

BEDS VMCC NEWS

KEEPING YOU INFORMED DURING LOCK-DOWN

Getting out and about on landmark rallies



The lift bridge over the canal at Talybont-on-Usk in Powys



Kilpech Castle (ruin) in Herefordshire

EDITORIAL

It's always difficult to know what to put on the front page but this time I'm indulging myself with a couple of pictures from my first few days away from home since the start of lockdown. Together with a couple of friends, I headed down on Friday to a pub/hotel we've visited many times before in the Forest of Dean, an easy 110-mile ride from home; a bit damp on the day, but fun. Saturday, we had a dry, 98-mile run taking in an ancient church and a castle ruin in Herefordshire, a Tudor Mansion in Llanvihangel, Monmouthshire and the Talybont-on-Usk canal lift bridge in Powys – all landmarks in either the Round Britain Rally or Triumph Motorcycle Owners Club Landmark Challenge. Sunday was a more leisurely day, also dry, just visiting two landmarks on a very round and about route – the Memorial to the Severn Rail Bridge Disaster, in Lydney Harbour, Gloucestershire, and The Old Station at Tintern in Monmouthshire. Pulling into the car park of The Old Station I parked up next to some other bikes before noticing one or two familiar faces from the Herefordshire VMCC, who were doing a twelve-bridges, themed ride and had called in for the obligatory coffee and cake (I had lemon and poppy seed – worth going to Wales just for that).

I've been doing the Round Britain Rally (RBR) for over 20 years now, the TOMCC Landmark Challenge for about 10 years, and I've also done the Irish Photo Rally (IPR) five or six times. These are a great way of getting to see places you probably wouldn't otherwise see, and travel roads you might not otherwise travel. Precise formats vary but, generally, you're presented with a list of locations to visit over the whole country over a period of several months, and take a photograph, with your bike in the picture, as evidence. With the RBR they tell you exactly what to look for but not exactly where it is whereas with the TOMCC they tell you where it is but give a cryptic clue as to what you are looking for. Both of these require a bit of research before you set off. The IPR is simpler as they tell you exactly what you're looking for and exactly where it is. Our own Bedfordshire Navigation Event is the same idea but obviously on a more local scale. As you've probably worked out, I really enjoy these events. There are also one-day events along similar lines, although necessarily more frantic, such as Northants VMCC Navigation Challenge, Hereford-on-the-Edge (also VMCC), the South West Peninsula Rally and, of course, the ACU National Road Rally. All great excuses to get the bike out and ride.

Many thanks to this week's contributors to another bumper edition brimming with brilliant articles: Don, Ivor, Mario, Mick, Nige, Richard, Robin and Will – As always, please keep the contributions coming.

Bryan

IN THIS ISSUE

**SECTION
NEWS**

**JACK AND
JOHNNY – PT 2**

**RIDING THE
BRAITHWAITE**

**WILL'S MORE
NUMBERS**

Section news, etc.

MIDWEEK DAYTIME RUNS



Bryan, Will & Don (behind the camera) at Baldock Services, abandoning the thought of a run in a thunderstorm

As you will see from the picture above, the timing of the start of the most recent intended midweek run unfortunately coincided with a rather heavy rainstorm. Over coffee we reached the conclusion that none of us trusted our gloves or waterproofs to hold out for the duration of a run, that we were wet enough already, and where was the fun in riding in poor visibility over roads with a lot of standing water. Terribly sensible chaps us (including Norm Lorton who, seeing the rain, stayed at home altogether). So, we went home and Don filed the run route, ready for a drier day. Curse the British Summer!

The next run, weather permitting, will be on Thursday, 27th August. Please contact Norman Lorton if you'd like to come along, either by email: norman.lorton@btinternet.com, or by telephone on: 07770 588770.

BEDFORDSHIRE NAVIGATION EVENT

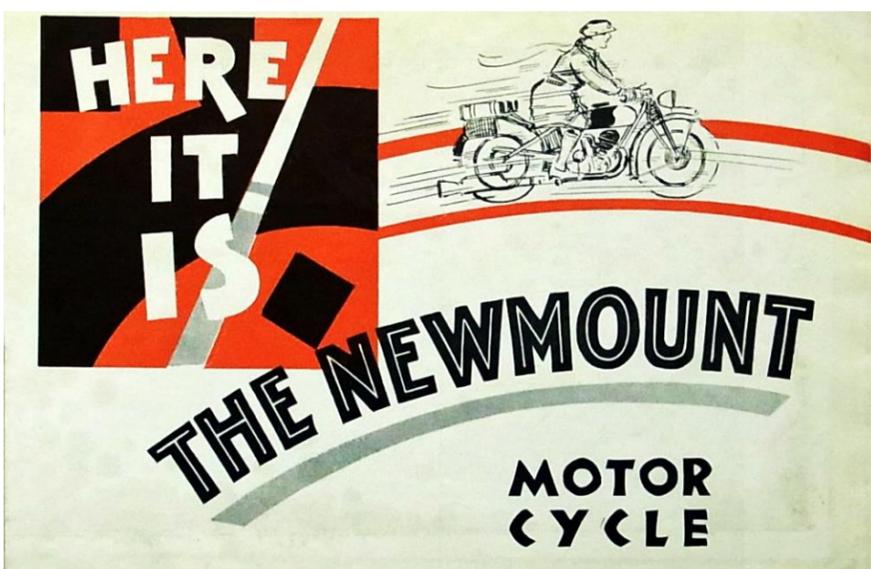
A few sets of answers have been trickling in but there's no rush. Hugh Gallagher used it to teach his grandkids some basic map-reading. With the map references he tasked them to find the quickest route between a selection them, and then took them out in the car to visit. Ellis also has been busy and has visited all 25 locations.

