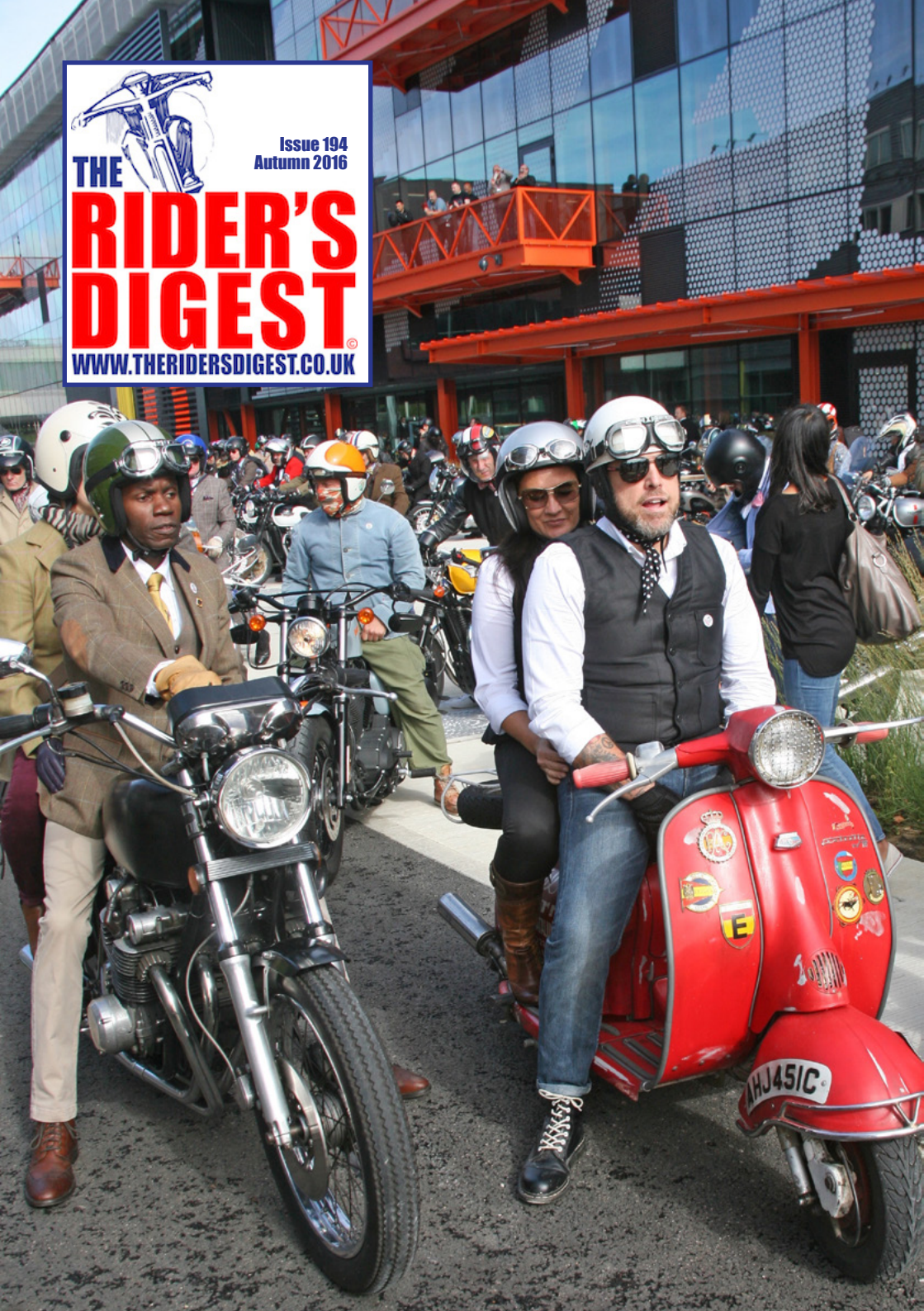
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Contents...

Editor
Dave Gurman

Web support
Phil O'Neil
www.domainsrush.co.uk

Contributors
Harriet Drury, Ian Dunmore, Martin Haskell, Andy Tribble, Nick Lojik, Chris Scott, Wizzard, Ray Johnson, Nick Smith, Ricardo Rodrigues, Jonathan Boorstein

Photographs
Cover: Paul Blezard, James Wright/Double Red, Jonathan Read, Martin Haskell, Andy Tribble, Nick Lojik, Chris Scott, Wizzard, Dave Gurman, Ray Johnson, Monique Kelly, Nick Smith, Ricardo Rodrigues, René Van den Brandt, René Vos, Errol L. Colandro

Thanks to Jim Witherspoon for the classic bike adverts
www.classicmotorads.com

Contact
Editorial
Dave Gurman
+44 (0) 20 8707 0655
editor@theridersdigest.co.uk

Advertising
Dennis Bagley
+44 (0) 7940 839721
advertising@theridersdigest.co.uk

From the editor...

When Mark Wilsmore spoke to me in July about the possibility of arranging a Courier Day at the Ace Cafe, my immediate response was, as anyone who knows me would expect, entirely positive and very enthusiastic.

I passed on the suggestion on 'London and UK Couriers Past and Present' on Facebook and the general consensus – somewhat predictably given the self-selecting nature of the group – was a resounding YES!

There then followed a period of comparative silence as TRD Towers were locked and chained for summer holidays; and that was followed by a further period of inactivity as I got bogged down in more of the sort of political distractions I alluded to in my last editorial.

I finally started sorting out the arrangements around the middle of September and given how long they'd been lying dormant it was surprising how easy it was to get them rolling again (most motorbikes would have taken a lot more starting after standing for that long) and everything has been falling into place nicely ever since.

All the details of who, what, where and when are on page 104 as are the details of the goodies we'll be offering in a free prize draw that will only be open to working couriers (there will also be smaller prizes for the people who have travelled furthest by bike and overall, which has got to be an incentive for all those mad Kiwi ex-couriers who are back on the other side of the world but might be tempted to come – assuming that the statute of limitations have run out on all of their old motoring offences!).

I also contacted Chris Scott, he of *Adventure Motorcycling Handbook* fame, to suggest that if we wasn't busy riding around the Sahara, he really should come to the Ace with a few copies of *Street Riding Years* his brilliant memoir about (as the subtitle says) *Despatching Through 80s London*; but he informed me that he wouldn't be able to join us because while the rest of us were assembling in north west London, he was indeed going to be elsewhere leading a ride around the Atlas mountains in north west Africa.

I offered to take some of his books with me to sell and in return Chris generously agreed that we could reproduce a chapter from it, which you'll find on page 62. I was so encouraged re-reading those very entertaining pages, I began sorting through the TRD archive to see if I could find a little more entertaining courier content and though I say so myself I believe I found a couple of good uns (especially now that they look so much better with the addition of some great photos by Nick Smith and Monique Kelly).

It's difficult to believe that my article about the history of the despatch industry in the Metropolis is over ten years old, but sure enough it first appeared in issue 100! Interesting then that everything I said back in January 2006 about changes within the business (with the notable exception of the DR's ubiquity), are as true today as they were then, if not more so. And Dylan's reflection on how a little motorbike affected his entire future, surely speaks to feelings that many couriers will relate to.

It's interesting that an issue containing so much courier content carries a cover featuring an event that lives way off at the other end of the motorcycling spectrum. The tweedy chaps in the DGR are apt to take an old courier carthorse like a CX and remove the mudguards, bung silly tyres on it and add various aesthetic touches; whereas the tyres are likely to be among the only parts that are halfway decent on a professional DR's bike and they've been known to add plastic 4 pint milk bottles as cheap effective hand protection and estate agent's boards as screens and weather protection for their legs.

It would be all too easy to point out that the difference between a DGR and a DR boils down to the word 'Gentlemen'; but as anyone who's ever been intimately involved with busking bikes across the capital will tell you, there are almost as many ex public schoolboys in the dispatch business as there are in category D prisons and the black sheep of many a good family have put in some serious miles on the streets of London and the motorways of the wider country!

So what am I saying? That motorcycles are the great unifier; that their universal appeal shatters all social and class barriers? It's a lovely idea because we've all heard stories, or had personal experience of the Earl, Duke or peer of the realm who shares a convivial chat with another biker over a cuppa, but have you noticed that those tales rarely end with his nibs inviting the fellow rider back to the family seat to shag his daughter? (And if they ever do, they invariably follow the one about the spectacular ride to the mansion at speeds well in excess of one-twenty-five – on a 125 – a short digressive tale about 'training' on Brecon Beacons – that he isn't really supposed to mention – and his forthcoming mission to the space station!)

The 'Toff Security' photo in Chris Scott's chapter, features a **Bike** article written by Mark Revelle about Security Despatch that states, "Roughly fifty per cent of the riders were at public school. Even Mavis was at Dulwich College. It's not policy, just accident. Would be riders are interviewed by Andy Lumis (Marlborough) and Jonathan Hood (Stowe) independently and have to be acceptable to both."

It's interesting that he concluded that the disproportionate number of posh boys at Security was pure chance, when he states in the next line that both of the public school educated bosses had an opportunity to blackball any potential employee who failed to meet their exacting standards.

But in the end it didn't matter what SD were doing in their corner of the industry because there were always a host of other companies out there who applied a different set of criteria, and unlike Lloyds of London, old merchant banks and trendy South Ken PR firms, they didn't give a toss about what school you went to – or if you'd been at all – just as long as you could read an A to Z and tear around the postcodes quickly and reliably in all weathers.

Ultimately there are loads of bike clubs out there that are distinguished by marque, back patch or money, and they all have their own explicit or implicit rules about who can join; but few of them can claim the kind of inclusiveness that the Courier Club celebrates, let alone the sort of phenomenal mileage that has rolled under the average member's wheels.

Personally I'm proud to be part of a club that even Groucho Marx would be honoured to be a member of.

Dave Gurman

Catch Dave from 9 to 11pm every Wednesday on www.bikerfm.uk

Riders' Lives

Name: Alan Dowds

What was your first motorcycling experience?

Ha! Well, ignoring jumping on the back of an already-two-up DT50 aged 14, it was probably getting a lift to my part-time shelf-stacking job at Tesco. My mate Eddie Guiller had a Honda CB250N Superdream, and when we were working shifts, I'd jump on the back. Felt like a rocketship, and I was hooked. He helped me buy a properly-shit Honda CG125, and I was away.

What is your current bike?

I've got a 'project' Kawasaki ZRX1100, which I'm building in Classic Motorcycle Mechanics. It was a proper shed when I bought it off the Bay for a grand, so it's needed absolutely everything doing, from the frame and crankshaft up. The plan is a blown (Big CC Racing are fitting a turbo), Öhlins-suspended, carbon-wheeled, 250bhp Eddie Lawson replica, for the road. It's taking a bit longer than I thought mind…

What bike would you most like to ride/own?

Oooooh, difficult! I'm in a lucky position that I get to ride a lot of press bikes, so plenty to choose from. I love the current Ducati Multistrada – they are amazing to ride on most real-world roads, and the electronics are incredible. The Diavel is another cracker, though a bit less useful than the Multi.

What was your hairiest moment on a bike?

I almost flipped a supercharged TTS Triumph Rocket III. It was damp in patches, and I was practicing wheelies, just to get a feel for how it would come up, and it was mostly spinning on the damp spots. Then, I gave it a big handful, it span in a puddle, hit a dry spot and gripped and suddenly all I could see was that big wide fuel tank. I slammed the gas shut and after hanging in time for an awful silent moment, she smacked back down, with mudguard, exhaust and indicator(!) all scraped. Unfortunately both the photographer and the video guy were standing, slack-jawed with their cameras pointing at the deck…

What was your most memorable ride?

Getting a golden ticket to the HRC journalist test at Sepang in '05. Five laps on Nicky Hayden's RC211V V5 MotoGP bike and three on Dani Pedrosa's title-winning RS250RW.

The V5 was great – an easily-accessed megabike, with stunning torque, power and control. But the 250GP bike really lit my fire. It felt like a perfect 600 that steered like a BMX. Gorgeous power, stupendous braking and the sharpest steering I've ever tried, yet supremely stable. Makes me wish for a time machine…

What would be the ideal soundtrack to the above?

Hahaha, something by The Fall (Brix E Smith era)! I do listen to tunes a lot while riding nowadays actually, mostly edits of John Peel's Festive Fifty from 76-93(ish).

What do you think is the best thing about motorcycling?

Getting there before everyone else, and having a laugh doing it.

What do you think is the worst thing about motorcycling?

The faffing about – locks, garage, side gate, clothing, kit for the heat, kit for the cold, luggage, rucksacks. Sometimes you just want to jump in the car and go.

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

There's lots of exciting stuff about smart 'connected' vehicles, so your bike would tell other traffic that you were coming so they wouldn't pull out on you – that would be nice. Apart from that, I want 300bhp turbo bikes, air-conditioning suits for all these hot days post-climate change, and a 'wheelie' button.

How would you like to be remembered?

Reasonably fondly?

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FOTOGRAFÍA: Dolores Mª Montilla Alfaro

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THE GIRL BIKER

"RACING THE 600, CRASHING THE 600!"

Hello again! It's been a busy few months for the 600; it was my first race of the season in July, a two-day race weekend at Anglesey Circuit. Having done a track day on the Friday, I was feeling pretty confident for Saturday.

And what a great day it turned out to be! I managed to cut my lap times down and enjoyed some pretty awesome races. In the last race I even managed to get my elbow down for a brief moment, it was the most exciting and scary thing I'd ever done.

The race organisers changed the layout for Sunday, adding a straight and a hairpin, but I had ridden that track on Friday's track day, so I was feeling pretty confident. Again the day was going amazingly well, lap times were dropping and the bike felt brilliant. However, it all came to an abrupt end in the last race of the weekend. I was riding the quickest I'd ever been; there were a group of us riding together and pushing each other to go quicker everywhere. I came to the banking hairpin with another 600. Realising there was no way I could've out braked him at this point I dropped behind him so I could get the drive out of the corner and overtake him then. That's when another rider got a little too excited and tried an overtake on me. His wheel went into the front of my bike and that was us both down! Unfortunately for the other racers, the race was red flagged, meaning it was stopped.

I landed on my head and destroyed my helmet and ripped a hole straight through my leathers. Luckily, we were able to get the leathers repaired so that saved quite a bit of expense, unfortunately a new helmet was needed so cue the mad eBay search for a decent cheap helmet!

I've had some extraordinary adventures on the 125. Living in Wales means there's always a nice road nearby pretty much all the time. Unfortunately, as a teenager I haven't really got much clue where anything is. This means finding new roads and random diversions to places that I'd never normally see. On one run I was trying to get to the top of a mountain. I took the wrong turning off the main road and ended up on a country road on the side of a mountain! The road was questionable but the view was amazing! It's quite comical being able to see the tallest mountain in Wales and the coast at the same time. I have also found new roads, which work quite well, less traffic and more corners – what's not to like?

One thing I have noticed in road riding is that to be quite honest, I feel safer on track. A lot of cars do not look for bikers and a lot

of other bikers make quite unreasonable overtakes. I cringe when I watch another rider overtake on a blind corner or over a hill. What's the point of overtaking like that when you cannot see ahead?

The Girl Biker

A View from the Group W Bench

Well I've more or less got my Bellagio sorted for touring. I ordered up a set of Stelvio hand guards/Bark Busters only to find they fit on the mirror mounts and my clutch mirror mount is broken due to an earlier spill, so that's £220.00 to fix that as well.

Sue and Keith Nock (Lincoln Eagle) made up a custom three box Givi rack for the Bella, still some modifications to go but it is now a suitable rally bike.

The Bella had a remote steering feeling from when I bought it, which I put down to the 18" front wheel but I asked Keith to take it for a run and see what he thinks. He came back saying he had upped the rear suspension by 6 notches and it was now OK. We also checked the air pressure and put a full complement of air in the tyres. As I had pumped then up with a supermarket airline two days previously buying a foot pump which I could trust became a priority (and Lidl supplied the goods two weeks later).

OK? Damn right it was, totally transformed the bike to something I could ride round a speck of dust. Cheers mate shows how knowing someone who knows his stuff is so important.

So I took it to a Mayflower Club camping weekend at the Waterloo Inn near Buxton; it was a grand trip both ways and I even beat the satnav on time and miles coming back by getting lost. I'm still not sure what happened there. So I am taking it to the Pilgrims Rally? Well no, I took it to do some pre rally shopping and to fill up when I discovered on switching on that I have no electrics at all. I try all the fuses, relays, earth and battery connections, nothing so it is Carol Nash breakdown time. The bloke from SOS Recovery tries the same with the same results and then fiddling with the key momentarily brought power on. Oh well that's a new ignition switch then. So the lil'Breva goes to the Pilgrims, and everybody had a grand time as usual.

I order up a new switch on Monday, one available in Italy and £180.00 total was a lot less than I expected.

So next weekend I started to strip down the screen and headlight to get the old switch out. All fine till the second bolt turns out to be a security bolt, which no matter what I do with hammer and small cold chisel will not move. So my mate Tony Botto (TB Motorcycles) came out with his battery screwdriver and special sockets and thirty second later it is out. Tony is happy with £40 callout fee so no complaints there but just how is the bolt going to deter a thief. Very few joyriders are going to steal a Moto Guzzi and any professional thief will have the sockets. Stupid security bolt, which I suppose attempts to force you to use a dealer. Fail there Moto Guzzi.

So I take the Bella through the Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean to the all new Moto Guzzi Festival –which has replaced the V Twin – at Forest Oak Farm near Lydney. New format, new site and moved back a week to avoid holiday traffic and allow ageing groovers to spend the weekend with family and possibly loved ones.

I arrived on Thursday at 12:05 to help set up for the Friday start to an incredibly frosty reception. The Rally organisers weren't expected till 16:00 and apparently at a previous bike rally people who arrived early had been moved by their own club organizers but they then blamed the rally site. Ho hum. Anyway shortly afterwards a beer barrel blew out its tap so two other early arrivals (known to the owners) and myself helped mop the mess up. Five rather than two working got the job done in no time, and by the end of the rally we had convinced the owners that we were truly a Friendly Club and all was well. And it was an excellent site, good facilities and chalets for those not up to camping.

The weather was inclement to say the least and did put off about twenty people who had bought tickets; but almost as many hardy souls turned up on spec and were allowed in. The V Twin had been pre book only since 2002 as a result of some HD riders taking advantage of the laid back attitude of the time. Still laid back but we want to see the ticket first. And only four tents blew away so not bad.

After breakfast on Sunday morning I set off. First thing was the A48 was blocked with no diversion signs so some minor roads later with the visible results of the last two days weather on them I was back on the A48. This was just the entrée. I then had a senior moment and missed the A40 and found myself on the A417 heading for Cirencester, not a problem, just a slightly longer journey on a nice day. A mile later the satnav told me to turn left on the A436.I had a look and two hardy sons of the soil (drugged up Lakeland poets can eat their hearts out) about fifteen years younger than me working on the road looked at me as if to say 'you're not dumb enough to take that bike down here are you?' I wasn't.

So why a mile or so later did the satnav come up with the same instruction and why did I hang a left without thinking and turn up it? I don't remember a Purple Cloaked Emperor smelling of sulphur climbing on the back and I certainly should have known better, it may well have been towards the A436 but it very quickly deteriorated to incredibly unnamed road quality. Eight miles later having ridden a fully laden Bellagio on roads with patchy tarmac that was mostly not wide enough for a wartime jeep let alone anything else that were still covered with wet leaves under the tree canopy, the satnav told me to turn right on the A436 in 0.4 miles. I had just come out of the trees, the road had decent tarmac and as I looked forward I saw a coach and then a lorry thundering across between the trees. Right I am following that road, I don't care where it was going but it was the A436 and indeed the one I wanted.

During the previous miles my rear orifice was going half crown, thrupenny bit (50p, 5p to you young 'uns) and my arms were shaking, as I had no idea what I would do had I dropped it. The satnav was invaluable as it gave me plenty of warning of some quite sharp bends [what after it had got you into trouble in the first place? – Ed]. At one point I passed a family out for a walk who had to press themselves right into the trees to let me past. If they ever read this then I apologise, as I had no right being there. But at no time did the bike feel it was going to let go so I recommend Dunlop Sportsmax Roadsmarts ZR's for all your trail bike needs.

Ride safe

Ian Dunmore

2016 London Distinguished Gentleman's Ride

On Sunday 25th September 2016, more than 60,000 riders participated in Distinguished Gentleman's Rides in more than 550 cities across 90 countries, making it the world's largest motorcycling charity event.

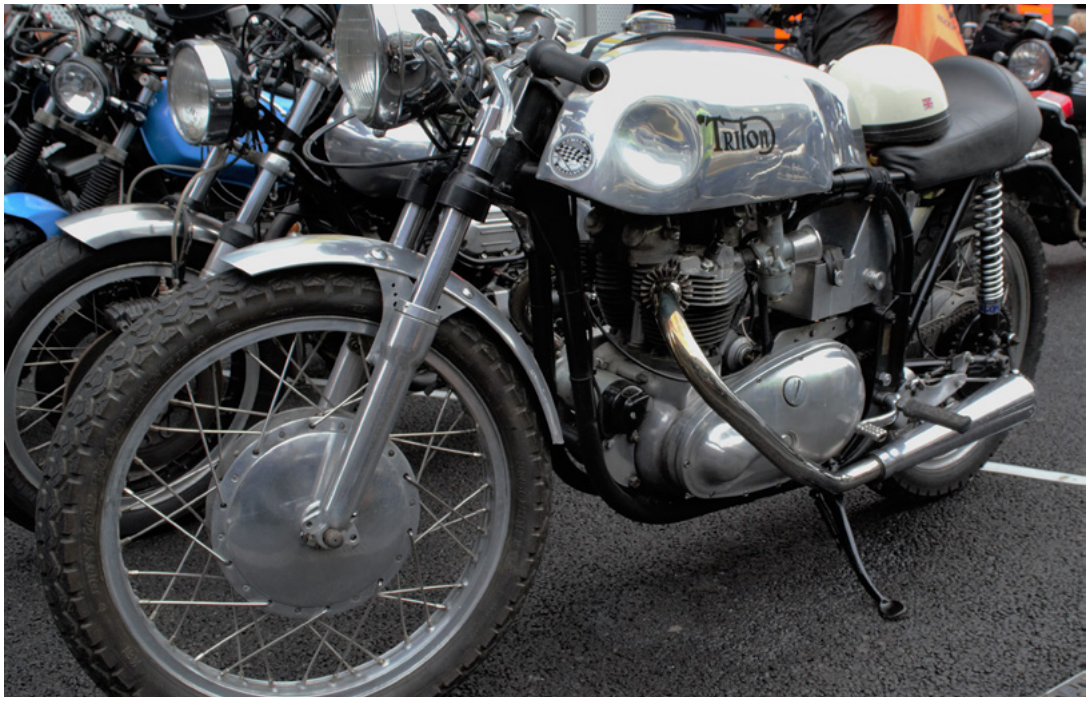
Riders and their pillions wore sharp suits, military uniforms and sometimes bizarre combinations of sartorial finery, while the ladies mostly looked like a million dollars; the combined result makes this event one of the most photographed in the motorcycling calendar. It works.

Facial hair (men's, mostly…) was trimmed and waxed, shoes were polished and chrome buffed up, with the bikes of choice being (and I quote) 'Cafe Racers, Bobbers, Classics, Trackers, Scramblers, Old School Choppers, Modern Classics, Sidecars, Classic Scooters and Brat Styled motorcycles.'

The Distinguished Gentleman's Ride is an annual event that traces its roots back to Sydney in 2012, when Mark Hawwa, founder of the 'Sydney Café Racers' Facebook group was inspired by actor Jon Hamm, who wore a sharp suit while riding a vintage Matchless in the TV series 'Mad Men'.

Believing that such a spectacle would go a long way towards improving the image of men riding motorcycles, Mark planned the first Distinguished Gentleman's Ride in Perth, but such is the power of social media that the number of riders wishing to join in quickly swelled to more than 2,500 in 64 cities around the globe.

The burgeoning popularity of the DGR led to Mark and his fellow ride organisers deciding to use the publicity it generated to raise money for a worthy cause, The Prostate Cancer Foundation.



After the final count for the 2015 ride, the DGR has raised more than $4m worldwide for local prostate cancer charities since its inception. That's quite an achievement for a load of people riding about on bikes wearing inappropriate gear.

The organisation continues to grow, and regularly evolves.

After tragically losing a DGR ride host to depression, the proceeds from the 2016 DGR will assist with the funding of suicide prevention programmes in addition to prostate cancer research, thanks to the help of a new official charity partner – The Movember Foundation – along with the support of title sponsors Triumph Motorcycles and Zenith Watches.

But that's not all that was different this year; the London ride in 2014 and 2015 started from the Borough Market area before crossing the Thames at Tower Bridge, passing along the Victoria Embankment (that's the northern bank of the river) as far as Albert Bridge, where it headed back over the water and returned to base along the Albert Embankment.

For 2016 the Capital's ride started at 'Here East' in the Olympic Park near Stratford, a modern venue that easily swallowed up the estimated 1,200 machines taking part, allowing the riders to mingle, get a bite to eat and grab a coffee while a brass band played contemporary classics along with more traditional rousing tunes.

Another new feature for the London ride which was less welcome was rain; a reasonably heavy shower that passed over as many were arriving in their best suits, possibly rueing the decision to ditch the mudguards on their shed builds.

I fared little better; last year I was riding the magnificent Indian Chief Vintage, which

had huge valanced fenders and a barn door of a screen, whereas this year my mount was the naked Harley-Davidson XL1200CX 'Roadster' – a sportier Sportster with lower bars, a more traditional riding position, and as luck would have it cut down mudguards (I'll be producing a full evaluation with more pics of the bike – along with my swish new Davida Jet lid – in the 'Winter 2016' issue of The Rider's Digest, which will be out in December).

I can't really complain about getting wet though, I had looked at the weather forecast, and wisely (I modestly believe) wore a lightweight rain jacket over my blazer, and opted for leather jeans, which the rain largely slid off.

Not wanting to arrive wearing waterproofs, I stopped and packed away my jacket on Waterden Road after dodging what looked like a pillion footpeg that was lying forlornly in the road.

On arrival, bikes were divided into the ones that leaked and ones that hopefully didn't, and I followed a very hot and smoky Moto Guzzi in, along with a very tasty looking blue and black BMW K75.

Founder Mark Hawwa was present, and joined in with the safety briefing before handing over to the organisers of the London event, Dutch and Vikki from The Bike Shed.

By then the rain had cleared and patches of blue sky were much in evidence, and remembering the stifling heat of a large air cooled V twin motor doing less that 20mph in first and second gear for a couple of hours, I opted to ditch my blazer and do the ride in my leather waistcoat, which with my black shirt and a silver bow tie matched the silver and black Harley very nicely, as well as my rather lovely black and silver Davida Jet helmet. If I sound like some kind of fashionista, I can assure you, nothing could be further from the truth!

A little while later, the riders set off with a thunderous roar, re-joining the A12 via a slightly tortuous route around several traffic islands before taking the Blackwall Tunnel approach and turning west along the A13 towards the City. *(continued on page 37)*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A very simplified version of the route is as follows:

A left turn along Butcher Row near Limehouse DLR station took the group along The Highway towards Tobacco Dock, which I suspect many of the participants were familiar with, being as it is the venue for The Bike Shed's annual show.

After passing the Tower of London the route stayed close to the river until Parliament Square, where the riders did an almost complete circle to travel along Whitehall towards Trafalgar Square.

Then it was Cockspur Street into Pall Mall before heading up St James's Street to join Piccadilly; we skirted the east side of Hyde Park on Park Lane before turning onto Oxford Street and left along Portman Street, which then became Gloucester Place, finally crossing the A501 (never sure if it's the Westway or Marylebone Road at that point [it's the Marylebone Road, it becomes the Westway after it crosses the Edgeware Road – Ed]) to Park Road, where we turned right to cross the finish line (another new feature) at Hanover Gate before parking up in the Outer Circle of Regents Park.

If you haven't been on one of these rides I can really recommend it, although a limit was put on the number of registered places available on the London ride, (so book early!) as London seems to be one of the most popular locations.

The atmosphere is wonderful, with everyone chatting to one another; many of the bikes are spectacular, as are the outfits the riders and pillions are wearing. There were even some hounds along for the ride, including a much photographed sausage dog – Sergeant Pepper – who looked splendid in his 'doggles'.

And most important of all, across the world another **$**3.5m has been raised so far by the participants in this year's ride, with the London total currently in excess of £155,000 from just over 1,000 registered participants, not all of whom are sponsored. I think that ought to change – just my opinion.

Despite the fact that taking part does not require the same kind of physical exertion as say, running a marathon, abseiling down a tower or doing a bungee jump, the Distinguished Gentleman's Ride seems to capture peoples' imagination, and having optimistically set a personal fundraising target of £250 the amount I raised is currently £295, thanks to the generosity of my sponsors.

It's not too late to chip in to the cause, simply visit the DGR donation page and get your wallet out. It's easy.

Finally, remembering my manners, I'd like to thank EVERYONE who sponsored a rider for the DGR, wherever they took part, your donations will mean that someone's loved ones will get to spend a lot more time with somebody special to them.

Many of our lives have been affected by cancer and mental health issues, so if parting with a few quid can change that in some small way I believe it's a small price to pay.

I'd also like to thank Jess at Harley-Davidson UK, and Sharon at Davida Helmets for their invaluable contributions that allowed me to do it in such style!

Martin Haskell

The new 'Ton-up' Suzuki GT250X

A 250 has never looked so good

The latest Suzuki 250 doesn't exactly hang about. It's top speed is around 100mph.

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Our new 250 has got a lot more going for it.

Like superb handling. (Back at the factory, Suzuki engineers have got weight distribution down to a fine art).

What else?

An all-new "Power Reed" engine.

