

BEDS VMCC NEWS

KEEPING YOU INFORMED DURING LOCK-DOWN

Still looking for light at the end of the tunnel...



EDITORIAL

Preparing for a fine old time, indeed, but just not sure quite when that will be. Despite further easing of restrictions, events in our field continue to be cancelled week-by-week, one of the latest being Northants Section's highly enjoyable Navigational Event. With the re-opening of some cafés popular with motorcyclists, Super Sausage, etc., it would be nice to think we might soon be able to resume the monthly Breakfast Meets but, unfortunately, the Shuttleworth café remains closed, although the Museum itself is open and they are starting to hold airshows again.

My (99,500 mile) modern Triumph wouldn't start on Wednesday (mysterious electrical fault) so I took the 1953 6T Thunderbird on my weekly 130-mile round trip visit to the Cotswold Motor Museum. The return trip proved one thing about that bike, beyond any doubt – it's waterproof!

Many thanks to this week's contributors: Don, Will, Brent and Mick. The usual appeal: please keep the contributions coming. It seems that word of the newsletter still hasn't got around to everyone; please let me know if there is anyone you know who would like to be added to the list.

Bryan

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SOME TYPOS CREPT IN

In true Guardian style, I need to make a couple of corrections to typos in Issue Ten. I'm afraid I produced it in a bit of a rush – “more haste, less speed”, as my Mother frequently said.

The 3TR 350 Triumph Trophy pictured on the front page had the cylinder *head* from half a 700cc generator, not the cylinder itself. And on page three, the lady model would, of course, been called *Tina*, not Diana, had she been on Triumph Scooter (and she probably wouldn't have been smiling!).

Section news

VIRTUAL CLUBNIGHT

Will has put together another of his excellent “virtual” club nights. This month the topic is “stopping”, and it can be found on: http://wcurry.co.uk/vmccbeds/net_night_july/w_001.html

MIDWEEK DAYTIME RUNS

The next run will take place on Thursday, 16th July. To sign up and get details of the start time and location, please contact Don either by email: donmckeand@hotmail.com, or by telephone on: 01525 720629.

At the moment, the restriction to six people, including the leader, stays in place; it works well. Should there be more than six interested, we will consider a second separate run on the same day, with a different route and leader.

POSSIBLE BEDFORDSHIRE NAVIGATIONAL EVENT

We are in the early stages of thinking about developing a one-day navigational event entirely within the confines of Bedfordshire. The idea would be that, on a day of your own choosing, you ride to a number of locations across the county. As evidence of your visit you would answer a simple observational question, such as the time of the Sunday service on the church noticeboard.

Watch this space for more information but it's going to take a considerable amount of scouting to set it up.

An Average MZ, or was it?

DON MCKEAND

My first MZ was a second-hand TS 125, bought as a ride to work machine. It proved to be very good in that role and had enough performance to encourage me to enter the ACU National Rally for the first time. I went for a Silver award for my first attempt which was easily achieved on the TS125.

With confidence in MZ as a marque having been established, a second-hand ETZ 250 followed and was ridden in the National Rally to a couple of Gold awards, although the Special Gold eluded me. At that time there was a special test consisting of a short course to be ridden at a given average speed and if you got close enough you qualified for Special Gold. I just could not work out how to balance the acceleration, slowing down, and the bits in between, to achieve the average.

After a couple of years of happy ETZ 250 ownership I tried an ETZ 300 demonstrator. The bored-out engine had been developed by importer Wilf Green, and it was astonishing how much difference the extra 50cc made to the performance. I had enough money by then to buy one – my very first brand new motorcycle.

On one occasion I entered it in an event called the Pennine Caper. It

was a two-day event starting near Huddersfield and riding through the Pennines, with a number of quirky special tests along the way. There was a lot of publicity then about using the waste heat from vehicle engines to cook food and I decided to experiment by wrapping a burger in foil and attaching it to the exhaust pipe of the MZ with wire. The first stop on the journey north was at Watford Gap and time to check the cooking. I was greeted by a tiny lump of what can only be described as charcoal, but the fat had escaped the wrapping and was now burnt onto the exhaust pipe and silencer. I have not repeated the experiment.



After an otherwise uneventful trip up the M1, with the 300 easily managing to cruise at the legal maximum, I arrived at the start to find out about the route and the first test. Before the route was revealed you had to nominate an average speed to the first control point. Buoyed up by my high-speed trip north I suggested 40mph. This was met with a mixture of guffaws and incredulity. “OK then, 30 mph”, which was accepted and led to more merriment.

The route was then revealed, and it went through Leeds – on a Saturday morning. That would explain the guffaws. There was nothing for it but to go hell-for-leather up the remaining stretch of the M1 and hope not to get caught up too much in the city traffic.

Needless to say, I lost points but did have the satisfaction of seeing a fellow competitor get caught out by the opposite strategy. He had nominated a ridiculously low speed, and had banked on parking up before the control point to wait until the right time for him to appear and claim his exact average speed. Unfortunately for him he was spotted peering round a corner to check where the control was located, which was taken as his arrival time – well over half-an-hour before his average would have got him there.