INTERESTING VIEWING ON "YOUTUBE"

Mick Ward recommends the following two videos from YouTube:

A Triumph factory film from the 1950s:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L40MaCjqY5w>

A fascinating film from the Rover motorcycle company in the early 1910s:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6m8PmMQK76s&app=desktop>



Still too many Triumphs (Ariels & Royal Enfields)?

IVOR RHODES PROVIDES SOME MORE ALTERNATIVES

[More pictures from his South of France Museum visit]



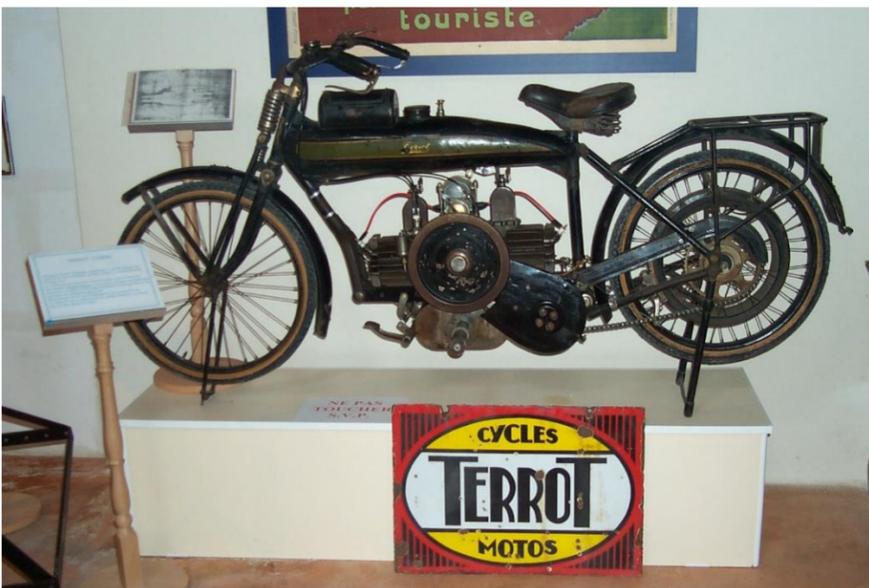
One for the Gold Wing fans – a 640cc, 5 cylinder Megola.



Views from either side looking directly at the engine, these shots show how the carburettor, sparks and oil pass through the front wheel spindle to the spinning engine. According to Erwin Tragatsch, they were manufactured in Munich from 1921 through to 1925 and were said to have first class roadholding!



A 4 cylinder OHC bike by Motobecane of 1930 vintage.



A Terrot - very similar to our Douglas in engine configuration

The final photos are for the steam engine fans. The temperamental Haleson as seen, I think, at Stanford Hall. It ended up setting fire to the grass on that occasion.



The page 3 girl



More Numbers

WILL CURRY

As I wrote in the previous newsletter the registration number on your bike can tell you a lot about where the bike came from and when and, if you are really lucky, there may still be archive records available which will tell about who owned it previously. Another set of numbers which can tell you a lot about the bike and the bits fitted to it are those stamped on the frame - the frame number.

From the manufacturers' point of view giving the bike a permanent identity has lots of advantages if there is some sort of record-keeping to accompany it. Most parts lists and handbooks include the request for the frame number to be part of the spares order which should help them correctly identify the spares required.

NOTES ON ORDERING

Always send a Spare Parts Order on a separate sheet with name and address. Do not embody the order in a letter, although the letter and order can be sent in the same envelope. This procedure will avoid delay in the despatch of parts. See Specimen Order Form on page 7.

Give Spares Number and description of part. Also quote Engine and Frame Numbers with prefix letters. If there is any doubt concerning the part required, return the old part as pattern; this will not be returned with the new part unless asked for. The engine number and prefix letters will be found stamped upon the crankcase, drive side, immediately below the Cylinder Block. The frame number and prefix letters will be found stamped on the head lug (left side) on Models VH and NH, and on the saddle lug on Model VB.

These records often include despatch information as well and are a real trove of information. The books I have seen have all been handwritten and usually in the order of completion of the bikes which often isn't

numerical order. This makes finding a particular number sometimes a challenge and it also means that having found the record reading it is not trivial and neither is understanding the abbreviations so often used.

