out under the Burgman. Although we'd initially left plenty of time so that we could take a comparatively leisurely scenic route, by the time I was confronted with the rapidly expanding puddle of coolant there really wasn't time for me to even think about calling the breakdown company so I topped up the radiator and by largely keeping it above about 35mph, which meant that the flow of air kept it just cool enough, we managed to cover the

















five miles or so back to where the Saab lives on my father-in-law's driveway.

We drove the short distance back to the M4 followed by the twenty miles of M25 between there and the M1 before swinging north. We had planned to ride to Jon and Ming's place in Melton Mowbray before going to Leicester with them in the evening to watch their band **Bluebird Parade** play, but we would have struggled to get to their house before they needed to leave so we agreed to meet them at the venue; which left us plenty of time to follow my usual biking practice of avoiding motorways whenever practical, so we turned off at Luton and stayed on the A6 all the way from there.

We'd picked an interesting day to visit Leicester because their football team was hoping to confirm its against all odds Premier League Championship that evening against

Everton, so the whole city was a buzzing sea of blue and white! Including, as it turned out, the pub, where the band's soundcheck was severely hampered by the fact that it was rammed with chanting, cheering fans watching the footy!

Jon wasn't too bothered though because he's a Foxes supporter anyway and as history has noted, Leicester City did win that game so as you'd expect the shouting, singing and horn tooting went on late into the night. Fortunately the full band, complete with brass section, makes quite a noise itself so the cacophony outside didn't interfere too much with the melodious melange we were treated to.

By the time Wendy and I surfaced on a bright sunny Sunday morning, a couple of Jon and Ming's IAM buddies had turned up (one on a beemer, the other on a 'blade) to join us for the ride down to Jack's Hill Café but we managed to get separated right from the









start when all the bikes shot off while we were still putting the roof down. It was no biggie though, I was perfectly content because I knew our route and I really hadn't wanted to slow the bikes down or hold them back.

We took the B6047 from Pork Pie town to Market Harborough, which proved to be twenty-odd miles of wonderfully smooth tarmac that rolled and twisted, and rose and fell delightfully; but as soon as we left Leicestershire it was apparent that the good burghers of Northamptonshire were a lot less bothered about their road surfaces!

We ran into the 'Blade pilot from Ming & Jon's while we were doubling back and forwards trying to find our way out of Northampton. He'd become separated from the others so he was happy to follow us assuming that we knew where we were going – well we do come across as very plausible! (There've occasionally been people who don't really know us, who have actually mistaken us for sensible grown-ups!)

Although it turns out that we did... well sort of. The road out of Northampton seemed implausibly small and twisty to be the correct one but sure enough it eventually took us through to the A5. Unfortunately when we got there we were further north than we'd estimated so we should have turned left rather than right, but by that time we were almost within smelling distance of a fry up so after a few miles of heading in the wrong direction I pulled a swift U turn (obviously after giving the following 'blade the 'circle the wagons' signal and looking very carefully up and down for other bikes before I did) and drove rapidly back to Jack's.

We were little more than fashionably late when we pulled in at shortly before half past the allocated time (but then again my wife and I are ever so fashionable! – see Bitz), which was

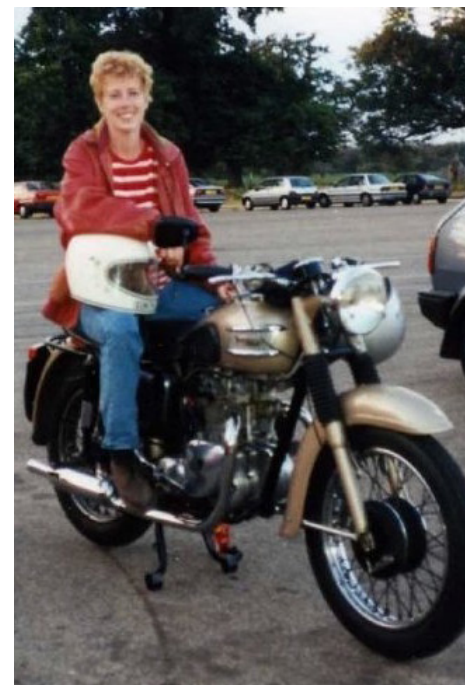
still before Jon & Ming and co who rolled in shortly after on their bikes! It was really good to meet and greet the various TRD contributors and regular readers who were already there (with a special mention to Nick Lojik and his son who travelled down from Yorkshire the day before to be sure that they weren't as tardy as we were) and others who turned up later.

Martin's already told the story of the many interesting machines assembled in the sunshine and the full English feasting, so I won't go back over that ground again. Suffice to say that we spent a lovely lazy early afternoon with some delightful people talking all sorts – not least of course motorcycles. As usual Blez was running on BST (Blez Scatterbrain Time) and turned up shortly after the café closed on his big beast HP2, but it was lovely to see him as always and it was still some time before we left (and even then we headed to the pub Martin mentioned).

A final mention to proprietor Suzanne Capella who was working absolutely flat out in the kitchen throughout the time that we were there. When I managed to speak to her after they'd shut up shop she confirmed that she remembered the free printed magazine that they used to distribute and the retail launch that this ride out was celebrating so I persuaded her and her mother Elsie to pose for inclusion in this piece.

Watch out for another get together at another old TRD outlet at the other end of the summer.

## Dave Gurman





# CATCH ALL.



**Z1100GP.** New '83 model. The first standard production bike to beat 11 seconds for the standing 1/4 mile.\* Four cylinder, DOHC, digital fuel injection, 1089cc

gives 120hp. Anti-dive, air-equalised forks, air-adjustable Uni-Trak suspension. Huge disc brakes. And it only comes in red.



**Z750GP.** New '83 model. Four cylinder, DOHC, 738cc, 86hp. Anti-dive, air-equalised forks, air-adjustable Uni-Trak rear. Huge brakes. Colour red or very red.



**Z550GP.** Four cylinder, DOHC, 553cc gives 61hp. Air equalised forks and adjustable Uni-Trak rear suspension. All-up 424lb dry. Available in red and red.



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Like all Kawasakis the GPs attract 12 months unlimited mileage warranty, special insurance, finance and extended warranty  **Kawasaki** schemes. See the bikes, get the brochure and check the prices at your Kawasaki dealer.

**WHO CAN CATCH A KAWASAKI?**

Source: Cycle Magazine, USA, Feb '83.

The specifications mentioned here apply to and have been achieved by production models under standard operating conditions. We intend only to

give a description of the motorcycles and their performance capabilities, but these specifications may not apply to every machine supplied for sale.



# MOTOLIT & CULTURE

by Jonathan Boorstein

## The Rhythm and the Ride

**It was a small blip on my metaphoric radar screen: someone named Maureen Griffin released a CD of biker songs. Called *Biker Girl*, it was touted as “the debut album”.**

Griffin might well be part of what seems to be a growing trend of women, usually middle-aged, who discover empowerment and the benefits of risk-taking by learning how to ride motorcycles and then write about it, if I understand the biographic information on [her website](#) correctly. There's not only Linda Crill (*Blind Curves: A Woman, a Motorcycle and a Journey to Reinvent Herself*) and Bernadette Murphy (*Harley and Me: Embracing Risk on the Road to a More Authentic Life*), but also Lily Brooks-Dalton (*Motorcycles I've Loved: A Memoir*), if we drop the 'age requirement'. Crill's and Brooks-Dalton's books were reviewed a few months ago (in *Les Motardes*); Murphy's will be reviewed another time.

But back to Griffin. It turns out she's a local (to me) New York metropolitan area rider. She's not the only neighborhood motorcycling singer/songwriter around here – the best known are probably Lou Reed, Billy Joel, and Dee Snider of Twisted Sister – and given her background in music theatre, it's more likely she sings on key.

Griffin is hardly the first to release an album of motorcycle music. Redline has

released its own CD of café racer songs and the Los Angeles-based Rocking Scoundrels has made a musical career out of songs about the Britiron motorcycle subculture of rockers and café racers with several CDs of rockabilly and old-school rock-and-roll revival. *Bikes 'N' Leather: Rocking at the Ace* is one of the better compilation CDs around regardless of theme (even if it is dominated by the shadowy Helen Ingham. Or is that because of Ingham?).