Heading out into the Pennines, there were a number of additional tests. One was to bounce a rubber ball into a bucket, from which it promptly bounced back out if you were not careful. Another was to state what you thought the pressure was in your front tyre. This was then checked with a gauge and points lost for every psi. you were out by. A roadside darts match was just bizarre, but the most fiendish was where an upright pole was fixed in the ground with a swivelling plate attached to the top, on which a ping pong ball was placed. A length of string was attached to the rim of the plate and the idea was to ride in a circle with the string either held or attached to your bike without the ping pong ball falling off the plate. Nobody achieved a full circle, but the further you got round before the ball fell off, the fewer points were lost. There were also observation questions about such things as the dates on buildings.

The overnight stop was camping at Dent, within sight of the Settle to Carlisle railway viaduct. The weather stayed surprisingly good for autumn in the Pennines, although there were bouts of rain just to make us feel things were normal and, all things considered, it was a very enjoyable event.

Despite my cockup on the average speed, I managed to come in runner-up, which only made me more determined to do better on the National Rally special test.

The following year I decided to practice average speed riding ready for the National Rally and set off on the ETZ 300 to find a secluded spot to practice. But before I could find anywhere, near to the ford at Edlesborough, I was rear-ended by a car. After making a close inspection of the tarmac I got up and took details of the ***** driver who had knocked me off. I then rode the three miles or so home but found I had not enough strength in my arms to put the bike on its stand. Not surprising really as the X-rays they took at A & E showed that there were a number of cracked bones in both wrists and my right elbow.

That put paid to my last-but-one attempt to maintain an average speed in a competition.

The final effort was when I took part in the VMCC Cheltenham International, which involved riding at an average speed nominated by the organisers around the Forest of Dean and the Severn estuary. A combination of having to wait for ages at a level crossing and missing a control point meant that I did not stand a hope in Hades of getting into the points. The locations of the check points were not revealed in advance, so I failed to notice one in my haste to make up time. This lack of fore-knowledge meant that you could not know the mileage and therefore work out the time needed to get to the next control at the average speed required. However, some experienced competitors were recording times that were less than a second off the pace. All this was before GPS and satnav, so how did they do it?

[answers on a postcard to Don]

Madiera Drive – closure?

GERRY GIBBINS

[You may be aware that Madeira Drive on Brighton Seafront has been closed for the duration of the pandemic – but there is now a move to make this closure permanent, threatening the future of many motoring events currently held there]

Please find a petition to Brighton Council calling for the re-opening of the drive, or all future events will be cancelled. The petition runs until 22 July. (There is also a petition elsewhere to keep it closed!)

<https://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/mgEPetitionDisplay.aspx?ID=694&RPID=35883279&PID=35883279&>

At least one of our members, Chris Illman, takes full advantage of this unique facility for speed trials, which have been run there since 1905.



The page 3 girl



Resisting jokes about dirty pictures, does anyone recognize this lady, doing rather well to be feet-up in that quagmire? Is that a Bantam?

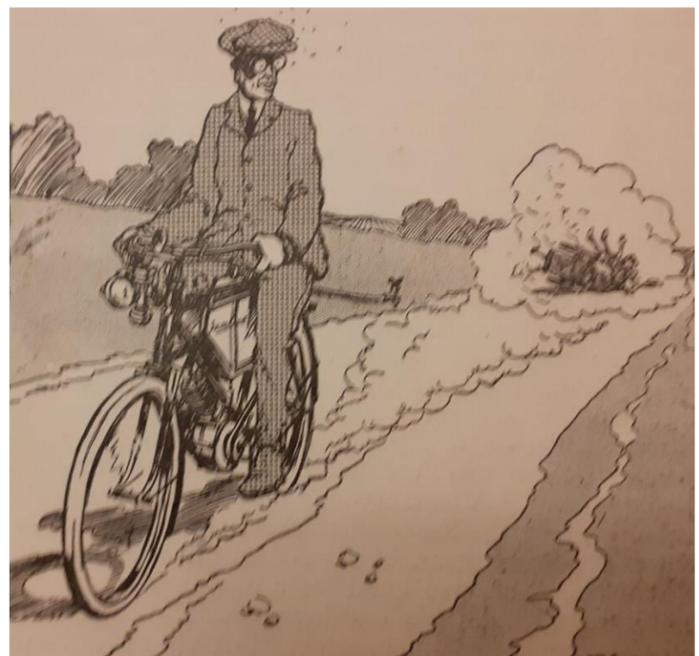
SEEN IN THE PAPERS

Luton Times and Advertiser - Friday 30 January 1903

MOTORS AND ROMANCE. Some persons still profess doubts as to the reliability of the motor-bicycle; but could a more striking testimony be paid to its trustworthiness than the fact that a gentleman selected it, in conjunction with a trailer, as a means of eloping? W.A. Sale., of Luton, writes to "Motor Cycling," to state that a motor-cycle and trailer were bespoke from him a fortnight before the event, and at the last moment he discovered the romantic purpose for which it was intended. If this fashion is likely to become popular, fathers of flighty daughters in love with ineligible should acquire and learn to ride racing motor-bicycles without delay. Then ho! for the merry chase, fully to legal limit, over the moonlit highways.

