

BEDS VMCC NEWS

KEEPING YOU INFORMED DURING LOCK-DOWN



[See inside for the full story about this beauty]

EDITORIAL

I've just noticed that, for some unknown reason, undoubtedly related to my incompetence, the banner on the last issue proclaimed it to be Issue 22 whereas it was actually Issue 23. Hopefully, I've got it right this week.

No Stafford, Newark or Bristol shows on the horizon and the National Motorcycle Museum is closed – how are we supposed to get the thrill that comes from standing in the midst of stacks of glorious old bikes, daydreaming of which ones would look nice in the garage (or front room)? Well, I found a good substitute today – viewing this weekend's Bonhams Winter Sale at the Bicester Heritage Centre. See inside for a brief write-up and pictures of some of the bikes that caught my eye. I'm tempted to do similar next week by booking a viewing appointment for the H&H Auction at the National Motorcycle Museum. If nothing else, it's a day out – and those are in short supply at the moment. Luckily, I have a heated jacket, and heated gloves, that plug into my modern bike, so I don't mind riding in the cold as long as it's not icy.

I've left putting this newsletter together until the last minute so please excuse me if there are more than the usual quota of mistakes or formatting problems. Many thanks to all contributors – Brent, David, Eddie, Neil, Tim and Will. Please keep the articles and pictures coming; it's going to be a long winter. Next issue – Christmas Day?

Bryan

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SECTION AGM

No comments or questions were received before the deadline on the 2019 AGM minutes, the written Secretary's and Chairman's reports, or the proposal to keep the existing committee in post. In that case the minutes are accepted, the reports closed, and the committee re-elected. I'm not sure what we do about minutes of this virtual AGM, but we'll think of something

There are still a few loose ends to be tied up before the financial report can be completed. Watch this space.

MIDWEEK DAYTIME RUNS/CLUB EVENTS

Midweek runs are once again permitted but obviously the weather is likely to be governing factor. We had one arranged for Tuesday this week but, unfortunately, I had to postpone it due to the back problem I get every now and again. As it turned out it was a lovely sunny day but very cold, so maybe a blessing in disguise.

We have provisionally rescheduled for next Thursday (17th). We still have two places available - should anyone wish to test their thermal underwear, please let me know (bryan.marsh@btinternet.com or 01525 877585). First come, first served. It'll probably be a relatively short run, say 30 miles, to somewhere we can get a coffee outdoors.

Tier two restrictions limit outdoor gatherings to six people, and indoor socialising is outlawed, so that essentially puts the kibosh on our normal Boxing Day gathering.

Out of interest, I thought I'd try to find out exactly what constitutes "indoors" and "outdoors" as intended by the Government rules. Not easy, but I eventually found this:

"a place is indoors if it would be considered to be enclosed, or substantially enclosed, for the purposes of section 2 of the Health Act 2006(26), under the Smoke-free (Premises and Enforcement) Regulations 2006(27)"



Of course, we're all familiar with Section 2 of the Health Act but, for those who've forgot - essentially, it's *indoors* if the walls (including awning-type walls) cover more than half the perimeter area.

LOCAL CAFÉ RECOMMENDATIONS

Cafés are open again and all those on our list so far have outdoor space, but not all of them are covered. Please send any additions to the list.

- Blossom Café – Leighton Buzzard Garden Centre (Neil)
- Blossom Café – Willington Garden Centre (Bryan)
- Jordan's Mill – Broom (Kerry)
- Nobby's Farm Shop, Great Billington (Bryan)
- Scald End Farm Tea Room - Scald End, Thurleigh (Norm)

VIRTUAL CLUB NIGHT

Hopefully, you got my email on Thursday afternoon but, just in case, here's the link again:

http://wcurry.co.uk/vmccbeds/net_night_dec/w_001.html

I hope that link works for you, I've been having some problems getting the presentation – works on my phone but not on my computer. Probably ought to switch it off and switch it back on again!