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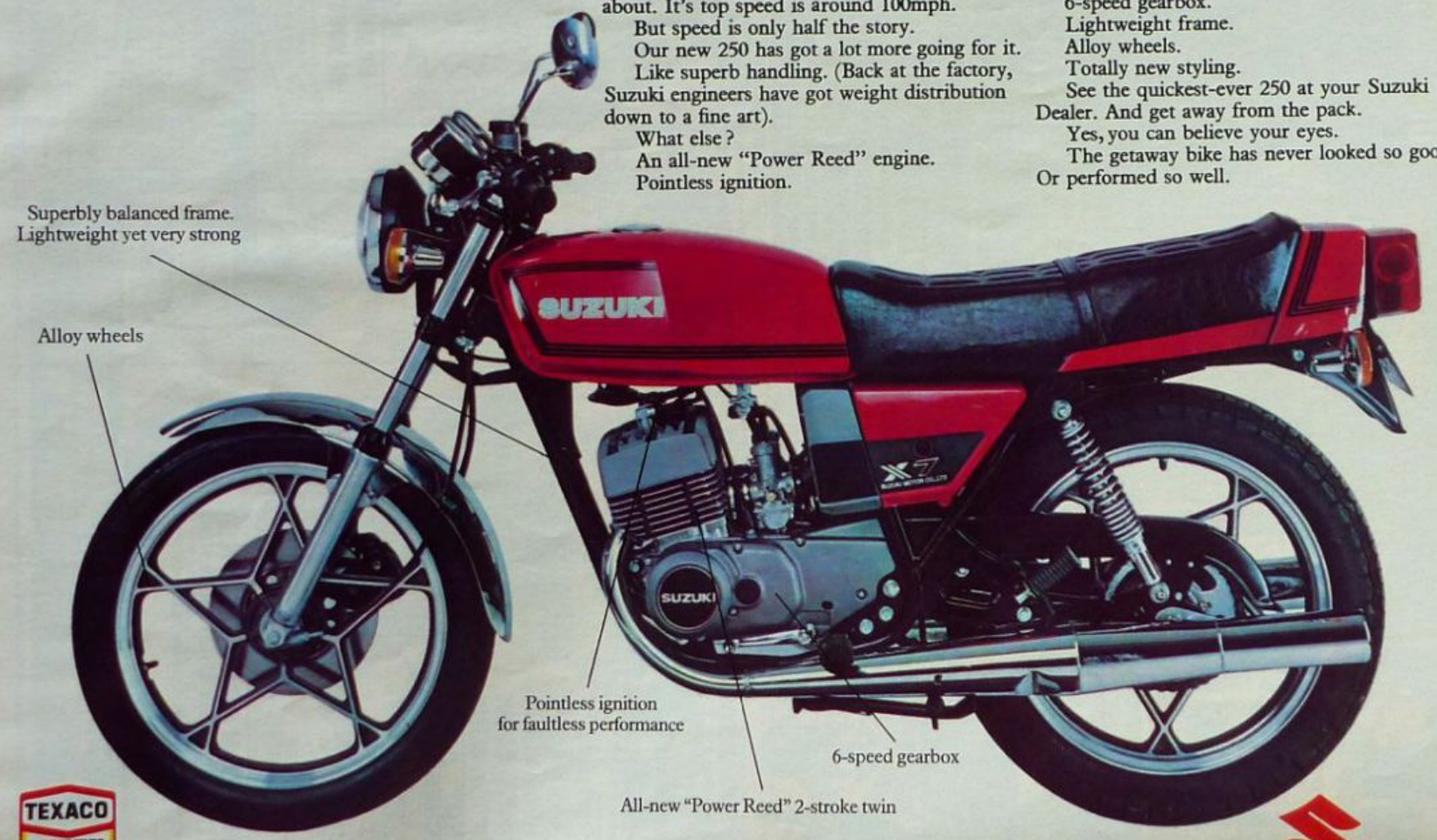
Alloy wheels.

Totally new styling.

See the quickest-ever 250 at your Suzuki Dealer. And get away from the pack.

Yes, you can believe your eyes.

The getaway bike has never looked so good. Or performed so well.



TEXACO HERON TEAM SUZUKI

HERON SUZUKI

the getaway bike

Meanwhile in Paris

Every year I hear people complaining that they feel excluded from the Distinguished Gentlemen's Ride. They'd like to go, but their bikes aren't cool enough.

The DGR is an event like a fancy dress party, or a 1980's nightclub, or the Carnival in Venice. The audience are the performers. The performers are the audience. That means all of them.

You don't go along to see a small core of interesting-looking people, surrounded by a boring mob of straights who haven't made an effort. Just no. That's a slippery slope to mediocrity. Don't go down it.

Anyway, back to boring bikes, most of us have insurance that allows us to ride other people's bikes. Surely at least one of your mates must have a bike that qualifies. You don't know someone who owns a BSA Bantam, or a manky old chop? By now? At your age? Something wrong with you.

So why did I do Paris rather than London?

I've done the London DGR 3 times, and I was looking for a change. Paris is not far away, a day's blat, airbnb gets us a city centre apartment for a couple of days, and bikes can be parked on the street. Also je suis Charlie. Show solidarity with the Parisians by buying their coffee at eight euros a pop.

When we first planned it, we had 3 bikes on the run. Me on whatever, Carla on her Ducati Scrambler, Julia on her Kawasaki Vulcan.

We lined up a few other things for the weekend. Carla spotted an exhibition of opera costumes at the Garnier, so we were on for that; and then I noticed that there was a really bonkers opera on the Sunday night: ancient Rome, luxury, perversion, sex, violence, and Franco Fagioli as a mad emperor. (Ever heard of Franco Fagioli? No. Check this link) Anyway we

got the last few tickets, cheap, at the back of a box. Had to be done.

But then the diary got a bit crowded and I was the only bike left on the run.

Carla sold her Ducati Scrambler, which would have qualified, and got a GS, which wouldn't; she could still have taken her 888 but then she got really busy, and had to ride her GS to business meetings in Maastricht, Gateshead and Belfast, in the wrong order. Maastricht – Paris – Gateshead – Belfast would have worked, Maastricht – Gateshead – Paris – Belfast was a bit much. So the poor girl had to drop out.

Julia was planning to come on her Kawasaki Vulcan, which also would have qualified for the run, but then she got really busy too, and she was stuck with a business meeting at noon on Monday in Canary Wharf. Did I say the opera was Sunday night? The only option was an early Eurostar on Monday morning. So she couldn't bring the bike after all. So that left two takers for the opera, and only one rider – me – for the DGR.

Having banged on about taking the right sort of bike, I was a bit of a borderline case myself because I didn't have anything suitable ready. Plan A was one of the two rigid-framed 125cc bobbers I have in the shed, but it still ain't road legal. Plan B was the Reliant-engined Voyager with hub-centre steering, but that's part dismantled looking for a clonk in the steering. Plan C, 250 MZ, blown head gasket and binding front brake. So came down to Plan D, the MZ660 Skorpion. It's a café racer of a kind, it's fifteen years old, it's rare, and it's had a lot of modding. But none of the mods have been done on style grounds, they were mainly due to things breaking. The lower fairing sections were smashed off long ago, the nose cone is rewired, the instrument panel is Halfords, the brakes are Brembo not Grimeca, the rear

shock is Hagon not Bilsten, the tail light is an LED arrangement off a Ducati Monster and the engine breathes into an external collector can. Would anyone notice? Probably only another Skorp owner. So I forgave myself, on the grounds that it's not a conventional sports bike; besides I was wearing UK plates – the only Brit there on the day. Result!

The Skorpion's a strange bike. It doesn't gather crowds, but if you hang back it always seems to have one or two bods staring at it and taking pictures. Often older people and Eastern Europeans. On the run, I was stopped on an almost deserted road, waiting for the rest to catch up, and a middle-aged lady crossed the road to speak to me. "That", she said, "is an MZ Skorpion. Good bike." Out of the blue.

I wore a hand-tailored suit by Raja Fashions of Hong Kong. (Mr Raja is online at raja-fashions.com and advertises in Private Eye. He tours the capitals of Europe booking hotel rooms where he takes your measurements, then heads back to Hong Kong to have them made up by his team of craftsmen.) The suit was accompanied by a purple two-tone shirt by Balmain of Paris, a pink tie by Red Herring, a red cashmere jumper from The Man Shop of North Cheam, and riding boots by Dubarry of Ireland. For gloves, I chose Gold Leaf nettling gloves from my local garden centre, which are water resistant and combine a 'soft touch' yellow hand with long cuffs that stop the wind from blowing up your sleeves. I had a Barbour 'Trapper Jacket' of great age for bad weather, and when I wasn't wearing my Shuberth I kept the sun off with a brown crushable felt hat bought from a street market in Normandy. And finally, in compliance with French law, I carried a sleeveless day-glo yellow overjacket, but there was no soddin' way I was wearing that.

The other gents were a bit of a mixed bag, I'm afraid. As you might expect, there were some impressive beards and moustaches, and a plenty of bowties and waistcoats. The sunglasses were well chosen. Plus-fours are always a good option on a motorcycle, with long socks and brown shoes of course, as you can tell from advertising illustrations from the 1930s. I spotted a lady in jodhpurs, which also works well. One chap had a rather violent red checked outfit, which I though was over the top, as if he had Googled 'Gentleman' and came up with 'Max Miller', not the same thing at all.

However, people seemed to lose inspiration below the waist. Too many started out with a good jacket, tie, shirt, waistcoat, and then ended with skinny jeans below that. It's an elegant look, I know, works well for daily wear in the streets, but I think on a special occasion people really should have tried harder.

It seems to me that Harley riders, in particular, don't read the brief. Some of them were clearly wearing the same jeans and jacket that they always wear at any other bike event. OK, you're proud of your Hardly, we know you've got one, because you're sitting on it. Also you've bought an expensive brown leather jacket with HARLEY DAVIDSON on the back, so that whenever you walk away from your bike, you are still wearing your jacket that says I Am The Man Who Owns A Harley. Just in case we forget. Well I'm going to tell you, after the event, that you don't have to wear your Harley jacket all the time. I'm going to give you a big hug and tell you that we respect you just for yourself. Possibly.

Footwear was either very good, or 'what were you thinking'? Lots of elegant high-ankled pointy lace-up boots that the French do so well. But then – Converse All Stars? Are


DUCATI


FJ51
MVA
GB
AC -
576 -CP


BARON
BMW

we skateboarding today, sir? Lowest of all, gym shoes worn without socks. I think I took a photograph.

But at least there was no day-glo. Absolutely none.

As with the whole DGR phenomenon, I'm astounded that the various elements of the new custom look should have spread so fast around the world, given that it's hardly well covered in custom bike mags who are still stuck in the past. The answer of course is t'internet. From Boston to Barcelona people can go onto the Bike Shed website and imitate the bikes they see there. So they don't need a magazine.

A good example of that is 'let's turn a CX500 into a cafe racer'. One bloke in London did that in about 2013, and even at the time people commented on what an unlikely choice it was. Well there were at least two CX500 cafe racers in Paris, perhaps three, unless I saw the same one twice.

Another trend that seemed unlikely when it first started is the stripped-down airhead boxer. Once upon a time, in about 2012, there was a firm called Untitled who were making these out of a railway arch in Camden, and they made about four a year. Then Kevils Speed Shop in Paignton was turning them out at about one a month, probably a lot faster now. Now they're everywhere. There were at least six there, including one group who ride together, I saw them crossing town on Monday morning. I had the pleasure of riding behind one in the rain. No front mudguard or back mudguard, he had a solid line of wet running straight up his back and another running up the front. That man suffered for Art.

A third trend, is taking a big-bastard engine and wrapping a minimal frame around it. It's a good use for an old K100 BMW. A couple of London people have done it, such as 2 Wheels

Miklos. So as expected I saw a couple of K100s that have had a grinder taken to them. The logical extension would be to attack a Triumph Rocket III the same way. There was one. It was halfway there but the owner hadn't got the idea of taking stuff off, rather than adding twiddly bits.

Three things that I see in England but didn't spot in Paris: 1) rigid framed pre-'75 Triumphs – perhaps they don't have the stock; 2) stripped down old Enfields – perhaps they're just too oily; 3) and this was a surprise – hardly anyone was messing with tiny bikes, putting surfboards on 125s, bicycle wheels on Bantams, doing daft things with Honda 90s. There are plenty of bikes this size in France, but perhaps they don't have the same silliness.

Apart from that, all the same detail trends were present: no mudguards, check; cut-off rear frames, check; hand-made brown saddles, check. Low handlebars but standard footrest positions. Forks so short there's almost no travel. Horrible square Firestone tyres, and fat ones on the front (one chap took the biscuit on the fat front tyre thing; he had a Van Van with the usual fat back tyre, and then on the front, he had another fat Van Van back tyre – I hope it was a one-off).

One trend I spotted is a complete lack of instruments. Several bikes had no clocks at all. Perhaps they were riding with no instruments, which may or may not be legal, or perhaps when they get on, they clip a phone to the bike somewhere, and there's an app that gives you a speedo display.

I used to believe that having a custom bike was all about building it yourself, or at least getting someone in a railway arch to build it for you. If you just walked into a dealer and bought a 'factory custom' like any other bike, that was just fake, and I used to get grumpy about it.

On previous DGR events about half the Harleys there were proper hand-built bikes, but the other half were straight off the showroom floor, and I thought that was just wrong. A 'custom scene' should always be separate from the 'showroom scene'. If they were excluding a broad swathe of new Japanese bikes, basically because they're bought, not owner-designed, how come they were allowing in scores of Harleys? After all the owner has acquired the bike in exactly the same way – by walking into the shop – only difference is, it says Harley on the tank.

I was even more uncomfortable with Ducatis. How come if you own a recently built red v-twin sports bike, and it says Ducati on it, you're welcome, but if it says Suzuki, you're not?

But now I've decided I was just being a snob. If people want to buy a 'factory custom' they might as well. I was just overwhelmed by the flood of new Triumphs at Paris.

More than half the new bikes there were Triumphs, and more than half of those were Triumph Thruxtons, so many that I stopped counting. I bet when Triumph allowed people to build a few limited edition Ace Cafe specials, they thought they'd sell about 25. But the Thruxton is clearly an export success. We Brits don't get many of those, do we. So my heart swelled with patriotic pride.

One odd thing about yer French, they might not always like us, but they seem to be suckers for British imagery. Go shopping in eLeclerc, and you'll be surprised by all the tea towels, cushions, mugs and clocks with Union Jack and Carnaby Street motifs.

So when a French chap buys a Triumph, he can't resist sewing a little Union Flag on his jacket, and putting Ace Cafe and 59 Club stickers on his bike. I'm all in favour of that. I was there! I was in the 59! I was just a yob then, I never imagined our logo would go round the world.

So anyway, Triumph have totally nailed the 'off the shelf cafe racer' look, and sold shedloads of bikes, and I'm not complaining.

I will now stop whingeing about Harley and the 'factory custom' thing, and be impressed instead. They were only just outnumbered by the new Triumphs, and they've been doing it for longer.

To my surprise, there were almost no new Ducatis in sight. This is very different to London. Just one Ducati Scrambler turned up.

So third place in the new-bike count, after Triumph and Harley, was taken by - Enfield! I don't think I saw a Continental GT, but there were several bouncy-saddle Enfields, all electric start. I think they're reaching out to the ladies' market, but more of that later.

Fourth place was taken by new Urals with sidecars, but we're into single figures now. Some bright spark had come up with the idea of Paris tours with you in the sidecar, and two of them came along.

Another interesting thing. There's just one Japanese 'factory custom' bike on the scene: the Kawasaki W800 – and they've just discontinued it. Where are the rest? Even though the brat bike scene – modding and hard tailing middleweight singles – actually started in Japan. Something wrong there. Complacency, probably.

A couple of girls in their twenties were having fun in the Chateau grounds on a couple of smoky, noisy little French bikes from the late '40's, which looked like Terrots. They were looning about riding them in circles around the field. Closest thing to teenage behaviour all day. Good for them. Several other well-dressed ladies turned up on their own bikes, and a lot of those were Enfields. When I went to the Continental GT launch in 2013, along with Paul Blezard, Enfield had invited a couple of stylish lady Enfield owners, not as promotions girls (perish the thought) but because owning an Enfield was part of their image as fashion people or artists. Good move. Enfields are lighter than the other retros, the electric start works and no-one is going to challenge you to a street race. Nobody else seems to be reaching out to cool female riders in the same way, so they've got the field to themselves. I have no idea why Harley don't punt their 750 sportsters at the female market and give Enfield some competition. Perhaps they're afraid of denting the masculine self-image of male Sportster owners. It's fragile enough as it is.

Unlike the London ride, the Parisian one didn't go round the landmarks, which was a pity. We started in a forest park on the edge of town, then went further out for an hour. A bit like starting off in Bromley then ending up in the middle of Kent.

First problem was getting to it, as the logical route was cut off by some sort of sports event that ran along the banks of the Seine and blocked all the roads. My satnav got stupid like they do and kept sending me back to the same route only to find it blocked again. I went all round the suburbs.

By the time I found the place I was half an hour behind schedule and fearing I was going to miss the off. Not a problem, no-one moved for at least another half hour.

It was a great place, in a park by a lake. I wandered around looking at bikes. And then all of a sudden people started their engines and the run was on.

This sort of spontaneous mob start was very un-English. The event was also un-English

at the other end where we just arrived and parked. There was a route on the website to print out. But no announcement, no ten minute warning, no signs, no speeches, no briefing session, no-one with a tannoy, no-one wearing an official armband, no coned-off areas, no speeches at the end, no announcement of funds raised etc. Anarchy!

The basic principle was to follow the crowd. Didn't always work. At one point on the route there were two linked roundabouts half a mile apart, and we had to go onto the first one, go up to the second, go all the way round it and back the other side of the road, to get the right exit off the first roundabout. But as we got to the second roundabout we saw a crowd of motorcyclists just entering it and heading up the other way. Naturally we fell in behind them. After a bit we realised that they had been behind us, and we were effectively a snake chasing its own tail. We went round the two roundabouts twice while making various French gestures, until someone had the courage to decide on an exit, and took off, so we all followed them.

At least three times I was waiting to cross a junction, when a whole load of motorcyclists crossed it from right to left, and we realised that they were part of our run, coming in from a different direction, and we had to decide whether to carry straight on as we intended, or turn left and follow them. On the whole we followed whoever it was.

About halfway though, a couple of people took off through an industrial estate. They'd turned off the route because they needed fuel but everyone who saw them followed suit until the whole petrol station was full of riders while just one or two were filling up.

It started to spit with rain at that point so I got waterproofed up. Good thing because it started to chuck it down a mile or so later, and I was dry. Most other people carried on riding through the rain because if they had stopped to change they would have been left behind and lost. A lot were soaked, especially those without mudguards.

After a bit I was in with a fast-moving group who seemed to know the way. Suddenly they all shot off down a side turning on the right. I was surprised that no-one sat at the junction to mark the turning, because that's how the Brits would have done it and I knew there was a slower group with sidecars in, two or three minutes behind. So I stopped at the junction and marked it myself. Then when the other group arrived and started indicating the turn, I took off. It was a bendy road and that's what Skorps are made for, I hared down it and soon caught the fast group. Then they did it again – took an unexpected turn off a four-way. So I marked the route again until the other lot arrived. Then I got sick of taking responsibility and followed the rest.

On a zigzag section, downhill through the woods, the guy just in front of me on a Sportster overdid the back brake and went sideways, then recovered it, but by the time he straightened up he was well on the wrong side of the road. He was clearly all shook up so I gave him a big thumbs-up in the mirror to help him get his mojo back.

At the end of the run, after we parked, he came and found me. You have to imagine this conversation in French:

Him: "You were the bloke behind me. Did you see that?" Me: "Yep. I am your witness. You overdid the back brake and nearly lost it. You were well on the wrong side." Him: "I can't believe that happened. It seemed like a dream." Me: It wasn't a dream. It really happened. I was there and saw it. But never mind, you got it back."

The chateau at the end of the run was nice but not spectacular, like a big farm. We passed some other fine buildings on the way though and it was a great run. You don't need to get far out of Paris for it to get deeply rural. They had a Triumph exhibition, a couple of food stands and a chance to have a go on a Segway or put your kids on a pony.

The food was OK but not as good as London. Although they know how many were coming, the food wagon people hadn't allowed for the numbers, so the queues were long. They ran out of gourmet paté burgers and had to tell the tail end of the queue to go away. There was an elegant coffee station mounted on a sidecar, but the process was slow and it seemed to serve about one coffee every two minutes. In fact the queue hardly moved at all. Bit of a flaw in that business model. I gave up in the end. But I was happy wandering round the bikes.

On the run home, at a steady 80-85mph, things got a bit weird. I think the vibes were killing the left hand switch cluster. First the horn switch packed up, and suddenly I was dumb. But I rode on. Then the main beam light started flickering on, the dipswitch decided that two beams were better than one, but I rode on. I have my phone mounted as a satnav, and it plays music into my helmet via bluetooth, but it started doing that iPhone thing of working too hard and losing power faster than it goes in. After a bit it went black. I had to pull into an Aire to recharge it.

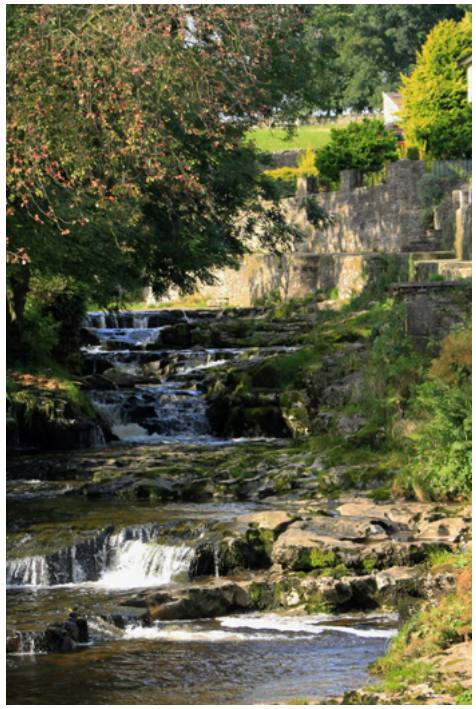
I decided to keep the music and forget the satnav, which was a mistake. On the outskirts of Calais, the roads to the tunnel terminal and the ferry port go in different directions. I missed the tunnel turn-off sign and found myself heading for the port instead, cursing. There's nowhere to turn around, just several

kilometres of tall fencing with barbed wire on the top. I considered stopping to reset the satnav, but you don't want to use a police parking area when it's occupied by a transit van with CRS on the side, so I had to go right to the end and pull in to the terminal car park. At least I could use their wi-fi to reload the route. But even there you can't just pull up, I needed to go through a barrier and take a ticket. The first two hours are free. Five minutes later I was ready to go again, but the exit barrier rejected my ticket. Perhaps five minutes was too short a time. In the end I left the stupid ticket in the machine and jumped the kerb, recorded by several CCTVs. I blame the system, it made me a criminal.

And how was the opera? The good news was the surtitles – the words displayed above the stage – were in both French and English, so it didn't matter that they were singing in Italian. The bad news was that in the cheap seats, you can't see the titles unless you bend double and lean across the people in front of me. So we have a shaven-headed man in golden robes, singing in a high voice, playing a psycho murderer and rapist, and he's singing "my problem is that I fall in love too easily". An orgy, with elegant nude bits, is broken up by a Dishonoured Maiden wearing a shroud and an attempt to poison people at a banquet is broken up by a flock of giant owls. As the Frenchman said, "Did I dream that? It seemed unreal". And I say "No it really happened, I was there".

Andy Tribble

Over Hills and Dales



The plan for this ride was to explore the Yorkshire Dales over a few days and as he was free, my son Daniel joined me on the trip. We'd booked a hotel in Hawes for a couple of nights from the 11th September, which coincided with the Hawes Sheep Sales so getting to sleep wouldn't be a problem.

Leaving Leeds on Sunday morning, we rode to Farnley on the B6451, weaving our way into Nidderdale, over the bridge crossing Lindley Wood Reservoir and then followed the road as it climbed all the way to the top of Lindley Moor where a dozen towering wind turbines waved their arms lazily in the breeze beckoning to us.

With Swinsty and Fewston reservoirs on our left, we crossed the A59 Skipton Road and the huge "Golf Balls" of RAF Menwith Hill listening station came into view on our right and passing their gates I wondered if they'd tuned into our Scala Rider comms system and were noting our progress as we rode down to Dacre, Summerbridge and on into Pateley Bridge for a coffee break.

Pateley Bridge is a small market town in Nidderdale that has the oldest sweet shop in Britain; it's also a popular stopping off point for bikers thanks to its many cafes'. Once a year the town holds a WWII commemoration and is decked out 1940's style, complete with taped shop windows, men and women dressed in the uniforms of the day and music from the era playing along the main street.

We took the B6265 out of town over the 17th Century Bridge crossing the River Nidd. We climbed all the way to the top of Greenhow Hill, which is almost 460m above sea level and passed through Nidderdale and Wharfedale before dropping down the other side to

Grassington. Parking the bikes in the National Park Centre (free for bikes) we walked down to Linton Falls where the River Wharfe first cascades over the weir then crashes over the rocks below the foot bridge before settling its pace as it flows through Wharfedale.

The B6160 took us north to Kettlewell and as we followed the River Wharf to Buckden, Pen Y Ghent rose above us to the left, with the Whernside Ridge on our right. Dry stone walls lined the road to The White Lion at Cray and then continued as it twisted and turned through Newbiggin before eventually arriving in Aysgarth.

Aysgarth is famous for its waterfalls and sits on the River Ure; it's a popular spot for tourists and was visited by artists and writers such as Turner and Wordsworth. We stopped in yet another 'free for bikes' car park and took a short walk to take in the natural spectacle. We weren't disappointed though lining up a photograph to avoid the tourists was an art form in itself.

The last ten or so miles on the A684 follows the River Ure and led us to Hawes and our hotel for the next couple of nights. The next morning we explored the town with its narrow cobbled main street, which opens out onto a main square lined with pubs and cafes. Gayle Beck runs through Hawes and there's a lovely waterfall, which takes the water under the main road and on to the River Ure further downstream.

The A684 to Sedbergh is still part of the Yorkshire Dales, although it's actually in Cumbria, and it passes through spectacular vistas, with the road weaving from left to right; sometimes it's wide enough for two lanes, while other stretches are so narrow that passing places are a necessity. Lunch was

had at the Red Lion Inn, an Olde Worlde pub complete with oak beams and hand pulled ale.

We returned via Dent, an even quieter little village of cobbled streets and ancient buildings. The road, known only as the "68" followed the River Dee as it wound its way through the countryside to Cowgill before eventually joining the B6255 and heading back to Hawes.

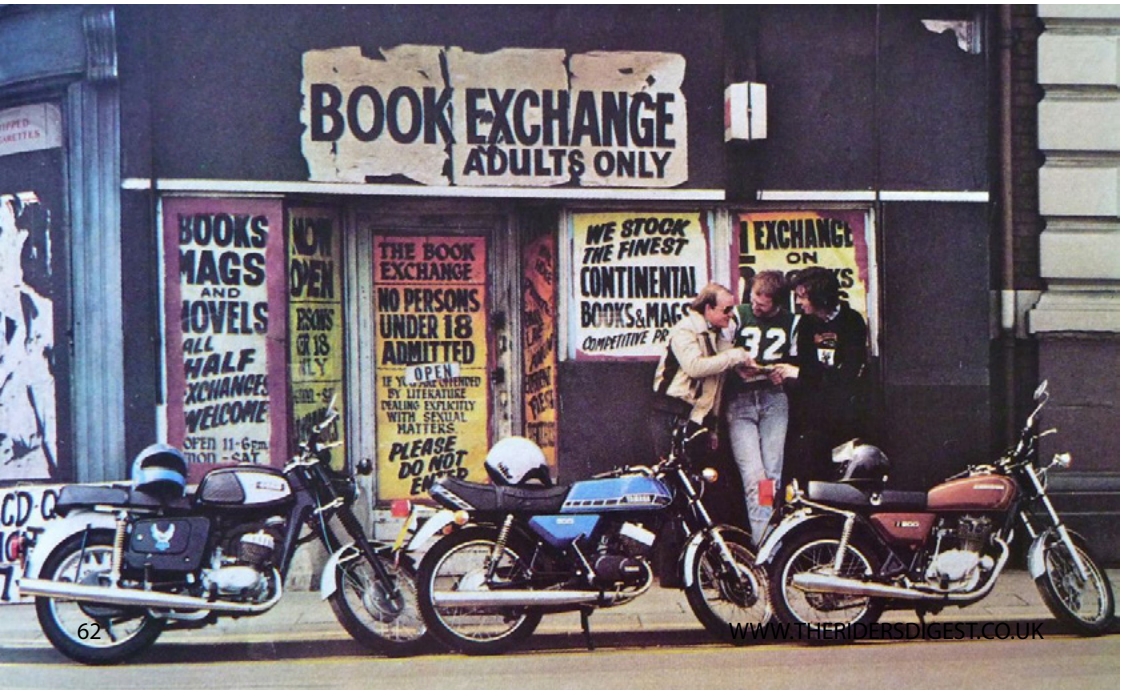
Our final day saw us riding back down the B6255 to the Ribblehead Viaduct. The road meandered along with relaxed curves and bends and minimal traffic. The Viaduct came into sight as the road opened out ahead. Standing at 32 meters high and 400 meters long this wonderful example of Victorian engineering was completed in 1874 as part of the Settle to Carlisle railroad.

After a pause to cool down with an ice-cream, we continued on to Ingleton where we stopped for lunch. Taking the A65 towards Giggleswick and Settle we left the main road for a steep uphill "track" which seemed to head out into a wilderness of narrow tarmac and wandering sheep. We followed this for five miles or so before reaching Kirkby Malham and from there on to Malham with its famous limestone Cove, an 80m rock face formed during the ice age.

By now the sky had changed, clouds thickened and threatened rain. We walked the half mile to the Cove but as we approached we heard the distinct rumble of distant thunder. Undeterred, we continued to the rock face for yet more photographs, before heading for home via Skipton.

Nick Lojik

LONDON CALLING



This is chapter four of Chris Scott's Eighties memoir, The Street Riding Years. It's the summer of '78 and he's survived his sports moped initiation as well as a misguided spell on MZs. Now aboard a gleaming new T140V but with poor exam results, it was time to get a job. What came to be know as 'the last rock 'n' roll job.'

The idea of messengering on motorcycles must be as old as affordable and reliable bikes. Since WW1 the military used motorcyclists, often women, as message or 'despatch' runners, hence despatch riders. And in the late fifties, BSA Bantams made scheduled runs between printers and London advertising agencies, but as a sameday ondemand delivery service, the job took off in the increasingly congested capitals of Europe and the US from the late sixties. In London you could probably factor in the sevenweek postal strike in early 1971, the first time post offices and mail delivery workers went on strike simultaneously, right across in the country. Using motorcycles for deliveries was seen as quicker and less expensive than taxis or minicabs.

At that time, minicabs themselves were only a decadeold alternative to the licensed black taxis. Some bright spark established that as long as the minicab driver didn't solicit trade off the street, but received work from a controller over the radio, he wasn't in contravention of some Victorian edict concerning carriages licensed for hire and reward. Once those bulky radios were adapted to bikes, the modern urban despatch rider was born. The earliest outfits included GLH, Yellow Express and Mercury Despatch whose orangeliveried Suzuki GT250s where most people's first memories of bike messengers in the capital.