Luton Times and Advertiser - Friday 05 June 1903

THE SPEED OF TRAILERS. It is earnestly to be hoped, says the "Daily Telegraph," that in drafting his new bill for the regulation of motor traffic Mr. Long will not overlook the claims of the motor-bicycle and trailer. At present, according to the strict letter of the law, it, must not exceed a pace of six miles an hour, being classed with light locomotives drawing trailing waggons. Of course this is an extension of the law which was never contemplated when it was passed, the motor-bicycle and trailer not being then in existence. The sensible thing would be to ignore this regulation for motor-cycles and their popular little basket cars are concerned; but every now and again a rider is prosecuted.



One day I gave the code call, 'Are you there, darling?' and there was no voice, not any that answered.' [Reminiscences, Ixion]

Roland Davies - Illustrator

BRYAN MARSH



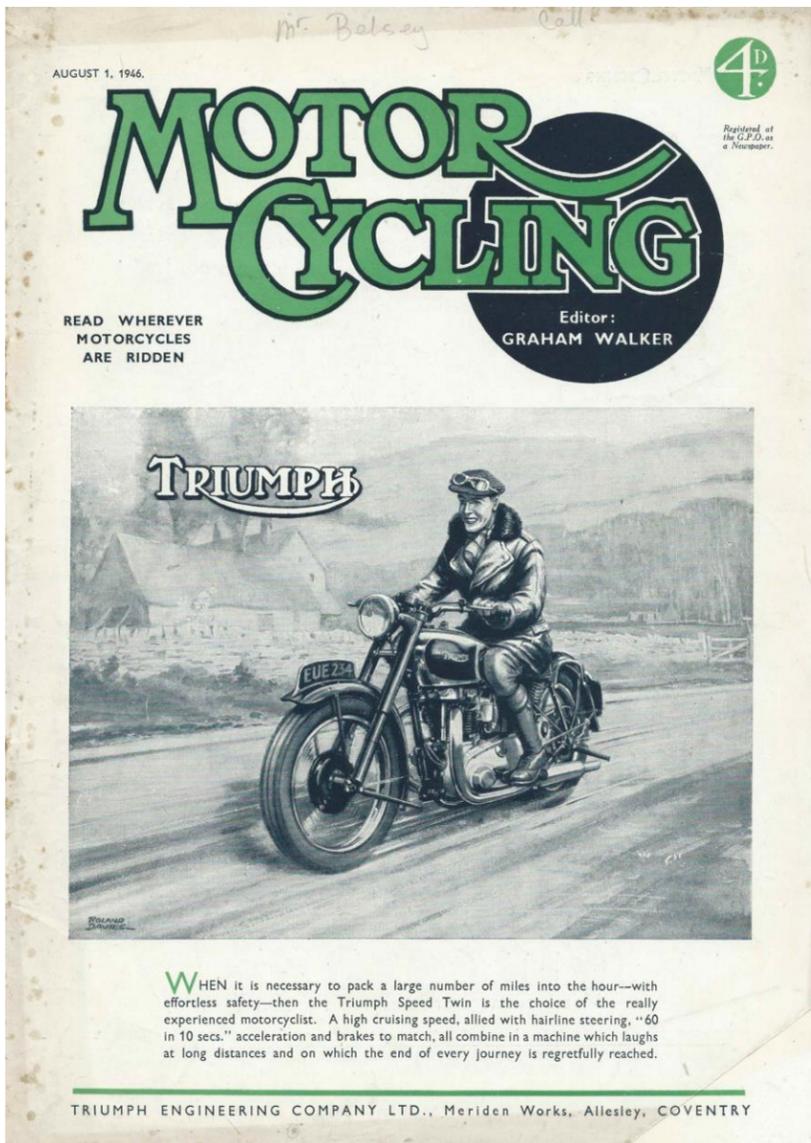
The Roland Davies Studio – that’s him in the cardigan

In Issue Nine we saw some of the work of the illustrator, Alex Oxley, particularly his cartoon advertisements for Triumph. Another celebrated illustrator employed by Triumph was Roland Davies, whose drawings, typically of idyllic rural scenes, graced the front covers of many issues of the weekly “Motor Cycle” and “Motor Cycling” magazines in the late 1940s.