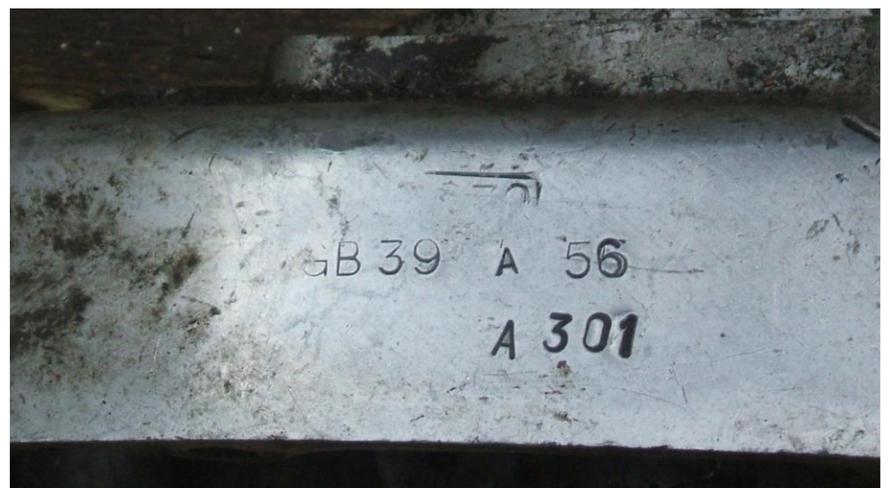
ENGINE NO.	FRAME NO.	TALLY NO.	CONCO	EQUIPMENT	DATE
142	2339	4241	J.N. Doyle Co	Motorcycle	11-11-42
1	2339	4240	"	"	"
2	2331	4242	"	"	"
3					
4	2382	4293	Red Bull	New York Motor	10-11-42
5	2342	4291	Green	NY Motor	10-12-42
6	2311	4257	Bennett's Wood	Sydney	1-1-43
7	2319	4258	"	"	1-1-43
8	2307	4255	Bennett's Wood	Sydney	1-1-43
9	2323	4263	Bennett's Wood	Sydney	1-1-43
10	2326	4262	"	"	1-1-43
11	2296	4272	Northbrook	Perth	1-1-43
12	2292	4256	Bennett's Wood	Sydney	1-1-43
13	2253	4254	"	"	1-1-43
14	2312	4252	"	"	1-1-43
15	2302	4244	J.N. Doyle Co	Motorcycle	1-1-43
16	2230	4250	Bennett's Wood	Sydney	1-1-43
17	2227	4245	"	"	1-1-43
18	2292	4251	"	"	1-1-43
19	2206	4272	Northbrook	Perth	1-1-43
20	2305	4166	J.N. Doyle Co	Motorcycle	1-1-43
21	2227	4253	Bennett's Wood	Sydney	1-1-43



Smiths' speedos and tachos have a code which identifies the style of the instrument and, often, what it was used on. While I'm quite happy playing around with magnetos and dynamos getting the needle off its spindle without damaging it or the dial is not easy. SC.3303/07 975 is the kilometers per hour equivalent of a 120mph speedo intended for BSA 500 pre-unit singles.

At one time the Science Museum held a lot of manufacturers' records but these were, I think, passed on to the club. Some have been copied as microfiche and these copies are held by the various one-make clubs concerned. Because of the scope for fraud, access to these records is usually restricted. Interestingly, most of the records are in engine number order, rather than frame number even though it's the frame which 'is' the bike and is quoted on the registration documents.

Also important for the reason it appears on the documentation is the engine number. In a similar manner to altering frame numbers, altering the engine number can 'promote' a bike from 'ride to work' to 'sporting' and increase its value considerably. Changing the numbers can also mask the identity of a stolen bike or allow a pile of disparate parts to assume an identity with a desirable registration number which can then be sold off.



Burman gearboxes are marked with both specification and date. GB39 is the specification for a 1956 to 1959 350 single Ariel and 'A 56' is the date code for January 1956. Quite what 'A 301' means I'm not sure. The difference between specifications wasn't always that much: GB40 was the same gearbox as GB39 but with a 3-plate clutch, not 2-plate. GB34 was the same as GB6 except that it had a folding kickstart. The date codes started with 'A' as January and the two digits as the year.

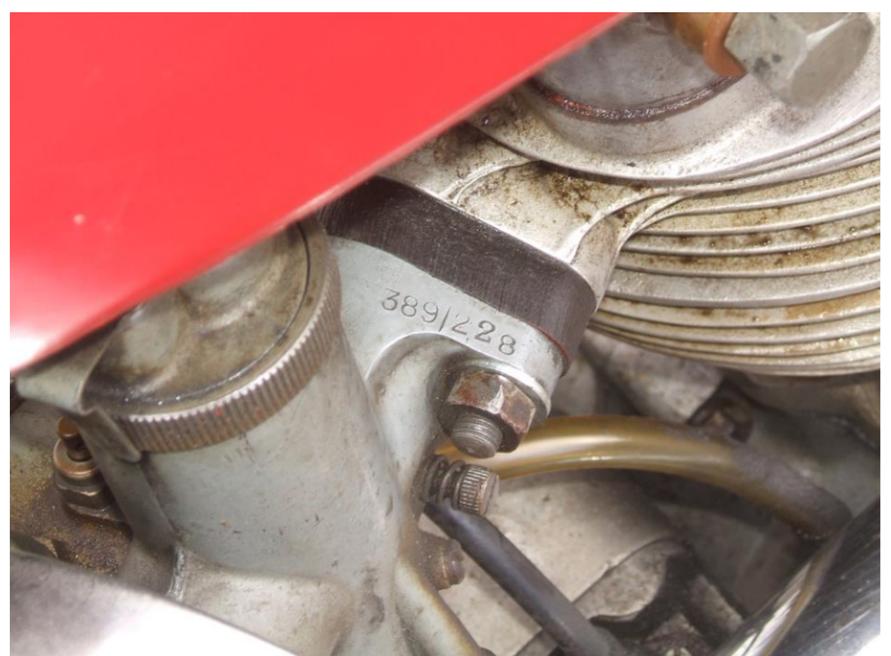
At least as far as Ariel was concerned both Burman gearboxes and Lucas magdynos could sit in the stores for several months so our gearbox here might not get used until March of that year.



It's worth noting that quite a lot of other components have either unique identities or date marks and application marks that be very helpful in verifying a claim that a particular bike is 'original'.



Lucas fitted identification plates to magnetos and magdynos which have a part number, a direction of rotation and often a date in the form 'mm/yy'. It's not that difficult to reverse the direction of rotation of a magneto or dynamo for that matter and a clockwise arrow on an anticlockwise mag isn't going to be that original.



Amal carburettors have an identifying number usually stamped on the right-hand side of the mounting flange - quite where they are on clip-fitting carbs I'm not sure. This identifying number, like the Smith's

number, indicates the specification to which the carburettor was assembled – what jets were used for example.