Both Harley-Davidson and the Ace have released compilation CDs of motorcycle-related music (though not all of the cuts actually mention motorcycles; some are just songs certain demographics of motorcyclists like). Spotify has at least a couple of dozen motorcycle playlists and iTunes offers three layers: Basics; Next Steps; and Deep Cuts.

That's when it occurred to me. I've written about motorcycle films and motorcycle poetry, but not motorcycle music. At least not yet.

Motorcycle songs are of course made up of both music and lyrics. The music tends to be country, rockabilly, or hard rock, though pop and blues have a strong presence as well. The themes and subjects of the lyrics cover speed and freedom as well clarity and empowerment. There is also articulate patriotism and inarticulate rebelliousness. There is the lure of the open road and the appeal of riding away



from everyone and everything, including whatever problems the rider is trying to leave behind. There is the relationship of the biker to the bike as well as love requited and unrequited, whether for a person or a motorcycle.

Many songs present the rider as a working-class Byronic bad boy, whether from some sort of unstated tragedy or post-Jungian journey. There's a sense of the rider having gone past the redline to somewhere no one is supposed to go; but unlike so many who did, managed to get back somehow, damaged, if not damned: what in Spanish is sometimes called '*duende*'.

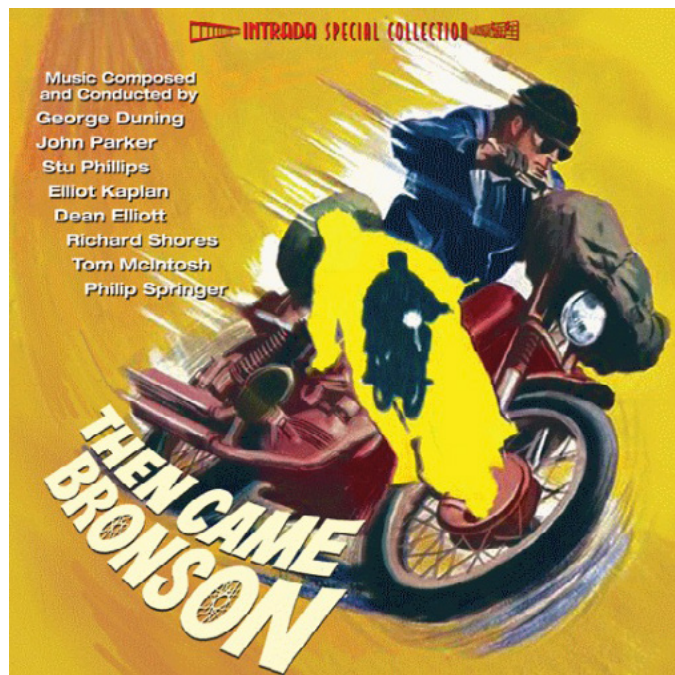
And what of the songs themselves? A quick web search found that motorcycle music lists included three categories of songs: songs about motorcycles – that is, motorcycles are mentioned somehow somewhere in the lyrics; songs associated with motorcycles – that is, used or overused on the soundtracks of films or television programs or evoke some aspect

of motorcycling to the compiler of the list; and music someone liked to play while riding – that is, neither about nor associated with motorcycles or any aspect of motorcycling. George Thorogood's *Bad To The Bone* appears on many motorcycle playlists. Yes: yes: I know: I know: we were all *Born To Be Wild* and born to be *Bad To The Bone*, but the song isn't about a bike; it's about a, uh, bone. If you like Thorogood, world beat, or classical music, why not play that when you ride? But that's a personal playlist for riding, not a motorcycle music playlist. My personal playlist might include Stormcellar, Bajofondo, and Judy Collins. And maybe Pitbull. Which says more about my taste in music – or lack thereof – than it does about motorcycle music.

Things become problematic when it comes to songs that reflect motorcycling or are associated with motorcycles. A couple of lists included George Michael's *Freedom 90*. It's a great song: its video is not only iconic, but also among the top ever and it includes the motorcycling theme of freedom. But about the only thing it has that has anything to do with motorcycling is the black leather jacket with BSA patches (from *Faith*) that goes up in flames. As the lyrics quote, clothes don't make the man. Or a rider.

*This Life*, the theme song from *Sons of Anarchy* (SOA), the television series about an outlaw motorcycle gang, may be right 'on the nose' for the show's creative team, but while the lyrics do allude to both biker and motorcycling themes, they never actually mention either of them. As for the singer and the band, Curtis Stiger is what in the States is called a soft rock/adult contemporary vocalist and The Forest Rangers is SOA's 'house band', whose make up seems to include members of the show's cast and crew.





While that connection is clear, at least for SOA fans, it's less so for say *On Any Sunday*, the theme song from, yes, *On Any Sunday*. The metaphors in the lyrics refer to flying, not riding. It makes a sort of sense for those who've seen the documentary, but otherwise the relationship is rather tenuous. Apparently, the score's composer, Dominic Frontiere, doesn't ride motorcycles, but has a pilot's license; and so could relate to the airborne lyrics by Sally Stevens (who also sang the theme).

*Long Lonesome Highway* falls somewhere between the two. The pop country ballad played over the end titles on the cult television series, *Then Came Bronson*, and was sung by the show's star, Michael Parks. It actually charted in the top 40 back in the day. No mention of motorcycles and more than a bit obscure, it's only a cut above something one might include in a personal playlist.

To be fair, those songs were specifically

written to accompany a motorcycle film or television show, so a connection can be argued. Using such songs as Foghat's *Slow Ride* in *Wild Hogs* or Sammy Hager's *I Can't Drive 55* in *Back to the Future II* to make filmic events of motorcycle mayhem and merriment possible do not make either any more motorcycle music than *Freedom 90*. And using *Whatever Happened To My Rock And Roll* in *Faster* is no better, even if the band, Black Rebels Motorcycle Club, is named after Marlon Brando's gang in *The Wild One*.

My list is restricted to songs that mention motorcycles or are all too clearly about motorcycling. It is by no means complete. I've only scratched the surface. Feel free to tell *The Digest* or me what songs should have made the list.

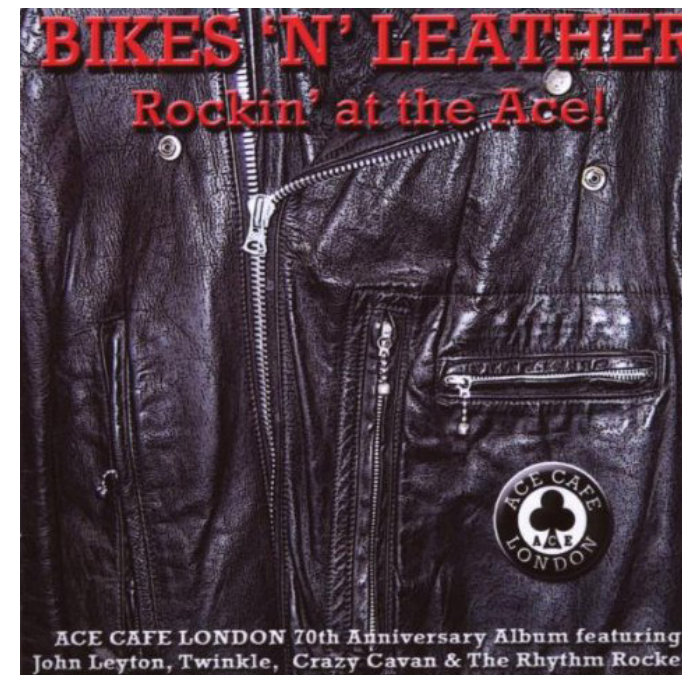
In alphabetical order (more or less, allowing for the odd tangent or digression) to avoid any sense of ranking:



A is for Ace: The Ace: The Ace Cafe.