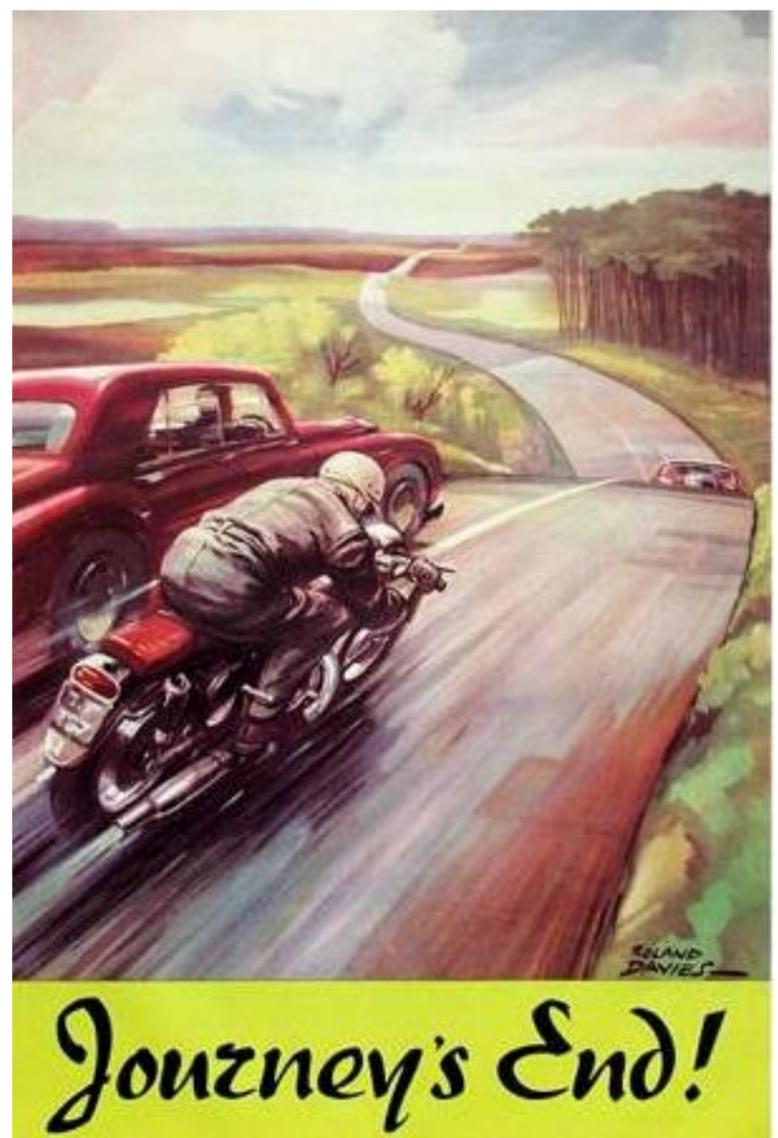
A friendly wave from the rider of a 1949 Speed Twin

Roland’s work also included a series of cigarettes cards for Ogden’s featuring car and bike racing scenes, four illustrated books including “The Daily Mail Speedway Book” (1949) and “The Daily Mail Motorcycling Book” (1950) [I have that one], and, in 1956, some striking road safety posters commissioned by the Government. Apart from motorcycles and cars, he enjoyed depicting trains and airplanes; anything fast it seems.



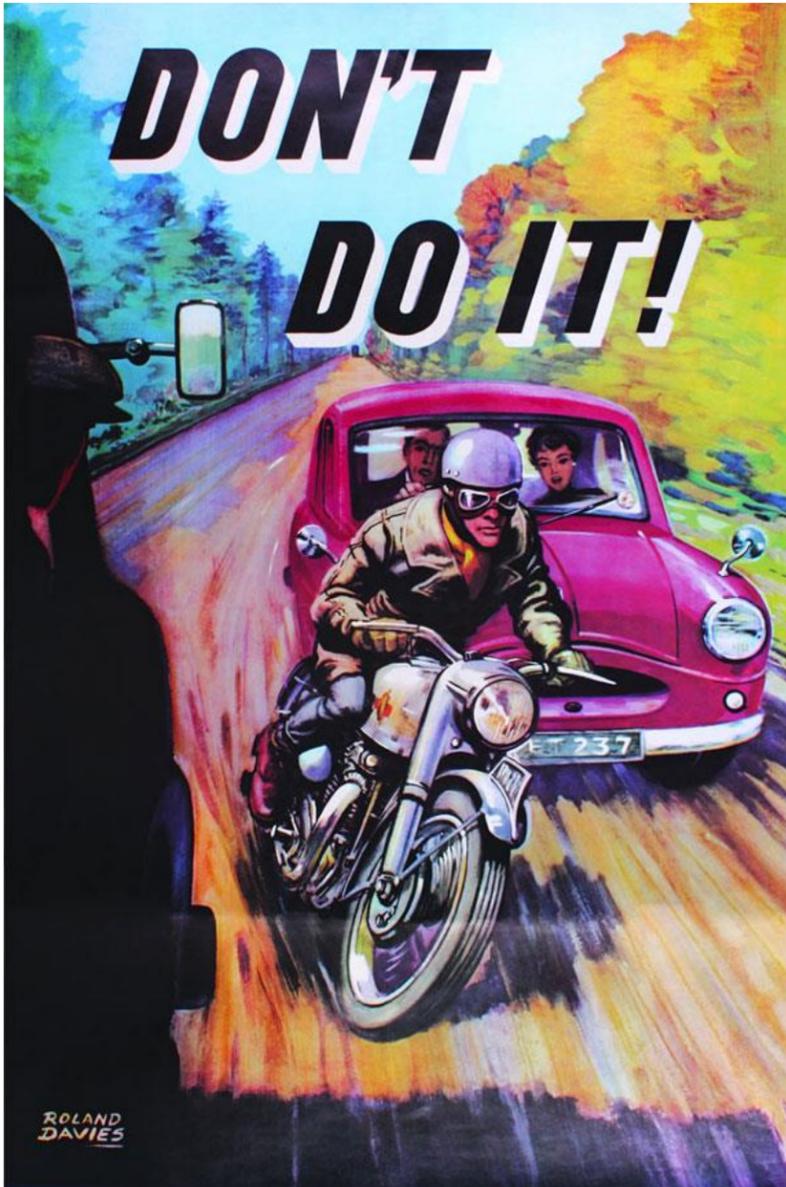
Front page advertisement for the 1946 Speed Twin