Please don't forget we'd love to hear from anyone who has an idea for a virtual club night. Lots of help will be available in putting it together. Go on, give it a go; you know you want to.

ROTARY CLUB CHARITY QUIZ SHEETS

A reminder from David Sparkes, in case you haven't already got your quiz sheet:

“At this time of the year I sell Hitchin Priory Rotary Club Charity Quiz Sheets. They are available by E-mail, at the usual price of £2, from www.hitchinprioryrotaryclub.org or at Hitchin Information Office, 1a Churchyard, Hitchin; Brookers shop and trade department; and several other shops also have copies. So, please members do buy quiz sheets.”

Building an Ariel Arrow wheel

EDDIE LLOYD

A combination of urban myth that the alloy wheel hubs gave better braking action than the later cast iron hubs, and a horror at the weight of a steel rim and iron hub wheel, led me to set about building a new lighter wheel.

Over a year ago, a fellow Ariel Owners Motor Cycle Club (AOMCC) Herts branch member, John, gave me an alloy Arrow front hub. The only problem was that one end of the hub, at the circlip groove, was broken. The circlip retains one of the wheel bearings. As the hub was slightly too large to fit in my lathe another local Arrow owner, Ivor, machined the broken end of the hub back to a useful working face. Another AOMCC member, Alan, kindly welded an alloy replacement hub end ring onto the hub.

I ordered a Morad 16-inch alloy rim from Central Wheel Components and they drilled the spoke nipple holes at the correct angle for the Arrow hub. Yet another AOMCC member, Ed, lent me a superb wheel building frame and, with Will Curry as overseer, I started installing the spokes. Will suggested that I first put in the spokes on one side of the hub, pointing one way (9 of the 36 total). When these were loosely in place, I put the other 9 spokes on the same side of the hub in the opposite direction. I repeated this process on the other side of the hub until all the spokes were in place. The front wheel was then placed in the building frame and the offset, obtained from the Arrow manual, between the wheel rim and the brake drum edge was set to 11/64 inch.

The wheel was trued by adjusting spokes as required to centre the rim. I watched a few YouTube videos to check I was using the correct procedure. A Dial Test Indicator (DTI) was useful for this and I managed to get both the radial and lateral the run out down to about 0.5mm. See photos 1 & 2 respectively.



Photo 1 - Sorting the radial run out with the dial gauge



Photo 2 – Doing likewise with the lateral run out

Final spoke tensions are done by getting all the nipple torques the same, by feel. A final check can be made by taping each spoke with a small spanner and listening to them “ring” the same. You can compare the “ring” of your just spoked wheel with another existing wheel. Spoke torque wrenches are available online but they tend to cost £60 or more.

I also used a lever type DTI to check the brake drum surface for run out and this was 3 thousandths of an inch. I missed a trick here as I never thought to check the brake drum run out *before* I spoked the hub. The advantage of checking the drum run out before spoking is that you can compare before and after spoking run outs and see if the spoke tensions have increased the drum run out. See photo 3.



Photo 3 -

I rode the Arrow with the new front wheel in and, with the front brake applied at 50mph, no “pulsing” was felt through the brake lever, or judder from the front end. My original steel rimmed and iron hub front wheel had the brake drum skimmed by T & L Engineering and the run out is no more than 1 thousandths of an inch.

What I have learned from this is the great resource of local knowledge and help I have received from friends in the classic motorcycle community and, in particular, the VMCC & AOMCC.

SEEN IN THE PAPERS

FOR THE STRENUOUS

Members of the Bedford Motor Club in the past have not been very strenuous competition riders, but this year they are to have at least one really stiff trial, arranged for the benefit of those "who take a delight in smashing up their machines." When the time comes to select the route, I think some of the members of the Luton Club could give very useful advice.