Quite a number of rock and rockabilly motorcycle songs are about or refer to that old transport café, though they are more about the legend of the Ace than any likely reality.

Both the Death Valley Surfers and Rueben Archer (Stampede) have songs titled *Ace Cafe*. The Rocking Scoundrels not only has a song about the Ace – *Ace Motorcycle Cafe* – but also remember the Busy Bee Cafe as well in *Motorbike Rock*. Easy Tigerz offers *Hold on Holly (Meet Me At The Ace)*. *Rockin' At The Ace Cafe* is the title of two different songs by two very different groups: Sabrejets and the Foggy Mountain Rockers. The Bad Detectives' *Midnight Brighton Run* mentions the Ace as part of the through line. And you just know the café in *Crazy Caven* and The Rhythm Rockers' *My Little Sister Got A Motorbike* – “a big, black BSA” no less – has to be the Ace (they have a second motorcycle song: *Both Wheels Left The*

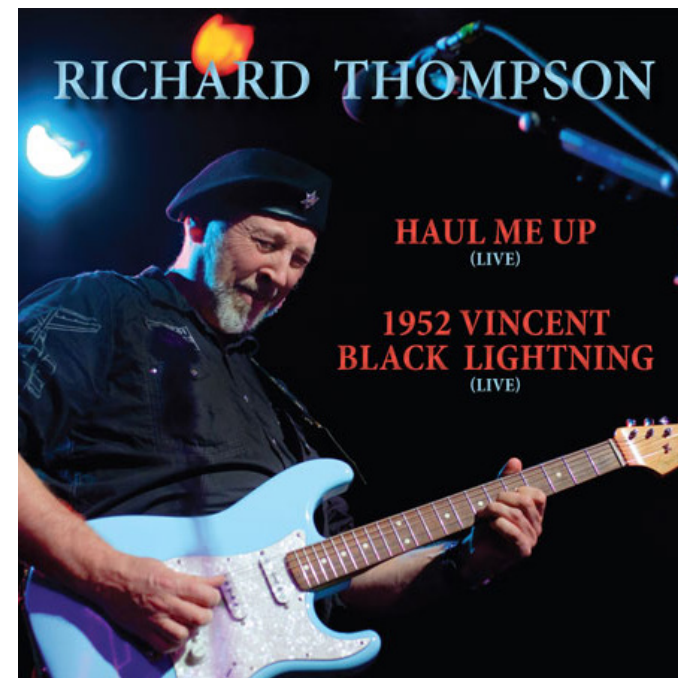


*Ground*, about speed and going so fast that, yes, both wheels leave the ground). They're all about sex, Britiron, and rock and roll: bad boy bikers, record racing and doing the ton down at the Ace on a Saturday night.

Your mileage will vary with any or all of them, but when you only have three minutes to save the world (or get back to the Ace), all do more than well enough. I played Martin Craig and the Sabrejets's *Rockin' At The Ace Cafe* for a 75-year old friend who hates pop music, knows nothing of the Ace, and thinks all motorcyclists ride Harleys and are members of the Hells Angels who need to be put across his knees and spanked. A few minutes later he complained that his toes were tapping in spite of himself. Now *that's* an endorsement.

I suppose if anyone would know a *Bad Motor Scooter* when he saw one, it would be Sammy Hager, then of Montrose. In this case, the hard rock and heavy metal vocalist sings





about a ride to an assignation.

*Bat Out of Hell* is probably the most famous of what I call Dead Biker songs, which go all the way back to 1955's *Black Denim Trousers And Motorcycle Boots*. *Black Denim Trousers* is not only considered the first biker or motorcycle song, but also the song that launched the sub-genre of teen tragedy tunes, also known as death discs or splatter platters here in the U.S. Dead Biker songs make me a little queasy. Perhaps I'm taking the elements of "the only good biker is a dead biker"; of the biker somehow deserved to die; and of that creepy line of poetry from Elizabeth Barrett Browning (I shall but love thee better after death) too personally.

Written by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, *Black Denim Trousers* was a huge hit for The Cheers. It was big enough for a French translation to be recorded by Edith Piaf a year later, which became the even better known

*L'Homme à la Moto*.

Terry was the next major motorcycle splatter platter. Sung by one-hit wonder Twinkle (Ripley), it was banned by the BBC, which may have helped it chart in the top ten. Her story may be sadder than Terry's: she died a year or so ago of cancer.

*Leader Of The Pack*, the biggest hit for the Shangri-Las, is seen by many as the ultimate teen tragedy death disc (Terry is the closest second-choice).

Variations on the theme include Moby Grape's bad girl biker in *Motorcycle Irene*, while in *I'm Dating The Ghost Of A Biker Chick* Easy Tigerz adds a fashionable touch of necrophilia.

Of course in Meat Loaf's *Bat Out Of Hell*, the tale is told from the dead biker's point of view as does the notorious Scottish alternative rock band, Jesus and Mary Chain, who sing of feeling "so quick in my leather boots" and being "in love with myself" while getting ahead and

so wild on a motorbike in *The Living End*. *Bat Out Of Hell* is frequently cited as one of the top ten motorcycle songs, which suggests I'm not in the majority about feeling queasy about such lyrics.

Another splatter platter that frequently makes the top ten list is Richard Thompson's *1952 Vincent Black Lightning*, which is a favorite of *The Rider's Digest* editor and *BIKERfm* disc jockey, Dave Gurman. (He shares Thompson's tastes in color schemes.) Instead of going the pop music or rock and roll route, Thompson looked back to medieval or traditional English ballads and folk songs. The story of James Adie and Red Molly replaces teenage angst with a certain gravitas, a romantic melancholy, if not fatalism. We'll leave it to members of the Vincent society to determine what sort of keys are needed to start a Black Lightning as well as exactly how "many a man" James had to rob to get his "Vincent machine" of which only about

30 were made.

It can be argued that another minstrel, Ian Anderson, more or less contributed another Dead Biker song with *Too Old To Rock And Roll, Too Young To Die*. It's a stronger song in isolation, where it's ambiguous whether the death is an accident or suicide, or even if the biker died; questions that are answered in the context of the titular concept album and not in an interesting fashion.

This is a bit of a tangent, but if you've ever wondered if a biker song made the reverse transition of *Black Denim Trousers* – that is, going from French to English – as I did, the answer is yes. Serge Gainsbourg wrote *Harley-Davidson* – an ode to riding a motorcycle – which was performed by Brigitte Bardot. (There's a [YouTube clip](#) of her wiggling around a stationary motorcycle while singing the song; only a few straight male riders will notice she can't sing.) After Gainsbourg's death, Mick

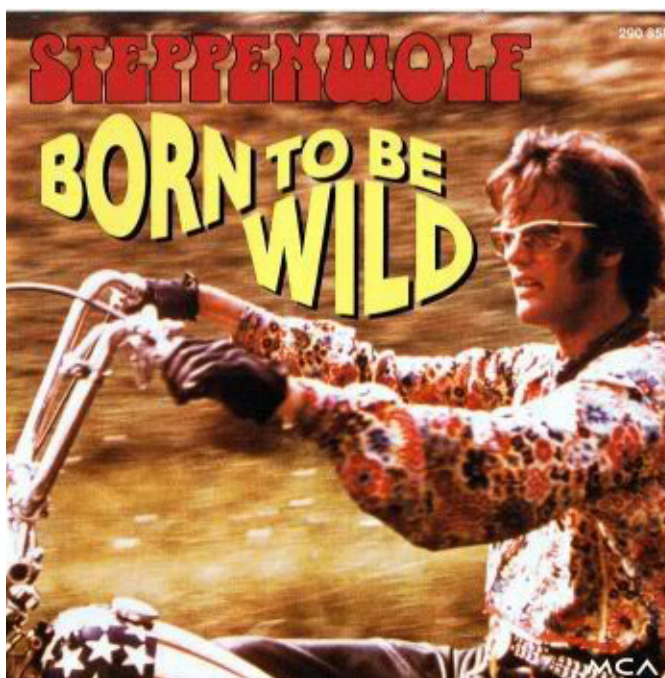




Harvey produced *Intoxicated Man*, a homage album, which included a solid translation of *Harley-Davidson*, sung by Anita Lane (both of The Bad Seeds) that didn't go anywhere.