After studying at the Ipswich College of Art, he originally trained as a lithographer but soon turned to illustration, starting with cinema posters and illustrations for Autocar and Motor Cycle magazines, and then various children’s comics. His list of credits is impressive, including the Beano, TV Comic, Champion, Swift, Princess, Eagle, Disneyland, Victor and even Woman’s Realm. During the Second World War he produced realistic drawings of technical equipment and vehicles for the Ministry of Information.

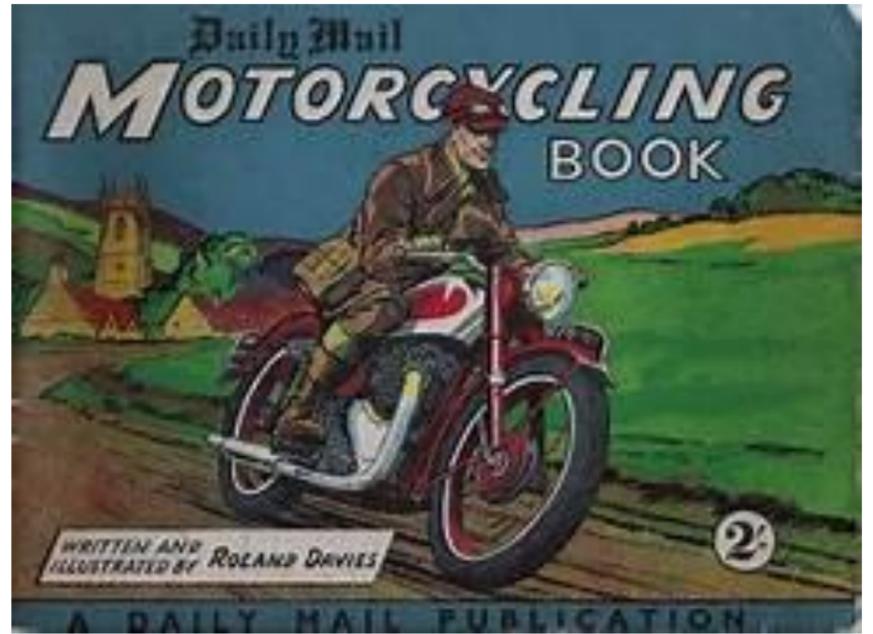


Government commissioned road safety poster

Roland was also a highly successful serious artist and, after retiring from illustrating in the 1970s, he spent his time painting London and Parisian street scenes, seascapes and even cowboys, as well as continuing his passion for illustrating speed, whether bikes, cars or planes. Roland Davies passed away in 1993. The Independent carried a lengthy obituary which can still be found on-line.