Up in Kentish Town, two miles north of Oxford Circus, Capital Couriers was a new player after a bit of Mercury's action. Their strategy to achieve this was by grabbing one of the other vivid options in the colour spectrum, and then outdoing Mercury with eyecatchingly goofy bikes. The result: Honda C50 mopeds dipped in a vat of rich, placenta pink paint, then fitted with plywood boxes the sized of an oven. It was a branding exercise worthy of a child's school project.

I must have spotted Capital's advert in the back of *Motorcycle News* (*MCN*, which I read weekly). The interview process took one phone call.

'Hello, I see in *MCN* you're looking for despatch riders.'

'Yes mate, what you got?'

'What bike? Triumph Bonneville?'

'Bourneville? Wassat, a twofifty?'

'Sevenfifty. T140V.'

'Tea for TV? Sounds great. Come on up for a pager. You know where we are?'

I'd never heard of Royal College Street or Kentish Town. Was there a Royal College there? And anyway, why was Kentish Town north of the Thames and miles from the county of Kent? As I was soon to learn, the metropolis was not an intuitive city to navigate, especially for a kid whose knowledge of central London extended

to handheld visits to Madame Tussaud's and the Tower of London. In fact, it transpired that Kentish Town was vaguely in the vicinity of my pioneering moped expedition to the Sobell Sports Centre a year or two earlier: Elephant, Blackfriars, Kings Cross, north by northwest. I had made my first connection. It was to be the key in getting to know the city.

Although I was in no position to judge, Capital Couriers was your typical cowboy outfit, the latest venture of Dennis, a chubby cockney Greek entrepreneur with a thick black perm like a scorched oven scrubber. To cover his bases he maintained close connections with the massage parlour next door and had accounts with a few others in the vicinity. That's how it was in that newly liberated but prepoliticallycorrect era. Just up the road *The Falcon* pub laid on lunchtime strippers before it became a New Wave music venue. Evening time there'd frequently be a job delivering a takeaway to the blackedout 'sauna' down the road, like something out of *The Sopranos*. Presumably a bloke got peckish for a lasagna while getting a blow job.

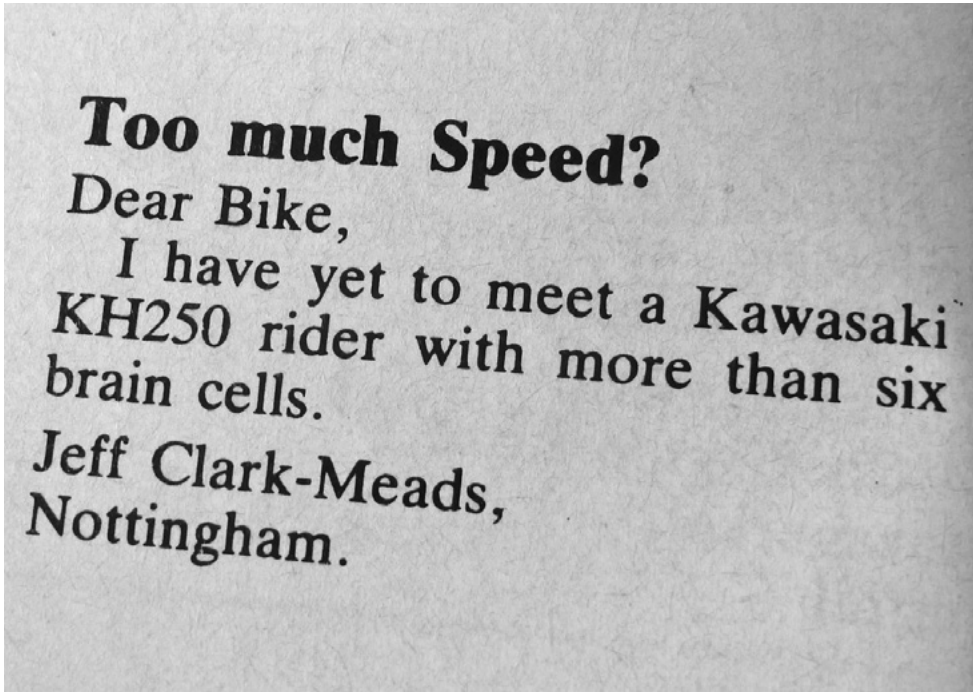
The tiny office was on the corner of Camden Road. Not the nearby Camden *Street,* not Camden *High Street* and obviously not Camden Square, Terrace, Walk, Way, Row, Passage, Mews or any of the halfdozen other Camdensomethings in the vicinity. How easy despatching must be in somewhere like Manhattan, where numbered streets go up and the dozen avenues run across town. Capital was the last in a short parade of shops below a terrace of sashwindowed flats. The last time I looked it was occupied by a charity treating substance abuse, but back then the office looked like it'd been hastily knocked up by some gluesniffing oddjobber who'd used the plywood off cuts to bang out the mopeds' loadcarrying oven crates. I parked my Triumph a safe distance from the pink mopeds. I'd never seen contraptions like them – nor would I until the pizzabike trend hit town twenty years later. Dennis was standing outside, fag and coffee in hand, proudly surveying his fleet of lurid death traps as well as his maroon Jag XJ6. Pink mopeds with giant boxes: 'Denny me ol' son, you are a fakin geeenius!'

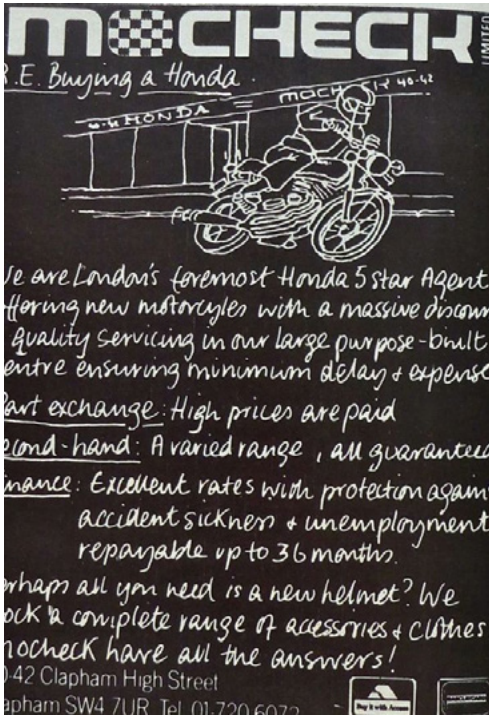
The Honda C50 mopeds could be bought from fifty quid. The paint job and boxes cost another tenner, tops. With that done, Denny signed up sixteenyearolds with a provisional licence picked up free over a post office counter. He charged the kids twenty quid a week, bleeper and fuel included. If they could ride a pushbike they could master a clutchless stepthru in a matter of hours. Just stamp on the gear lever and turn the go handle. At that rate, in just a month the mopeds would be as good as paid for, and from there on it was money in the old bank. Den was angling to upgrade to the new XJS like the one that twat Gareth drove in the *New Avengers*. It was merely a matter of time.

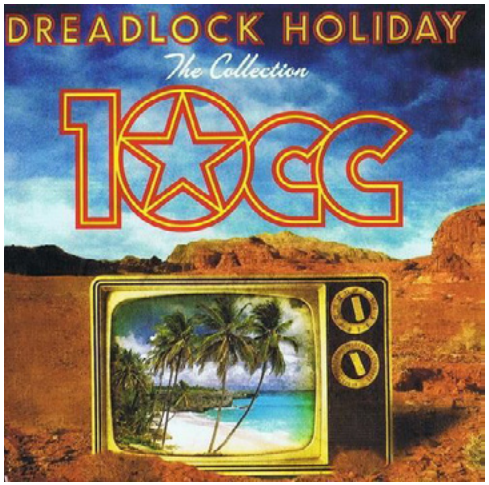
Dennis looked over to me, dropped his fag to the ground and scrunched it.

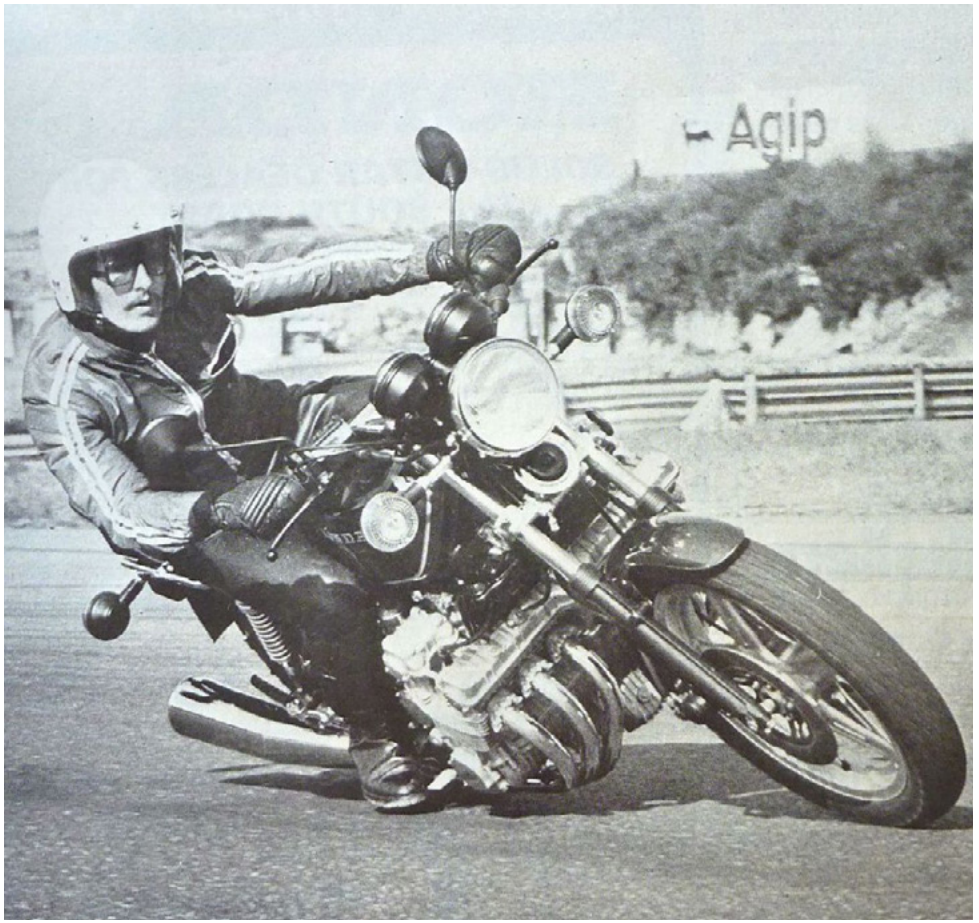
'You 'ere for a job? Pop in and see Mario. 'E'll sort you out.'

Then as now, central London was comprised of two districts that mattered to messengers: the City and the West End. The City was the site of the original Roman settlement where pottery and other relics from that era are still regularly unearthed. London had grown from there, although 'filled up' might be a better way of putting it, because by seventeenth century the capital within the old Roman walls was notoriously congested and squalid. The Great Fire of 1666 helped cure that, and as the flourishing empire's merchandise flowed









through the nearby docks, the City evolved into a trading and commercial district which became today's 'Square Mile'.

To my suburban eyes what was then known as the 'Corporation of London' had the air of a Vaticanlike enclave, concentrated in the EC2 and EC3 postal districts. In places along its convoluted boundaries, fierytongued dragons braced against the shield of St George marked the city's former gates or 'bars'. It had its own mayor and police force, as well as arcane privileges, taxes and responsibilities dating back to the reign of William the Conqueror. Less than 5000 people actually lived in the City, the majority in the recently completed Barbican estate. As English municipal districts go, only the Scilly Isles had a lower residential population, but weekdays from nine to five, the City's ancient foundations creaked as some 200,000 office workers streamed in from the suburbs.

Two miles away, the West End was more familiar to me, quartered by the grand axes of Oxford Street and Regent Street which met at Oxford Circus. North of the 'City of Westminster', established as the seat of the monarchy and parliament during the Norman era, the West End was designed to more spacious Georgian sensibilities quite different from the old City. Oxford and Regent streets informally divided the postal district of W1 was into four neighbourhoods: Marylebone at the top left; Fitzrovia top right; Soho bottom right; and exclusive Mayfair to the left, alongside Hyde Park. At that time the prevailing liberal attitudes had permitted a redlight district of discreet 'models" services as well as inyourface sex shows to fill the lanes of southern Soho, close to Piccadilly Circus and a short walk from Carnaby Street.

The City was the home of financial institutions in tall buildings, a conservative place where old boys' networks made money from money. The West End was much more lively, the creative and entertainment quarter accommodating publishers, advertising agencies, film and record companies, as well as cinemas, theatres, restaurants, clubs, hotels and shopping boulevards. Between the two the districts of Covent Garden, Bloomsbury and Holborn were de facto 'west end' as far as messengering went, and off Fleet Street and Holborn were the ancient Inns of Court, a maze of cloistered courtyards occupied by the judiciary.

From Mayfair westwards was largely wealthy and white collar, while east of the City the East End was predominantly working class. And beyond both was the Outer Zone, a ring of suburbs where people lived in houses and children played in parks.

For us, though, the bulk of the work involved bouncing around the City and the West End like the pinball in Brian Protheroe's likenamed song. Had he teamed up with W.H. Auden, they could have composed a catchy tribute to despatchers' along the lines of Auden's 'Night Mail' poem, but set to the rhythm of a 250 Super Dream with a dodgy camchain. Models' portfolios to Soho or Chelsea; affidavits to the Lincoln's Inn Field; artwork or transparencies to Covent Garden; financial reports from City to City; press releases to all the papers; VT footage to the two TV stations, shoes from Kings Road or Shoreditch studio, master tapes to pop star's pad, tissue samples from out of town lab – and any number of cheques, forgotten keys, plane tickets or wallets. If you needed it there within an hour, or just wanted to impress someone with a poste haste hand delivery, call for a leatherclad biker boy. By the mid-eighties as commerce in London thrived, we could barely

keep up. But in the late summer of 1978 my knowledge of the streets of London was based primarily on the Monopoly board game. I knew the expensive dark blues, greens and yellows: Mayfair, Piccadilly and Bond Street – were posh areas and so West End. The cheapies like Pentonville, and Whitechapel? Out east somewhere. As for South London? That was all one big suburb with little activity requiring bike couriers.

Armed with my Monopoly knowhow and a reasonable sense of direction, I took on my very first job – a delivery to Chiswick in west London, close to the river. That'll be easy: head south to the river and simply follow the north bank upstream to Chiswick. A foolproof strategy refined along the hostile banks of the Nile by the likes of Livingstone, Burton and Speke.

That may have been an efficient route had the River Thames run as straight as a Roman aqueduct, but despite being bounded by the city's aged infrastructure, like the real river it was, the Thames meanders north and south by up to two miles. Not knowing this, I connected with it at Parliament Square on the north bank, and took a right along 'the Embankment', my shorthand for the sixmile run paralleling the Thames from the Tower of London in the east to Chelsea Wharf in the west. On the way it changed the thoroughfare name at least ten times, before swinging away from the river on to the Kings Road. Kings Road! The Rolling Stones and, more recently, spikeyhaired punks. This was all getting more exciting than French campers on mopeds. But now where? West but erring south back towards the unseen river. Follow the river – it was an incontrovertible geographical truth. The Kings Road ended at Putney Bridge but bugger – there was no continuation. Over the bridge then, first major right and err north. 'Lower Richmond Road' said the AZ to which, like most males, I was loath to refer. It broke the flow of getting unlost relying on raw willpower, logical positivism and dead reckoning. Next major road north then, back to the river at all costs. A bridge! Hammersmith Bridge, an undersized Victorian suspension bridge and halleluiah, a sign for 'Chiswick'.

Some two hours after collecting what should have been a ninemile, twentyfiveminute ride along the as yet undiscovered trade route known as The Westway, I got the package signed for without a word of complaint. That came to be the everlasting paradox of messengering: clients may have been paying twenty times the cost of overnight postage, and on occasion we obliged by pulling every trick in the book to get it there fast. But most times no one gave a toss on receipt, far less offered any thanks for executing a highspeed delivery that left a trail of destruction fit for an episode of Orgi.

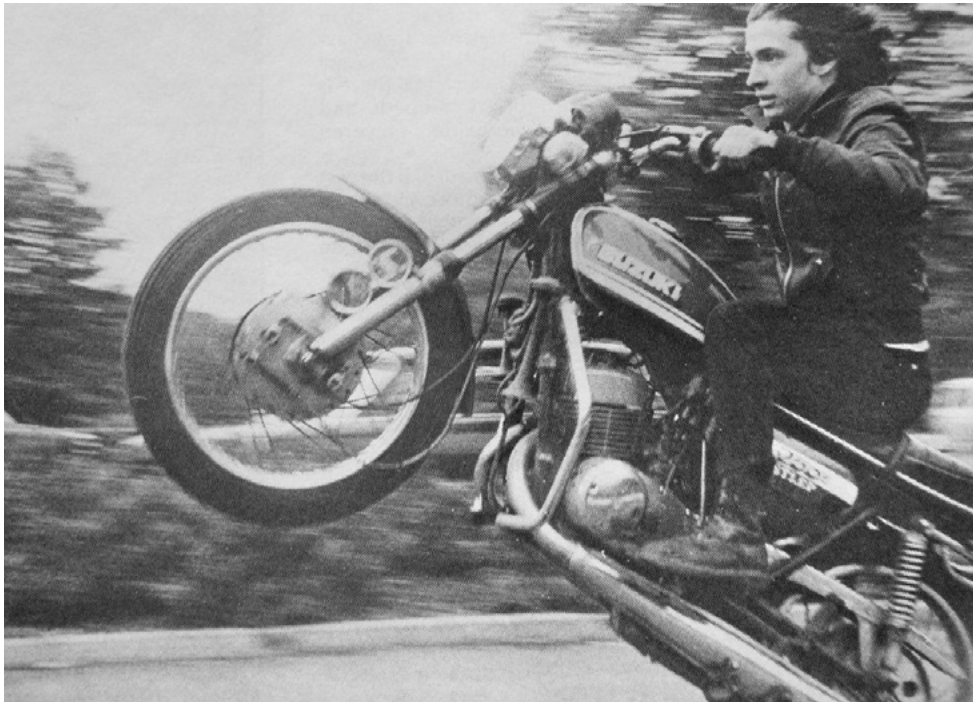
I remember one time an urgent 'waitandreturn' to Ashford in Kent, a 110mile round trip for which I got paid both ways, plus waiting time. It was good money so I belted up and down the M20 to make it better, and as I rolled back into Maiden Lane, WC2 I announced to the guy with some pride:

'Ashford and back, two hours five!'

'What a wing you are.' he said dryly as he scribbled a signature and handed me back my clipboard.

'Well fuck you, pal' I thought. I never dared make such a boast again, well not to a customer at least.

No, the real pressure to deliver promptly was not so much to please clients but to get more work and the buzz that going for it generated. It was a form of gambling: how fast and hard could I go before blowing it with



an accident, an altercation or a pull from the rozzers (police). We were paid by the job and £1.50 (about a fiver today) was the minimum fee for a W1 to W1. As long as there was the work, the quicker you rode the more you earned, and that could be multiplied by getting two or more jobs in the same direction. Just like truck haulier, running across town 'empty' set your earnings back three spaces. Every mile had to pay, even the ride to and from work.

The best way to achieve all this was to keep in touch with base – never let them forget about you. Handheld twoway VHF radios had been around for years but required expensive hardware and licensing. Being a flybynight outfit, Capital Couriers supplied us with the cutting edge alternative of the time: pagers or 'bleepers', the mobile phones of the day. By some electronic miracle devised by Motorola, Mario could ring my pager's unique number and seconds later it would bleep on my shoulder – a signal to call base now. Hopefully I heard it and soon learned to hoard 2p coins and memorise the locations of payphones around town.

The first few days continued in a litany of agonised blunderings with regular reference to the soon to be despised *A-Z*. But gradually the key traffic arteries began to take form and join up. Even if it did follow the meandering river, the Embankment was still a quick way from Westminster to the City; Park Lane was rated at 40mph so pushed to fifty was a fast way of skirting Mayfair. You could also snatch a quick burn up in the underpass linking Piccadilly to Knightsbridge. Nailing that underpass eastbound was a bit of a gamble though. At any time of day a tailback could backup off Piccadilly into the chicaned tunnel. Come round the exit lefthander too fast and you'd ram the back of some limo and find yourself sailing over car roofs, as happened to one overexuberant guy at Capital. Meanwhile, in the congested City with its medieval street plan, there were no topgear runways, excepting the brief thrill of London Wall.

If you had any distance to cover you wanted to get on to one of these axes, and chief among them was the Euston Road. Ask any London despatcher now or then and they'll confess to a lovehate relationship with the Euston Road and its western extension, the Marylebone Road. In a city centre where most of the flow was east to west, this thoroughfare verged on an urban freeway. Not only that but the underpass below Euston Tower had no unsporting bends, so when the rare chance presented itself you could belt through it at a fair lick. A canny or sufficiently hypedup rider rarely got stuck on the Euston Road. Three lanes and the median railing also discouraged jaywalking pedestrians which made speeding safer, and those lanes also offered the harried courier a choice of two channels between the slow moving traffic.

With a slim bike and a confident attitude you could slip by up to 20mph faster than the cars either side before you started taking huge risks. And whether they did it for a summer or a decade, this nervewracking practice of 'lane splitting' through moving traffic is I suspect what's burned deepest into most despatch riders' collective psyche. It was a live version of the yet to be invented video game in *Tron* (a 1982 scifi movie), but with nursemeeting consequences.

Best of all, the usually reliable Euston Road was a quick way west out of town, and what a relief it was to do that once in a while. At Marylebone it rose up over the Edgware Road on to a flyover that whisked you over Paddington and Notting Hill's Portobello

Market, with nifty exits down to Shepherd's Bush for Hammersmith and the M4 to Heathrow, and then Wood Lane for the BBC TV Centre. Soon after that the elevated racetrack came back down at East Acton where the stillbrisk A40 Western Avenue ran on to Oxford and beyond.

This flyover was the Westway. Completed in 1970, it was actually less than three miles long, but if necessary could be covered safely in as many minutes. It was the only motorway in town and after hours of stopstart pushing and shoving through the West End's gridlock, it gave you a chance to purge the cylinders. And it wasn't only despatchers who thought so. A year before I became aware of this westbound runway, The Clash had sung about tearing along the flyover after dark on their original *The Clash* album. And a year later Chris Petit's road movie *Radio On* featured the Westway too. If only London's planners had kept at it and cleared a Northway, Eastway and Southway, the capital could have been a contender for courier's City of the Year.

At Capital I bonded with the only other rider running a big bike, Nick on a CB750K6, a too close descendant of the revolutionary 1969 superbike which led to the current megabike frenzy. Nick and I soon engaged in an amiable 'Brit shit/Jap crap' banter.

'Bland.'

'Unreliable.'

'Over complicated.'

'Crude.'

'Sewing machine.'

'Pneumatic drill.'

This sparring ran for days at a time, but always with a twinkle of affability. Of course I was only partly joking. His gargantuan, fourpipe CB was far from what I aspired to in a big bike. In that category even Suzuki's cackling GT750 triple had more going for it. No, at that time I was fully enamoured with my Bonneville, and I wasn't the only one. With the inaugural Chiswick debacle still only days old, one morning I bounded up the stairs of a red brick Edwardian block off Oxford Circus. A pretty receptionist was just tidying up some photocopies rolling off the machine behind her.

'Ooh, are you the bike? Won't be a minute.' she said with a smile, glancing over her shoulder at the skinny bloke manning the Xerox.

'Are you new? I haven't seen you before.'

She had an optimal blend of nice hair, posh accent and comely figure to produce a pleasing, kneeweakening effect.

'Yes, last week. I just started,' I spluttered.

'Ooh. What sort of motorbike do you ride?'

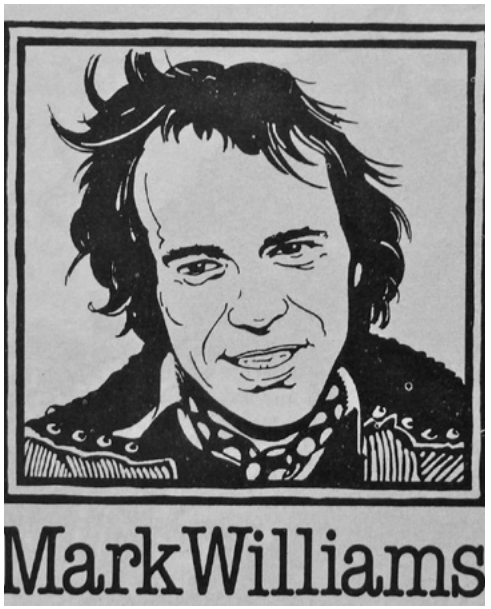
'Triumph Bonneville. Sevenfifty,' I added.

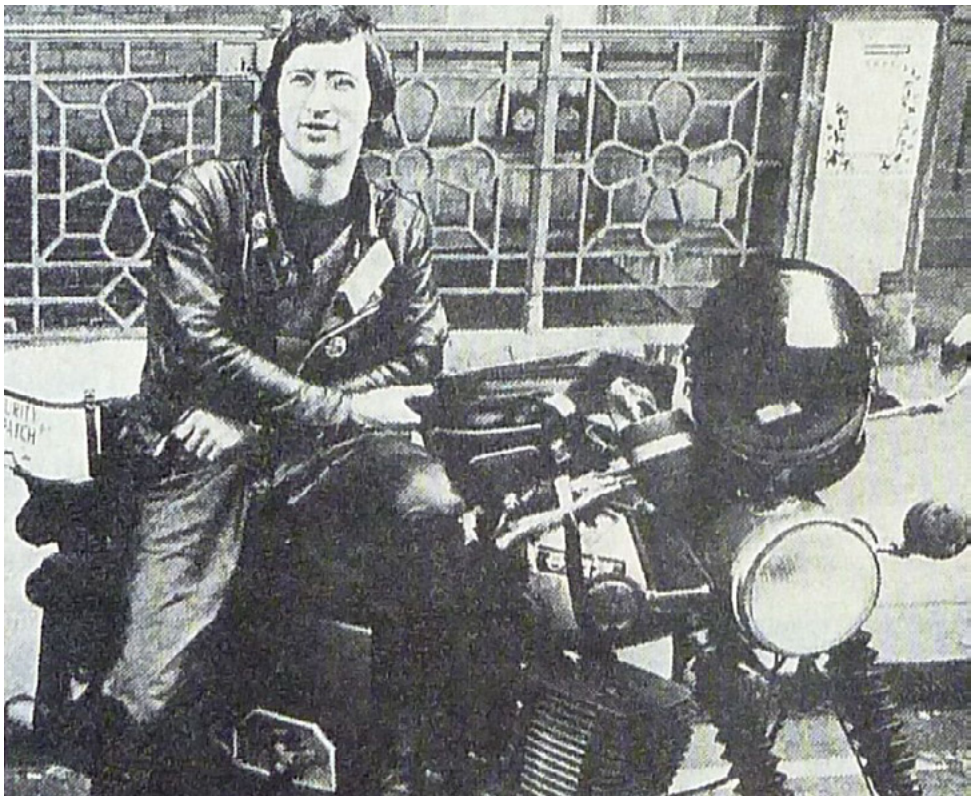
'Oh,' she replied with a light gasp, which I unhesitatingly interpreted as dazzled admiration. I reached out for something on which to steady myself, but then Xerox bloke chucked some documents in front of her in a huff and broke the spell.

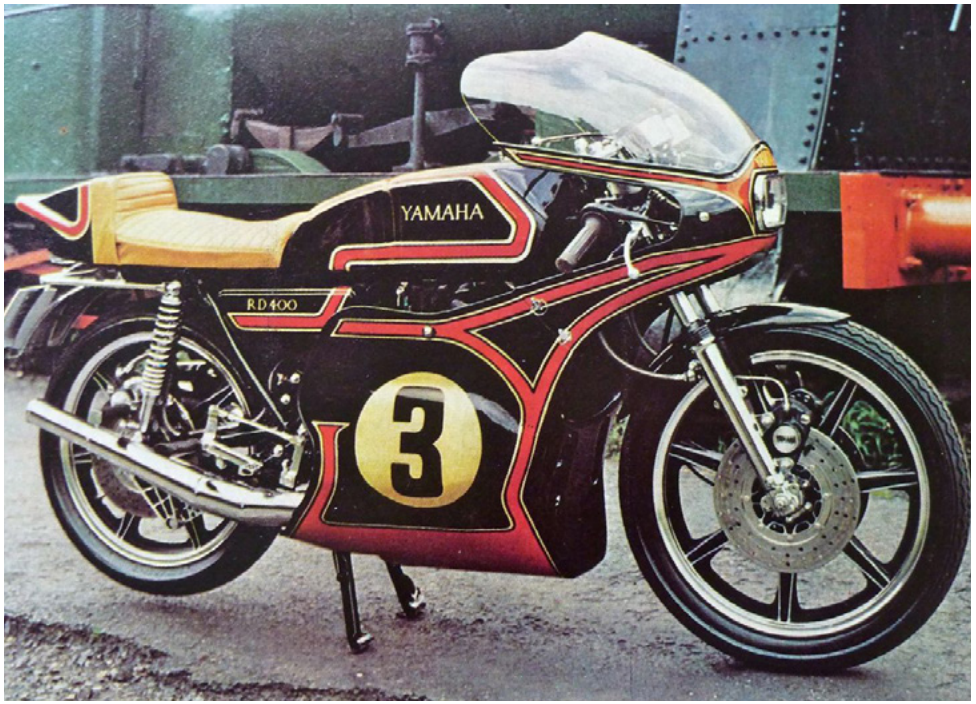
'Ah, here we are, thank you *Jeffrey,*' pronouncing his name with a bite. With a final shuffle, the documents were slipped into an addressed envelope which she handed to me with another smile.

'There. Don't ride too fast now. See you soon!'

I relived that early encounter for hours if not days. Had I just had a nearmiss in the rain and she been an equally attractive but stuckup bag asking me patronisingly not to drip on their carpet, I'd have probably lost interest in despatching and been dishwashing in Bristol by Christmas. Sadly I was never to collect from John Princes Street again, but my faith







in this latest example of the Triumph's magical charisma was enshrined.

Another time, as I was leafing through my *A-Z* in Westbourne Grove, an Australian tourist asked to take a picture of the bike.

'What, with me on it?'

'You bet. My son back in Melbourne will love it. He's always wanted a real motorbike.'

And in Victoria Street on another day I came trotting back to my bike to see a pinstripey old chap stooped over the Bonneville.

'Oh do excuse me. I was just admiring your superb motor cycle. Does it really do a hundredandsixtymilesperhour?' The way he asked conjured up a guy who was beginning to see reminders of all the things he could have done.