In *Biker Girl*, the pop punk rock band, Annie Activator, sings about a girl on the back of bike who rides the highway of love. For the rest of us, that's usually an unpaved road with lots of potholes.

John Doe's *Beer, Gas, Ride Forever* is used as the title track in *Roadside Prophets*, a film in which he also stars as a motorcyclist who is carrying the ashes of a friend who was electrocuted playing an arcade game. While on the way to a casino where the ashes are to be scattered he meets a man, played by The Beastie Boys's Adam Horowitz, who is looking for the motel in which his parents committed suicide. I presume this is a comedy. Cameo and supporting players include Flea, John Cusack, and Arlo Guthrie.



As for Guthrie, his *Motorcycle Song* is distinguished – if that's the word – by being on a number of ten worst motorcycle songs lists as well as on a number of ten best lists. Guthrie himself is on record as saying he can't believe he got away "singing this dumb song" for so many years. He lost me with the opening couplet rhyming pickle with motorsickle. It's about the motorcycling theme of it being about the journey, not the destination, but it's still silly and very much of its time and place.

The Mystica Girls, a female heavy metal band, offers *The Boogie Biker*. Being a metal band, it's all about a bad boy biker: in this case, the ultimate bad boy biker: Lucifer, who would rather ride a bike in hell than serve in heaven.

For many, *Born to be Wild* is **the** motorcycle song. It's close to half a century and counting since Steppenwolf first released the song in 1968, a year before it was used in *Easy Rider* and entered history, if not legend. It is the first

heavy metal song as well as the first song to use the phrase "heavy metal". While its message about going down the highway on two wheels has never been questioned, some do wonder if *Born To Be Wild* shouldn't have been *Born To The Mild*.

Steppenwolf – among others – was not Peter Fonda's first choice for the soundtrack. The cut was originally used as a placeholder because Fonda hoped to get Crosby, Stills, and Nash to compose the soundtrack (Neil Young might have been more appropriate.) At some point, everyone realized it was exactly right and kept it. Fonda's plans for the score, it turns out, was quite ambitious. He wanted Bob Dylan to write the title song – *The Ballad of Easy Rider* (which doesn't mention motorcycles) – but Dylan wasn't interested. Instead he scribbled "The river flows, it flows into the sea" on a napkin and told Fonda to give it to Roger McGuinn, since he, McGuinn, would know



what to do with it. It was later a great success for The Byrds.

Jimi Hendrix not only supplied a song to the score – *If 6 Was 9* – but also was inspired by the success of the film to create *Ezy Ryder*. It wasn't released until after Hendrix's death. It's not prime Hendrix, but it does mention motorcycles and is worth a listen or two.

The biker being referred to as a rider turns up in a number of other songs as well, though sometimes the meaning is interpretive. For example, in *Midnight Rider*, it's not completely clear whether the rider is on a bike or a horse. Given The Allmann Brothers' connections to motorcycling, the rider in question is unlikely to be on a horse. Although *Ghost Riders In The Sky* is seen by many as a motorcycle song, no such ambiguity exists. The opening line bluntly refers to a cowboy, or in some covers, a cowpoke. Because of the number of riders in the US who identify consciously





or subconsciously as cowboys, the cooption makes sense. However, although it's a great entry in the American Songbook, it's still not a motorcycle song.

Of course not all ghost riders are cowboys. Rush's *Ghost Rider* is very much a biker trying to ride to get away from it all. Although motorcycles are not mentioned specifically, we know that's what it's about because of what we know about Neil Peart (who also wrote a book also called *Ghost Rider*, in which motorcycles are mentioned). As a lyricist, Peart's weakness is a compulsive fear of being obvious.

The ghostly motorcycle rider in Suicide's *Ghost Rider* is the comic book character, a favorite of group member Martin Rev. For those who don't know, the Ghost Rider in question is a demonic bounty hunter working for the devil.

John Leyton's *Lone Rider* is a ghost rider of another sort. He laments being alone and lonely on the road. Going from the ludicrous to the lugubrious – or is that the other way around? – Leyton's *Forbidden Love* offers the tale of a boy on a bike who meets a girl on a scooter. It's a one-joke novelty number about a



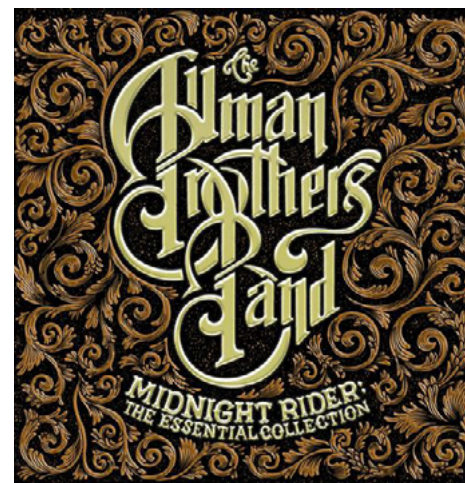
one-night stand.

*Motorcycle Rider* from The Icicle Works, an alternative rock band, is kind of a neat sleeper worth seeking out. It's about the thoughts and experiences of the long-distance rider.

There is actually some debate whether Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run* is about a motorcycle. The argument in favor is strong enough for me to include it here. The premise, of course, is to ride to escape with a loved one.

*B.S.A.* is the title of a number of motorcycle songs, including ones by The Brian Johnstown Massacre and The Steve Gibbons Band. Brian Johnstown specializes in psychedelic experimental rock. Its *B.S.A.* is about getting a motorcycle to get the girl. It's not the group's best effort, which may be *Musique de Film Imaginé*. Steve Gibbons's tune is about someone who loses the girl to a rider on a B.S.A. and so plans to get a Clubman, perhaps for revenge, perhaps to get the girl back, perhaps for some other reason. It's an entertaining number by someone who was around when rockabilly was new and not a revival.

There are at least three tales every rider has told or heard: the one about hauling someone's

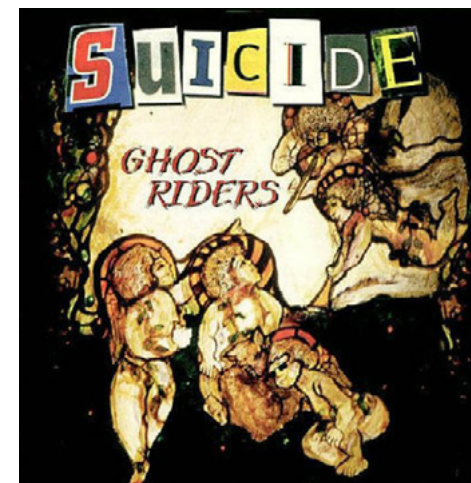


ashes on one last ride before they're scattered as some scenic or significant spot; being stopped to help someone stranded on the road, usually a naked statuesque redheaded woman (a tale killed by the advent of mobile phones); and a woman challenging a man to a race, with her as the prize if he wins.

While there are properly documented cases of each having occurred, for the most part they're not factually correct: the truth is in what the narrator is trying to say about himself or herself through the tale. It's a mild surprise that the tales don't figure that prominently in motorcycle songs.

An exception is the Johnson Family's *Catch Me*, or as the refrain goes, "If you want me, you can have me, but first you have to catch me". The story song ends with a satisfactory whiff of brimstone and the occult.