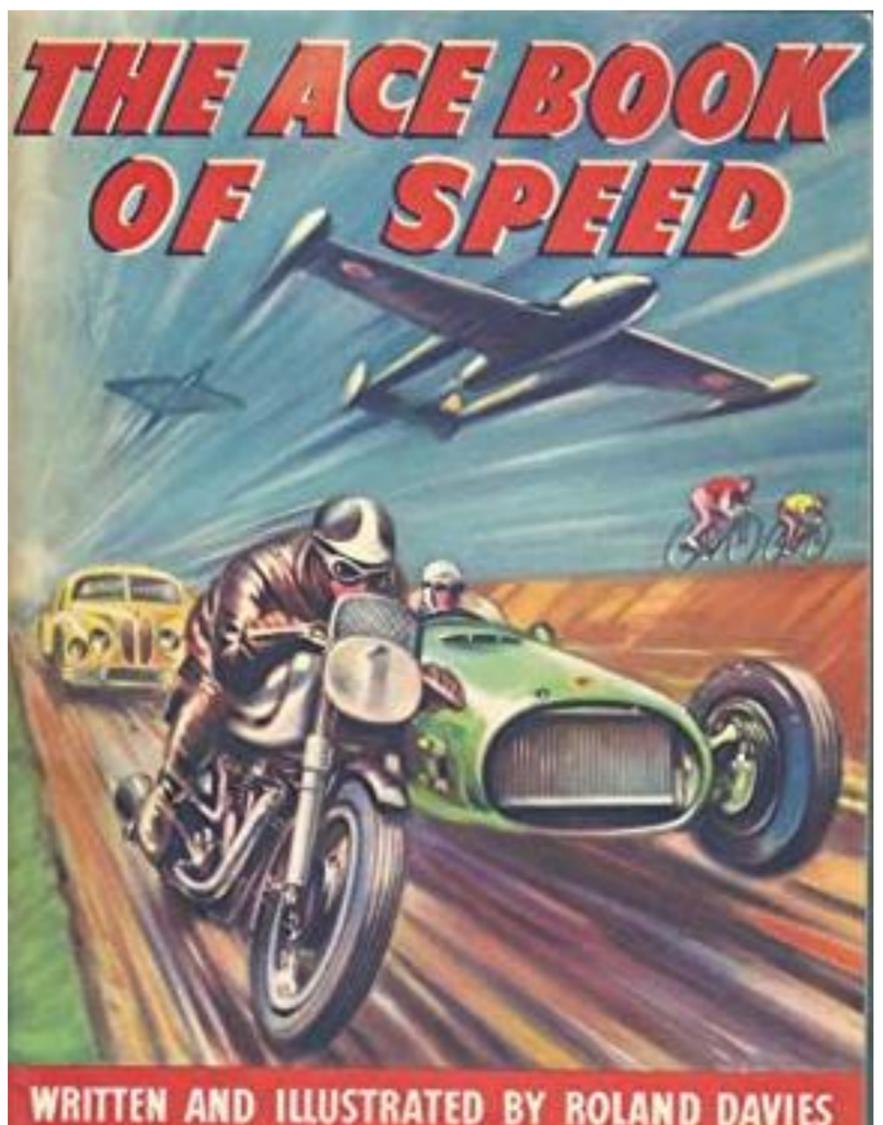
1950s road safety poster



Front cover and "reliability trials" illustrations from The Daily Mail Book of Motorcycling



Illustration for the front of an Annual Triumph Sales Catalogue



Not just motorcycles, he liked to draw anything fast



One of a series of Ogden's cigarette cards

Secretary's Scribbles – Brent's Bit

BRENT FIELDER

Well, we've had a squint through the fifties in some of my earlier waffling 'Bits', let's move forward to 1973 today. What was available for the newcomer to powered two-wheeling, and also for the more experienced, read "wizedened", rider?

The sixteen-year-specials of the day had just been launched and top of the tree sales-wise was the Yamaha SS, later re-named as the FS1E.



This spidery looking piece of sports-mopedery was a great introduction to the sport. Proper manual clutch, four speed gearbox and lashings of candy paint and shiny chrome. The average wage in 1973 for an unskilled man (women hadn't really been invented at this stage) was around £25 a week. It's gone up about thirteen times since then, so the Fizzer at £165 would be about £2,145 in today's money. Not cheap for a 49cc bike but attainable on the dreaded HP to most youngsters in work. [but not for us schoolkids – so I had to settle for a £25, 7-year old, Raleigh RM9 "Ultramatic" - Bryan]

Having grown up for a year thrashing the living daylights out of the poor old 'ped, our 'L'-plated seventeen-year-old could then move up to a 250cc machine. The Japanese big four offered the Honda CB250, not popular as it was a bit too slow and ugly looking, the Kawasaki S1 which was quicker, but harder to get parts for through the Agrati concession, the Yamaha RD250 and the Suzuki GT250. These latter two were the hot ticket, fast and good looking. Italy offered the Benelli 2C, not as sophisticated with its six-volt electrics and mix-in-the-tank fuel supply, but light and quick. Both Japanese bikes were just under four hundred quid apiece, the Benelli was significantly dearer, another £65 needed to purchase one. [I couldn't afford one of those either at age 17, so it was a second-hand Honda CB175 for me – Bryan]



If you were fortunate enough to pass your test it was just another hundred pounds to move up to a Suzuki T500.



If you wanted a Honda CB500 on your drive you were looking at £645, ouch that's almost eight and a half thousand pounds in today's readies.

However, these prices pale into significance when one considers the newly-released BMW R90S.



Indeed, it was a magnificent piece of Bavarian engineering, however it came at a price. The captains of industry among us could probably just about buy one at the eye-wateringly high price of £1,800, that's, wait for it, £23,400 today. Mind you, when you look at the price people are prepared to pay for a new Norton today, maybe it's not too bad.