'Oh I don't think so. That's just the speedo.' Though there was a high chance that at fullchat the jumpy Smith's instrument might well flicker wildly anywhere between onesixty and zero while actually doing eighty.

Nonbiking civilians who didn't know a pushrod from Rod Stewart responded to the Bonnie in a way no other bike of mine ever inspired, whether flash or trash. I put it down to a warm nostalgia for British engineering at its gentlemanly apogee ten or twenty years earlier: sporty, but never aggressive or ostentatious. British sports cars from the same era probably evoke similarly fond reactions. And it wasn't just a patriotic thing. In the sixties, threequarters of new Triumphs were sold in North America where they loved Brit Iron too. The Bonneville was of course named after the salt flats in Utah where from the midfifties onwards, landspeed records were set by American daredevils on Triumphs.

Nick was of that generation, a white African born in Kenya which I suspected he'd left under murky circumstances. Or maybe he was just a public school casualty and generalpurpose misfit – there would be plenty of those in the game. While professing to be well brought up, Nick had a dark edge that was at times a little scary. My mum spotted it straight away the one time he came round. Occasionally he'd expel misogynistic or racist rants, or pull off episodes of crazy riding. But he was also supportive when my Brit shitheap needed some TLC.

With more experience and a decade my senior, he was my guide into the world of motorcycle despatching. We'd hang out after work and talk bikes. He had a lockup nearby where a mate kept a gorgeous burgundy T160 Trident that was 'resting'. I'd never really fancied the triples. It seemed the Brits were overreaching themselves with that extra pot, at least without a few more decades of development.

Nick also introduced me to the exotic Levantine delicacy known as the doner kebab, the fast food fad that had recently followed croissants from the Continent. The hideous rotating stump of raw, compressed animal matter appeared oddly appetising when you'd subsisted on crisps and Nutty Bars all day. One chilly night on Chalk Farm Road Nick instructed an oilsplattered vendor to wipe himself down and shave me a freshly grilled morsel with his huge knife.

'Try that,' he said. 'It's delicious.'

At that age and that time of night, my taste buds weren't as fussy as my eyes, and once some crispy salad, a spoonful of hummus and 'chili sos?' had been ladled on, it went down well enough. With enough salt and grease to tan a herd'sworth of buffalo hides, it took a few years for me to come to my senses and revert to my original misgivings.

Like a lot of young riders getting to grips with despatching, or perhaps just adulthood,

I became enamoured with my newfound selfimportance and the perceived urgency of my errands. Soon I was riding around like an arrogant twat, slashing across lanes, kicking back at cars that cut me up and scaring pedestrians unnecessarily. Necessary intimidation was entirely legitimate, as I had to explain to a traumatised plain clothes cop once. But it didn't take long before I got a taste of my own medicine. One day I turned north off Shaftesbury into Great Windmill Street, former site of a fifteenthcentury windmill but at that time the hub of Paul Raymond's softporn empire. The narrow lane was clogged with stationary traffic that showed no signs of moving, so with little hesitation I rode up on to the equally narrow pavement. Just as I passed a doorway a bloke strode out, zipping up his flies with the satisfied mien of one who'd just had a twentyquid bunkup. I grazed matey's girth, chirped an 'Oops, sorry mate' and dropped back on to the road behind a van. Striding up behind me unseen, bunkup man belted the back of my helmet with a thwack. 'Yew FAKIN' CANT!' he yelled and strode off up the road, justice served and most annoyingly of all, getting to Brewer Street quicker than me. I was suitably shamed and made a vow to in future always give way to pedestrians when riding on the pavement.

Sometimes though, the rules just had to be broken. One evening at the Colindale Blood Bank I was handed a padded vinyl case with 'Urgent – Human Tissue' emblazoned in red across the top.

'How long will it take to get there?' asked the receptionist.

'Er… Children's Hospital, Great Ormond Street? About 2025 minutes?' I replied, quickly juggling what might be possible with what she wanted to hear.

'Oh,' she said with a frown. 'Well, please be as quick as you can.'

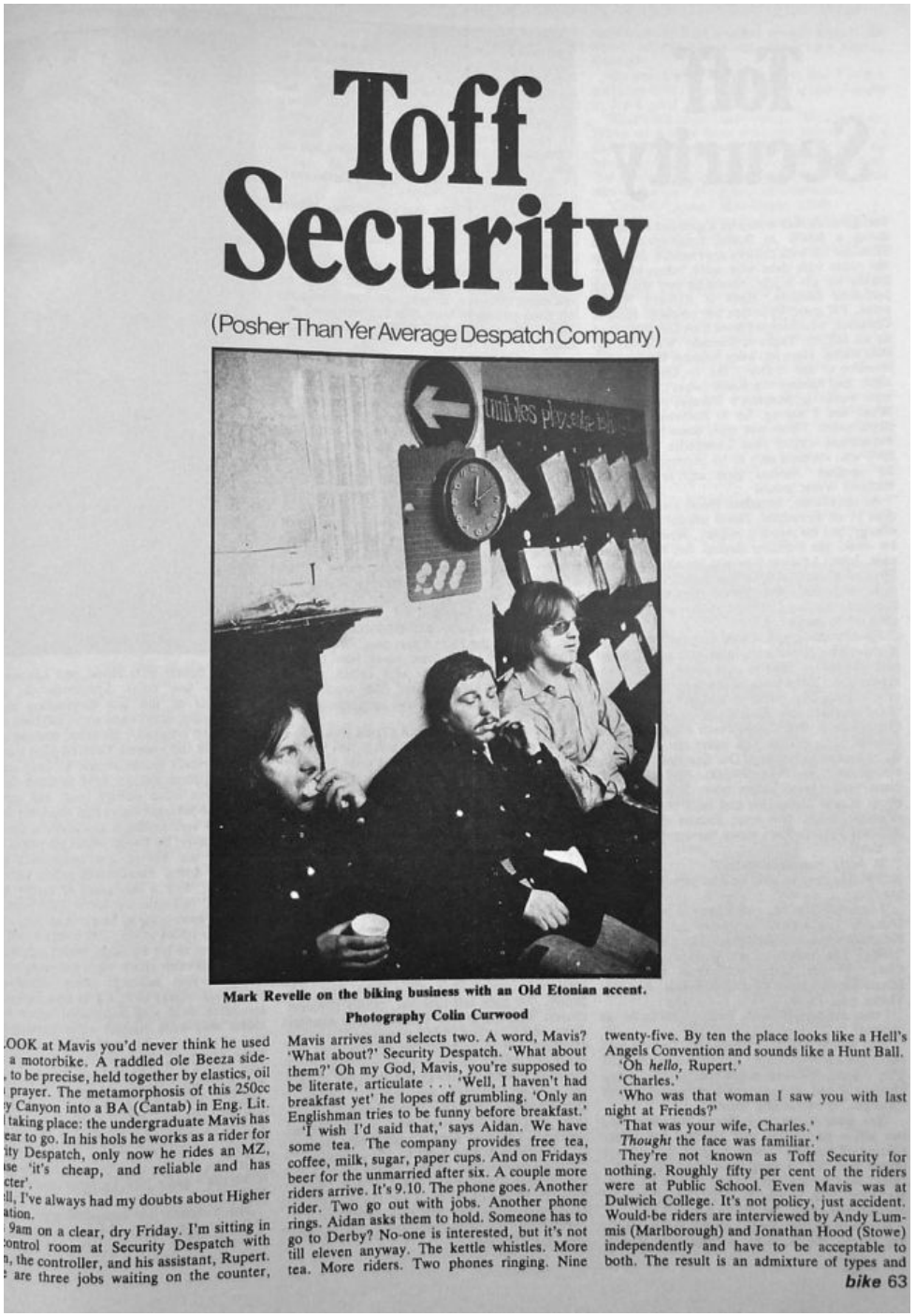
Crikey, this was urgent. I'd never picked up blood before. Was some poor child actually haemorrhaging on the slab, nine miles away, with their life in the balance? As I kicked the Bonnie over I wondered – should I? Dare I? Is it allowed? I decided tonight, yes it would be. The time was 7.22pm and the Highway Code was being temporarily suspended.

I flicked the headlight on high and roared off down the Edgware Road for Staples Corner, then hit sixtyfive along the short stretch of the North Circular before swinging through the traffic for the roundabout under the A41 Brent Cross flyover. From here the broad Hendon Way was always a reliably fast run with only two sets of lights on the way to Finchley Road. I braked hard towards them, squeezed between the queued cars and pushed out past the white line. Cross traffic swept from left and right, but once a space opened up, and contrary to all my licencepreserving instincts, I launched myself across the red light and belted on towards Finchley Road.

The next stage was going to be dicey: slow traffic, buses and at least halfadozen lights to negotiate before Swiss Cottage. Where necessary I skipped round the outside of traffic islands, and on the reds pulled up out front, watched for a chance, then launched again.

Amazingly no one seemed to be hooting at me and no sirens wailed. At Swiss Cottage I slipped into the flow coming from the left and managed to cross Adelaide Road on green. Swift, smooth progress with minimal right turns: that seemed the secret to racing efficiently across town, fed by the colossal rush brought on by concentration.

Like a rally racer I was visualising the next 'bend', or in my case a junction or traffic light,



Toff Security

(Posher Than Yer Average Despatch Company)

Mark Revelle on the biking business with an Old Etonian accent.

Photography Colin Curwood

.OOK at Mavis you'd never think he used a motorbike. A raddled ole Beeza side-, to be precise, held together by elastics, oil prayer. The metamorphosis of this 250cc y Canyon into a BA (Cantab) in Eng. Lit. taking place: the undergraduate Mavis has ear to go. In his hols he works as a rider for ity Despatch, only now he rides an MZ, se 'it's cheap, and reliable and has cter'.

ll, I've always had my doubts about Higher ation.

9am on a clear, dry Friday. I'm sitting in ontrol room at Security Despatch with , the controller, and his assistant, Rupert. are three jobs waiting on the counter, Mavis arrives and selects two. A word, Mavis? 'What about?' Security Despatch. 'What about them?' Oh my God, Mavis, you're supposed to be literate, articulate . . . 'Well, I haven't had breakfast yet' he lopes off grumbling. 'Only an Englishman tries to be funny before breakfast.'

'I wish I'd said that,' says Aidan. We have some tea. The company provides free tea, coffee, milk, sugar, paper cups. And on Fridays beer for the unmarried after six. A couple more riders arrive. It's 9.10. The phone goes. Another rider. Two go out with jobs. Another phone rings. Aidan asks them to hold. Someone has to go to Derby? No-one is interested, but it's not till eleven anyway. The kettle whistles. More tea. More riders. Two phones ringing. Nine twenty-five. By ten the place looks like a Hell's Angels Convention and sounds like a Hunt Ball.

'Oh *hello*, Rupert.'

'Charles.'

'Who was that woman I saw you with last night at Friends?'

'That was your wife, Charles.'

Thought the face was familiar.'

They're not known as Toff Security for nothing. Roughly fifty per cent of the riders were at Public School. Even Mavis was at Dulwich College. It's not policy, just accident. Would-be riders are interviewed by Andy Lumis (Marlborough) and Jonathan Hood (Stowe) independently and have to be acceptable to both. The result is an admixture of types and

so as to calculate how best to clear it. Opposite Regents Park I slipped left on to Prince Albert Road. Some countries allow this maneuverer at traffic light junctions on red, but not the UK. Once through though, I kept it down to 5055: we all knew that along residential '30mph' streets, 40ish was the 'working' limit. Stray beyond that for too long and things can happen too fast and fines would probably involve a ban.

At Camden Parkway the evening traffic made it too difficult to shoot across the junction, but six weeks in the game and I'd already learned the trick of watching the other lights change to red in anticipation. The middle lamp flicked to amber and as soon as the road cleared I was off again with a squeal from the K181 and a good four seconds before my light turned green.

Running alongside the railway tracks, Park Village East, NW1 was a nifty back road linking Regents Park with Euston. Nick had put me on to it recently. Braking at the end, I crunched the side stand into Granby for Hampstead Road where I knew the lights took ages to change. So I dashed across to the central strip, and then sped off south once it was clear left.

ETA just a couple of minutes now. Scrape left into Carrdington and down the side of Euston station – watch out for taxis! – then slip on to the busy Euston Road and heave over to the right lane quick to line up for the lights into Woburn Place. There was no chance of pushing across three lanes here, but once barrelling down Woburn I ran all the reds as before.

Just after Russell Square I was looking out for a pedestrian passage I'd spotted one time. It led directly into Queen Square, so avoiding the twominute schlep via Theobald's Road. There it was, Cosmo Place. I rode onto the kerb – some tourists stopped in their tracks, startled by the revving Triumph's full beam and my determined glare. I passed them and weaved briskly among Cosmo's earlyevening revellers heading for a preshow meal, and dropped into Queen Square without so much as a 'bloody bikers'.

By now I was buzzing like a midsummer hive and with the engine baking my shins, I sprinted down to the hospital, grabbed the blood, leapt the steps in a single stride and landed at reception.

'Hi. Got some blood here from Colindale.'

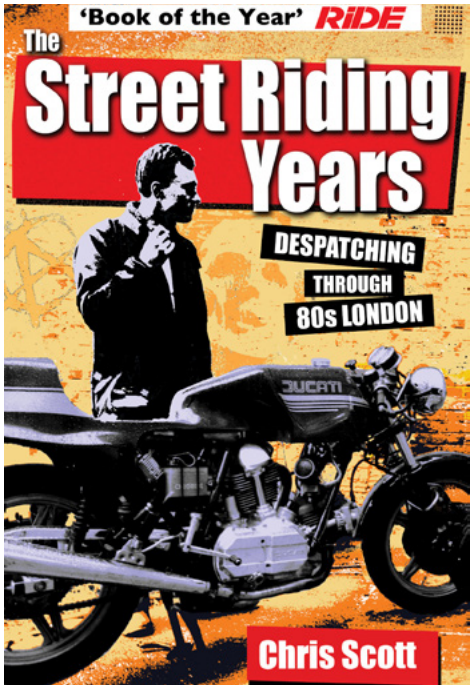
I checked my watch. Just coming up to 7.37. Fifteen minutes and as many red lights. Not bad.

In the UK the practice of using 'blood bikes' dates back to the late sixties. A couple of years after my dash, a voluntary 'Bloodrunners' service was established and still thrives today. The volunteers' machines get hiviz stickers resembling police bikes except with 'BLOOD' stencilled across the windscreen. And although some are also fitted with blue lights and sirens, they're only used as additional ways of making the riders noticeable in traffic. Bloodrunners aren't instructed or permitted to run red lights, ignore speed limits or pass round the wrong sides of traffic islands as I'd done that evening, although on the job we despatchers flaunted those latter two rules daily.

What would have happened had I got stopped by the cops? I like to think they'd at least have escorted me to my destination on a blue light before throwing the book at me. As it was, even though we all clocked up our share of ambulance chasing, it was amazing that no one reported me.

That memorable blast across town was an example of the immunity we despatchers felt from the Law and the laws of physics, engendered on that occasion by a well meaning if mistaken sense of entitlement. It explains how we treated every job when under pressure or in the mood – 'you want urgent, I'll give you urgent!' – and why we were to become notorious in the years to come.

Street Riding Years is £8.99 and is available from all good book shops, from Amazon and from Chris's website with free postage.



Downsizing For Baby Boomers

Kawasaki GPZ500S Long-Term Test

Anyone who observes changing trends in the sales of motorcycles in the UK cannot have failed to notice the swing away from high powered race replicas to big adventure traillies. I bet BMW had no idea what they were starting when they introduced the R80 G/S in the early eighties. The adventures of Ewan McGregor, Charlie Boorman and friends kicked off the popularity of the big oil head GS models, and the hordes of imitators which followed, but why has this genre of bike proven to be so popular after the long reign of the plastic rocket in the UK?

Firstly, I'm sure most readers will agree that sports bikes are fun, but only if ridden fast. Try riding one at the legal speed limits and you will be bored, suffer from sore wrists and a sore back. Ride one the way they were built to be ridden, you will have a big grin on your face, but at the back of your mind you will be thinking about the consequences of getting caught again by the speed cameras or unmarked cars, and trying to remember just how many points are currently on your licence. So this type of riding experience has become a pretty risky process. Touring with your tent, sleeping bag, and enough kit in your throw overs to last a couple of weeks isn't much fun either.

With all that in mind you can see where the adventure bike makes a lot of sense, as long as you are not a bit vertically challenged that is! You can have a lot of fun on the road, without going *too* fast, tour Europe fully loaded in comfort with your mates, and even venture onto some loose surfaces as long as you don't expect Paris Dakar handling and you have the ability to pick the bike up again if/when it hits the deck! Fine, that explains why we have been seeing so many big traillies on the roads nowadays.

However, over the last couple of years I have seen a new trend coming to the fore among my many biking friends. They are downsizing their bikes in the same way that many mature couples downsize their houses at a certain stage of their life. Their sports bikes are long gone, and now their adventure bikes are being sold off too, to be replaced by… what?

Some are going down the custom route, buying Harleys or similar cruisers. Fun to ride without blowing speed limits apart, cool looking luggage if you want it, comfortable, and importantly, easy for everyone to get both feet flat on the deck. For the rest, who have not yet seen the light emanating from Milwaukee, there is a new direction that many are taking and which may come as a surprise.

However, before I reveal this latest trend, let's have a look at why they are abandoning their tourers and big traillies. These guys are the post war baby boomers who have had the free cash to indulge in their two-wheeled fantasies, which were just not possible when they were young. These are the very guys who prompted the description 'Born Again Bikers' because they were returning to biking after the financial constraints of marriage, 2.4 children and mortgages had eased off a bit. Lots of disposable income and a desire to recapture the crazy days of their youth (real or imagined), prompted the sports bike frenzy followed by the move to adventure bikes for the aforementioned reasons.

A lot of these very same guys have now got Father Time chasing their back wheels, with clicky hips, dodgy knees, creaking backs and a hundred and one other ailments that all make riding a bit more difficult. Hence the move to low seated customs, which are also pretty good at protecting that precious driving licence. But not everyone wants to give up all

the sports bike power and handling just yet, so they are buying middleweight bikes hand over fist. Monsters, Bandits, Fazers, Hornets, with engines of around 500 or 600cc that fit the new requirements of all us knackered old blokes who need something comfortable to ride and easy to push around the drive that will still offer them a bit of excitement. Hardly a day goes by just now without someone telling me that they are looking to downsize to a bike in this category.

Last year I found myself in the very position I've described above. Various health problems meant that pushing my big bikes around the gravel drive was nearly killing me – literally – and I had started to doubt my own abilities to hold up the heaviest ones in parking situations; plus I felt I really had to slow down before the licence flew out the door.

Reluctantly I sold my BMW K1 and Honda Pacific Coast (I nearly dropped that one in the drive when the new owner came to pick it up), but kept my Harley Dyna as it's my favourite bike of all time and for some reason I have no problem moving that around. I had sold my Bandit streetfighter the year before and knew that I wanted something even lighter than that, so the search was on for a lightweight bike that was reasonably quick and handled well.

There is a bewildering choice out there, but it was an ex courier mate who came up with the recommendation to try a Kawasaki GPZ500S (in a previous article this year you may remember ex sidecar champion Mike Richards singing the praises of the GPZ600). Duly tried and tested, a late model GPZ500S soon joined my dwindling collection in the garage, and for surprisingly little money. As I'm now totally smitten with this cracking little bike (I cant believe I just typed that – I remember as a lad dreaming of buying something seriously big, like a 500 Triumph Tiger), I thought I would share my experiences of this latest purchase and try and tempt a few others to go down the same route.

Firstly, the techy bit. This model ran from 1984 to 2004, with a few changes being made to the later models such as twin front and single rear discs and a seventeen inch rear wheel. The parallel twin 498cc engine produces 60bhp and a top speed of 120 mph and if you believe the comments of numerous owners and reviewers, delivers a wide variance in fuel consumption (35 – 65mpg) depending on how it's ridden of course! The engine is said to be bulletproof, but I've heard that before about other bikes and I've still managed to blow them up! Suspension is a bit low spec and would definitely benefit from an upgrade.

So, having bought one of the last of the line, first registered in 2003 and ridden it regularly for the last nine months, what are my impressions?

It's much lighter at 176kg than the bikes I usually own and with a low seat height of 760mm, it immediately felt easier to manoeuvre around the garage and gravel drive. It feels quite long and narrow pulling out onto the road, with light responsive steering giving an instant feeling of confidence – ideal for a new rider or someone downsizing. Initial acceleration was very slightly lumpy and the engine felt buzzy until the revs hit 6,750 and then the little rocket really took off right up to the 10,500 limit, with the engine smoothing out as the revs increased. It feels really strong, belying its small size – wow this is fun!

Handling was excellent on the "B" type roads that are the norm around here, especially considering the all original suspension has done 21000 miles. I had heard that they were a bit skittish on bumpy roads, but there are plenty of them around here and I didn't find it a

problem. Moving onto "A" type roads revealed the first thing I think could be improved on the GPZ – it seems to be screaming its head off while making progress. It feels like there should be another gear, but maybe just one less tooth on the rear sprocket would make a difference without losing too much acceleration? One of the reasons for buying this bike has been partially addressed, but not fully – that of keeping speeds reasonably close to legal limits. The engine just cries out to be thrashed, so of course it would be rude not to! I do try honestly, and start of with good intentions, but the first time I overtake a car and feel the post 7000rpm rush, I just want to keep it going. I am going slower than with some previous bikes but still a bit quicker than I intended.

I haven't bothered to monitor fuel consumption – I never do – but fuel does seem to vanish quite quickly, which brings me to the next little niggle. There is no fuel gauge, or even an idiot light, so the locking tank cap must be lifted before each run to see what is left. There is a reserve option on the fuel tap, but I don't think I would depend on this to get me very far. Additionally, I don't like running an older bike right down to an empty tank, as I have no way of knowing what crud has accumulated down there over the years.

Build quality is better than average for this level of bike, and it has survived the last thirteen years with the only marks being caused by human error rather degradation. Like not removing the belly pan before pushing it onto the trailer. Oops. The centre stand makes chain oiling or wheel changing an easy task, and also helped recently when I changed the fork seals.

Now to the pillion seat – if your partner is over about five foot three, they will not be comfortable on this bike. If they are five foot nine, they will have their knees around their ears and leg cramps after five minutes. I happen to know this as the seller of my bike took me for a run on it to get me out of the town and into the country for my test ride – definitely not a pleasant experience!

To sum up my thoughts on the GPZ500S, its absolutely perfect for screaming round the roads around my region (but I wouldn't want to be touring or doing motorway work), it isn't hard on fuel or consumables, and I REALLY wish I had bought one years ago. In fact, if I could still buy a new one, I would, especially if Kawasaki addressed the few niggles I've mentioned above.

Wizzard

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 motor-cycle journalism. Dave Gurman makes you glad that you're riding and glad that you're reading.

Austin Vince
Mondo Enduro

Dave Gurman is blindingly honest, funny, never PC... When I picked this book up, I couldn't put it down.

Sam Manicom
Into Africa/Under Asian Skies/Distant Suns

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.

Harriet Ridley
Trinity Mirror Group

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 *****

Pete Williams
Amazon customer

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Or from [The Rider's Digest online shop.]

A LEAGUE OF NOTIONS

Back in July, when summer had finally draped its warm cloak across the land, that august publication, the International Journal of Motorcycle Studies held its 6th Conference at Chelsea College of Art, on the banks of the River Thames in London.

Well, almost on the banks.

The Conference was a gathering of great academic minds, there to talk about many aspects of motorcycle culture, more of which later.

While I've been to a number of universities, mostly delivering things like tins of baked beans and even my offspring (but not in a midwifery sense) I am keen not to re-write TRD Editor Dave's excellent coverage of the event back in 2013 (TRD179) so I will attempt to report on and do justice to this excellent event, which may be something of a stretch for my simple mind, so please, bear with me.

Most of the speakers had travelled many, many miles to get to the conference, as indeed had some of the audience. Kimonas-Stylianos Konstantelos and his colleague Nicolas Christakis had made their way to Chelsea from Athens (Greece, not Georgia) Dr Lisa Gerber had flown in from LA, and even Paul Blezard, who usually rides in on some kind of rechargeable electric bicycle had swooped in from Paris on a Honda Vultus that he appeared to have borrowed from Batman.

Attendee Andy Tribble – who'd encouraged me to attend the conference over lunch at the London Motorcycle Show back in February – had flown in from Geneva, midway through a mammoth bike tour of Europe. Me? I rode up the A20 from West Malling.

Day one started with me being fashionably late, but I think I got away with it, slipping quietly into the lecture theatre due the

confusion caused by the fact that the first keynote speaker, Anthony van Someren (better known around these parts as 'Dutch von Shed') was later and inevitably far more fashionably so than me.

Bravely, Jeff Morrison, a senior lecturer from Maymooth University in County Kildare decided to get it over with and stepped into the breach, announcing that on his daughter's advice he wasn't going to tell us about the relevance of place in the modern motorcycle travelogue, opting instead to talk about Motorcycles in the Press.

He immediately struck a chord with me by talking about the difficulties of riding with ageing knees (try yoga Jeff!) before displaying his first slide, the cover shot of 'The Road to Gobblers Knob' by Geoff Hill.

Clearly those present were either too

mature or perhaps too embarrassed to acknowledge the 'Carry On' style reference in the title; Jeff noted that the attraction of the book title seemed mainly to be that the aforementioned destination was somewhere that most of us had never heard of.

With further slides of intentionally 'comic book' style covers from notable motorcycle adventurers including Lois Pryce, Jeff suggested that Ted Simon, whom he acknowledged quite rightly as 'the master', offers the paradigm for such tomes in the form of Jupiter's Travels.

He finished with a comment that motorcyclists who have yet to make 'the big trip' are akin to Muslims who haven't visited Mecca.

The next speaker was German born Jenny N. Smith, who under the title of 'Riding the Dragon' gave a fascinating account of her 12-year journey through China on a decidedly 'Ural-esque' Chang Jiang CJ750 combo.

Jenny revealed many intriguing facts about life in modern day China, most notably that motorcycles are seen by the authorities as a threat to road safety, the environment, to civilisation and to harmonious society, with many developed areas banning the use of them altogether.

In areas where they are allowed, you will need a licence plate to ride one, which Jenny said costs up $18,000, several times the value of the bike. You can however reduce that figure to around $450 if you know 'the right people', and riders who have 'the right plate' are likely to be pursued by people trying to buy it from them.

But the problems don't end there. We were told that 'for safety (and probably national

security) reasons' motorcyclists are not allowed to fill their bikes up at petrol pumps, instead having to park on the periphery of the filling station and carry the petrol across to their bikes in whatever receptacle you happen to have to hand, such as a watering can or a bucket, which Jenny said can take some time with the large tank on the CJ750.

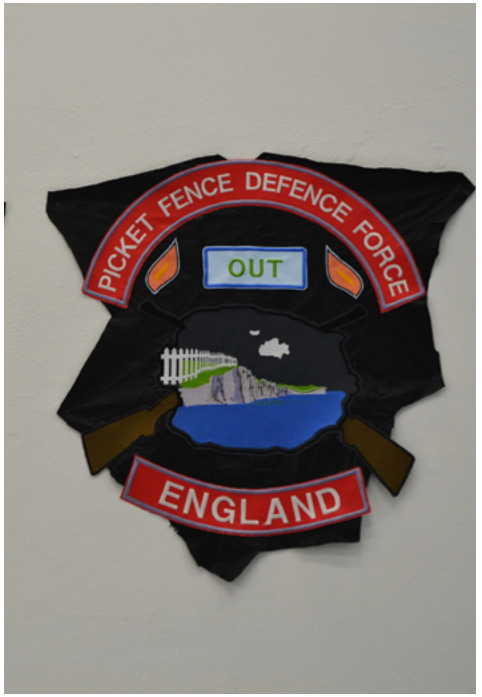
Harley-Davidsons are apparently popular with the Chinese, but a shortage of officially sourced machines means that many are bought from mafia sources, and cost 3-4 times as much as you would normally expect to pay in the States.

One of the most surprising things Jenny told the audience, especially bearing in mind China's unenviable reputation for their poor control of greenhouse gas emissions, was that once your motorcycle reaches eleven years old, it has to be scrapped.

The next speaker to take the lectern was Utah based Jeffrey O. Durrant, a geography professor whose talk was about motorcycling trends in parts of Africa, where he has carried out extensive research into the use and demographics of bikes alongside a burgeoning population that currently stands around 1.1bn, but is thought likely to increase by 1.3bn over the next 34 years.

We earned that Togo has imported $1.9m worth of motorcycles, but that in many parts of Nigeria they are (as with some Chinese cities) banned, as unfortunately terrorists, paramilitaries and assassins find them as useful for getting around as engineers, tradesmen, medics and taxi operators.

With the predominance of cheap and easily maintained small two stroke engines, Professor Durrant noted that many riders have discovered that the engines last much longer if the fuel is overdosed with two stroke oil, which



has a very negative effect on pollution levels.

There are other economic issues too, in Chad for example, we were told that import duty currently stands at 100%.

While Professor Durrant gave his speech, Dutch quietly entered the auditorium, and during the coffee break that followed the group discussion with the audience asking questions of Jenny and the two Jeffs, he explained that he'd had a couple of beers the night before and rather that ride in, he wisely decided to travel to the conference in a cab, which had been held up by some sort of incident at Trafalgar Square.

Better late than never though, and Dutch, for those of you who have been either living on another planet (or possibly another continent) is the founder and 'Head Honcho' of The Bike Shed, the highly successful East London venue and meeting place for riders and lovers of all things connected with motorcycles and café culture.

Dutch provided those present with a fascinating insight into the origins and growth of The Bike Shed venue in Shoreditch, which as a concept started out as a virtual platform to display 'shed built' custom bikes for sale and for general approval from sites such as 'Bike EXIF'.

Filling us in with in his background in the media, Dutch noted that his wife Vicki (known as The Duchess) had once commented that all the people that they liked in the industry were motorcyclists – the rest seemed to be 'wankers'.

Dutch had also discovered a fondness for retro and unusual motorcycles when he realised that riding an 80hp air cooled Ducati Classic Sport bike provided him with far more satisfaction and usable speed that the latest irrelevant and expensive race replica.

It was this, along with a general loathing of traditional motorcycle shows as being 'horrible, nasty trade fairs where women are paid to be there' that led him to decide to create a friendly and relaxed show environment where couples, women and children could come along and enjoy a great atmosphere while looking at some very cool bikes.