According to the Amal application list the 389/228 here in the picture was intended for a BSA Lightning or Hornet. Which is somewhat strange as it's fitted to my Ariel scrambler. Quite why it has the carburettor from a BSA is a bit of a mystery. Anyway, that's just another of its non-original features.

Hazy Racing Memories

RICHARD CHAMBERS

My mate Geoff and me at Lydden Hill in 1971-ish, ...by the hair cuts!

This [top picture opposite] is me on a 1966 Triumph Bonneville down at Lydden Hill in about 1971. I bought it off a friend who put the Thruxton pipes on it, etc. but it was standard spec. engine wise. I fitted a close box to it, and down at Lydden it was great fun as there were no long straights there. It went quite well and handled ok, up to a point, but did get lively if pushed, which meant that I was pipped to the post for third place by a better handling (and ridden!) Thruxton Velo, such is life.

The other machine is a well-sorted 750 Norton engine in a Manx frame. This bike did rather well, ridden by Geoff Groom, runner-up in the BFRC club championship two years on the trot, despite missing a round or two. I raced it the odd time and it was a good bit of kit all round.

Happy days...



Birding with Ivor Rhodes

[In his article on the Navigation Challenge in the last issue, Norm Lorton observed "One bird was possibly the biggest I have seen, with a square end to its very long wing – I will have to look it up." It seems Ivor has saved him the trouble.]

I may be able to help Norm Lawton identify his very large bird and at the same timeshare a tale or two. Back in 2012 Jane and I spent 4 weeks touring Scotland, Scottish Six Day Trial + Outer Hebrides and some of the Inner Hebridean Islands. Whilst on Skye I happened to say to the owner of the cottage we were renting for the week I had hoped to see a Golden eagle during this tour, I had visited the West Coast a number of times but had never spotted one. He said "if you see a large bird that looks like a barn door" that will be an eagle but not a Golden one, it will be a Sea (or White Tailed) Eagle, they were re-introduced to Scotland some 30 years ago and we have one that visits Skye quite regularly. When leaving at the end of the week and heading for the bridge a huge bird flew overhead, it did indeed look like a flying barn door with long rectangular wings - we had seen our first eagle, a Sea Eagle! They have recently re-introduced Sea Eagles to the Isle of Wight so they have been spotted flying around the countryside and have been seen over London and East Anglia, so I suspect that was what you saw Norm.

Having crossed to the mainland we were travelling on the A87 alongside Loch Duich when we encountered another bird, this time the metal kind but equally exciting. Jane and I had been chatting on our helmet radios about how fabulous the loch looked, over the hill I suspect an RAF G4 Tornado was lurking and probably they had picked up our radio. Taliban just over the hill! He came at us head on, very fast and very low, 150-200 ft.? The shock waves on the leading edge of the wings were causing the water vapour in the atmosphere to fizz!! What a sight, I wished I had a GoPro fitted.

Later in the tour we visited Arron and I had to visit the distillery, as you do, there they proudly told us about "their" Golden Eagles so after a walk around an a dram we high tailed it up the hill to find the Eagle. Turned out it was not one but two, male and female, he feeding her, she sitting on the nest, fabulous.

The West Coast of Scotland has never failed to enchant me. OK just to keep to the rules:- the machine we were riding was a BMW R1100RS.

Jack and Johnny - part 2

DON MCKEAND

[This is the second part of a series of articles about ISDT riders Jack Stocker and Johnny Brittain. The first was about Jack's ride in the 1948 ISDT. This part covers his experiences in other ISDTs and as team manager, and the final one will be about Johnny Brittain.]

After his dramatic debut in the 1948 ISDT, Jack went on to participate in the 1949 event in Wales riding a 350 Bullet, where he gained another Gold medal as part of the Vase A team, despite suffering from suspected pleurisy during the final speed test.

In 1950, again in Wales and again on a 350 Bullet he earned his third Gold medal as part of the victorious Trophy team.



Jack Stocker's 1951 500 twin restored and sold at auction in 2019

It was back to Italy in 1951, this time riding a 500 Twin Royal Enfield. Once again, his individual Gold medal contributed to the victory of the British Trophy team. The bike he rode was sold at auction in 2019 having been very well restored. As a link with the other personality in the title of this article, the same bike was used by Johnny Brittain in the 1952 event.



Jack and the 1951 500 Twin. His riding number in the ISDT was 203, so this is probably at the earlier selection tests

In 1952 at Bad Aussee in Austria he was mounted on a 692cc Meteor twin as part of the Trophy team. He gained a Gold medal even after springing a leak in his petrol tank, but the team lost out to the Czechs. After a crash, the team captain, Hugh Viney, rode the Meteor for a while, and to help Jack's confidence told him what a fine handling machine it was; only after the event confiding that he thought it handled like a garden gate!



AUSTRIA

Jack Stocker starts off from Bad Aussee on the "Meteor 700," on the morning of the fourth day of the 1952 International Six Days' Trial in which he won a Gold Medal, with not a single mark lost.