The Johnson Family also covered The Queen B's *I Don't Want A Boyfriend (I Just Want A Motorcycle)*. It's spot-on pastiche that in many ways is better than any of the original rockabilly motorcycle songs. More interesting is that both groups include Helen Ingham, who also works as Helen Shadow. She wrote both songs, as well



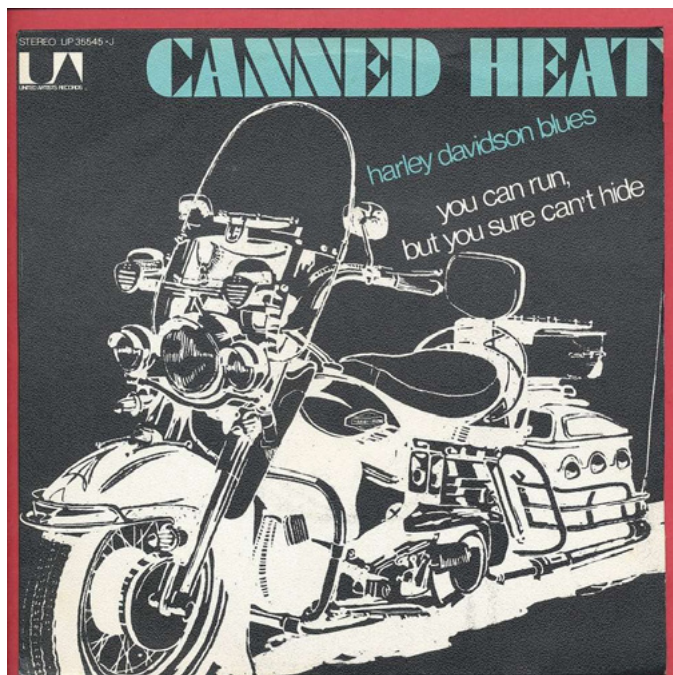
as the perky *Return of the Ace*. All three appear on the *Bikes 'N' Leather* CD, though whether by coincidence or design is unknown. However, it does make her the dominant musical voice in the compilation.

According to Discogs.com, Ingham/Shadow is also a member of two other groups, Killer Brew and Shooting Star. I was not able to get a hold of either by press time (as they say), but one cut on Killer Brew's titular album is *Shooting Star*. The Shooting Star's album, *On the Road Again*, has a speeding motorcycle as the cover art. Who know what rockabilly lurks in the heart of riders? The Shadow knows.

George Strait, the so-called "King of Country", offers *Cowboys Like Us*, about a ride to nowhere with like-minded friends. A motorcyclist himself, Strait sings of the lure of the open road – at least for a long weekend.

Queen's *Crazy Little Thing Called Love* was Freddy Mercury's rockabilly tribute to Elvis Presley. For those who find the juxtaposition of Mercury to Strait jarring, please remember country singer Dwight Yoakim's cover of the song charted in country. As for Elvis himself, he sang about motorcycles in *Roustabout* with a





ditty called *Wheels on My Heels*. Even though motorcycles are not specifically mentioned, it's clear enough that it's about motorcycles and the lure of the open road. (A stricter reading might conjure music hall images of half a dozen Elvis impersonators on roller skates.) It's not quite among the ten worst motorcycle songs ever written. Elvis gives it what it has.

The heavy metal band Judas Priest's *Desert Plains* features a nighttime motorcycle run to an assignation. For those of us whose reading covers a rather wide range, the lyric, "The engine roars between my thighs", is unintentionally hilarious. Motorcycles are something of a leitmotif for Judas Priest. Motorcycles figure in other songs as well – *Freewheel Burning* and *Hell Bent For Leather*, for example – and band member Rob Halford usually enters the concert stage riding a Harley.

David Allen Coe, the outlaw country singer, is another performer who likes to make

his entrance riding a Harley on stage. His contribution to motorcycle music is *Panheads Forever*, about the lover between a man and his bike. The cut is from his *Underground* album, which was sold by mail order from ads in the back of *Easyriders* magazine.

(*Hells Angels*) *Devils Lullaby* by BoogabooMusic is a tribute to the biker lifestyle, riding on and riding free. It's enjoyable, but it's heavy metal lite. More serious and more credible is Motorhead's *Iron Horse/Born to Lose*, which is dedicated to the Hells Angels. It's an ode to the open road and the love of motorcycles as well as the relationship of the biker to the bike: "Iron Horse his wife, Iron Horse his life".

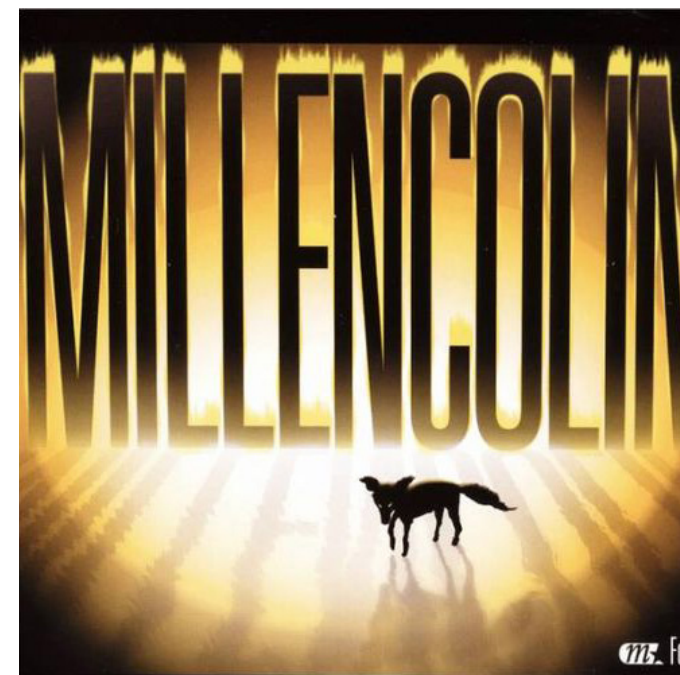
There's probably a motorcycle and popular culture essay in the frequency of the motif and metaphor of the gypsy in motorcycle playlists. (I've been known to use it myself.) It sometimes seems that those *Born To Be Wild* were also



born with a *Gypsy In* (their) *Soul*. How long it will be politically correct to refer to those who are nomadic, who were born to wander, as gypsies is anyone's guess. Meanwhile, as far as I can tell, only one song that mentions both gypsies and motorcycles. L.A. Guns, the hard rock band, sing of the lure of the open road and the freedom motorcycling brings in *Electric Gypsy*.

David Wilcox's music genre is known as Wailing White Guy in New York snark: no one knows the troubles a member of a racial, sexual, and religious majority has seen. Or in this case, observed. *Eye Of The Hurricane* is about a woman with a need for speed to get away from whatever gives her pain.

Fox is an amusing throwaway by the Swedish punk band Millencolin. It's about a boy who loves his scooter: really loves his scooter: really, really loves his scooter. "She's my life, she's so bad/She's the best ride I ever had."



The biggest surprise about the 40-year-old novelty number, *Funky Moped*, isn't that it's aged better than one would guess, but rather that anyone in North America has heard of Jasper Carrott. He enjoys a cult following here, and has for many decades.

Cinerama's *Girl On A Motorcycle* is living on the edge and on the run while the narrator waits for her to calm down and come home.

The metal band, Mötley Crüe, offers at least two motorcycle songs: *Girls, Girls, Girls* and *Kickstart My Heart*. Despite a mention of motorcycles at the beginning, the first lives up to expectations and is about, well, girls. The second is more about extreme sports and experiences, though it does mention a "custom bike doing 103" in passing.

*Grandma Is A Biker Chick* by Steff and the Grogan Girls was composed for small children. "Grandma is a biker chick; grandma is a biker chick; grandma is a biker chick and she's so





cool; grandma is a biker chick and grandmas rule". It's actually fun, perky, and upbeat. Those determined to be adults may beg to differ.

In Canned Heat's *Harley Davidson Blues* he's bought an old secondhand hog and it's done broke down and let the rider down. It's on the humorous side of the blues and rock and roll.

Despite the title, John Fogerty's *Hot Rod Heart* includes a verse about old bikes. This was a happy find since I've been a fan of Fogerty going back to his Creedence Clearwater Revival days. Two wheels keep on turning.

Machine Gun Fellatio's sound is punk meets rockabilly. The older you are the more you'll need a sense of humor for the Australian band's *I'm A Mother Fucker On A Motorcycle*. The name of the group doesn't do much to assuage my male paranoia.