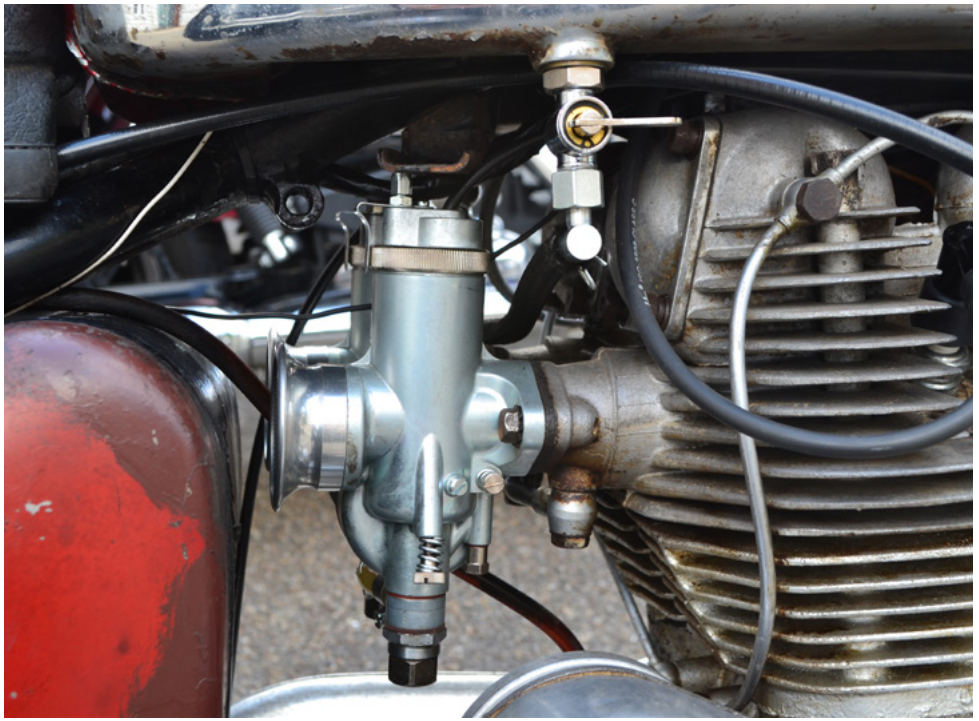
The initial Bike Shed show held in a collection of railway arches at Shoreditch Studios – known as the 'Event' had attracted 12,000 visitors, with Dutch commenting that Moto Guzzi seemed confused by the turnout, asking where he'd where he'd got all the young people from.

The show soon caught the attention of Triumph, but Dutch told them they couldn't bring standard bikes along, which resulted in them building five custom machines, they were also encouraged to have a lounge, rather than a stand. They duly obliged.

Other highlights recounted by Dutch include competing in 'Dirtquake' – a speedway style race for custom bikes, during which he was lapped by Carl Fogarty and Guy Martin, the latter riding a chopper.

After a series of increasingly successful shows in London and Paris, as well as overseeing the organisation of the annual London charity event the 'Distinguished Gentleman's Ride', Dutch then explained the thought processes and business plan behind setting up a permanent 'Bike Shed' venue in Shoreditch, East London, which combines a restaurant, a meeting place and a showroom for clothing and helmets as well as custom built motorcycles, affording visitors the opportunity to get 'inked' while the in-house traditional barber sorted out helmet hair, before relaxing beneath bare brick railway arches on huge leather Chesterfields.

After a break for lunch, artist Tom Cardwell took to the microphone to tell us about his



paintings of fictional motorcycle jackets that he designs after interviewing people.

At first glance the detail in the folds of the fabric would lead you to believe that that Tom paints the actual jackets, but he was at pains to explain that his works are illustrations of his interpretation of what someone's jacket would look like, and that he has never painted on an actual item of clothing.

We were then given a very informative insight into the origins of patches and the various insignia proudly displayed on bikers' attire, with Tom explaining that the trend was adopted from military uniforms, which in turn had evolved from medieval times and the heraldry. I had actually wondered about this when associating with a few 'patch clubs' in the dim and distant past, so I found Tom's talk fascinating.

Themes Tom discussed linked folk music with heavy metal, and the general notion of the wearer being a wanderer and a loner, hence the motorcycle connection.

We were then shown a painting of a jacket entitled 'How the West (Country) Was Won/ Jacket for another Tom Cardwell', linking Tom's roots in the parts of rural south and west England formerly known as Wessex, cleverly linking them with the U.S. State of Wyoming, where research had revealed Tom's namesake, a young rodeo rider and cowboy who had sadly succumbed to cancer in 2014.

Tom's work was later displayed in an exhibition on the campus.

Art of a different type was then discussed by Bangkok based photographer Simon Larbalestier, whose monochrome images collection 'Equus Machina' explores the link between motorcycles and horses, with detail images extensively and effectively re-worked to emphasise texture and contrast.

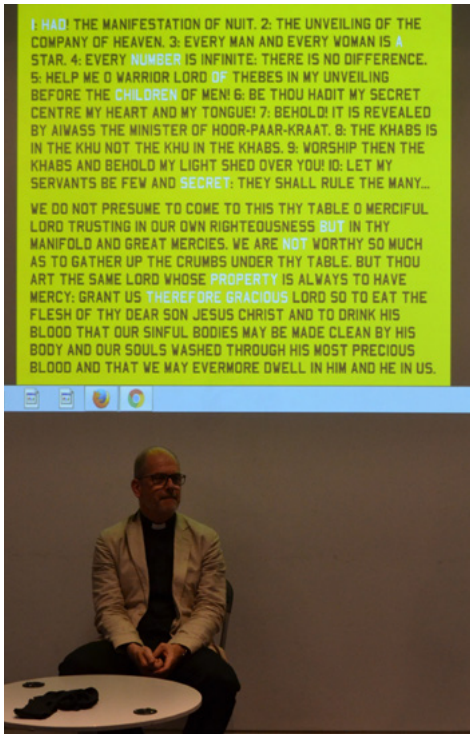
In common with other countries discussed during the earlier sessions, Simon informed us that bikes are aspirational items in Thailand, possibly due to the 400% import duty. You can view Simon's images on his website.

The first day was rounded off with an exhibition curated by conference organiser Caryn Simonson entitled 'Motorcycle Culture II' in the campus gallery, known as the 'Triangle Space', situated as it was in the corner of the grounds.

Exhibits included a set of TT Legend Joey Dunlop's leathers, (along with one of his crash helmets), iconic monochrome prints with neon highlights were displayed depicting the 59 Club and huge poster style watercolours of motorcycle combinations by Toria Jaymesadorned the walls. The aforementioned motorcycle jacket creations by Tom Cardwell were featured too, and a bizarre film loop created by Mark Dean, showing grainy head and shoulders footage of two female Israeli border guards seemingly riding on a scooter and accompanied by a looped clip of The Beatles''Lovely Rita'.

As the exhibition opened a steady stream of motorcycles and scooters arrived and parked in the courtyard, with the Triangle Space steadily filling with invited guests on that pleasant summer's evening.

Due to other commitments I was unable to return to the conference on the second day until lunchtime; I missed morning presentations by Dr Nora Berning, who discussed the breakdown of Motorcycle Literature before, during and after the Inter War period. Nora was followed (according to the programme) by Thomas Goodman from the University of Miami, whose subject matter was John Berger's 1995 novel *"To The Wedding"* with a talk entitled 'Rider, Writer, Tinker, Thinker'.



The late morning session commenced with Manchester based Professor Esperanza Miyake talking about 'The Dark Side of Japan: Japanese identity, gender and motorcycles', followed by psychologist Lisa Gerber's recounting of 'Panther's Story' – describing how her relationship with her 1988 Harley-Davidson Hugger 883 evolved from being a used bike into a protective predator.

Professor Katherine Sutherland brought the morning session to a close with 'Beach Landing' – which described the aftermath of the 2011 Tohoku tsunami, which caused the deaths of almost 19,000 people and the depositing of 18 million tonnes of debris and nuclear fallout into the ocean, including a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, which was later rescued and reunited with its owner, Ikuo Yokoyama.

I re-joined the conference as Dr Ben Cocking from the University of Kent once again raised the subject of Motorcycle Adventure Travel, and its effect on online communities, and the rise of the niche.

As has been discussed many times before in many different circles, the debate about the authenticity of Charley Boorman and Ewan McGregor's Long Way Round/Down series, which included a guest appearance by 'touchstone' Ted Simon, and went on to question whether or not his inclusion in the series added legitimacy to the films, which have often been slated for their commercial success and extensive use of support and camera crews.

Ben asked whether Charley & Ewan, with their extensive social media coverage perceived 'symbolic mastery' brought much

needed publicity to adventure travel, or made it appear to be the preserve of the wealthy.

Atlanta based Christian Pierce, a member of the IJMS editorial board then presented an interesting insight into communal garage experiences, citing the mixed fortunes of 'Brother Moto' in his hometown, which appears to operate in a parallel universe to mainstream dealer maintenance.

The schemes seem to be popular with female riders, and basic tools are available for use, as are battery, tyre and oil disposal options, with membership from as little as $20 per month.

Christian was followed by the Reverend Mark Dean, who had been inspired as a youngster by a 1960s American TV series entitled "*Then Came Bronson*" which starred Michael Parks as a journalist who becomes disillusioned with working for 'the man' following the suicide of his best friend, and sets off on a voyage of discovery on an old Sportster fitter with knobbly tyres. Dutch would have been proud of him.

Mark went on to talk about Chris Edwards' hypothesis in 'Motorcycle Maintenance without Zen' which deconstructs the theories contained within Robert Pirsig's bestselling book.

We were then shown intriguing split screen film clips from *"Scorpio Rising 2"* which juxtaposed Pier Paolo Pasolini's *"The Gospel According to St Matthew"* with the 60s cult movie *"Hells Angels on Wheels"* You can find more information and view the video clips here.

I had been looking forward to Saturday's sessions due to TRD regular Paul Nicholas

Blezard being scheduled to open the proceedings with a pictorial talk on the development and evolution of 'feet first' motorcycles and the rise of electric powered machines.

Unfortunately, Paul's talk was beset by incompatibilities between Apple and Windows operating systems, and after struggling manfully for some time to get his slides to load he admitted defeat and returned home to Ham to change the format.

His place was taken by Kimonas – Stylianos Konstantelos from Athens, whose subject matter was 'Emotional Management on Two Wheels' – a theory regarding symbolic masculinity.

This study explored the link between the rider's psychological state in relation to the bond between man and machine, resulting in feelings of joy, fear, anger and sadness. It was noted that females had far more complex psychological feelings going on.

The study was based on 10 interviewees, all of whom happened to be male. This revelation didn't seem to be particularly well received by some of the females present, but Kimonas explained that there were very few female motorcyclists in Athens, and none seemed to be attending the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

The next speaker was Los Angeles based film producer Dr Sheila Malone, who like Christian is a member of the IJMS editorial board. Sheila gave a thought provoking presentation dealing with the Politics of Noise, citing the San Francisco 'Dykes on Bikes'organisation, who disrupted male dominated Gay Pride marches using loud motorcycles.

Another example given was the use of loud bikes by the Thin Blue Line motorcycle club, comprising ex police and servicemen, who used their bikes to drown out the voices of anti-death sentence protesters trying to save the life of cop killer Daniel Lopez in 2012. He was later executed.

A third instance was that of the Patriot Guard, who use their bikes to mask the bullhorns of the protestors from the Westboro Baptist Church.

One speaker with whom I felt I had a lot in common (the same couldn't really be said of the majority of the speakers at the conference) was London Advanced Motorcyclists member Eddie Wright, who gave his talk on 'Motorcycling and Issues of Safety and Risk – it's all about the balance'

After showing an amusing collection of slides detailing how basic the UK motorcycle test was in the 1960s and 70s (I went through the same experiences) Eddie noted that motorcycle training methods have evolved significantly in the UK, but also observed that it costs the same to train a barista in a coffee shop as it does to get somebody through the Institute of Advanced Motorists test.

He then went on to extoll the virtues of the latter and the Bikesafe course, and noted that very few were gifted with the innate ability of riders such as Joey Dunlop, linking to the leathers and helmet he had borrowed from Joey's former sponsor John Harris Motorcycles for the exhibition.

David Alan Walton had flown in from the University of Murcia in Spain to discuss 'Sons of Anarchy: biker films, focal concerns and narrative pleasure'.

The main thrust of David's talk had been about subcultures, and cited Profane Cultures, by Paul E. Willis, describing how the author dedicates an entire chapter to the experience and enthusiasm associated with motorcycling.

David went on to examine how popular motorcycling based films and TV series such as 'Sons of Anarchy' often seem to be about everything except bikes, and notes that motorcycles are rarely mentioned or talked about, and appear to be just a means of transport to get from A to B.

In contrast, the 1960s movie *"Leather Boys"* at least makes an effort to include biker banter, albeit slightly stilted and not terribly convincing.

The final day was closed by Dr Sarah Holland from City University in New York, who examined the reported riots and disruption allegedly caused by biker gangs at Hollister – a rural community in California - in 1947. Many scholars and writers have cited the Hollister riots in the decades since as being the birthplace of the outlaw (male) biker, as portrayed by Marlon Brando in *"The Wild One"* six years later in 1953.

However, photographic evidence has provided little to substantiate these theories, which could lead one to conclude that the Hollister riots were a figment of the media's imagination.

Female riders were depicted in the Brando movie as 'topless distractions' while in reality all female biker gangs such as the Tracy Gear Jammers and the Motor Maids of America are said to have been present in significant numbers, although there is precious little information available to prove this.

Alas, shortly before the end of Sarah's talk, Paul Blezard reappeared, having re-configured his slide presentation to work with Microsoft Windows, but by then it was too late, the caretakers needed to close the building, and so sadly we never got to hear Paul's speech or see his slides.

Many of those present then headed off to The Bike Shed across town for a beer to celebrate the end of a successful conference, before going on to a restaurant for dinner; and they met again the following day for brunch at Bolt Motorcycles in Hackney.

I have to admit, I was a little apprehensive about attending this conference, and was concerned about becoming lost in the heavyweight musings of such notable scholars, one of whom had been described in the accompanying literature as being led to 'the crossroads where the union of Hermes and Brunhilde took place'.

But I became absorbed, and enjoyed it, even joining in the discussions towards the end. My teachers at Northfleet Secondary School for Boys, with whom I'd parted company in my sixteenth year would have been proud of me.

To find out more about the International Journal of Motorcycle Studies, visit their website

My thanks to Cary Simonson for her support in the production of this report.

Martin Haskell

Courier Day at the Ace Cafe

At the tail end of the 70s I spent a lot of time hanging out with couriers and most of them seemed to take it as a given that real biker music began with AC/DC and ended with ZZ Top, so whenever there were a bunch of us socialising in our flat in Peckham (which seemed to be a regular occurrence, probably because many of our contemporaries were still living at home with their parents) I was always greeted with jeers and disdain whenever I attempted to open things up a little by injecting a little Soul or Country into the proceedings.

I particularly recall one occasion when I attempted to expand their musical appreciation by adapting a C&W classic so that it was more relevant to their experience:

"Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be couriers.
Don't let 'em ride Suzukis or drive them old trucks.
Let 'em be doctors and lawyers and such.
Mamas don't let your babies grow up to be couriers.
'Cos they'll never stay home and they're always alone.
Even with someone they love."

Not only did I fail to convince them that Waylon & Willie were outlaws and were singing about them too, I also got 'bundled' by the assembled despatch riding Philistines for being such a twat, before the record was tossed to one side and replaced with something by Motörhead; but I still believe that were many similarities between the rugged western heroes and my colleagues on the road, not least because most of their working time was spent running around in splendid isolation.

That said, in the same way that cowboys like to get together in saloons after a long wrangle (and to end the evening with a massive brawl once they've knocked back enough rot gut whisky), couriers have always tended to gather in certain spots when they were standing by (or skiving). Back in my early days at Mercury it was Shoe Lane cafe, partly because Shoe Lane was the gateway to the City but also as it was conveniently located alongside one of the company's account petrol stations.

There were any number of spots where riders from other companies gathered, including cafes like The Smithfield and centrally located bike bays like the one at the top of Carnaby St on Gt Marlborough St and another by the telephone boxes and the paved area at Cambridge Circus; and unless it was a ridiculously busy Friday afternoon, any time you rode past any of those locations, you'd invariably find at least one or two riders hanging around, either waiting for work or simply smoking and shooting the shit.

The Ace Cafe was never a regular courier hang out back in the day because a) it was still a tyre fitting centre until the mid 90s and b) it was a long way outside the Central London map area where riders were largely concentrated. That said it's ideal for a pre-planned gathering of riders old and new today, not least because it is one of the few

places that could actually accommodate everyone if a whole load of past and present couriers decide to turn up.

The Ace Cafe was also one of the first outlets outside of the immediate courier world to distribute TRD, so owner Mark Wilsmore has been a friend of the magazine for many years now. We were speaking recently and he suggested that the Digest might be interested in organising a Courier Day – and I of course said that given our roots we would be delighted to do so.

Their diary is booked throughout this year and most of 2017 so we explored various double up permutations before deciding that it might be best to share a Sunday with the "Rat, Brat, Bobbers & Choppers", as their owners were least likely to be put off by being joined by a bunch of largely disreputable past and present couriers.

There seems to be more than enough rose coloured nostalgia to get quite a few of the vast army of ex-despatch riders along, but it would be particularly good if we could get a decent turn out of current couriers; so by way of encouragement to persuade them to come out and play at the weekend, we've been on to various kit and equipment contacts to scrounge a few sweeteners for a free prize draw we will be holding on the day.


KEEP CLEAR
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So far Held have generously agreed to supply us with three pairs of their highly rated £150 Cold Champ gloves! Wemoto have come through with a 'Power Bank and Jump Starter pack', plus two hundred of their neck tubes and Motohaus have bunged in an SDoc100 Classic Motorcycle Cleaning Kit (although I did remark that I'm not sure how much use that would be to a courier?). There are guaranteed to be more prizes once everyone has got back to us and because we believe that they're way overdue for a few goodies, only couriers who are currently on the road will be entered – and it will be 100% FREE!

There will also be smaller prizes (copies of mine and Chris Scott's critically acclaimed books about the courier life – and of course a limited number will be available for purchase too) for the people who've travelled furthest to get there; one for the longest trip by bike and the other for the longest journey overall.

If you work in the offices of a courier company, please bring this article to the attention of your riders. You can also contact us at courier_day@theridersdigest.co.uk and we will send you a flyer that you can put up in a prominent position so that all of your riders will be aware of the event.

As for all of you couriers out there, whether you are current or retired, be sure to pass this invitation on to anyone who you think ought to be there.

And if you need any further info just give me a call on:
020 8707 0655

See you there?

Dave Gurman

How a small motorcycle changed my life

The Gurmeister phoned me a while back to ask if I would write a few words for a future issue. So I sat back and wondered what might fit the bill.

At first, I considered just telling some hoary old stories about the good old days of couriering; then I realised that Dave already does this himself and that two of us hopelessly lost in the memory lane postcode might be too much for you the poor reader.

I started to recall wild post-work Friday nights as eight company-owned GS425 roared around the west end firing off deliberate backfires, sounding like the James Gang as we went from pub to gig to curry house. We were all young and carefree, and just loved riding bikes; we'd work all day and then ride for pleasure in the evenings and weekends. If two or more of us rode together, the ride inevitably became the last lap of the TT or the first hour of Le Mans in our strange little minds!

I spent an hour or two chuckling as I recalled these halcyon days while I ploughed up the M6 on a mission to some sorry northern town. It suddenly occurred to me that 27 years after temporarily becoming a courier on a company bike, I was still making a living from moving stuff about. OK, these days I do it in a nice van with aircon and a CD, and I have my own customers, but I still regularly do jobs for that same company (Point to Point) which is now owned by a couple of guys who were once my fellow drivers.

When I became a courier, an uncle rubbished the job "you can't do that for the rest of your life – you should learn a trade". Since that day I've survived at least three recessions, managed

to buy a nice house in a nice place, travelled a bit, and done the Le Mans thing for real. While friends who did learn a trade ended up being shafted as their jobs followed British industry down Thatcher's toilet.

Over the years I've had a bash at controlling and managing, but still love the idea of going out in the morning knowing that you could be on the way to Scotland before lunchtime. I've been all over Europe at someone else's expense, and although I've had my share of rubbish days and idiot customers, I'm still better off than the millions of people who drag themselves to a despised job each day with a heavy heart.

I began to realise how much of a pivotal moment it had been for me, when I sat in front of Sammy Rose (see issue 100) in October 1978 as he described the duties of a despatch rider at Express Despatch. Minutes later I wobbled away on a Suzuki GT250 (usual courier spec – handlebars bent one way, frame the other!) wondering why nothing was happening as I twisted the throttle. I had just reached the conclusion that it must have been out of fuel, when the motor hit the power band and the front wheel soared skywards as I hurtled between the startled punters and stallholders in Golborne Road.

In those days we were all on PAYE, or at least the Slippery Sam mk3 version of it. I never did figure it out – it appeared that about 60% of my wages had been quietly diverted from the toilet roll budget. Maybe Sam had decided that his holiday home fund was more deserving of shekels than the Inland Revenue. Whatever

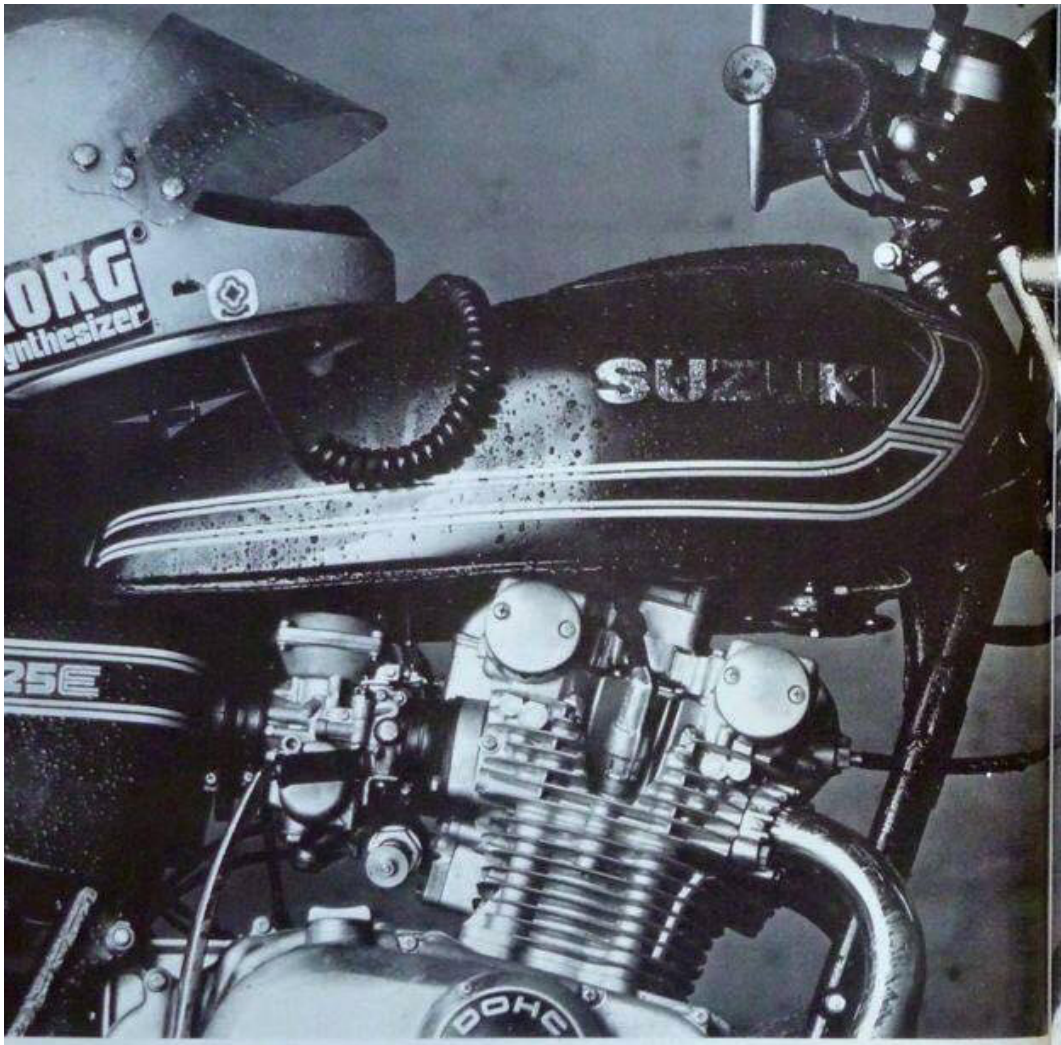
was going on, we were paid in cash every Friday evening, retiring to the pub next door to plan the evening's entertainment.

As I headed south again that night, it began to dawn on me that most of the important things in my life had come about from an interest in motorcycles in general, and becoming a courier in particular. Although I had no idea at the time, the people I met as a courier would change the course of my life: many of my present circle of friends can be traced directly back to those days, and most of the rest were mutual friends of the first lot.

I first met my wife when she was a driver for Pony Express, and we both filled up at Store Street garage. I started bike racing in 1984 with encouragement from Steve Talbot (aka "Toolbox" – mechanic at Mercury and then Express) and met another bunch of idiots, some of whom are still good friends today. I live where I do, because we had taken a shine to the area in our racing days when we travelled up to Snetterton every other weekend.

All my adventures with the NHS have been motorcycle related: a broken leg in '82 (sustained riding an RD250 up a staircase at a party!); a couple of collarbones on the track, along with two vertebrae and a dislocated shoulder at Oulton Park last year during my mid life crisis return to racing.

By the time I turned into my drive in the early hours, I'd started to consider how different (and



'My living depends on Avon Roadrunners'

Like most bike messengers, Mike Hall rides on plenty of wrist.

His job is to get packages and parcels through London's daily snarl-ups as quickly, safely and cheaply as possible.

So it will come as no surprise to knowledgeable bikers that Mike's Suzi 425 wears Avon Roadrunners.

Avon Roadrunners are probably the only tyres to combine the two factors that matter most to Mike. Performance and economy.

Mike rides for Mercury Despatch, the firm that took a long six-month look at the best tyre for today's conditions.

They found that their messengers raved on about Roadrunners' superior wet grip and road holding.

They also found that Avon Roadrunners delivered over 46% more mileage than its best known competitor.

Obviously, economy was important to them.

The cheaper their bikes were to run, the more competitive they could make their rates, and the more they could pay the likes of Mike.

Nowadays, every single bike in the Mercury fleet is equipped with Avon Roadrunners. Because that way everybody was happy – the customers, the bikers and the moneymen.

Check out Roadrunners for yourself.

You'll find they have something unique to offer. The best of both worlds.

16"	17"	18"	19"
3.00 H16	3.00 H17 5.00 H17	3.00 H18 3.60 H18 4.10 H18 *4.25/85 H18 4.70 H18	3.60 H19 *4.10 H19

*Available in tubeless

BIKE ON AVON

dull!) my life could have been, had I decided to stick with my Mk1 Escort in the summer of '76, instead of buying a friend's Honda CB125 to commute to my office job.

I'm convinced that a love of motorcycling in someone is generally a sign of an interesting personality (although some of the part number experts at owner's clubs may disprove this). Is it a coincidence that most of the friends we have been drawn to outside motorcycling, turn out to be long-time bike fans?

Although motorcycling has changed immeasurably since I started out – for better (training, bikes that go, stop, and handle properly) and for worse (speed cameras, silly insurance premiums), its inherent character remains untouched. It gives me great satisfaction to see young riders like the Boy Biker of this parish embarking on this journey with the same wonder and excitement that I felt at his age.

Between his wheels lie the whole range of human emotions from despair and anger when his fifth puncture in two weeks has stranded him in the middle of nowhere at 2am on a November morning; to satisfaction and exaltation as a sequence of twelve dark woodland curves deposit him into the glare of the setting sun on the coast road above Chesil Beach.

Wherever the journey takes him, he can be sure that he'll be going there with a bunch of interesting riding buddies.

Dylan

LOOKING BACK

Motorcycle couriers weaving a path through London traffic in bright company livery have become as much a part of the Metropolitan milieu as black cabs and red double deckers (in fact it's been scientifically proven that at 4pm on a Friday afternoon in the City, you are never more than ten seconds away from a despatch rider!). DR's are now so commonplace that some readers may be surprised to learn that they are actually a relatively recent addition to the landscape — that when London started swinging in the Sixties, they didn't even exist.

Given the Digest's origins as a newssheet aimed at couriers, the 100th issue seems like a good time for a little reflection on the origins of the industry. First off, contrary to my assertion above, it's pretty obvious that there were plenty of shrewd people delivering stuff on two wheels 40 years ago, in fact they've probably been doing it since the bicycle was first invented. Jimmy Melon (Point to Point) tells me that when he was a foot messenger at a photo company way back in 1969, he bought himself a Lambretta and used it without their knowledge to save himself having to tramp all over the West End (which had the added bonus that it bought him loads of time to lounge around on his L51 and watch the mini skirts wiggle by). But while astute individuals might have been utilising bikes since the year dot, the readily identifiable motorcycle courier that we now take for granted, is definitely a more recent phenomenon.

Unfortunately, in spite of the comparatively short period of time involved, it has actually turned out to be incredibly difficult to come up with any sort of precise starting point. Although I spoke to any number of genuine industry relics (you all know who you are, thank you) they were unable to provide me with anything resembling a meaningful consensus about when it all started, let alone coming up with a definitive founding father. The only thing I can state with any degree of certainty, is that the despatch business predates my arrival at the end of 1978 by at least a half dozen years (I can be sure of this because even now people I've known for 27 years, still rarely miss an opportunity to remind me what a complete and utter newbie I am!).

My research wasn't entirely fruitless though, because I got to speak to all sorts of interesting people, who gave me loads of information. For example I discovered that Doug Sissons was running "Scooter Messengers" out of a small office in Soho Square in 1969! That beat any other dates I was offered by at least 2 or 3 years, so Doug could well have been the first; but as his riders looked just like anyone else scooting around the city, they never really became part of the public consciousness. The two companies mentioned most often with regard to that particular distinction were Pony Express and Mercury Despatch.

I tried to track down the origins of Pony, but I was frustrated by the fact that they had been bought by Securicor, before ultimately being swallowed up by DHL. Fortunately the late Sammy Rose — who as the operating brain behind the setting up of Mercury was nominated by a number of people as the first person to create a recognisable fleet of motorcycle couriers — is someone I enjoyed a longstanding relationship with. So given the acute lack of verifiable facts, I decided it might be best to concentrate on what I know best and focus on Mr Rose as the Daddy of the industry.