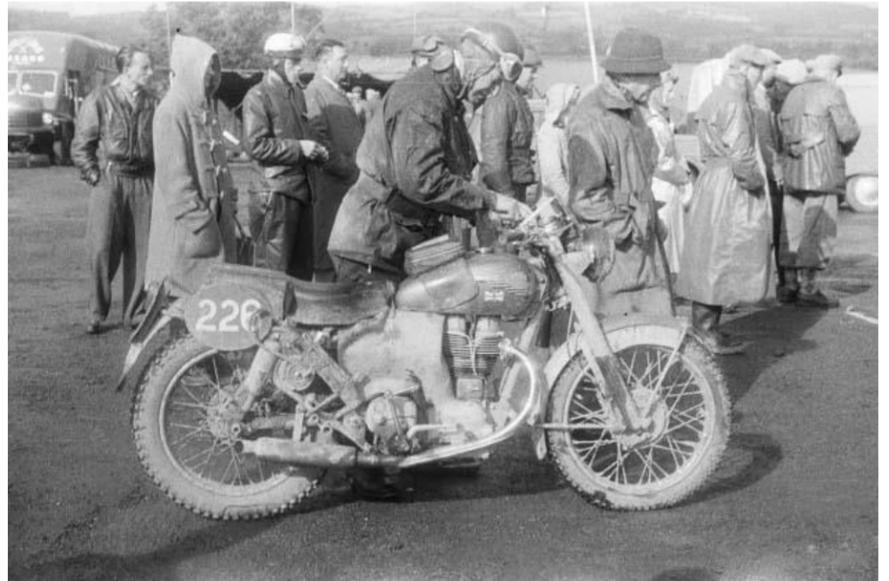
Riding 700 Meteor in the 1952 event. Royal Enfield publicity booklet

The 1953 ISDT in Czechoslovakia was more successful for Britain and Jack once again contributed to the Trophy team's win with his Gold medal. He was riding another 500 Twin.



1953 ISDT - riding another 500 Twin

This meant that in 1954 the ISDT was held again at Llandrindod Wells in Wales. The British Trophy team came second to the Czech team, but once again Jack won a Gold medal. This was to be his last ride in the ISDT as in 1955 he was side-lined by injuries received in the Welsh Two Day Trial earlier in the year.



Jack's last ISDT ride in the 1954 trial mounted on a 350 Bullet

But this was not the end of his involvement with the ISDT. In 1959 when the event was held in Czechoslovakia the British motorcycle industry refused to support either the Trophy or Vase teams. The ACU fielded a team of privateers by helping with their expenses and appointed Jack as team manager. They did not really stand a chance against government and factory supported teams from other countries, but their lack of success was not for want of trying.

In 1966 Jack was again the team manager for the event in Sweden and in 1967 in Poland. He relinquished the post to Alan Kimber in 1968. I have not been able to ascertain whether he performed this role in other years, but 1965 in the Isle of Man was not one of them. The organisation of the back-up and support for the British teams at that event was severely criticised but in 1966 it was noted that the organisation improved enormously under the guidance of Jack Stocker.

Cheating was unfortunately a feature of the ISDT, and Jack's role as manager involved being able to counter this and perhaps indulge in some as well "because everyone else did".

The competition rules meant that major components were marked with a special paint and could not be changed. Cylinder heads were sealed to barrels and fitted with lead seals and gearboxes and engines were likewise sealed to the frame. Bikes were locked away in a parc fermé at night and only 10 minutes were allowed in the morning for maintenance without being permitted to start the engine and using only tools and components carried by the rider. The engine had to start within two minutes (later one minute) and the bike cross the line under its own power. Failure to do so incurred penalties. Any other maintenance or repairs had to be done on the course by getting ahead of the time schedule.

However, components did get changed in hidden places, so one of the first things for the manager was to get scrapings of the special marking paint and find a solvent for it so that it could be re-constituted to mark replaced parts. According to Jack, solvent for repairing mackintoshes was used one year. Lead seals were either "acquired" during scrutineering or donated by private entrants who had to retire along with scrapings from the paint markings. Jack recounted a number of instances where bikes on the point of expiring mysteriously acquired a new lease of life the following day. Sometimes faulty components were swapped, repaired and then refitted. Team managers scouted out suitable locations near the course where a bike could be concealed for clandestine work.

Jack mentioned one case in Italy where a certain scooter manufacturer was reputed to have had a streamlined pantehnicon parked on the autostrada with the tail gate down. The scooter team rode up the ramp and were disgorged some way further along with people wondering what had gone on inside.

There were even cases of complete bikes being swapped and in Italy Jack was informed of a case of this by a local boy. Examining the machine showed that the paint on the number plate was still wet. When he drew this to the attention of another team manager, he in turn reported it to the organisers and the offender was excluded. This became more difficult in Germany where the organisers used a helicopter to keep surveillance on the course.

The cheating seemed, if anything, to accelerate as the 1960s wore on. It was noted that several countries had spectators riding identical machines and even the riders were attired identically to the competitors. There were a number of exclusions for substitutions and they were only the ones who were caught.

To conclude, Jack Stocker was one of the outstanding riders of the post war era who then continued his service as team manager. It was a privilege to meet him and hear his memories.

Last time for this picture

[caption submitted by Mario Costa-Sa]



“Thomas Knoll – The earliest recorded use of Photoshop software.”

Safety Quiz – part 3

IVOR RHODES

The third and final batch of questions taken from the BMF Blue Riband Advanced Rider Scheme.

- 21) If traffic or road conditions make it necessary, positioning must always be:-
- For the maximum view ahead
 - Adjusted in the interests of safety
 - Rigid to the rule of the road
- 22) There is a natural tendency for the eyes to focus according to speed. TRUE or FALSE
- 23) A 30mph speed limit is indicated by street lights:-
- Unless indicated by signs showing otherwise
 - Only if the street lights are lit
 - During daytime only
- 24) As a general rule the road camber is more favourable on a left hand bend then on a right hand bend:-
TRUE or FALSE

- 25) When negotiating a bend or corner at speed, centrifugal force may be countered by the rider:-
- Slowing down
 - Staying upright
 - Banking the machine over
- 26) The left hand, or nearside, indicator signal means:-
- I intend to turn left
 - I intend to move to the left, turn left, or stop on the left
 - I am moving to the left
- 27) Rear observation should only be made when approaching a hazard. TRUE OR FALSE
- 28) Flashing your headlamps means:-
- I am coming ahead
 - To let other road users know you are there
 - You may cross ahead of me
- 29) Stop light signals fitted to the rear of your machine mean:-
- I am stationary
 - I intend to slow down or stop
 - I am slowing down or stopping
- 30) On a good but wet road surface, best braking effect is obtained by the use of brakes with a distribution of about:-
- 60% front and 40% rear
 - 75% front and 25% rear
 - 50% front and 50% rear

Ivor is prepared to mark your answers if anyone cares to send them in. No prize, other than a smug grin to anyone who gets them all correct.