I've owned all of the bikes mentioned above except, predictably, the Beemer. However, none of them were brand new, my purchases were always second-hand. In fact, they were mostly fifth or sixth-hand by the time they were within my price range, but I got to sample lots of bikes, that way, back in the day. Not surprisingly, I had lots of breakdowns and adventures but that's a tale for another day.

By the way, changing the subject quickly with a word of advice: remember to keep out of Bedford. I actually started avoiding the precinct well before the lockdown even started. The last time I was there a man and woman were arguing in front of a bunch of kids. Then the guy got violent and started hitting the woman. She hit him back and then a policeman showed up to try and sort it out. Long story short the man wouldn't be calmed down and turned on the officer. In turn he drew his truncheon out and hit the man, the man then grabbed the truncheon and started hitting both the policeman and his wife with it. Then a crocodile turned up and stole all of the sausages....

Keep smiling Chums.
Cheers, Brent

My Ariel competition machines – Part 2

WILL CURRY

The outing with the Gold Star at Brands Hatch [see Issue 9] was obviously going to have consequences.

Speed obviously wasn't going to be a feature in my future - I was rubbish at it. To my simple mind if I wasn't any good at speed then I must be good at slow. Slow was trials riding. Hitherto I had paid it no real attention but I remembered what the Irishmen had said to me in the paddock at Brands.

Armed with a magnificent innocence - or ignorance - a DOT was acquired. Villiers 197 with a wide-ratio 3-speed 'box, swinging arm and Dowtey Oleomatic forks. Which were capable of holding air for nearly 10 minutes. I had several interesting outings. Despite my best efforts I wasn't scoring anywhere near as many points as some riders who were falling off all over the place. I'm told I can be quite quick on the uptake sometimes. This wasn't one of them.

After one trial someone came up to me and said 'You're enjoying yourself but you're a bit of a big lad for the DOT aren't you? Go and see George here and tell him we said you should have his bike'. I was given a piece of paper with an address. The bike formed an integral part of the otherwise collapsed shed. George spoke no English, having arrived in this country in 1939 to fight Nazis and help free Poland. His wife however did speak English and it was agreed I should rebuild the shed in exchange for the bike. It turned out to be a rigid frame Ariel 500. Just how special it was didn't dawn on me 'til I needed to get parts for it much later on. With it was another 500 engine and a gearbox, both of which turned out to be quite special too. Also in the shed and looking hardly used was a James trials bike with a 197 Villiers engine. This with its swinging arm suspension was to have been the replacement for the rigid Ariel. George was, if anything, even bigger than I was. I was bright enough not to ask how he'd got on with it.



I enjoyed the Ariel but it wasn't long before the lack of rear suspension began to become something of a handicap. The same someone who had put me onto George's Ariel kindly put me in touch with a Mr Gasson who sold me an Ariel trials sidecar, complete with seemingly obligatory spare engine, for £10. This would have been significantly more than a week's wages, if I'd actually had a job. It certainly was when I finally got one. The outfit wasn't so radical it couldn't be used solo which is what I did. For some reason, nobody I knew was prepared to passenger for me.



Solo, the Ariel was not small being one of the duplex framed variety. The engine was quite powerful enough for me, a sidecar and a passenger. Unencumbered by sidecar and passenger it was quite capable of propelling me out of sections in more or less any direction. Observers tended to move back towards the 'Section begins' signs when I approached and to retreat rapidly once I started.



For the third and last time the mysterious 'Someone' appeared and pointed me to a farm in the far north where someone called 'John' had an Ariel I should buy. Buying this Ariel took a while and a number of visits but in the end it was mine for the princely sum of £40 with £5 back for luck, something I'd never come across before. It was a genuine 1957 HT Ariel with an engine just overhauled by the works. It had also been well used and had shed a lot of the heavy bits like seat, mudguards and exhaust system, all of which had been replaced with much lighter homemade items. This left it only about a hundredweight heavier than the two-strokes which were now making a comeback.

Pure chance lead me to a trials BSA, a C15 from the first batch. I'm told the second batch was vastly superior but having been bitten once I wasn't about to waste any more money on BSAs, there were lots of other manufacturers to choose from.

It seemed much lighter than the HT. It was however an absolute cow to start unless the ignition was so far retarded that when it did start it wouldn't rev at all. This was my introduction to Lucas's Energy Transfer system. This paled into insignificance compared to the gearbox problem. Seven miles from picking it up a small spring in the gearbox broke. This allowed the gearbox to randomly change gear whenever it felt like it [I had that same problem once on a 750 Bonneville, makes life interesting! – Bryan]. The replacement cost 1/9 - the gaskets, tab washers and oil also necessary cost considerably more. The spring was secured to the back of the gearbox with two screws. To change it the mainshaft had to come out which meant not only disembowelling the gearbox but also the primary drive. It was hateful. On my first outing I was asked if the spring had broken yet. 'Yes' I replied. He responded by asking if I'd made sure I'd got one of the new springs which had been heat-treated properly rather than another of the overcooked ones. 'All the good ones have a dab of red paint on them'. I couldn't remember any paint, let alone red. It had to go and go it did.