*The Isle* may be the most obscure recording on this list. Composer Phil Fuson was obviously inspired by the Isle of Man TT, but the song is

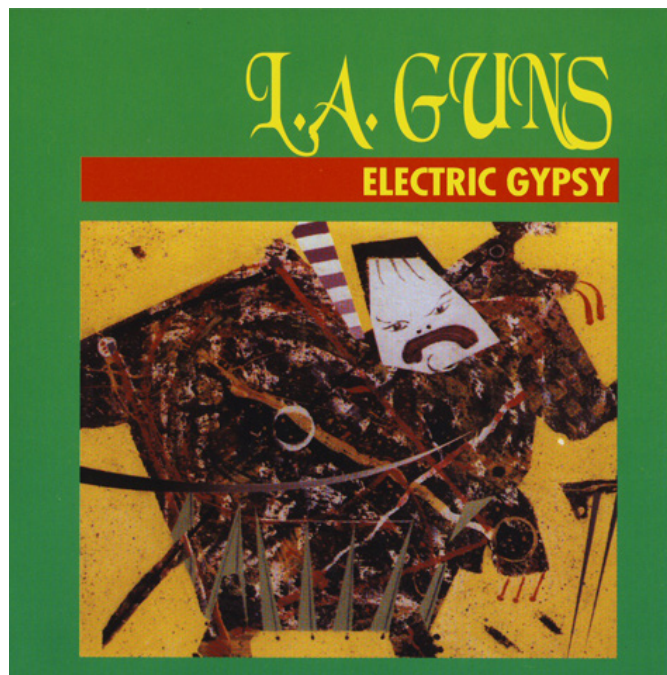
actually about the love of riding regardless of the marque (but note the dig at The Motor Company).

*It's A Great Day To Be Alive* for Travis Tritt, another country music biker, because among his good-day options is starting a three-day cruise on his Harley. It's upbeat and sunny (rare for the sub-genre).

Keith Urban's *Jeans On* is another upbeat country song. Among his options of things to do with his jeans on is riding a motorcycle.

*Jet Black Machine* is a rollicking number from 1961 about a biker on the prowl for the right woman to ride with him on his bike. Time has not been kind to some of the lyrics, which now, more than half a century later, seem unfortunate. He wants to find a queen to put on the back of his black machine. Most queens I know would prefer a car and driver.

Michael Sarne is an actor, writer, and director best known for the cinematic debacle



*Myra Breckinridge*. (At least no motorcycles or motorcyclists were harmed in the making of that film.) More than fifty years ago, he also released a number of pop songs including *Just for Kicks* about a boy who likes "a burn up with a bird up on [his] bike".

You'll meet the nicest rhythms in the jolly little period piece, *Little Honda*. The Beach Boys' perky paeon to the Honda 50 hasn't aged that badly and fits easily into the old-school rock-and-roll revival.

The phrase, *Live To Ride, Ride To Live*, is such a commonplace among North American bikers that it's almost a surprise that it's not used more often in song than seemingly just by Twisted Sister. Snider is willing to embrace the dark: the final couplet of the chorus runs, "You ride to hide, You ride to live to ride". Snider is also responsible for an annual charity motorcycle run in New York to raise funds for a local food bank. Called 'Dee Snider's Ride to Fight Hunger

on Long Island', its sponsors include 20<sup>th</sup> Century Cycles, owned by Billy "Piano Man" Joel himself. Among the beneficiaries is the Harry Chapin Food Bank, which was started by the late singer/songwriter.

As for Joel, his *Motorcycle Song* sings of riding around Long Island (among other subjects) on a "big old motorcycle". It mentions such local roads and places as Sunrise Highway and Lake Success, but Jericho Turnpike mysteriously morphs into Jericho Road. But then again the entire song morphed into *All About Soul*. As a New York boy myself, I've been on these roads from when I was doing my riding in the back seat of an automobile, so the song might resonate more strongly with me than it would with those who haven't a clue what or where any of the places mentioned are.

The *New Sensations* the praises of which are sung by that third New York area rider/

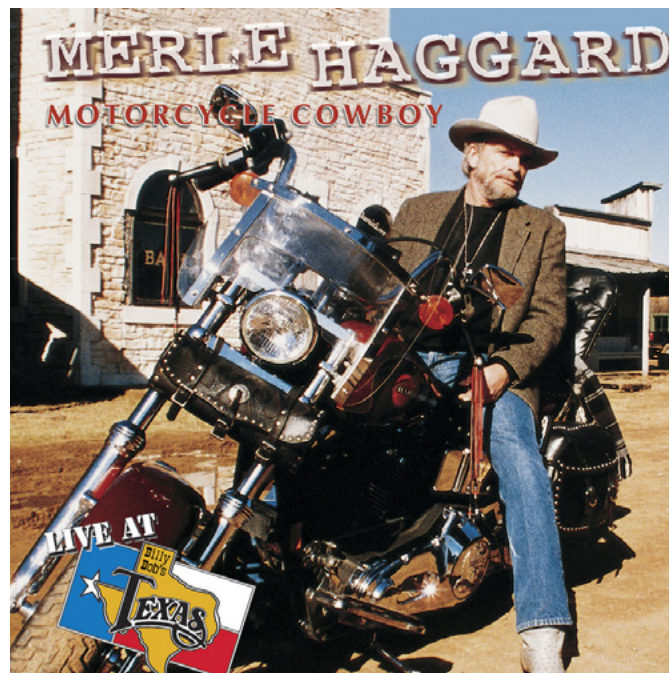




songwriter, Lou Reed, all involve motorcycling, which is why, in part, a bike in general and a GPZ in particular isn't mentioned until the song is half over. Reed was – and is – an intriguing mix of music, motorcycles, and martial arts (Chen Tai Chi), but why is a tale for another time, if it is told at all.

Eric Idle of Monty Python was a friend of MotoGP legend Barry Sheene. Sheene apparently had a sense of humor for Idle composed a comic ode to his friend, *Mr Sheene*, featuring what we proper critics refer to as dubious lyrics. "Big red throbbing riding machine" indeed.

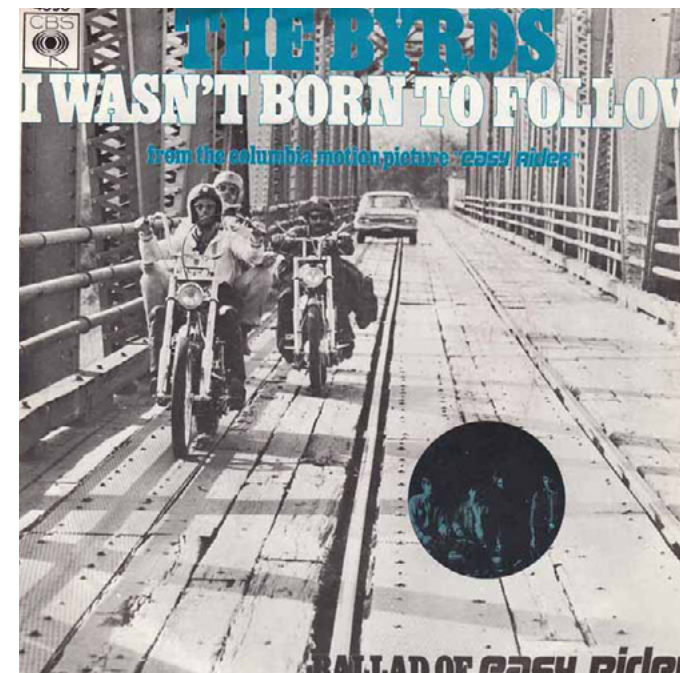
Session musician Chris Spedding was a one-hit wonder with *Motorbikin'* about a boy and bike with a girl on the back riding fast. It was covered by Billy Idol some years later and could almost be read as the "prequel" to Idol's *Summer Running*, about a biker riding into the sun as he moves on from an affair.



I'm not sure how many songs about motorcycling are titled *Motorcycle*, but one of them is by the goth, new-age band, Love and Rockets. It's about a rider's feelings about bikes and riding. Despite the band's name, it's not about a crotch rocket: "You don't go too fast; You just set me free". In another motorcycling song titled *Motorcycle* – in this case by Kip Moore – a boy invites a girl for a night ride on his bike.