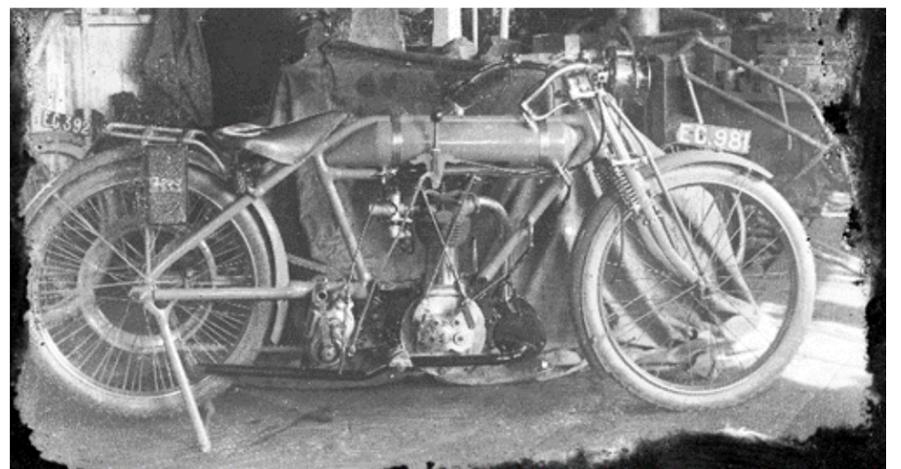
Riding the Braithwaite: Four gears and three neutrals

ROBIN BRAITHWAITE

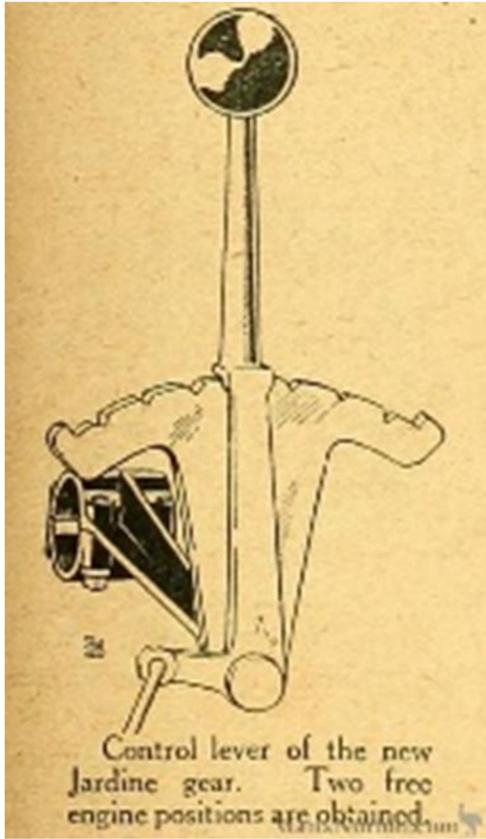
If you've read the previous article, you'll be familiar with the decompressed second-gear chuff and puff start and, hopefully, the Braithwaite tango pair achieved self-sustaining reciprocation.

This article is primarily concerned with managing the Jardine Mk 17 gearbox which has four gears and almost as many neutrals! I've added a few quotes which come from the “Mark 17 Patent Four Speed Motor Cycle Gear” maintenance and parts manual, by John Jardine Limited.

Once I've got the machine running, I usually pop it into neutral (between 2nd and 3rd) while I readjust my composure and get my breath back. When I'm ready, I gently ease the gear lever rearwards into second gear. There is a little clutch drag and the lever tends to chatter a little as the sliding dog engages. I never use first gear because that gear is generally reserved for tow-starting tracklaying vehicles or for riding up Scafell Pike with a sidecar loaded with the entire family and the dog! Indeed, John Jardine remarks about first gear: “With most engines it will only be necessary to use first the gear for starting on an exceptionally severe gradient, or from an awkward position, such as a gutter or gully”. I'm guessing that he wrote this after visiting Westmorland!



When pulling away, it's immediately apparent that the cork clutch is soft and progressive, but things start to get interesting when it's time to change up a gear. The Mk17 Jardine gearbox is a four-speed unit with a hand operated gearchange lever which is bolted directly to the end of