[Beds and Herts Pictorial - Tuesday 05 February 1924]

The page 3 girl (1910 style)



The sprocket

WILL CURRY

Years ago I had an MZ Skorpion Traveller. It was just as reliable as you'd expect from a marriage of German and Japanese technology but it did throw me a few surprises, one of which, the clock I have related elsewhere. It came secondhand from a local dealer. I walked in one day and was greeted by the salesman with a cry of 'Hello Will, just the person I want to see'. I left a little later the proud owner of the Skorpion. I fitted a Scottolier, a wonderful device I fit to all my modern bikes. The old ones don't need Scottoliers as they all have built-in chain oilers and effective they are too.



The Skorpion - Don't those square mirrors look dated?

In the case of the Skorpion, the Scottolier was a little late as the chain and particularly the front sprocket were already somewhat worn, something I was aware of before I bought the bike. So, in the fullness of time I returned to buy a chain and sprocket kit. It had to be a Saturday as I was still working at the time. There was a fair crowd there, both inside and out and the pavement was busy as well. In short, there was an audience and things never go well for me when there's an audience. I needed the new chain and sprockets so there was nothing for it, in I went.

The front sprocket wasn't a problem which just left the back sprocket. There were two sizes of back sprocket, one with 47 teeth and the other with 49. For some reason, now long forgotten, they were not interchangeable otherwise it would have been 47 teeth thanks and goodbye. I would have to count the teeth. Outside again and the bike is put on its centre stand and the pannier taken off. This naturally attracted the attention of the crowd.

There are a number of challenges here. The first is to get close enough to the sprocket to be able to see the teeth. My arthritic knees didn't help but things might have been less complicated if I'd not left my reading glasses at home. I rubbed the grease off one tooth and turned the wheel slowly while counting teeth until the greaseless one reappeared. "One, two, three...". "You all right mate?", came a concerned voice. I explained what I was trying to do. "Sorry mate", was the reply. Fortunately, I hadn't even got into double figures. I started again. I didn't get very far before the next interruption. This time it was a child's voice: "Mummy, he's wrong. Eight comes after seven, not buggit. What is buggit?". Mummy's reply to this was to avoid the question: "It's time we left. I think he's about to take his boots off and that will not be pleasant". It took me some time to work that one out.

I had expected a certain amount of inaccuracy, maybe one or two teeth but by the time I reached 53 it was becoming obvious there was another issue. The chain on the sprocket neatly reapplied the grease my finger had removed. I wondered if I could use the spring link in the chain as a marker. I turned the wheel once again. I'd never had a bike with a riveted chain before. This time I marked a tooth with a deep scratch courtesy of the screwdriver from the tool kit neatly stowed under the dualseat which by now had my coat and gloves on too. 47. I counted again and got 47 again. Things were looking up. I climbed onto my feet using the pannier frame and made my way inside. My performance had not gone unnoticed. "you sure?" was the first question which was followed by "How many links? Can you count them?" and then "The look on your face!". I always wonder when people say that. There isn't much face to see between the woolly hat and the beard and what there is is behind a pair of thick glasses.

The rest of the process, the bit with the spanners, went without a hitch back in the workshop and audience-free. Even the riveted link with the little rubber 'O' rings behaved itself.



New chain, sprockets and Scottolier - It can't have been that difficult, can it?

Tales of a Triumph Trident

BRENT FIELDER

Back in 1991 I was looking for a big comfortable bike that I could use for my modern motorcycling exploits. I'd always had motorcycles, from the age of sixteen, and after owning many different brands, I'd been using an old Triumph 750 Bonneville. However, I found that it floundered somewhat when asked to ride from London, where I lived at the time, to Yorkshire, where my family were, and back in a day so I decided a new Japanese bike was the order of the day. I'd narrowed it down to either a new Kawasaki or Honda when the weekly comic landed

on the mat with earth-shattering news. A newly formed Triumph factory had kicked off production in Hinckley; to say the least I was absolutely gobsmacked. Instead of the usual slow trickle of teasing rumours about a new great British motorcycling hope, that seemed to be in MCN just about every week, Triumph had just kept quiet, built a factory, filled it with the latest up to date machinery and started knocking out brand new modern Triumphs with virtually no fanfare at all. The promises of new BSA, Matchless, AJS etc machinery had been doing the rounds for years but had never materialised, then suddenly here was a brand-new British Triumph that was bang up to date and looked a million dollars, wow! Two of the first bikes were the three-cylinder Tridents, they came in a choice of 750 or 900cc. I plumped for the 900 as there wasn't much difference in price and the 100bhp 900 was reputed to have lots of low-down power.