Legend has it that when Sammy was a mini cab driver, he was driving a wealthy American, Noel Rothman, out to Heathrow and while they sat there bemoaning the traffic, they got to talking about Sammy's idea to offer an express delivery service in London by buying some bikes and hiring a bunch of bikers to race around on

them. With the financial backing of the US businessman, he bought half a dozen Suzuki B120's and in 1972 Mercury Despatch began working from an office in Glenthorne Road, W6; by the time I joined the company six years later they occupied a large chunk of a mews in Maida Vale and had a highly visible fleet of bright orange GT250's, backed up by a load of equally carroty looking vans.

Shortly before I arrived Sammy had moved on, taking a bunch of employees and a few prime accounts with him, to set up Express Despatch at the top end of Ladbroke Grove — where he replicated his Mercury fleet in even brighter yellow. (Although the libel laws mean there's no danger of ending up in court for speaking ill of the dead, I still think it better to draw a discrete veil over what many would describe as Sammy's dodgier aspects. This is partly because he was such a lovable old rogue — imagine a Jewish Arthur Daley — that it would be churlish of me to mention them but also because I never saw his dead body, so it wouldn't surprise me in the slightest, if at this very moment he was sitting alongside a swimming pool in some suburb of Tel Aviv, enjoying a few cocktails with Robert Maxwell and paying for them with Mirror pension money and the two WC1's and the NW10 that fell off my pay slip in March 1981! If you are Sammy, cheers! Enjoy!).

I was already aware of Mercury's existence before I bought my first bike in 1975, but I spent literally years fantasizing about getting a job there before I finally got around to calling them. Walking into the cobbled mews in W9 the buzz of activity was amazing. I was so desperate to get a job riding one of their new orange GT250's, that I was scared the interviewer would hear my stomach churning; but less than half an hour later, I couldn't believe how easy it had been.

A few days later I could barely contain my excitement as I rode out of the mews on a nearly new orange Suzuki with topbox, panniers and large handlebar fairing. OK I had a bleeper rather than a radio and the bike felt distinctly


Lois Fast-Lane

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Services...

For inclusion in the Service Directory, please call The Rider's Digest on 020 8366 1421

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OMSS Motorcycles 020 8746 0925 W12
RJS Motorcycles 020 7221 1919 W11
Moto Serv 020 7837 0472 WC1
Buzzbee Motorcycles 01708 767668 Rmfrd
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GLC 020 8691 9696
Bladerunners 07702 048727
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GMG Motorcycles 020 7394 1004
LBT Recovery 020 7228 0800
SOS 020 8807 9003
All Bike Spares 020 8293 5335
The CG Centre 07904 299033
MC Recovery Direct 07711 078822
Phil Holmes 01992 622700
Bandit Bikes 020 7780 9346

Beg Guide

Hyde Park Corner W1
Regent St. W1
Great Castle St. W1
Cambridge Circus W1
Great Marlborough St. W1
Broadwick St. W1
Paddington St. W1
BP garage 1/4 mile short of Hanger Lane (A40 Eastbound) W5
Kensington Rd. W8
Gt Suffolk St (BP Garage opp. Chasbikes) SE1
Buckingham Palace Rd. SW1
Pimlico Rd. SW1
Sloane Square SW1
Lupus St. SW1
Horseferry Rd. SW1
Whitehall, Parliament St. SW1
Sydeny St. SW3
Wellington St. WC2
Lincolns Inn Fields WC2
Tavis St. (Covent Gdn) WC2
High Holborn WC1
Shoreditch High St. E2
Tower Hill EC3
Jnctn of Eastcheap and Gracechurch St. EC3
Lower Marsh (by Library) SE1
Black Prince Rd. SE11
Camden High St. NW1
Auto loo at Notting Hill Gate Free on Westbourne Grove Junc Colville Rd

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Hurst Trimming 01293 771661 Reigt

Accident Claims Services
Rider Support Services 020 8246 4900
ROAD TRAFFIC GUARDIAN 020 7328 0300

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mangled, but as I screamed off to W2 for my first pick up I thought that I'd landed the best job in the world. A couple of weeks later I rode out of London Comm's in Regents Park Road with a radio in my topbox, a microphone in the chin piece of an orange Griffin helmet, and the controller barking an address into my earpiece, and I knew without any doubt I had definitely landed the best job in the world.

Although there was good money to be made even then, when I joined Mercury all their riders were on wages and company bikes and it was obvious that they were all more than happy to pick up a decent pay packet for doing something half of them would've done in exchange for the loan of the bike. I met very few heads-down money-focused career couriers back then; in fact most of the riders I knew behaved more like career nutters.

But then the business was still in its infancy in those days. Even the oldest, most seasoned DR's probably hadn't hit thirty; and with an average age of around 22, it's no great surprise that I encountered (and became embroiled in) a lot of pretty childish behavior (both on and off of bikes). Of course there was a job to be done but our natural enthusiasm and post adolescent stupidity, meant that we tended to cover the ground quite quickly (even quicker if you met up with another rider going the same way) so generally it all got sorted.

In those days it was all paper dockets. The most I was ever given in one go was 13 (and half of them would have been multiples) but if the controller was on form and they all ran nicely, you'd sweep across W1, WC1 & 2, and the EC's, picking up and dropping as you went until you reached a point in the City where you

turned around and repeated the process in the other direction. There were untold rainy Friday afternoons, when I'd never have less than 4 or 5 jobs on board; nonetheless, whenever a punter asked if I was going directly there, I'd always reassure them that I most certainly was — oh yes indeedy!

We didn't have to wear bibs and rarely had to produce signatures, so the kind of pain in the arse security guard who's become the bane of the modern courier's existence, was likely to be told where to insert the package if he even attempted to impose any special conditions or send you off to a post room three postcodes away. Screw him, any rider who could do the business when it all got a bit hectic, earned himself a lot of leeway and even if you upset your controller enough to be given the bullet, everyone knew everyone in the business so you'd often get a call the same evening from a friend at a rival company, saying that they'd heard you were available.

The situation was greatly exaggerated in the rivalry between Mercury and Express because at the time the management of both companies were so neurotic about people going over to the other side with "secrets", that if you were arguing or negotiating with them, you'd always hint that you were thinking of "going up the road" if you needed a little extra leverage. Which was mad really, because relationships between staff of both firms were entirely incestuous. I was sharing a flat with a Mercury van driver and a controller from Express and I went from orange to yellow and back again without any noticeable effect on my earnings. In all that chopping around, the only thing that really changed about my colleagues or my circle of friends, was the

colour of the Helly Henson waterproofs they'd pull on when they stumbled out of our flat in the wee small hours of a working morning after yet another night of epic silliness.

The same day delivery business has come a long way in the quarter of a century since our madcap heyday. Of course there are still young men and women out there who know how to party, and who get as big a bang out of getting paid to ride a motorbike for a living as we did; but the face they are expected to present to their corporate clientele is of necessity far more professional than anything we ever had to muster.

Modern technology, including e-booking, palmtops and real time tracking, mean that riders no longer even have the option of lying to customers about where their package is – or to their controller about their location! It's one thing for them to strongly suspect that "a major snarl up on High Holborn" means that you've been skiving in Shoe Lane cafe with their other missing riders, but it's another altogether if they're looking at four stationary red dots in the same corner of EC4! – does this mean an end to the kind of the devil may care insolence that was the curse of the courier classes in those halcyon days?

Whatever the case congratulations are due to the despatch industry for evolving into the business it has become today and to Roger for commitment he's shown in providing it with a hundred issues of The Rider's Digest.

Dave Gurman

This first appeared in issue 100 in January 2006

Stand by West One

The photographs on the following pages (and quite a few on the previous ones) were taken by Nick Smith as part of a study about the make up of individuals working in one 'open door' industry, the courier industry. It was exhibited in London in 1997, at the Metro Cinema in Soho under the title "9 Lives'.

In 2015 Nick digitized his film work, and he became interested in the idea of trying to contact the people shown, and finding out where the intervening 18 odd years had taken them.

Nick says:
"I'm looking to re-exhibit the work with the comments that are made, in time for its 20th anniversary (or thereabouts). The 9 people whom I photographed in black & white, (and who gave the original show its title) are all here in their street pics – I think. A few others were co-workers, but most were those who were simply kind enough to let me go in, often very close, with a 50mm lens. I thank you all. You can simply click on photos, or run down through the films in their chronological order."

He set up a Facebook page called Stand by West One where he posted 138 photographs along with the following appeal: "if your picture is here, or you see an old friend, and are willing to take part, join in and make a comment." A lot people have responded and many of the riders have been identified (including our very own Lois Fast-Lane) but there are still a whole load of blanks so have a close look at the photos on these pages and then you might like to see the rest on the FB page.

Nick also has a blog page where anyone who chooses not to use Facebook can check out all of the pictures and even add comments.

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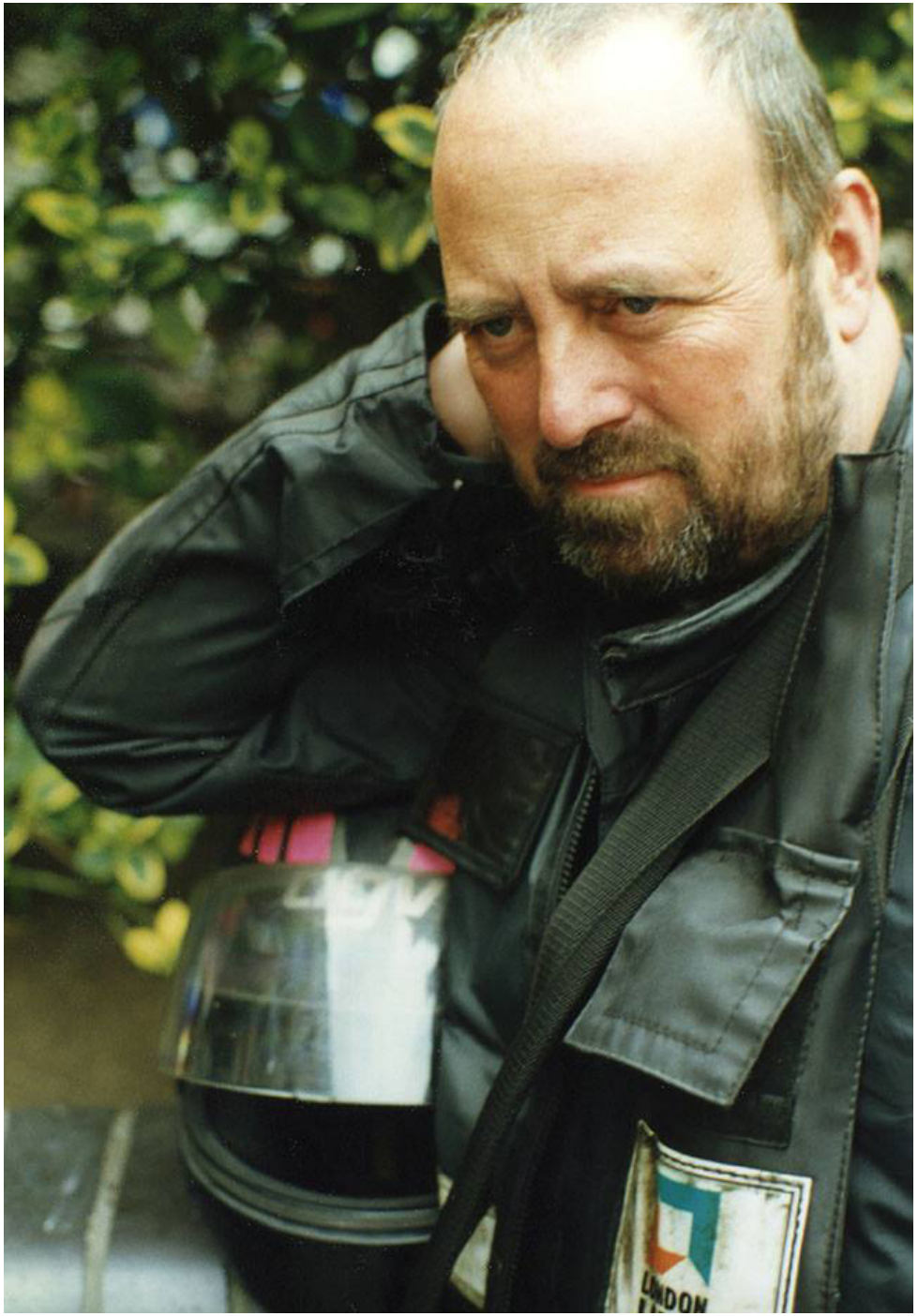
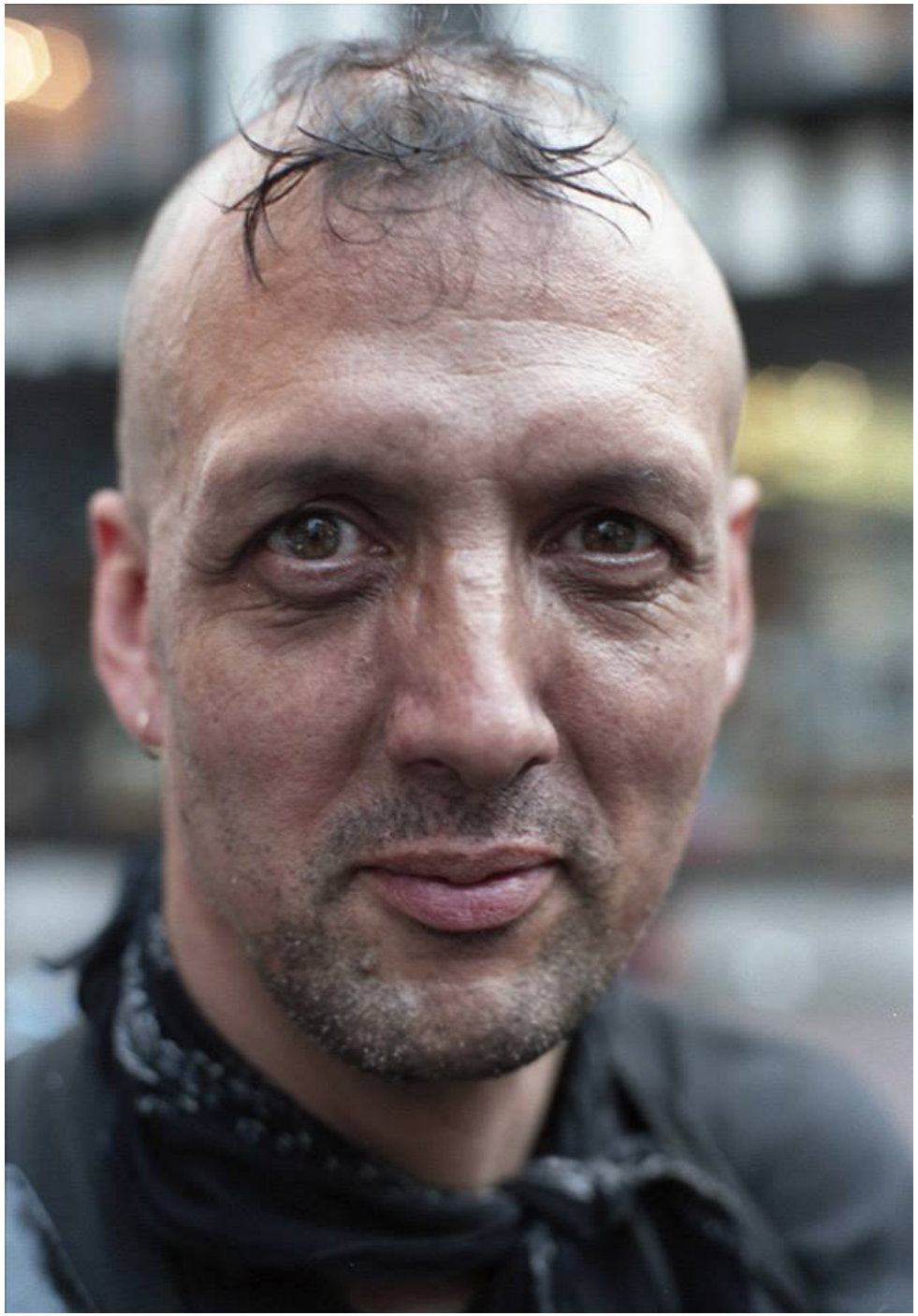



GP 1

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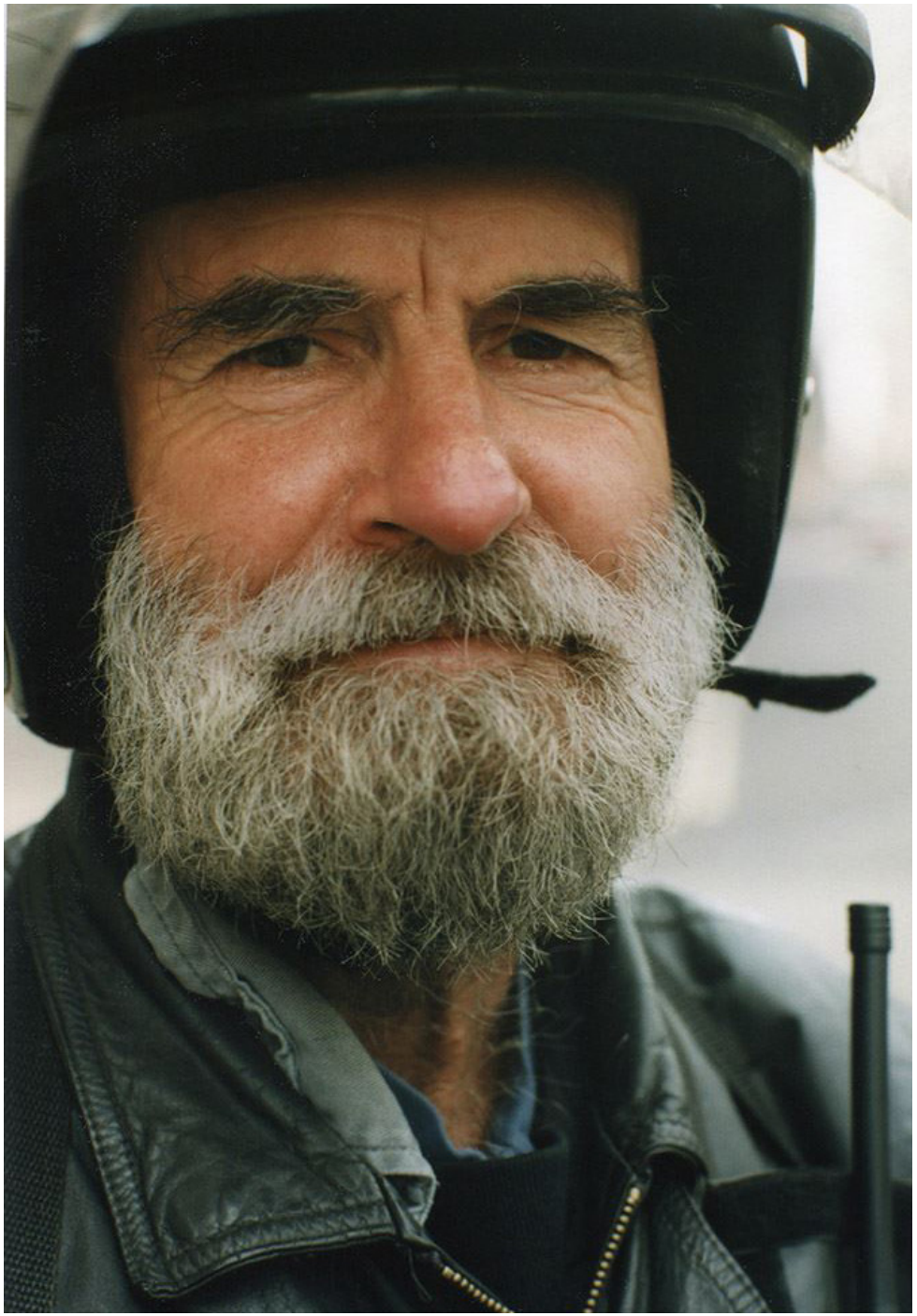
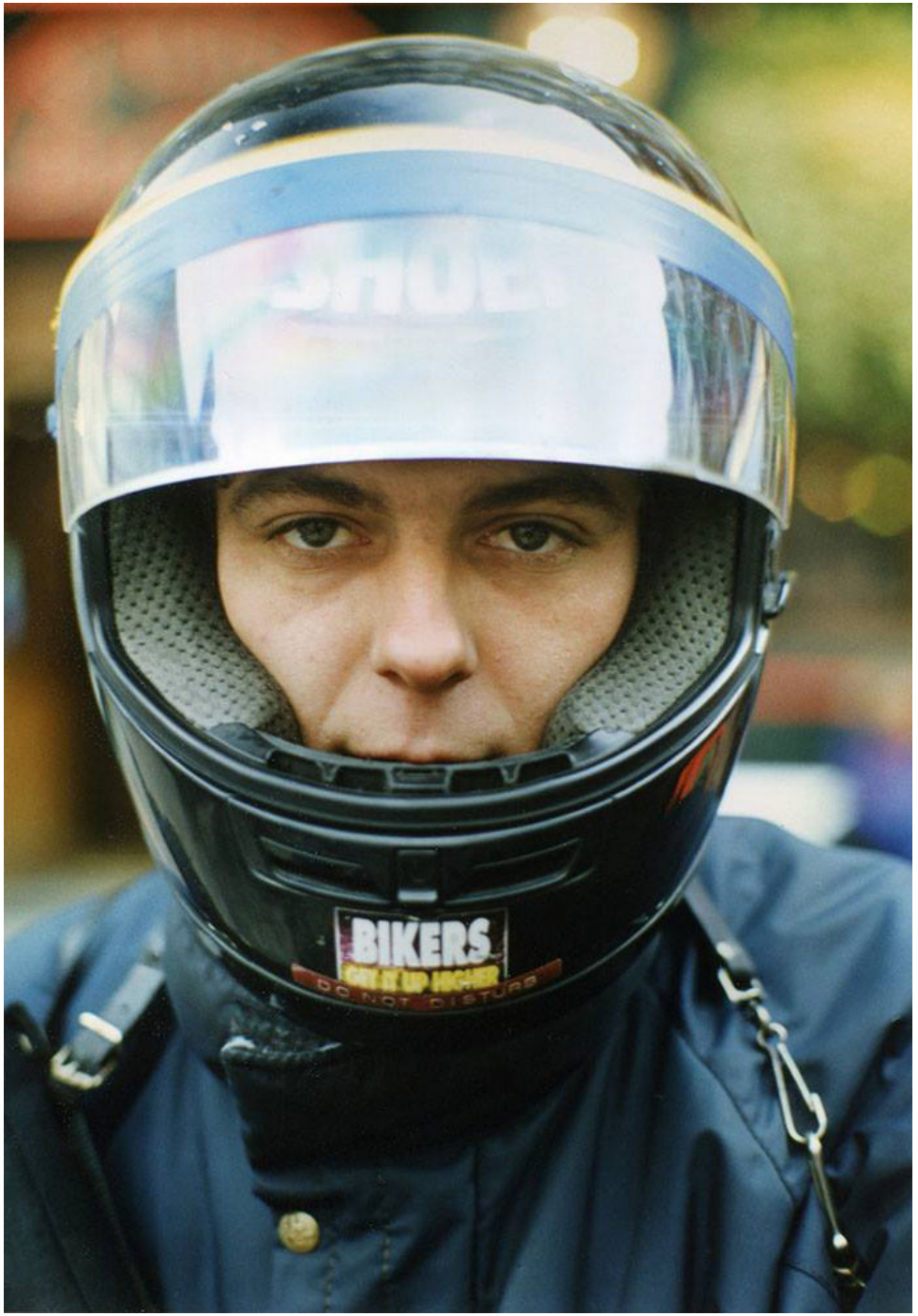
HELMET

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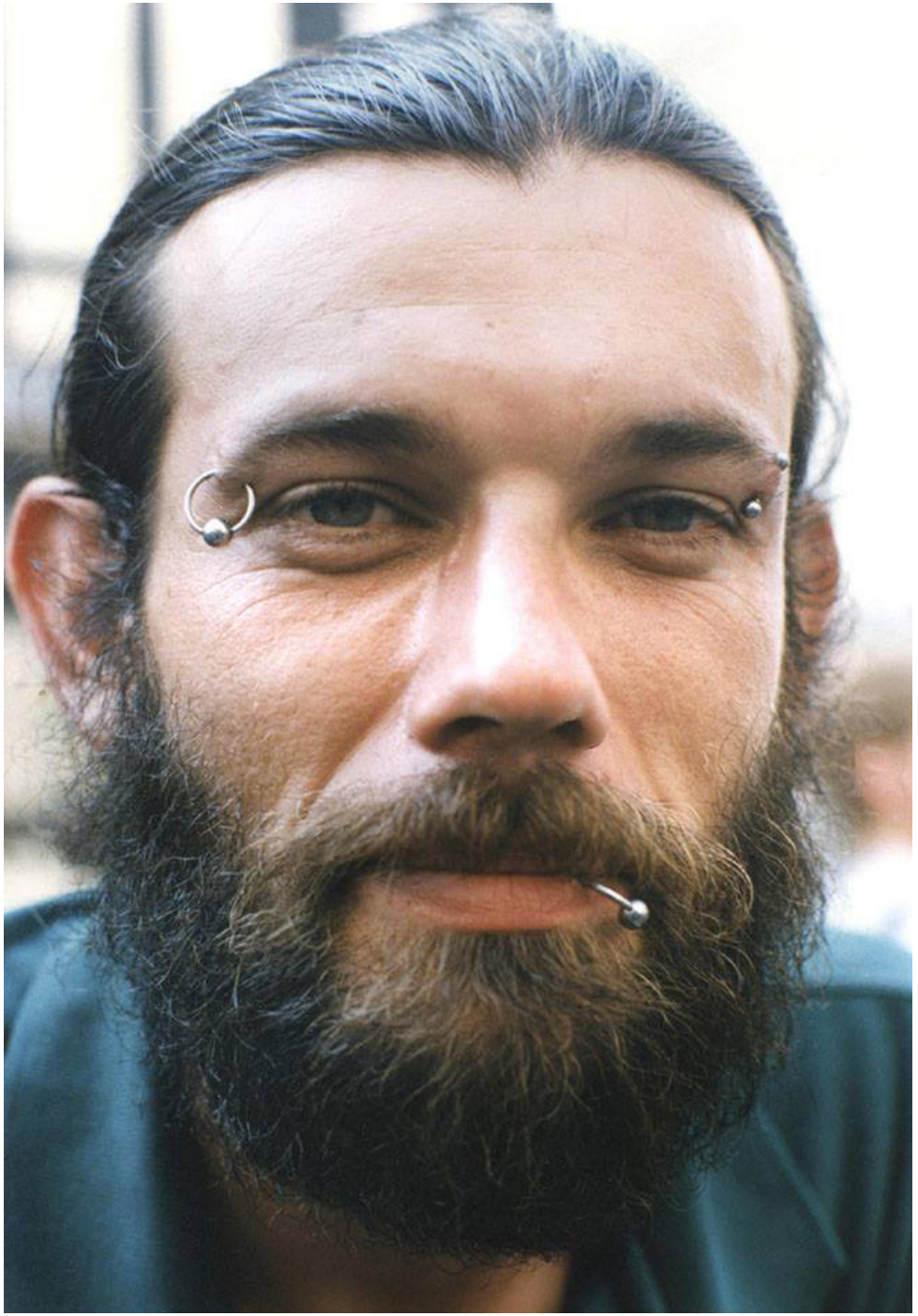