Merle Haggard is one of the legendary names in country music. It make sense that a) he thinks of riders as cowboys; and b) while there is a motorcycle in *Motorcycle Cowboy*, the song is really about a man looking back on his marriage to a "hippie biker chick".

The Cruzados sing of the unrequited love for a *Motorcycle Girl*. Band member Tito Larriva is a friend of film maker Robert Rodriguez, for whom he has worked as an actor, composer, and musician.



Sailcat's *Motorcycle Mama* is the classic 1972 invitation to "see the world from a Harley". It made the Southern pop rock group a one-hit wonder. I'd all but forgotten this jaunty, upbeat tune existed, but it quickly turned into the earworm of the article.

Neil Young's *Motorcycle Mama* is also an invitation, but one to settle down. The late Nicolette Larson's contribution is not to be underestimated. *Unknown Legend* is another Young motorcycle song. This one is about a woman remembering her riding days. Or is it fantasy? Young has a complicated, but longstanding, relationship to motorcycles and motorcycling. For example, he provided the incidental music to Hunter S. Thompson's *Where the Buffalo Roam* and outfitted his entire touring band in custom jackets from Langlitz Leathers.

The classic and influential heavy metal band, Saxon, produced *Motorcycle Man*, about

street racing for kicks: "I'm a motorcycle man... (who) can beat your street machine".

In Richard Hawley's *Motorcycle Song*, there's an old bike, back roads, and a lost biker who can't find his way home.

The *Need for Speed* by The Regulators is another rarity to say the least. The song is from the early 90s and the band might be described as L.A. honky-tonk rock-and-roll blues. It's very much of its time and place. We'll play nice and not ask whether the modified Harley mentioned in the lyrics can satisfy the rider's need for speed.

*The Norton Spirit* saves the rider's life, at least according to The Blue Cats. It's fast driving rockabilly with an interesting video featuring the Dazza mix.

"[T]he years fall away with every mile" when Steve Earle rides his motorcycle in *The Other Kind*. Country folk rock and not bad of its kind.





In Joe Satriani's *Ride*, it's more about the guitar than the lyrics, which are about the freedom of riding, just hitting the road and keep on going on a bike.

Poison's *Ride the Wind* is another ride forever ballad, here on "Saddle iron horses of chrome". Poison was one of the better "hair bands", but metal isn't to everyone's taste.

Roots rocker Bob Seger sings about freedom in *Roll Me Away*. The joy of riding, whether alone or with someone, whether to escape or to get somewhere. No one does "male blues" like Segar. His *Turn the Page*, about life on the road (tour) inspired Jon Bon Jovi's *Wanted Dead or Alive*. JBJ's hard-rock singing cowboy on an iron horse may be too "on the nose" for some, but it was and still is a popular choice for motorcycle song playlists. It was also used on the soundtracks of *Wild Hogs* and *Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man*.

*Speeding Motorcycle* "of my heart" that's

"always changing me" is Yo La Tengo's contribution to the sub-genre. It's a nice low key number by the cult band and critical darling.

(This is more than a bit of tangent, but it's too good to resist. It seems the group's name was inspired by a baseball anecdote involving the Mets. Many decades ago, center fielder Richie Ashburn had problems communicating with shortstop Elio Chacon. They frequently ran into each other trying to catch the ball, which meant neither one did, to the benefit of the other team. Chacon, who didn't speak English, didn't understand what Ashburn was talking about when he shouted, "I've got it! I've got it!". Right fielder Joe Christopher, who spoke Spanish, suggested that Ashburn shout "yo la tengo" ("I've got it" in Spanish) instead. Then next time Chacon and Ashburn were running to catch the same ball, Ashburn shouted, "Yo la tengo". It worked: Chacon stopped to let



Ashburn catch the ball; except the left fielder, Frank Thomas, was also chasing after the ball and crashed into Ashburn, letting the ball drop to the benefit of the other team. Thomas's only comment was, "What's a yellow tango?"

Given how many personal motorcycling playlists include one or more songs by The Rolling Stones, it was a welcome discovery that the venerable band has at least one number that qualifies for this round up: *Start Me Up*. The double entendres are double speed in what is essentially a one-joke song, but when it's The Stones, there's more going on musically than just the gag.

Sasha Mullins has made a bit of a career out of being "the chrome cowgirl". In addition to two books, *Bikerlady: Living and Riding Free* and *The Chrome Cowgirl guide to the Motorcycle Life*, Mullins recorded *Two Wheels Move The Soul*. A solid description of the result is good-natured country rock.

In *White Collar Girl Biker Blues* by Penny Menze, a female RUB hits the road to get away from that mean SOB (Son of a Businessman). It's a nice embroidered one-joke number that might be worth more than one listen.

Which brings us back to Maureen "BikerMo" Griffin. Griffin's voice is well-trained as she's one of the few singers here who hits notes true and strong. The musicians backing her on her album all have prestigious résumés. This is the most professional-sounding self-produced CD I've encountered in a long time.

According to her website, her songwriting began when she would sing while riding down the highway. Real lyrics gave way to spoof lyrics involving motorcycling and the spoofs gave way to original lyrics to more original melodies. She adds, "All of my songs are based on my personal experiences, and it is my sincere hope that they touch on the emotions that bikers experience when they're riding."



Although her musical taste and image seem to run toward country or pop country, she's actually Broadway and the results are more the Great White Way than the Grand Ole Opry. *Biker Food*, for example, is a humorous ode to the less than nutritionally correct diet of the typical American biker. There's more to those beer bellies than just beer. *Biker True And Proud* is also lightweight, but that's as it should be: the song is about a bike that's older, slower, and lower capacity, but beloved. At the other end of the scale, there's *Bonnie, Bonnie Journey*, which is an attempt to revise *Loch Lomond* as an upbeat biker on a trip song by way of a sea shanty or two. If the lyrics are meant to amuse, the music shouldn't remind listeners of those lost at war and at sea. Noel Coward pulled the trick with his version of *Loch Lomond*, but very few of us are Noel Coward. *Thank God, I'm A Biker Girl* is a gloss on *Thank God, I'm A Country Boy* (music used with permission) that's a cross between an in-joke and a skit on a television variety show.

She's in no danger of winning a Grammy, but the CD should do well enough with its intended market at biker weeks and rallies around the United States, certainly enough to justify her working on a second album as she claims on the website.

**Jonathan Boorstein**

#### Top Ten Tunes:

I'm less than enthusiastic about ten best or ten worst lists. Let's just call this my motorcycle music playlist, a work in progress (or regress) that I'll add to as time and interest allow. It's in strict alphabetical order.

- **Black Denim Trousers**
- **Born To Be Wild**
- **Catch Me**
- **Ghost Rider (Rush)**
- **Motorcycle Mama (Sailcat)**
- **Motorcycle Rider**
- **Motorcycle Song (Joel)**
- **New Sensations**
- **1952 Vincent Black Lightening**
- **Rockin At The Ace Cafe**

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## Mercury Hearing Custom-Made In-Ear Monitors

**Since having the decibel levels of the wind rushing past one's crash helmet highlighted to me several years ago, I have worn disposable ear plugs, usually bought in bulk from an industrial supplier.**

Despite being a bit wasteful these also make your bike sound pretty good, allowing the baritone bark of the exhaust to filter through while shutting out the clatter of fuel injectors and noisy valve gear.

Try a short ride with/without them and you'll see what I mean.

The exception to this was when I needed to listen to the sat-nav device on my phone, which necessitated me wearing my Apple ear buds – the ones shaped like tiny hair driers.

Inevitably with the sound of the engine clattering away below and the breeze battering your lid, to actually be able to hear the directions properly YOU NEED TO HAVE THE VOLUME UP QUITE HIGH, which risks distortion, hearing damage and getting lost. Also, while the ear buds are fine in normal use, wearing them inside a crash helmet can become quite painful, especially when taking it off.

So with this in mind I approached Mercury Hearing Ltd's stand at the London Motorcycle Show back in February to see if they could

provide a solution to these first world problems.