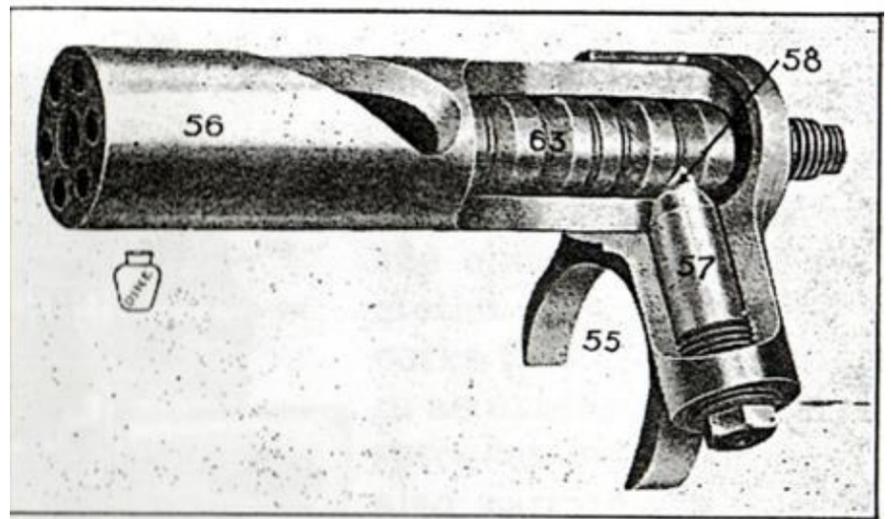
the gear selector camshaft. Unlike a modern sequential motorcycle gearchange, the Jardine gear selection has a "rotary action" and the lever has a different position for each gear – push or pull the foot-long lever and it rotates the selector camshaft. It doesn't take a genius to work out that, with a rotation of around 80 degrees between first and fourth, you need to be either a contortionist or have the arms of an orangutan to access the full range. Picture this: in first gear the gear lever is almost vertical; in fourth gear the lever is horizontal, and at the same height as the footrest. Personally, I would have retained the original Jardine frame-mounted remote-control quadrant, which can

be seen in a photograph of EC981 (pre Brough frame) when it had an earlier mark of Jardine four-speed box fitted.

On recovery of the motorcycle in 2019, I found that the lever had been incorrectly fitted while it was in the care of another. It can be fitted in various positions and, when I finally managed to unseize the lever, kick-starter and gearbox, I found that the first gear position had been set somewhere behind the saddle: it was just past the vertical in neutral and in top gear the lever was at around the two o'clock position. Sure, you could reach all four gears with your hand but selecting first or second meant that you had to reach behind and under your right thigh. More contortions! My grandfather obviously decided that he wanted the benefit of a foot change so, about halfway along the lever, he riveted a brass tang which enabled foot operation when the lever was too far away to reach by hand. This was a Braithwaite modification: there is no reference to the bracket in either the Jardine gearbox manual or the parts catalogue. However, John Jardine does say "*If desired it (the lever) can be bent by the rider to be foot operated. This will be appreciated by one-armed riders, to whom enjoyment of a four-speed mount would otherwise be denied*". I find it most interesting that one-armed riders get a specific mention and given the era, this may be a reference to disabled soldiers. Neutral is between 2nd and 3rd gear and, through trial and error, I found that the best lever angle (when in neutral) is at around 40 degrees. It's a compromise that enables hand operation for first and second and foot operation for third and fourth. It was only later, when studying a 1948 photo of my grandfather sat on the machine, that I realised that, assuming that the machine is in neutral, I might have replicated his original setting! The lever can be seen in front of his ankle.



From second gear, lifting my foot up quite high off the footrest and then pushing gently down on the brass tang, eases the gear lever forwards and rotates the gear selector camshaft (56 - see picture overleaf) through neutral and, hopefully, into 3rd. I am feeling for two definite clunks – one for neutral and one for third, as a spring plunger (57) on the selector fork (55) rides over a series of concentric grooves machined into the selector rack (63). If you don't push hard enough, you are straight back into neutral; push ever so slightly too hard and you still feel the clunks but you will discover that this gearbox has a false neutral between third and fourth. Push a little harder still and you can inadvertently skip straight into fourth (top) gear. Indeed, it is possible to crash the gearchange from first to top without damaging anything more than your pride. This usually happens when others are watching. I find that getting the gearchange wrong at large roundabouts and turning right at traffic lights can become a trifle interesting and usually ends up with lots of clutch slipping, in too high a gear, as one desperately attempts to pull away.



Assuming the gearchange from second to third went ok, third to top is a piece of cake as the gear lever reaches a dead stop at fourth gear. But, changing into top still requires that right foot to be lifted quite high off the footrest to then push down on the brass tang, giving rise to more spectacular leg-waving as the Braithwaite tango pair accelerate away!

After setting off, at the first opportunity, I reset the Best & Lloyd semi-automatic oil pump by pushing the spring-loaded plunger all the way home to its stop. I confirm that the oil drip-rate is somewhere around one drip every three to five seconds and adjust the indexed needle valve if necessary. The flow can alter slightly depending on the engine load: I believe that some crankcase backpressure may be felt up the oil feed pipe. The plunger should be reset every ten minutes or so. It's a job to remember to do this regularly so I use my arrival at practically every junction to remind me. On country lanes, that will rarely be more than every ten minutes and it matters not if it is more often.

The next thing to do is to adjust the ignition advance / retard lever, which is a thumb lever on the left handlebar. With the machine cruising in top gear, the lever is advanced until the engine feels at its smoothest. Too much and the engine starts to get lumpy. At the "sweet-spot", I back the lever off a quarter of an inch, or so, to eliminate the likelihood of pre-ignition pinking as the load increases with acceleration or on the smaller hills. At this setting, the ignition can largely be left to its own devices unless I encounter a steep(ish) hill. In which case, the ignition is progressively retarded as the load increases. Sometimes, when approaching roundabouts and junctions, I'll fully retard the ignition and, with the throttle closed, the engine over-run produces some most satisfactory pops and bangs: it's an excellent situation awareness tool to wake up narcoleptic car drivers. So much for "sorry mate I didn't see you" because, unless they are deaf as well as blind, the Braithwaite tango pair has a fighting chance to see another day. Approaching these junctions causes others to use many senses – sight and hearing are the more obvious ones but smell and taste also come into play if I've allowed the oil pump to overdo things a tad!