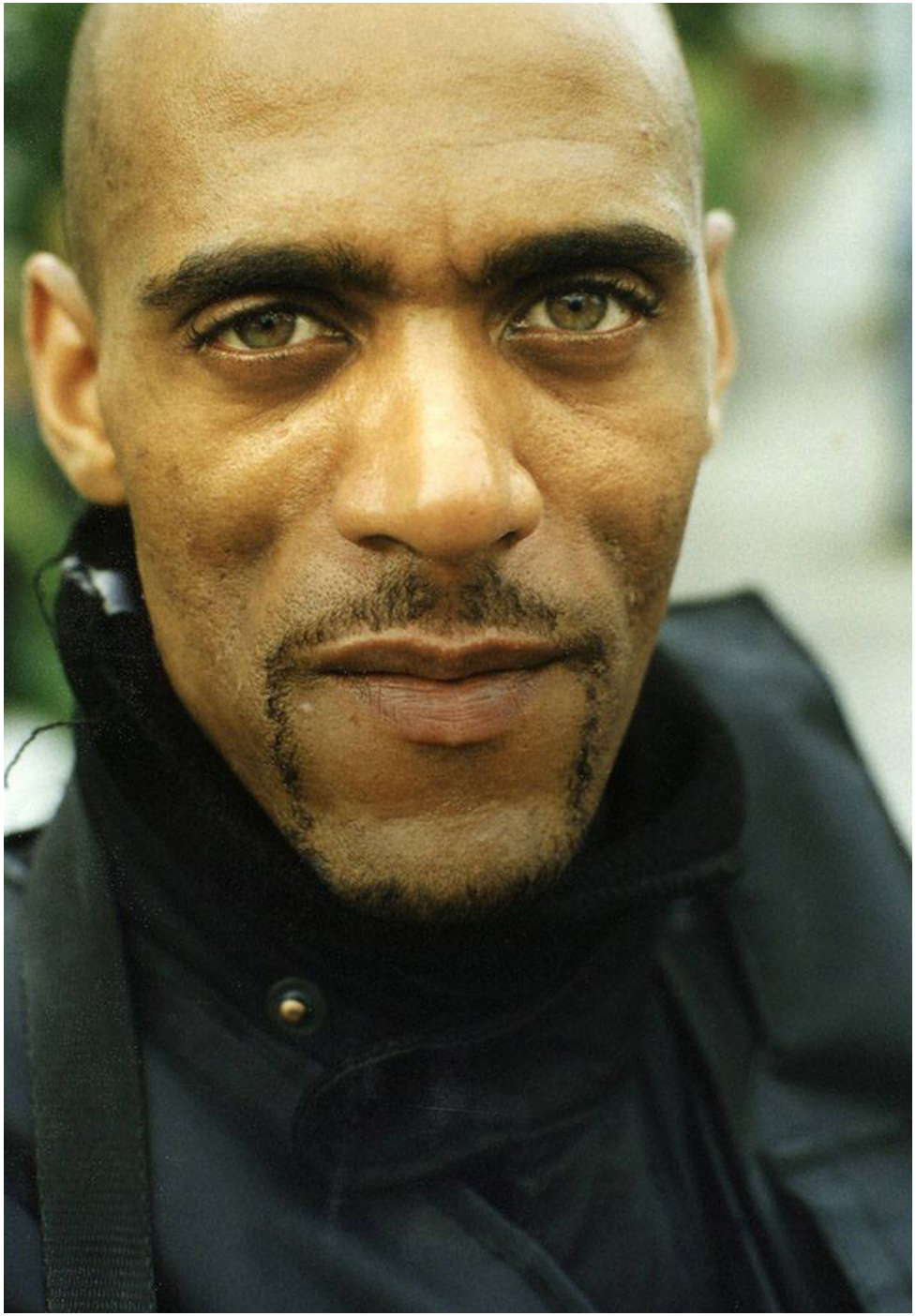

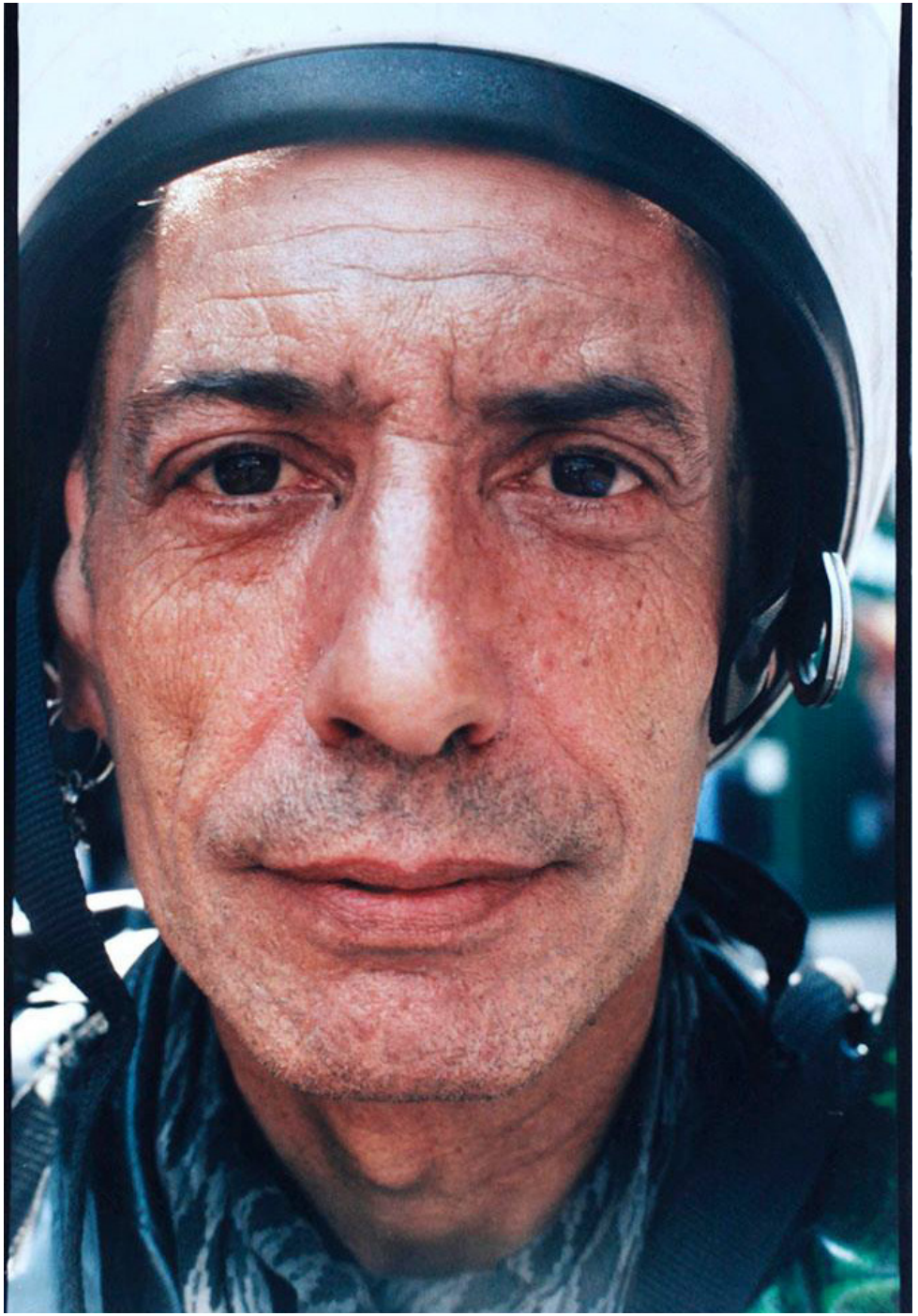

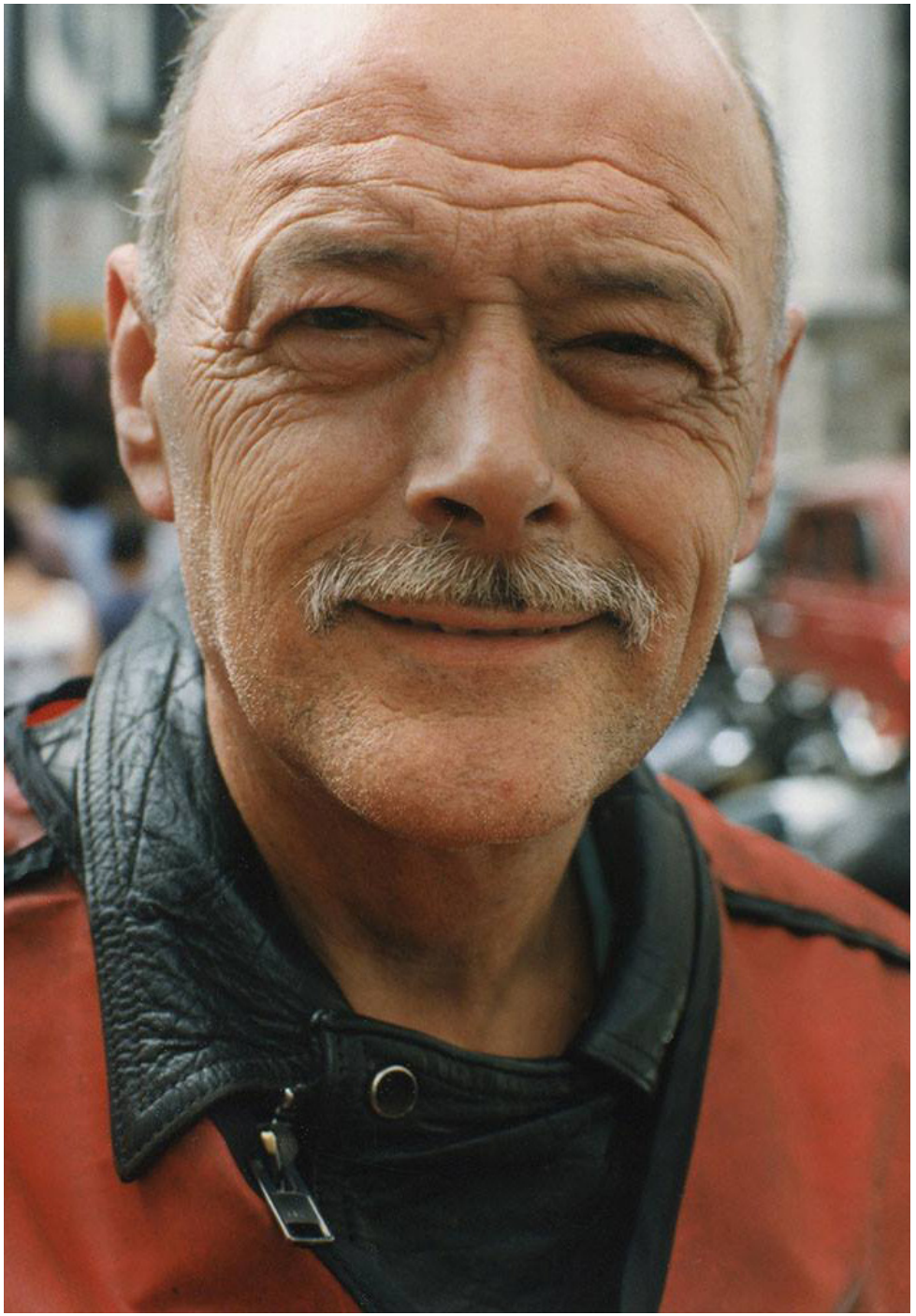

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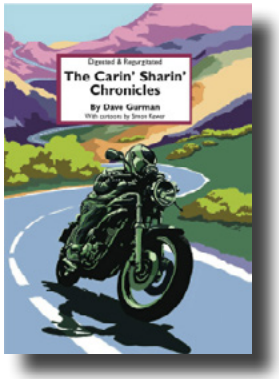

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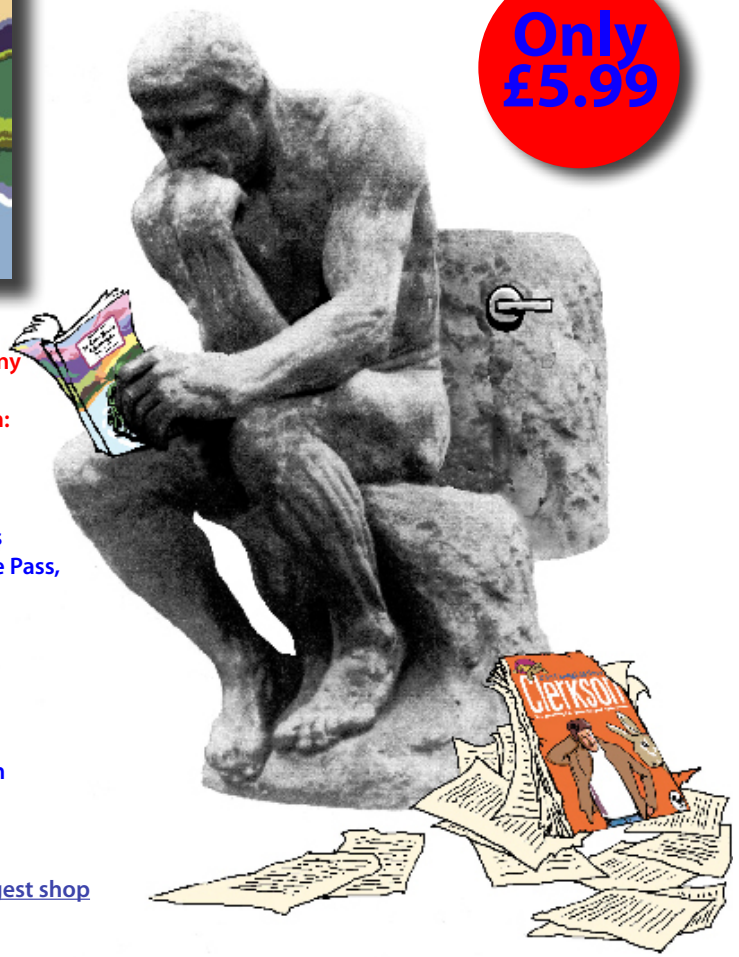

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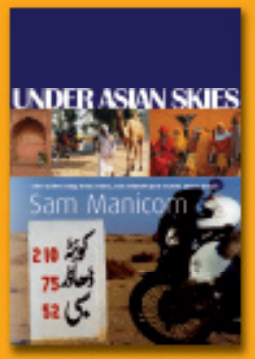

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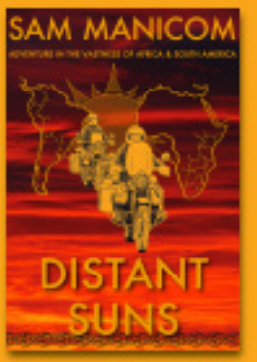

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Rekindling The Lost Flame

We've reached that time of year when I usually describe my latest summer bike trip. Except this time I don't really have anything to tell you.

The last time I got on the Multistrada for a proper multi-week trip was back in 2014 and although I had some amazing experiences riding rental bikes in Thailand, Cambodia, and Greece, by the middle of winter this year I was feeling the need to bond with my own bike again as thoughts of selling it started to spawn.

It's as if we were starting to grow estranged, she was left parked in the garage for most of the time, only to be ridden for the occasional commute or weekend ride.

All very boring, dare I say: at times even unpleasant; the Italian temperament of the girl not being very conducive to slow urban riding.

A couple of hours of internet browsing was all it took to find and book 4 therapy sessions to hopefully rekindle the flame and erase any thoughts of trading her in.

With a couple of months to go before the first track day, I spent the time making sure I would fit in the leathers (more workouts; fewer carbs), scouring the internet in search of a bargain set of racing boots and sorting out some crash protection (see BITZ at the back of this issue).

The 25th of April finally arrived and I have to say I wasn't super excited to get up at 5am and set off for the track in rain and a chilly 5°C. In my urge to book the sessions together I might have jumped the gun and gone for one too early in the season. To add to my woes, the crash protectors hadn't arrived and I had just replaced the brilliant in the wet Pilot Road 4s with a set of sportier Pirelli Diablo Rosso IIs; then the Ducati decided to be funny by killing the heated grips. Needless to say I wasn't the most confident of riders as I stepped into the small trackside cafe for the initial briefing.

Midland Circuit Lelystad is a tiny track that started as a 600m dirt-track oval back in 1982, subsequent renovations brought it to its current form as a fully paved multifunctional track using a combination of the outer oval, inner oval, and tight infield sections to make a full lap. Nicknamed Mickey Mouse Track due to its size and peculiar shape, it's more suitable to a supermoto than a superbike.

My last track outing was more than two years ago on sunny AIA in Portimão in Portugal – the WSB track – on a lithe and agile KTM Super Duke, which was the polar opposite of the current situation! Nevertheless, possibly because of the small venue and adverse weather conditions, the group of riders was a friendly mix, with diverse levels of experience and completely different bikes, from nakeds to tourers, with a couple of sports bike in between.

One group, in particular, caught my attention and as we started chatting I learned the reason for their Mad Max looking bikes: they were regular Moto Gymkhana riders and were there for their first track experience to try and get some more experience. Funny enough one of the events I had already booked was a Moto Gymkhana experience.

With a fully wet track, I started on the slowest of the three groups before feeling comfortable enough to move up to the intermediate after a couple of sessions. The switch coincided with the rain stopping so despite the wet surface my confidence kept building and I was surprised to find that even in the wet the Pirelli consistently had enough grip to lift the front wheel under power exiting corners.

I didn't get my knee down in the wet and at times riding in the pouring rain was downright scary but the Multistrada's combination of traction control and ABS provided enough of a safety net to allow me to push beyond what my scared brain wanted. I left the track with a whole new view on what the bike can do in the wet. Would I choose to do a track day in the cold and rain again? Definitely not, but if it happens I can guarantee there is a lot you can learn, and even some fun to be had.

A month and a half after the mildly unpleasant yet enriching first experience on track with this bike I was delighted to see the weather forecast for my second track outing was clear skies and a temperature in the mid-twenties.

With still non-functioning heated grips but a full set of R&G crash protectors now fitted I set off for Lelystad again, this time to the CHM Lelystad Circuit, which is part of the Dutch Police Academy. A state of the art facility used for training police riders and drivers, it includes a race track with changes in camber and altitude combined with narrow infield sections to simulate a variety of riding conditions, and as I was about to find out we would be using all of it.

Yes...again in my haste to book the track day I might have overlooked the (Dutch) description and not have realized the venue was a full day of advanced rider training, not a track day 'per se'. Well, I can't say I was unhappy with the news.

The day started with a cone slalom, providing a challenging warm-up. No matter how enthusiastically the instructor ordered us to look ahead, the damn things proved to be a stronger eye magnet than a pair of boobs at a bike rally!

To reward our spectacular performance in the slalom we were treated with a round of ball-shrinkingly scary evasive manoeuvres from track to (wet) grass runoff at speed: clutch in, stand up, smooth steering inputs through feet on pegs, back on track – and breathe! Hitting the tall grass at speeds around 90km/h was the scariest thing I've ever done voluntarily on a bike!

By now we were ready for the fun part to begin: full on braking exercises! With the bike's ABS set to one of the intermediate levels the girl proved to be absolutely brilliant, braking from 120 - 0 km/h with the rear wheel hovering a couple of inches above the road surface and zero ABS intervention. The therapy sessions were doing their job and I was loving the bike more with every minute!

Done with straight line braking it was time for mid corner 'emergency' braking: take the corner at decent pace and at the instructor's signal, lean in further touching the imaginary central divider before straightening the bike and braking hard. Definitely a useful exercise and the first one to start showing the ground clearance limitations of the Multistrada with the first foot peg touchdown of the day.

After a short lunch break, the afternoon was dedicated to proper track riding and I only had to press a couple of switches for the bike to be correctly setup with suspension in Sport mode and intermediate levels of ABS and Traction Control. Yes, I know, modern gimmicks; old bikes were for real men!

Well, I'm not getting any younger but I guess I can't be that old either, as I quite appreciate the wonders of modern electronics. And if I was already a fan of electronically adjustable suspension, TC, and ABS, the truth was I'd never really seen the point of engine maps, until then. For daily riding I have the

bike set to full power in all riding modes, as I don't like the inconsistency in power delivery when switching between the different riding modes to adjust the suspension response. The fact is on tracks with slow tight sections the intermediate map with the full 150hp but soft power delivery seems to produce the best results, filtering out some of the on-off throttle jerkiness and allowing – at least for me – much faster riding. So yes, I am now a full disciple of Master Chip!

Where was I?

Ah, right, so this time I started in the intermediate group but quickly moved up as I was feeling comfortable to up the pace, by then I was able to get my knee down on several corners and the Ducati started to show its limitations dragging the pegs and my boots! No matter how far up I tried to tuck my feet, I needed to lean off the bike more and more to carry more corner speed. I was having a blast and feeling very proud of myself with the traction control light flashing away mid-corner… until the session ended and we were instructed to switch to counter-clockwise riding. From this point on I never felt as comfortable on the bike. Don't know if it was because I was getting tired and losing focus or some other reason but I was way slower and didn't enjoy myself nearly as much this time around.

Mind you I wasn't the only one: one of the riders on a CBR600F decided to test his newly learned off track riding skills by going straight in a corner ploughing through a patch of loose dirt. 'Kudos' for him for saving it and not dropping the bike!

By the end of the day I was fully in love with my bike again! No matter how boring the ride back home was the fact is the same bike that took me and a pillion 5,000km to Scandinavia and back in absolute comfort and rode off road on a beach in Norway, was also a blast on track irrespective of the weather conditions.

Make no mistake: given the choice, I would still go for my ex-KTM Super Duke 990 for track use. It might not have ABS or TC but the lower centre of gravity and lighter weight make it much easier to push hard… it's just a shame it was such a pig to ride with pillion and at anything below sporty pace.

Humm… I wonder how much an '07 KTM Super Duke goes for nowadays?

Ricardo Rodrigues

TO BE CONTINUED… (In the next issue, the Multistrada tries Moto Gymkhana!)

THANKS TO:

- René Van den Brandt for the photos of the track day at Midland Circuit Lelystad
- René Vos from Circuitpics NI for the photos of the trackday at CHM Lelystad.

Check out his website for professional photos of Dutch and International racing events.

MOTOLIT & CULTURE

by Jonathan Boorstein

From Anarchy to Angst

Having just buried my mother, I expected to sit down and write this issue's column consciously or unconsciously thinking philosophically of mortality or nostalgically of times past. Instead I find myself thinking about my old master's thesis as well as one particular teacher, which may be considered the past of a different time.

My graduate work was in design and architectural criticism and journalism. Motorcycles of course are good examples of industrial design (although try convincing an academic). I am qualified to discuss why, say, the Vespa deserves its reputation as an iconic example of mid-century Italian design or why Philippe Starck's Aprilia Moto 6.5 will never ever even come close to that status, even though it's become a bit of a collector's item.

Usually the relevance of my graduate work has to do with the nature of coffee table books. They're about pictures, not text, and are typically neither well-written nor well-researched. Sometimes I get to refer to that one teacher who had issues with anthologies. She could never figure out why what was included was included. Anthologies are an argument developed and illustrated by the works that are selected. She also didn't grasp that just because an editor wanted to include a work didn't mean that he or she could obtain the rights to reprint it.

On occasion I get to point out that some things are critic-proof. A die-hard fan of the Norton Commando will buy every book about the marque and the model whether or not the volume is any good. I'm certainly guilty on that count. However, I never expected to be reminded of a minor ethical scandal I came across while analyzing regional interior design style books. One of the things I like about motorcycle literature is that it generally has a higher than usual level of integrity when it comes to content.

Let's start with a couple of coffee table books, both of which are good examples of the type, perhaps because they are both well-written and well-researched for a change. The pick may be ***Cuban Harleys, Mi Amor*** (2015), produced by Max Cucchi, Connor Gorry, and Jens Fuge.

The Harleys in question are indeed Harley-Davidson motorcycles, which Cuban bikers have kept going despite an embargo that lasted more than half a century. Here a biker riding a Harley is called a Harlista, a new word to me, but one I have fallen madly in love with and shall use shamelessly.

The authors estimate that there are about one hundred vintage Harleys still in use in

Cuba, more than half of which are included in the book. The text emphasizes the owners over the bikes. There is less about the oldest running Harley (1936) than about the oldest riding Harlista (104 at the time of publication), Cheíto Puig, who claims to have met Arthur Davidson himself.

It's not impossible. Harleys were being imported to Cuba as early as 1913 and the first dealership opened in Havana in 1917. By the end of World War II, the most important dealership turned out to be in Santiago de Cuba, run by the Bretos family, which ushered in something of a "Golden Age" for Harley-Davidson motorcycles over the course of the 1940s and 50s, according to the authors. The motorcycles were used for everything from despatch and deliveries, to trips around Cuba and Team Acrobática, a stunt troop run by the police.

What the Cuban Revolution didn't bring to an end in 1959, the US embargo did (officially it began in 1962; but sanctions were in place earlier). The police Harleys were buried in cement, and the Harlistas found parts and service harder and harder to get. A second "Golden Age" – that of the "Artful Bodger" – arrived as owners had to fabricate or cannibalize parts to keep the bikes going. There seems to be as much legend as fact surrounding the best of the bodgers, José (Pepe Milésima) Lorenzo.

The combination of those elements is what inspired the book. "The lack of parts and accessories for these motorcycles caused by the commercial and financial embargo to which the country has been subjected for more than 50 years has made the story of "Cuban Harlistas" as exciting and as mystical as the history of Harley-Davidson motorcycles

themselves. With our photographs we present some of the most iconic personalities, who have crossed the frontier from simply possessing one of these motorcycles. By overcoming the lack of spare parts in order to get a Harley on the road, together with their friends and relative (sic), they form a unique chapter in the ongoing Harley-Davidson story (p.6)".

As for the Harlistas themselves, there is quite a range of different types of people from different walks of life. There's Adolfo Reinaldo Prieto Rosell, a co-founder of the Cuban Chapter of the Latin American Motorcycle Association (LAMA) and Elizer Días de Villegas, who started a small museum dedicated to Cuban Harley-Davidson ephemera and memorabilia. In addition there's María de los Ángeles Santana, an actress, who was the first woman to ride a motorcycle in Cuba as well as Adriana Domínguez León, a lawyer, who is currently the only woman Harlista in Cuba. There are also such celebrities as David Blanco, a singer-songwriter, and Ernesto Guevara March, the son of Che Guevara, who recreated at least part of his father's motorcycle trip.

Each Harlista gets a couple of pages. The narrative is stitched together from quotes and appears in three languages, German, English, and Spanish. There are passing mentions of some truly impressive roadside repairs more details of which would have been nice. Photographs are uncaptioned, which always annoys me.

Cuban Harleys is important because it highlights a little known chapter in political and motorcycling history. There are a couple of articles and a documentary, none of which are well known. The book is a solid introduction to the topic. The authors note a renaissance of Harley-Davidson culture in Cuba over the past decade or so. Cuban Harlistas participate in international rallies and visitors can tour Cuba on Harleys. Now that the embargo has been lifted, I suspect the real renaissance is about to begin.

Sons of Anarchy: The Official Collector's Edition (2014) is a different sort of coffee table book. A companion volume to the television series, its target audience is obsessed fans of the television series and that audience will turn on the producers of the book for the smallest mistake.

The show ran for seven seasons between 3 September 2008 and 9 December 2014. The book was released right after the last of the show's 92 episodes aired, but before Christmas 2014. *The Collector's Edition* is highly professional product, but let's look at the show itself first for those who may be unfamiliar with the series.

Sons of Anarchy (SOA) was created by Kurt Sutter, who was fascinated by outlaw bikers and outlaw biker culture. He took the dramatic situation and thematic questions of *Hamlet* as his point of departure. Here the father of the protagonist, Jax Teller (played by Charlie Hunnam) is overthrown by his gang brother, Clay Morrow (Ron Perlman), who then marries Jax's mother, Gemma (Katey Sagal).

Because the gang ran guns and, later, were drug mules, the meditations on violence, its appropriateness, and its consequences brought the show closer to *The Godfather* trilogy than to *The Sopranos*, a serial drama to which SOA was often compared. A typical SOA story arc balanced the domestic drama of Jax and his family with the over-the-top criminal antics and violence of the outlaw motorcycle gang, Sons of Anarchy Motorcycle Club, Redwood Original (SAMCRO). In short, in which "father's footsteps" did Jax intend to follow?

In addition to the antagonists inside Jax's

extended family of SAMCRO, there were rival and allied outlaw gangs, not all them on two wheels, as well as government agencies who try to help or stop SAMCRO's illegal businesses. Too often the ethics of the law agencies turned out to be indistinguishable from the ethics of the mob (Russian and Italian), the Triads, or an offshoot of the IRA, not to mention such other outlaw biker gangs as the Mayans and the Nordics.

Few critics commented on the dubious morality of a universe which pits the 'good' bad guys against the 'bad' bad guys as well as, depending upon how one sees legal authority, the 'bad' good guys. Instead the comments focused on unnecessary plot complications, gratuitous violence with increasing shock value, and "undisciplined story telling", at least according to *The New York Times*. Much the same could be said for *Hamlet* itself, which ends up with a stage strewn with dead bodies around which Fortinbras must circumnavigate without reminding the audience of John Cleese and The Ministry of Silly Walks to deliver the final lines of the play.

My main critical objection to SOA is that, regardless of how well-written and well-acted is was, and it was, it reinforced the negative stereotype of a motorcyclist being a criminal of one sort or another. While Hunnam is probably known as the hunk who launched a thousand romance novels about alpha males in motorcycle gangs, he was quite good as Jax, despite a variable accent. Sagal and Perlman were excellent. Sagal even won a Golden Globe. Her Gemma is up there in the pantheon of malevolent, manipulative matriarchs alongside Angela Lansbury as Eleanor Iselin in *The Manchurian Candidate* and Siàn Phillips as Livia in *I, Claudius*.

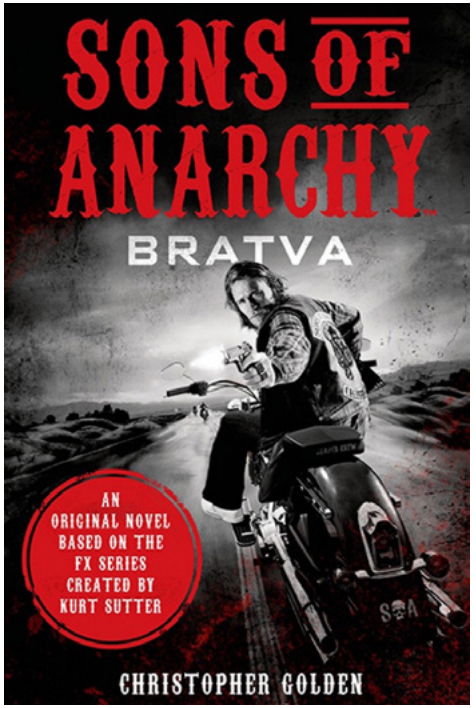
The Guide was written by Tara Bennett, who might be best described as a professional

geek. She has written or co-written more than two dozen official guides to a range of films and television series, including *Lost*, *Firefly*, and *24*. More recent releases include *The Making of Outlander: The Series* and *The Official Making of Big Trouble In Little China* (both 2016). She is the US editor for *SFX Magazine* and contributes to *TotalFlim* and *Blastr*, among others. She may be best known in Britain for monthly appearances on Siren FM.

Sutter provides a short, sweet, and sarcastic introduction to this "fun look inside the twisted, beautiful, dysfunctional family of the Sons of Anarchy: in front of the camera, behind the camera, and every fucking thing in-between (p.8)".

The book is divided into five sections: "The Sons Are Born"; "Welcome to the Clubhouse"; "Creating the Chaos"; "The Rise and Fall of SAMCRO"; and "The Final Act". The first section covers how the series came about in terms of conception and development. The next two sections cover the cast and characters as well as the production details – sets, props, costumes, make-up, stunts, special effects, soundtrack, and even contemporary biker slang. The last two sections are episode guides, the second of which includes an "In Memoriam" for the approximately 250 characters who died or were killed over the course of the series. There are sidebars covering such things as how the name SAMCRO evolved and how the SOA reaper logo developed.

The mindboggling attention to detail that went into the series is impressive. Sutter wanted – and got – about as accurate a background of 21st Century outlaw biker culture and lifestyle as is possible in a TV series. Most film and television productions are still mired in the 1950s/1960s image of the biker from *The Wild One*, despite having become a joke by then. The best and best-known send-



up of the period was probably Eric von Zipper (Harvey Lembeck) in a handful of AIP Beach Party films.

For those who ride (or are just motorcycle mad) the short section on the bikes might be the most interesting. The Sons rode customized Harley-Davidson Dynas (yes, they were Harlistas one and all).

The Guide is apparently a revised and expanded version of an earlier newsstand edition. Nevertheless, it's a good overview of the entire series and will make die-hard fans, past, present, and future, feel like insiders in some fashion – although it's probably too much detail for those who aren't fans and not enough for those who are.

SOA has also launched comics books, soundtrack CDs, and, if memory serves, a video game or two. In addition, it has published ***Sons of Anarchy: Bratva***, a tie-in novel that is supposed to be the first of a series. The TV tie-in book used to be quite popular here in the States, even for series lasting only one season. *Then Came Bronson*, an earlier series about a motorcyclist, for example, lasted a year, but spawned three pulp paperbacks. The record may be for the mid-sixties spy series, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, which produced 24 spin-off novels, a surprising number of which were quite readable. One writer, David McDaniel, even developed a cult following.