Mercury Hearing is a family firm of five fully trained technicians with more than 40 years of experience between them, their business supplies a wide range of customers including the NHS, security companies and the armed forces. Not forgetting motorcyclists.

After a short discussion with Julie and Nicky it was decided that a pair of built-in earbud plugs would probably serve all my needs, and with that my ear'oles were cleaned, a couple of pieces of string inserted with tiny cotton plugs on the end and my ears were filled with a special mix of green gunge, which felt rather odd. After what seemed like an age (it was actually just a few minutes) of enforced deafness the impressions were pulled out, and my details taken along with my colour preference.

A few weeks later a Jiffy package arrived containing a neat blue pocket sized storage box and my motorcycling life was immediately transformed. As was my lawn mowing.

After carefully following the instructions provided I cleaned my ears with a babywipe and carefully inserted the peculiarly shaped plugs, (the one with the red dot goes in your right lug hole) twisted them slightly and



suddenly they fitted very snugly into my respective meatuses and helices. That's dirty talk for ear people you know.

I then plugged the other end of the Kevlar coated wires into my iPod Classic – deliberately set at low volume – and gradually turned it up to halfway, which was really all I needed. It sounded good.

I then needed to go for a ride, and after a bit of trial and error I discovered that the best way (for me) to wear a lid with the plugs was to fit them with the 'Y' piece behind my neck so they stayed well clear of the chin strap, the wire then passed round and under my arm

to connect to my iPod or phone in the inside pocket of my jacket, a bit of moving my head from side to side ensured that there was enough slack cable, and I was in business. I found that wearing a Buff also helped keep things in place.

On the open road I was pleasantly surprised to find that I didn't really need to increase the volume, and could still clearly hear the engine of my bike and other traffic while either listening to music, the radio or satnav instructions, although I found that I lost some of the bass register. Maybe my ears need syringing.





The plugs also work just as well when not plugged into anything (apart from my ears of course) and eliminate wind noise very effectively. Insert your own joke here...

I found that initially the plugs made my ears a little sore after a while, but the more I wear them the better they have become.

I also found that far from distracting me, listening to the radio or music actually enhanced my riding experience, and now I never ride without them.

Downsides? Well, I mentioned the lack of bass unless using them indoors. And if you use them for the FM radio on your phone inevitably you have to stop and retune now and then.

A potential problem is that often when you carefully remove the plugs (don't just yank them out!) they may have lumps of cerumen on them, which can be a bit embarrassing (I usually save it though as I'm making a Christmas candle).

They can also be a bit awkward when people (like parking attendants at the O2) try to tell you where to park. And speaking of the O2, I wish I'd asked for them to be flesh coloured, as they are great for loud gigs, you can hear everything without getting deafened.

But apart from all that, I wouldn't be without them.

The monitors I have are available from £100 depending on colour and material options from [Mercury Hearing](http://MercuryHearing.com) (01444 400494).

## Martin Haskell

# BITZ

## Held Shina Ladies' Leather Jacket



**When I met Dave and became his passenger I didn't own any motorcycle specific clothing, as the only forms of transport that I used were the public variety. So for the past 6 years, while I've been riding pillion with him, I have been wearing his jackets and coats or indeed my own rather flimsy attire because once I am back on shank's pony I want to look good.**

Let's face it; I am a woman, and a woman who is pleased by the aesthetics of something far more than its practicality. I am assured by Dave that such an attitude is bound to get a round of tut tuts and murmurs about foolhardiness, but each to their own I say.

To complicate things even further though I have found with my advancing years that not only do I desire items that are stylish, I also need them to be comfortable. Imagine my dilemma then when Dave proposed the trip to meet up

with TRD peeps at Jacks Hill Café, luring me with the promise of a Triumph, knowing that I have a weakness for a beautiful thing and I love how they look.

But what was I going to wear I fretted? I had absolutely nothing suitable. Being a carin' sharin' kind of guy Dave suggested I have a look through the extensive women's range in the [Held catalogue](#) to see if there was anything I fancied. In all honesty I have looked at motorcycle gear over the years and it has never filled my heart with joy so I wasn't really expecting to be blown away, but blown away I was as soon as I clapped eyes on the Shina jacket.

I was in love. It was perfect. I was already imagining myself wearing it on the back of the Triumph. The styling was perfection and different to anything else I have seen, not so much a 'biker' style item but something I would wear anyway. Once I knew it was on its way, I





couldn't stop talking about it and showing my colleagues at work pictures of it – especially the ones who ride bikes. Needless to say they were all mightily impressed.

And when it arrived it didn't disappoint. It looks even better in the flesh. It's gorgeous thick but supple leather that already looks worn in and it's a snug fit that is both flattering and stylish. It has superb details including the pockets and buttons that make it stand out as something special and an amazing collar that will keep drafts well and truly at bay. It also features soft orange d3O armour at the shoulders and elbows, which is removable so I did.

It smells good, feels good and looks amazing; all in all it's a wonderful thing that encompasses all my comfort and beauty

requirements and would also fulfill the needs other riders priorities such as safety and practicality.

Sadly the Triumph was neither comfortable nor secure enough – with no sissy bar or topbox to reassure me – to ride all the way to Leicester so we didn't use it in the end (see Back to Jack's). But hey who cares, I don't have to wear it on a bike. In fact I might sleep in it.

## Wendy Dewhirst

**The Held Shina Ladies Leather jacket (Art. 5225)** is available for around £310 from various outlets.

For further details visit the [Held website](#) which includes a 'Find a dealer' facility





## Summer Gloves by Tucano Urbano

**A**s any experienced rider will tell you, if you're going to ride a bike regularly all year around and you want to be anywhere near remotely comfortable, it's essential that you have the right kit.

If you get caught in an unexpectedly heavy shower on a typical summer's day and get soaked to the skin, it's not very pleasant but it's hardly the end of the world either; but if the same thing happens in the bleak mid winter and it's snow that's discovering the limitations of your 'waterproofs' it can be a far more unpleasant thing altogether – not to mention downright dangerous when your core temperature starts to drop.

Although over-heating isn't quite as critical as exposure, it can still have a profound effect on how much you enjoy your ride when the weather becomes more favourable.

I realise that there are many riders out there who stick rigidly to the All The Gear All The Time mantra, irrespective of how hot they get or how much they sweat at anything less than the national speed limit; personally I favour maximum comfort at all times over the extra layers of security for those – hopefully – rare occasions when it all goes Pete Tong!

Consequently when I asked **Tucano Urbano** if they would like to send me some of their **Aero** and **Gig** gloves to test, Ivan at their communication agency cautioned me that neither of them were protective gloves and offered to send me some 'proper armoured



ones'. I reassured him that although I come from considerably further north than their gloves do, in the height of summer I'm more inclined to dress the way Mediterranean riders do, rather than the full metal jacket approach that seems to have become the norm in this country.

And when the gloves arrived they were exactly what I had in mind. It's strange that both gloves, but in particular the **Gigs**, look a lot more substantial in the pictures than they do in the flesh. I don't mean this as any sort of criticism though because as I said above, they were precisely what I wanted – they're just a whole lot softer than they look.

The **Gigs** are the most wonderful tactile butter-soft leather and they fit like a golf glove or the sort of driving gloves that you'd expect a chap in a flat cap to wear while he's driving his MGB GT! When people say that something "fits like a glove", these are the kind of gloves that they have in mind. And for all you peeps who can't be arsed to take them off to use your Galaxy, the **Gigs** have smart phone friendly tips on the thumb and first two fingers.

The **Aeros** are made of ever so slightly less supple leather, but they still mould to the hand beautifully and they're incredibly comfortable. It's hardly been warm enough to trade them for the **Gigs** any day so far this year but the mesh on the back promises genuine cool-hand comfort if and when the temperature finally decides to soar.

A pair of **Aeros** will cost you £29.99; while the sumptuous **Gigs** will knock you back £54.99

### Dave Gurman

See the **Tucano Urbano** [website](#) for further details.



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