I covered 6,000 miles on it on a couple of trips to France, Spain and Portugal. Also went to the TT on it in 1993 and it was great for those jobs but as work became more intense, and commuting to Yorkshire was more convenient by car so that I could ferry my young son around, it got used less and less. My motorcycling was slowly changing from a necessity to a luxury and I found that I preferred using older, lighter bikes so the 900 was relegated to the back of the garage.

Fast-forward to this year and I heard that Triumph were looking for a first year Trident to photograph. They wanted to use the picture in a brochure for the new Trident model they were launching, so I offered them mine. They took it away for a week and apparently it will be in their 2021 literature.



Triumph's publicity photo of Brent's Trident

As I had the bike on the bench, I checked it over. It had a failed fuel tap that leaked petrol out and it would only run on two cylinders. I guessed the carbs needed cleaning and the tap replacing. With a sudden rush of blood to the head I stuck it on eBay, using the picture supplied by Triumph. It sold for £4,200 which was fantastic. I think I paid five thousand for it in 1992, so I was well pleased. The buyer was chuffed too. He told me that he had a collection of early Hinckley Triumphs and this one would go into that garage. I don't think he's even going to bother to fix the two faults that I had highlighted in the advert.

Having made some space in my garage, and having the money burning a hole in my pocket, I'm now looking out for my next bike. Doubt I'll own it as long though!

Billy, his goat, and a BSA M20+2

NEIL CAIRNS

Like all ex-servicemen, I can tell lots of service-life stories. Having completed 22 pensionable years between 1966 and 1988, telling 'War Stories' comes naturally. I served in the RAF as an 'Aircraft Engine Fitter', later called an 'Aircraft Technician Propulsion' just to confuse civilians. My natural 'bent' was towards anything with an engine in it and during my time at RAF Valley on Anglesey, I ran a P&M Panther M120, 650cc combination (along with a few old CZ's and a BSA C10.) The story of how I obtained this outfit is far too long for a newsletter, but for part of this machine I was indebted to Billy. I will not give his

full name for reasons you will soon see.



A Panther outfit (but not Neil's)

I arrived on Anglesey in early 1978 and found myself attached to a small group of other 'Erks' (an enlisted airman) on a 'Flight Line' called 'Sparrow Hawk'. A Flight Line is a parking area for aircraft prepared ready to fly. The reason for the name being we operated the 'BAE Hawk' fast-jet-trainer. This was just as the tiny 'Folland Gnat' trainers were being scrapped. We had a very young 'Flying Officer' as a boss, with Billy and me as the shift Sergeants. I was the 'fitter' Sgt, Billy was the 'Rigger' Sgt. ('Rigger' refers to the airframes trade.) With us were three corporals of various trades and a dozen 'Flight Line Mechanics', FLMs or better known as Flems; these were hard-working airmen aircraft-attendants who strapped in the pilots, refuelled and checked each Hawk before and after each flight. 'Sparrow Hawk' line carried out air-tests, flying instructor training and weather checking. RAF Valley had far more commissioned officers than Erks, as the place was full of pilots halfway through their 'Fast Jet' training. Anglesey is an island and had millions of sheep, only a few humans and only two policemen. Sheep are usually pretty law-abiding.