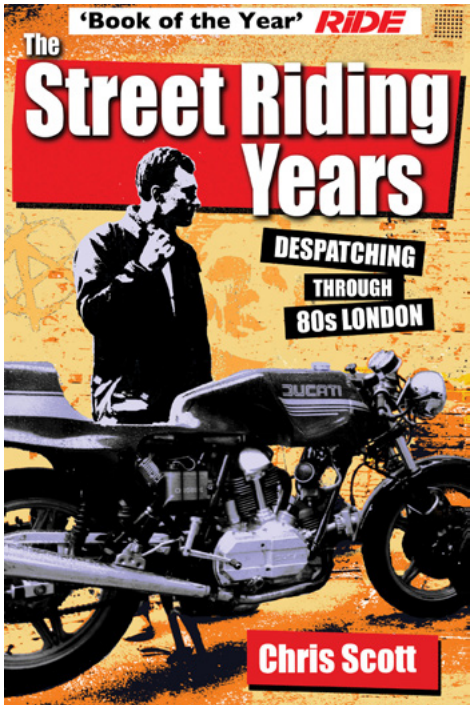
TV tie-in novels are not quite as popular here these days and the continuity between episodes and seasons in SOA was quite tight, making a space for such an outside adventure difficult. To address that, Sutter (or his production company) turned to another professional geek, Christopher Golden, whose credits include horror, suspense, and fantasy novels and comic books for adults and young adults. He is no stranger to the tie-in novel either. His include *King Kong*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*. Coincidentally Golden worked with Mike Mignola on *Hellboy*, the films from which starred Perlman.

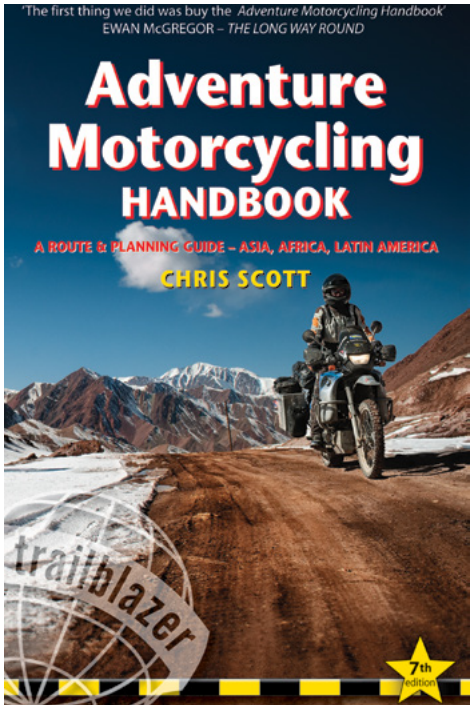
Bratva is set up as a lost episode taking place at some unspecified point near the beginning of the fourth season. It takes a minor and somewhat undeveloped character from the series – Trinity, Jax's half-sister and a member of an offshoot of the IRA in Belfast – and builds a story around her 'rescue' from the Russian mob in Nevada with whom she has become involved. Hiding their connections to SAMCRO as much as possible, Jax and two of his gang brothers go to find Trinity and settle some of their issues with the Bratva.

It's an easy read. Golden is consistent to the plot, tone, and characters of the series and makes sure nothing that happens would change the story arc of the season or of the series. For some, that may make the ending a bit weak, if not predictable. Violence and resulting injuries are surprisingly realistic (not always the case with the series itself).

I'm not an expert on the marque, let alone a Harlista, but I'm under the impression that Dynas have electric starts, making it unnecessary for Jax and his friends to kickstart their bikes. Golden may wish to check whether I'm wrong before the next book is released.

As a critic, I don't review books that haven't been written, but there is one SOA book that should be. Sutter has been fascinated by outlaw culture and lifestyle since his twenties, possibly earlier. He rides and once lived in the Lower East Side (we were neighbors and didn't know it), which is where the regional headquarters of the Hells Angels is located. When it came time for him to go cross country to Los Angeles and become Kurt Sutter, showrunner, he rode to California by motorcycle. That could be a





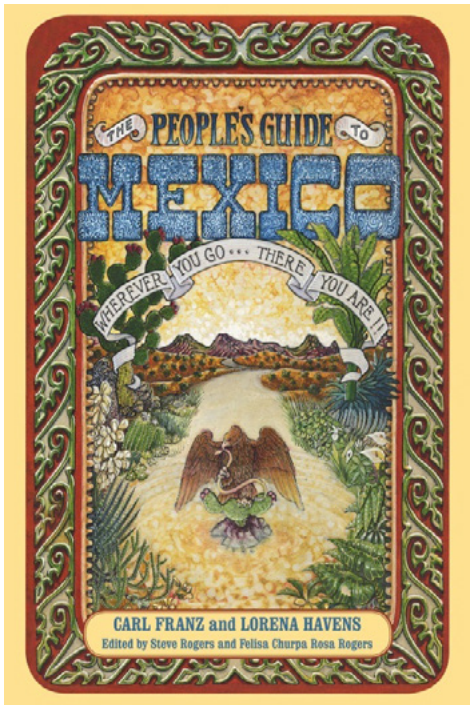
very interesting motorcycle adventure travel memoir, if he ever gets around to it.

By the time ***Adventures in Motorcycling*** (2015) got around to me, the title had been changed to ***The Street Riding Years***. Regardless, the subtitle, ***Despatching Through 80s London***, remains the same and more on target. Under either title, it's Chris Scott's companion volume to *Desert Travels*. Both are memoirs of how, well, Chris Scott became Chris Scott. It ends more or less about the time Scott creates *Desert Biking*, the guide that would eventually evolve into the *Adventure Motorcycling Handbook*.

For about twelve years, Scott was a despatch rider in a London slowly and relentlessly being destroyed by Thatcherite policies. Scott's life at the time was about as frenetic. He sets the inside minutiae of how a despatch company and its riders go about their business against his wider world of sex, drugs, music, squatting, desert travel, hospital stays, and sleeping in vans when not driving them to carry various activists to one political rally or meeting or another, though not necessarily in that order.

And then there are his reviews of the motorcycles he rode during that period. Readers who think I'm an exacting and forensic critic haven't read one of Scott's analytic reviews of a motorcycle. I'm surprised a Norton Owners group hasn't taken a contract out on him. (Riders of vintage bikes tend to buy into the romance of a marque or model rather than the reality. And then go into denial. I'm not guilty on that count.)

As a writer, Scott is an accomplished raconteur, with a journalist's ear and eye for the telling detail. He's as incapable of telling a dull story as he is of writing a dull sentence. His off-



beat take on life and its indignities is balanced by the rather droll British quirk of exaggerating minor points or issues and minimizing major ones.

Despite being arranged chronologically – both in terms of time and bikes ridden – *Despatching Through 80s London* is a collage of brilliant anecdotes. Nevertheless, it captures the spirit of the time and place perfectly. What is wrong is something Scott may not care about. Because of the bike reviews, it may never reach the mainstream audience it deserves.

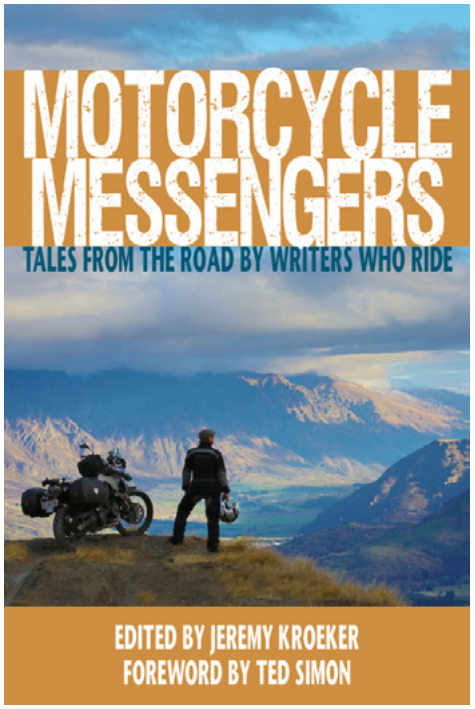
Scott's claim to fame is of course ***The Adventure Motorcycling Handbook***, which just celebrated its 25th anniversary with a Seventh Edition. The only guide book I can think of that has had as many editions, been around for an unbelievable number of years, and has as intense a cult following is ***The People's Guide to Mexico***, originally published in 1972 and now in its 14th Edition. For many it's best known for its hippie-era tag line: "Wherever you go… there you are".

Motorcycle adventure travelers probably won't need much more than those two books to tackle Hispanophone North America, but if you're an art and culture whore like me, you might want to toss Andrew Coe's *Archaeological Mexico: A Guide to Ancient Cities and Sacred Sites* and Chicki and Oz Mallan's *Colonial Mexico: A Traveler's Guide to Historic Districts and Towns* into your rucksack as well. Both are still valid, though long out of print and could use an update.

Although *The People's Guide* only mentions motorcycles in passing, the two books have something important in common. Neither can be bothered to tell us where to eat or sleep, what to do or see. Both are really about a "philosophy" of travel, a way how to experience things. Or as Scott says in his Introduction: "you're beyond the safety net of conventional… touring… so the word 'adventure', with its associations of risk and uncertainty, is appropriate" (p.7).

I don't know whether it's scary, depressing, or says something about the quality of both books to realize how many editions of each I've read over the years. It's a mix of all three of course, but mostly the latter. It says one thing when you read a book; it says another when you reread a book. I'm not alone. Dale Coyner, who prefers paved streets to packed sand, calls *The Handbook* "the definitive guide in world travel" in *Motorcycle Journeys Through North America*. *The Handbook* even impressed an actor named Ewan McGregor.

The new edition updates information on routes, motorcycles, and other things the reader might need to know to ride "in the developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin



America" (p.7). The sections highlighting various travelers and their trips are now in color, with the emphasis on a photograph of the rider. The technical data is now squeezed into small boxes, more like long captions. The first three parts remain the more important ("Planning & Preparation"; "Bike Choice & Bike Preparation"; and "Life on the Road"). The small anthology at the end – "Tales from the Saddle" – is as solid as always. This is not the sort of book you buy because it will look pretty on your coffee table. Nevertheless, a graphic overhaul might be a good idea for the eighth edition.

The Handbook is not just essential motorcycle adventure research, it's essential motorcycle adventure literature reading.

Because of *The Rider's Digest*'s origins in the same despatch riding culture Scott wrote about, the title of Jeremy Kroeker's anthology, ***Motorcycle Messengers*** (2015), is unintentionally misleading. Motorcycle messengers (or couriers) is what despatch riders are called in North America; except in Southern California, where, because its heavy use by the legal industry, couriers are known as docket rockets (as opposed to the other sort of docket rockets, which may violate due process).

For Kroeker, however, these messengers only carry the stories of their motorcycle adventures abroad or on the road (or both) back home. This conceit of the traveler's tale is not new, but the title allows Kroeker to indulge in a bit of harmless trans-Atlantic wordplay that the subtitle, ***Tales from the Road by Writers who Ride***, doesn't quite clear up.

What really needs clearing up, however, is what reminded me of my long ago thesis. In a section discussing how self-referential, if not highly questionable, it was (and still is) for an author to include his or her own interior or that of another author as a 'best example' of this or that style or design element. And the favor is returned. This insidious bit of egoism reached an apogee – if that's quite the word – when Suzanne Slesin, still one of the major interior design writers in the US, released *New York Style* in 1992. Slesin not only included her own country house as an example of "New York Style" (whatever that is), but also used it for the cover. *New York Magazine*, then as now, always good for pure snark, quoted a "design insider" as saying, "What fun to have your own place on the cover of a book that is supposed to represent the best New York has to offer" (*New York Magazine*, 18 January 1993).

What fun to include not one but three samples of your work in a book that is supposed to represent the best motorcycle adventure travel writing has to offer. And in a book you published yourself.

To be fair, fellow Canadian Mark Richardson also gets three slots. I might have wondered if this weren't a case of misguided patriotism, promoting Canadian motorcycle adventure writers, whose contributions to the sub-genre often get lost, if not forgotten. But Neil Peart, who is more famous that the rest of the writers put together, gets only one excerpt and the Ryan brothers, whose books about circumnavigating China and India made quite a splash recently, get none. To be fair, Geoff Hill, who is not Canadian, but whose bibliography has more motorcycle adventure travel books than anyone else I can think of off the top of my head, has only two slots.

It's a shame really since everything else Kroeker did in assembling this anthology ranges between spot-on and brilliant. The literature of motorcycle adventure travel is still primarily a British subgenre, although writers from the United States are catching up fast. Because so many of the books are self-published and the authors' budgets for promotion fall somewhere between limited and non-existent, readers on one side of the Atlantic are sometimes unaware of writers on the other side. Unless you want to spend a couple of hours now and then searching Amazon, Amazon.au, Amazon.ca, and Amazon.uk for likely titles as I do, you're stuck. Kroeker hits a nice balance between British and North American writers, well-established names in the field with lesser known ones – and even introduces one completely new writer. In short, he runs the gamut from Lois Pryce to Natalie Ellis Barros.

Kroeker plays the contributor biography and incidental information light, sometimes echoing such classic Canadian humorists as Stephen Leacock or Will and Ian Ferguson. The actual selections are kept short, which may be a good idea in this age of tweets and shortened attention spans. I'll leave wondering why who was included to my old professor, though Graham Field and Allen Karl are noticeable omissions, especially since Karl is mentioned in the acknowledgements.

Ted Simon provides a general foreword. He also contributed an excerpt and is mentioned in the acknowledgments, along with the Jupiter Foundation, which gets an ad in the back. In contrast, the other *eminence grise* in the genre, Sam Manicom, for once gets the top billing he deserves to receive more often.

Regardless of the questions raised, *Motorcycle Messengers* is still a good catch-all for most of the more important or interesting writers in the field. The related idea of an anthology of Canadian motorcycle adventure travel writers is also a good one. Both Australian and Canadian contributions to the genre are too often lost in the Anglo-American shuffle.

Bernadette Murphy carries a very different message on her motorcycle in ***Harley and Me: Embracing Risk on the Road to a More Authentic Life*** (2016), which seems to be part of what is either a trend or an odd bit of synchronicity: middle-aged women who step out of their expected comfort zones and learn to ride a motorcycle for the first time. Linda Crill (*Blind Curves: A Woman, a Motorcycle and a Journey to Reinvent Herself*, reviewed in *Les Motards*) and Maureen Griffin (*Biker Girl*, reviewed in the last issue) are two other examples.

It might be too early to tell. The Digest's friends at the *International Journal of Motorcycle Studies* (IJMS) noted the analogy of the middle-aged man buying a sports car (though some do buy motorcycles). Suzanne Ferriss suggested that the narrative (or, in the case of Griffin, CD)

might be different. A female narrative might be more internal, more about the psychological risk, while a male narrative might be more external, more about the physical risk.

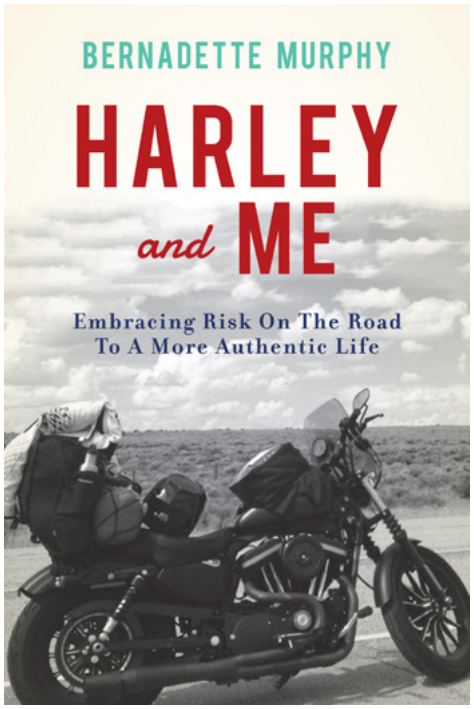
Nevertheless, we can already see a few recurring elements. The woman is in some sort of dead end, ready for change, whether she knows it or not. There is an inciting incident – death or divorce say, if not both. Her reaction includes learning to ride, usually a Harley (Harley-Davidson's free learn-to-ride program has a lot to answer for). The late-blooming novice Harlista then goes on a road trip, the challenges of which help her face her life issues as well.

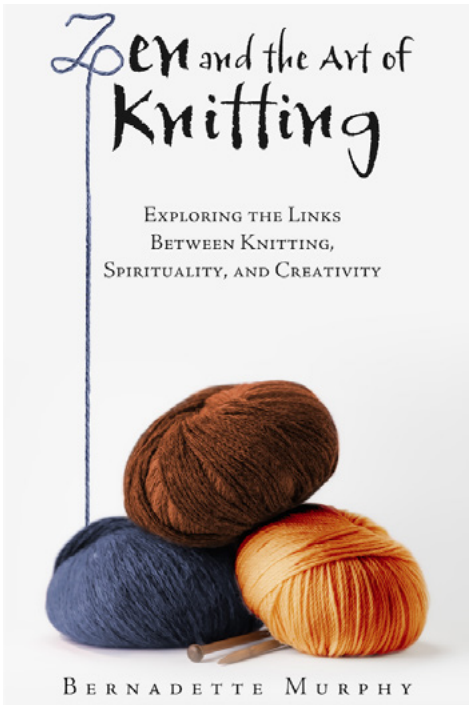
In short, the feminist memoir of personal empowerment meets the motorcycle adventure travel narrative. If, like me, you believe that a proper travel book combines in some way an inner and outer voyage, this can give the narrative some oomph, if not depth.

Murphy is a professional writer, who provides a bit more than just that: she looks into the psychology and biochemistry of taking risks. According to her website, she is an "Author. Motorcyclist. Parent. Knitter. Runner. Climber. Professor. Explorer. Risk Taker. Human." Yes, she's Southern California born, raised, and educated.

In addition to being an Associate Professor of "creative non-fiction" at Antioch University, she has published articles in *Salon*, *Ms. Magazine*, *The New York Observer*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, among others. Her previous three books include two about knitting. My sister, who knits, never heard of Murphy, but thinks one of the knitting books sounds intriguing.

At 48, in rather short order, her father died of cancer and her husband of 25 years





filed for divorce. Despite a difficult childhood with a mentally ill mother and an unplanned pregnancy as a teenager, she raised three children, the youngest of whom would soon leave her with the proverbial empty nest.

While all that was going on around her, she decided to learn ride as background research for a character in a novel. We never do find out what happened to that novel; what we do discover is that she felt empowered riding her Sportster and wondered why doing something that risky would feel so good. She began to investigate the effects of risk on human biochemistry; what sorts of people take risks, including dangerous ones; and why risk energizes some people.

Her scientific reportage is intertwined with her personal memoir of her life unravelling and reravelling against the background of the set piece of the big road trip: 5,000 miles from Los Angeles to Milwaukee for Harley-Davidson's 110th Anniversary Celebration. Her descriptions of riding around Los Angeles and cross-country to Milwaukee are excellent. She not only includes the usual bungles and breakdowns, but also the sensory experiences of riding. She discovered you can't get a decent vegetable in the Midwest, but you can get an orgasm riding a motorcycle.

The scientific interviews and analysis are thorough, if occasionally repetitive (in one case, almost word for word). She does note that most investigations into risk taking focuses on the negative aspects, not the positive one, without going into the larger question of why contemporary society is so risk-adverse and what it means socially to enforce that through such research. The social and political implications of a risk gene are left unaddressed.

Despite her claims of being averse to

risk herself, she has quite a history of taking risks from going back to university at 30 for a post-graduate degree to becoming a full-time professional writer. And unlike Crill, motorcycling wasn't pulled out of thin air. At least one of Murphy's children rode; a close friend runs a Harley dealership; and her first book about knitting is called *Zen and the Art of Knitting*.

She tells her story with a light touch, that's often humorous. Murphy illustrates how the confidence she gained from riding gave her the courage to deal with other issues in her life, great and small. For her, taking a risk, taking a chance, is as much a path to a more authentic life as riding a motorcycle.

Her personal story is undeveloped in places, especially when it comes to members of her family. This is understandable to a degree: some things should be left off the page, but it's at odds in a way with her overall message of the necessity of taking risks, especially for women and the ageing. The ageing brain needs risk to stay healthy, according to her research into the neuroscience of risk-taking. Risk will keep you young, will give you a richer, more fully-lived life. It turns out we don't have to learn to ride a motorcycle, climb a mountain, or jump out of an aeroplane to enjoy the benefits of risk. We get the same effect if we risk learning a new skill or take up a new hobby.

Murphy also points out the lack of women as 'conquering' heroes in popular culture, noting ruefully that *Thelma and Louise* is limited as a reference for female freedom. No argument here, but they are out there, going back to at least the 11th Century and my favorite Viking: Gudrid Thorbjarnardóttir. But to be fair, when was the last time you curled up in a reading chair with a good Edda?

In the end, like Crill, Murphy advocates risk taking for young and old, men and women. Crill is much more the motivational speaker, trying to inspire everyone to take risks and so is more egalitarian. Murphy because she is more interested in how learning how to manage taking risks by riding a motorcycle also teaches her how to manage other risks in life is more focused on women in general and older women in particular. It's not that she excludes men; she goes out of her way to include them. But the specificity of the narrative narrows its focus.

The only question left is who will be the next middle-aged woman Harlista to ride down the pike?

Sixteen-year-old Bert Bowden not only rides a Harley, but also kickstarts it to get it going. Except it's 1989 and Bert is learning to ride on a used 1969 Sportster. There's no electric start. He's lucky to get the Sportster going on the first attempt.

Bert is the protagonist of Terry Davis's 1992 coming-of-age novel, ***If Rock and Rock Were a Machine***. Davis has published three novels for young adults, the best known of which is *Vision Quest* (1979). The 1985 cult film is best known for having unleashed Madonna as a mainstream actress upon an unsuspecting public.

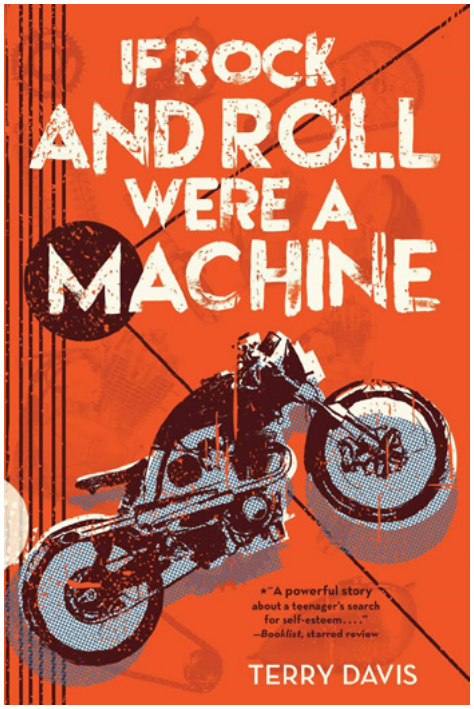
Davis dedicated his book to all the coaches and teachers who were kind to him, a statement he amplifies in the acknowledgments: "I'm not exaggerating when I say the following teachers and coaches and one neighborhood dad helped save my life. There is nothing in the world that lifts a kid's spirit like a smile on the face of an adult when he or she sees you coming. If these good people are happy to see you, you can't be as worthless as you feel". And that's practically the novel's thematic statement as well.

Bert feels worthless because of indifferent, though possibly well-meaning, parents on the one hand and because of the abuse and bullying he received from a teacher on the other. A different teacher at school who thinks Bert has talent as a writer and the owner of a vintage motorcycle garage who doubles as a racquetball coach become the mentors in the family Bert creates for himself as he find out who he is and who he can be.

The novel is loosely plotted and focused more on Bert's resolving his issues with the abusive teacher than with his parents who seem to fade away. The ending is more a quiet epiphany than a slam bang finish: it indicates that all of Bert's issues will be resolved, but doesn't resolve all of them. We get a sense of where he's going, but the book doesn't spell it out for us.

If Rock and Rock is best when it focused on Bert. The passages about sports events – a football game as well as the climatic racquetball match – are superbly done. Davis not only manages to wring a new twist out of a hoary cliché, but also give the cliché a fresh veneer, which is no easy task. Less persuasive are the parts where Davis tries to evoke what motivates Bert's mentors to help him.

Although young adult fiction has quite a following among mature adults (and probably should among immature adults), it's really meant to be read by a younger audience. I think my 10 or 11-year-old self would have liked it, but he would have wanted more about the old motorcycles, despite the fact that the book wouldn't be published for another 30 years notwithstanding. The promise of there being someone out there who would take me under his or her wing would have been a welcome fantasy. The abusive teacher alas is the more common reality.



My adult self would have liked more about how Bert and his motorcycling mentor determine that Bert is not a Harley guy, but what we would now call a Britiron guy. By the end of the tale, Bert winds up with a 1973 Norton Commando, which both my younger and present self like. Somehow Bert just didn't seem like a Harlista to me either.

Jonathan Boorstein

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BITZ

R&G Crash Protectors

For a brief moment last winter I had the idea of buying a cheap sports bike for track use. Somehow I ended up driving 200km in a van to pick up a yellow CBR 929 Fireblade only to sell it again after 2 months, having parted with a couple hundred euros in taxes and insurance for the "pleasure" of riding it – on the road – for about 150km.
Then came spring and I was stuck with the Multistrada and an itching desire to get back on track: first world problems right!

The Ducati is probably the sportiest of all the upright tourers and with the exception of the BMW S1000XR, there isn't really any competition when it comes to finding a comfortable bike that feels as much at home on a bumpy broken road as it does on track, however this one is my own bike so the prospect of crashing it and parting with my hard earned money immediately sent shivers down my spine.

Unlike more off-road focused trail bikes, the Multistrada does not crash well: the fancy Ohlins front forks are easy to damage, the engine casings and oil pump are completely exposed and the beautiful single sided swinging arm is one of the first points of contact with the pavement. Not what you would call ideal when deciding to push it a bit further on the track. Looking up some online stores and catalogues I found a few options, most of which involved some sort of metal crash bars, which were more suited to off-roading where a drop usually means a low-speed crash on a soft surface and not a potential crash and slide on the tarmac.

The lack of any sort of impact absorption of the metal bars, plus the additional weight and reports of them interfering with the rider's knees put me off this solution and I would still need to find a solution for the fragile fork legs and swinging arm.

As luck would have it the good guys R&G Racing stepped in to supply me with a full set of crash protectors specifically designed for the Multistrada. R&G sponsors and works closely with several racing teams in BSB and AMA and after seeing the fantastic job their kit did saving the True Heroes Racing 899s on several occasions I knew they were up to the task (see TRD 191).

The founder of R&G had his own precision engineering company, when he discovered a gap in the market for high-quality crash-protectors and they have been developing their product range since 1999. They focuse

on crash protectors but also make accessories like knee sliders, paddock stands and radiator guards.

R&G's sets itself apart from the competition by offering a range of model specific products instead of adopting a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. For the 2011 Multistrada S alone there are over seventy products on offer, but these are the items that I actually tested:

- Bar End Sliders
- Swinging arm protectors
- Fork Protectors
- Set of Engine Case Cover (right-hand side) and Water Pump Cover (left-hand side)
- Aero Style Crash Protectors (frame)

Straight out of the box all the parts look high quality: beautifully machined from stainless steel and high-density polyethylene or moulded polypropylene. Each box comes with all the necessary parts and fittings, a simple but useful instruction leaflet and a neat R&G sticker. Needless to I now have plenty of stickers!

The installation procedure for all parts is quite straightforward requiring 30min to and hour for the whole lot and only a couple of simple tools like Allen keys and a ratchet with a couple of standard sized sockets. I would, however, recommend the use of good quality Allen bits and a torque wrench, especially for the frame protectors and engine covers. Trust

me, the torque wrench is essential because you wouldn't want to risk over tightening those bolts on the engine's fragile aluminium threads.

Unlike most bikes the Multistrada doesn't come fitted with bar-end weights, only two small plastic caps. Replacing them with the substantial R&G sliders makes the already wide handlebars even more so I must confess and I was a bit wary that the weight would affect the feel through the bars but they don't! The bike feels exactly the same; it just looks smarter and is better protected than before.

A similar thing happens with the rest of the parts, they are absolutely unobtrusive and for the most part, they finish the bike off nicely. Yes, the front fork bungs are a bit long and skinny and if you look at them from the front they look a bit odd, but making them any shorter would probably limit their usefulness. On the other hand I quite like the way the swinging arm protector covers the previously hollow rear wheel spindle.

I can't say that the Aero style crash protectors improve the overall looks of the Ducati but the best I can say about them is that for the most part I don't even notice they are there. The semi-matte black colour and sleek profile manage to make them blend in. Yes you can see them (they wouldn't be very useful if they were not protruding) but they don't pop out at you at first glance. They are also smartly engineered with the HDPE top responsible for absorbing the impact and slowing the bike down by wearing instead of shattering. On the frame side, the mounts are made of steel and R&G claims they were designed to bend avoiding putting excessive stress on the frame.

I've been running the full kit for a few months now, both on road and track and everything looks as good as new. How they will survive the Dutch winter is still to be seen but

given how sad the Ducati OEM fasteners are looking I would guess the R&G ones can't do any worse.

At about this point in the review I would like to claim we are so rigorous in our testing that I dropped the bike just to see how the kit would do. But this is a bike that I love so if you're looking for photos of bruised and battered crash protectors check out R&G's Facebook page where they regularly share photos of rider's mishaps.

I did however thoroughly test the ground clearance and ergonomics of the bike with protectors fitted and I can confirm that with a 1,85m rider on board there is absolutely no interference, even during knee-down cornering.

If you're looking for a set of crash protectors for your bike – be it for road or track use – have a look at R&G's catalogue, they are certain to have something specific for your bike and unlike that cheap-let's-hope-it-works internet special your mate just sent you by email, you can rest assured that it's all been properly tried and tested by hundreds of fellow riders. 20/20 hindsight is fine but when you drop your bike you'll wish you'd spent that 0,5 % of the bike's value on proper protection.

SUMMARY:

ENGINE COVERS (£93.33)

Plus:

- Good fit and quality feel
- Easy to install
- Lightweight but strong (made of 4mm thick polypropylene)
- Inconspicuous

Minus:

- The oil sight window is perfectly visible but not the oil level markings, making it harder to check the exact oil level.
- The screws that hold the engine cover are

silver not black as the OEM and a couple of them require washers (supplied) to adjust fit. Not the most elegant solution.
- Not as pretty as the original Ducati engine cover

BAR END SLIDERS (£22.08)

Plus:
- Beautiful and well built (much better than OEM caps)
- Likely to be very useful in a crash!

Minus
- Not free

SWINGARM & FORK PROTECTORS (£29.99 and £25.83)

Plus:
- Easy to install
- Essential to protecting the fragile and exposed single sided swinging arm and posh forks legs and callipers
- Fairly inconspicuous

Minus
- The looks might not be to everyone's taste
- One more thing to remove during wheel changes

AERO STYLE CRASH PROTECTORS (£74.99)

Plus:
- Easy to Install
- Discrete and absolutely unobtrusive
- Much lighter than crash bars
- Again essential to protect the whole mid section

Minus:
- Not invisible
- Don't have the rugged adventure style look that seems to be cool nowadays

Ricardo Rodrigues

All prices are ex.VAT. Check out the R&G website for their entire range of products.