Changing gear must be done with care, thought and planning. Unlike a modern gearbox, to change gear with the Jardine box you push down to change up and lift up to change down! Couple this with the fact that most motorcycles I've ever ridden have the brake on the right and some interesting situations can develop when slowing down in third gear and I want to brake. In an instant I find I've just done a very slick clutchless

gearchange back into top! John Jardine has something to say about clutchless gear changing: *“To obtain the smoothest possible change, it is desirable to partly disengage the clutch. A quick change may be made by lifting the exhaust lever, instead of the clutch lever, when changing gear. This method is perhaps preferable when changing down rather too late on a steep gradient”*.

Changing down from top to third again requires some care, thought and planning. Allowing the engine to remain revving slightly as I change down enables the drag from the clutch to keep everything spinning in the gearbox. It’s not quite a double de-clutch but the net result is the same and practically guarantees a smooth change down. Lifting the brass tang with my toe, once again I’m feeling for that bump from the selector camshaft rack as the plunger finds the groove for third. Get it wrong and there’s that false neutral again, only now we are coasting and still searching for that elusive gear!

In flying, they say that good landings come from good approaches; with the Braithwaite, good gearchanges come from a good approach – don’t try to hurry anything or you could find the gearchange has skipped from top straight into a much lower gear or one of the three neutrals – yes, there’s another one between first and second. If I need to stop at a junction, it is a bit of a wrestle and despite all those neutrals, oddly, there is never one to be found when you need it most. The inevitable result is lots of clutch slipping in a desperate attempt to pull away in too high a gear.

Occasionally, when riding, I feel a buzz from my left boot and I was sat one evening, admiring my boots (as one does) and I noticed a distinct groove on the inside of the left heel. This has been caused by the six clutch retaining bolt heads regularly contacting my heel. John Jardine mentions a cover disk that clips over the outer disk *“to form a smooth exterior”*. Sadly, it is long gone and, unless I can find another one, I’m going to have to accept the fact that my left heel has an extra instep which seems to get ever deeper.



In 1948, the Brough girder forks were replaced with a pair of Dowty oleo-pneumatic forks. My grandfather was very much of the opinion that the machine’s life was one of continuing development and he saw hydraulic forks as the future for all motorcycles. How right he was. While the machine was in the museum, I understand that the staff eventually gave up pumping them up for the forks constantly leaked air. Had they thought to fill them with the correct type and quantity of oil, they could have saved themselves some bother. The forks now reliably hold their pressure and, other than routine greasing, they haven’t needed any attention in the past six months. The forks do an excellent job of smoothing out even the roughest roads and, whilst there isn’t any rear suspension, the sprung Terry saddle is quite comfortable and adequately absorbs most bumps. All round, it’s a smooth, comfortable ride.

The brakes are rather good too, but one must remember that the frame and wheels are a much later development and, with a pair of single leading shoes in both hubs, they must be quite an improvement on the original V-blocks. Good brakes or not, engine braking alone provides a decent amount of deceleration so there’s really no need to slam on the anchors every time a junction looms into view. As Aesop once said,

“slow but steady wins the race”.

Despite my apparent struggle with the gearbox, the machine is a delight to ride and handles well if ridden carefully. I guess it’s merely a matter of me getting used to a different type of gear changing and re-educating some muscle memory. Personally, I believe that, in its day, and for many years after, EC981 was a superior machine and, sure, the four-speed gearbox has nearly as many neutrals as it has gears, but in 1915 this stuff was cutting edge and all those neutrals were just part of the fun.

Book Review

BRYAN MARSH

AROUND AUSTRALIA THE HARD WAY IN 1929 Jack L Bowers

A chance purchase from the Oxfam online bookstore, this book proved to be one of those that was difficult to put down once I’d started. Published some 65 years after the trip, Jack Bowers describes how he and his good friend Frank Smith took a seven-week “holiday” to travel approx. 9500 miles to become the first motorcyclists to circumnavigate the Australian continent. And, in doing so, they set a new record time for any motorized vehicle, of some eleven weeks. The trip was remarkable for so many reasons including the lack of proper roads, no bridges to cross the creeks and rivers in the remote regions (i.e. most of it) much of which was unmapped and inhabited only by nomadic aborigines and a few white men at the occasional cattle station, a meagre diet of flour-dough and treacle supplemented by whatever got in the way of the sights of their shotgun, and the difficulty in finding fresh water. Perhaps the most remarkable achievement of all was that Jack and Frank remained the best of friends throughout.

Their choice of machine was a brand-new Magneto Model Harley-Davidson, fitted with a home-made box sidecar but without a headlight as they didn’t think travelling after dark would be a good idea.



The “road” near Cloncurry

The bike proved extremely reliable, apart from a single broken con-rod which they fixed with parts dispatched promptly by a distant H-D dealer. Not so the sidecar which suffered badly from the harsh treatment it received on an almost constant basis. The width of the outfit being less than that of the few cars and trucks that had formed rough tracks meant that the sidecar wheel wasn’t in the relatively smooth wheel rut. Apart from the areas of large stones, like in the picture above, a particular problem was spinifex grass which grows in tufty clumps about a foot in diameter and about eight inches high, which the sidecar wheel would continually be bouncing over for mile, after mile, after mile.

Written so long after the trip, I suspect Jack downplays a lot of the heroic endeavours they must have produced to overcome the inevitable hardships they surely encountered, day after day. The foreword to the book says that there are other, similar stories of amazing journeys and steadfast resolve, but few have such unassuming and likeable heroes as Jack and Frank. I have to agree.

From the Archive

NIGEL COOTES

A MISCELLANY OF EVENTS AND PARTICIPANTS