I came across it much later in one of the then-new Pre-65 four-stroke trials - or at least the registration number. According the pilot it was an ex BSA works bike he'd found in a barn near Oxford. He sounded so keen I hadn't the heart to ask him if the spring had broken yet.

After the BSA came an ex John Bull Greeves Anglian. What a revelation. Light, powerful, controllable, reliable and much, much better than I would ever be. After 6 months I gave it away, completely dispirited.

VMCC trials changed all that. I still had all the Ariels.



A picture paints a thousand words

I travelled a long way to places like Normandy Hill which was the province of the Brooklands section if I remember correctly. Leicestershire was another favourite with trials run by the Taveners. More locally, the Chiltern section trials were most enjoyable. Another favourite outing was to the Oxford section's Boxing Day trial. I used the rigid-framed Ariel almost exclusively, even when the HT became 25 years old and thus eligible. It somehow seemed too modern.

My last outing was at an Oxford section Boxing Day trial. I rode there on the HT. I was more than surprised when I was told to put the crash

hat back on as they were now compulsory for trials. It wasn't the same. I had one last surreptitious ride along one of the tracks in my old woolly hat and then rode home.

I still have the Ariels and the woolly hat and the memories.



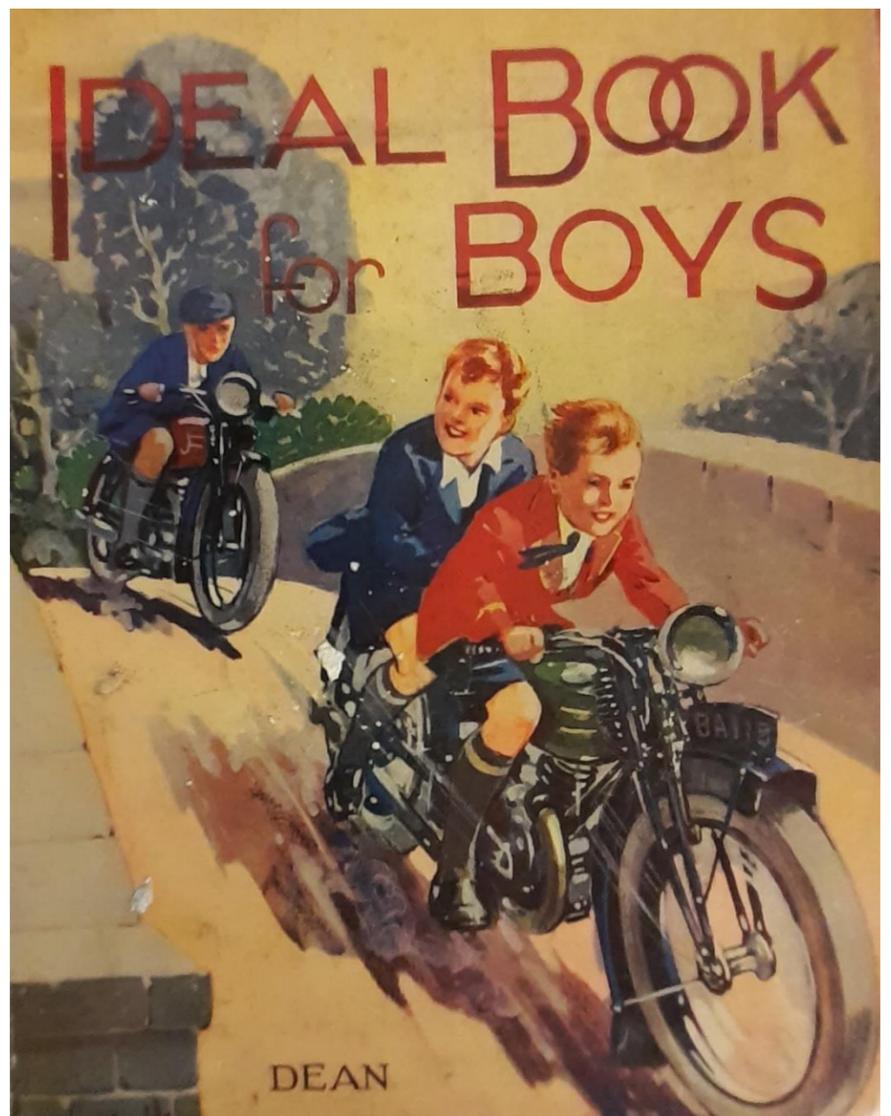
SOME MORE KEN DODD JOKES

MICK (16H) WARD

What a beautiful day for dashing out to Trafalgar Square, chucking a bucket of whitewash over the pigeons and saying, 'There you are, how do you like it?'

A big ship rang ran aground in Abbey View harbour. It was loaded with a cargo of red and blue paint. All the crew were marooned!

It was alright in 1933...



Not sure this sort of thing would be encouraged these days