A BAE Hawk

Billy is the subject, that above is just to set the scene. Billy was about five foot two in his socks. He was about five years older than I, and due demob in about five years to complete his pensionable 22 years. He was a bundle of nerves and a very hard worker. I had found a Panther M120 in bits on the island, purchased it, rebuilt it and put it on the road. The whole thing had cost about fifty quid, including Mot, tax and insurance. I rode this machine to work from Caergeiloig to Valley every day all my time there. Billy rode an ancient WW2 BSA M20. He lived quite some distance away just outside Gwalchmai, in a bungalow in the middle of a field. He had a huge number of children, some from his and his current wife's previous marriages, as well as their own. He kept pigs, chickens, goats and a few sheep. Because of our interest in motorcycles, we were soon good friends as well as work partners. The team we ran between us worked well, we were firm but rarely had to use the Form 252, (a charge form.) Flems lived and played hard and could easily get out of hand.

Like all service units, nicknames were common. Mine was 'Darth

Vader', after the Star-Wars series on TV. The reason for this was because I had 'unofficially obtained' a huge shiny black plastic, aircraft washing full-length coat, to go with my black full-face helmet and gloves to wear when riding the Panther. Billy shortened this to 'Daft Aider'. Billy was 'Billy' to everyone, even though he often bellowed at the Flems that his name was 'Sergeant' to them. Such was the rigid discipline of the RAF in those days, this usually got a two-fingered reply.

Early one morning (we started at 5am to get the 'kites' ready by 8am) Billy arrived on his M20 (the M20 is a 500cc, single-cylinder, side-valve BSA motorcycle that was made in the tens of thousands for the Army in WW2), and I noted that he had painted it. It was its normal awful camouflage green (paint provided free by HRH for the RAF) but there was less rust showing. Then I noticed scratch marks on the number plate that were new. I asked him why he had painted it, and he confessed to me he actually had *three* M20 motorcycles, all identical. Only one was taxed, Mot'd and insured, and which ever one started in the morning he put the number plate on it. His favourite one had played up, so today he was riding 'reserve' number one. The reason he had three was because he had gone with a mate some years previously to an ex-Army auction sale. His mate had purchased an old Bedford Three Tonne, and when they got home, they found three BSA M20's in the back as part of the 'Lot'. Billy took ownership of them. Back then, the Army was getting rid of the M20 in droves filling up the lorries just to get rid (an early form of BOGOF?). As there were only two bobbies on this Welsh island and Billy knew them well, and all three M20's looked almost identical, he never got caught.



A BSA M20 (but not one of Billy's)

Billy would sometimes be a bit late. One day, he arrived on his M20 looking a bit glum. He walked into the line-hut and caused an immediate explosion of Flems leaping out of doors and windows to get away from a terrible stink. Billy had no sense of smell and never had had since birth. He had been out that morning trying to get his Billy Goat to mount a female. It had an erection, but just kept looking between its legs at its penis as if wondering what it was and what it was for. Billy had bent down to talk to the stupid male goat, in front of it when it had looked up forwards at him. At the same time, it began to pee; with an erect penis its aim was perfect, getting Billy full in the face, soaking his hair and clothing. He gave up trying to get the goats to mate and, as time was getting tight, he rode to work. His arrival in the line-hut stinking to high heaven of Billy-goats pee was the reason we all vacated the place as fast as possible. Billy, of course, could not smell a thing.

Then there was the time he arrived wet through, on an early dry summer's morning. Billy would take the Llanfaelog road to work and cut through the village of Rhosneigr. This was much quicker than running down the A5 road and in via Valley. He used a small ford to cross the river Crigyll, and then along an old unmetalled track, through a hole in the airfield perimeter fence and thence down the north perry-track to the line hut. (Perry track, where aircraft taxi to the ends of the runway.) When he arrived, soaked to the skin, he had walked from the shallow ford. He told a sorry tale. Late the evening before, the local Gypsies had popped down to the ford to get some aggregate, using a tipper truck and a JCB. They had scooped out a huge hole where the

ford was, and then left. The hole filled with water from the river and, at 5am, looked just like the normal shallow ford to our Billy. He had thundered through it on the M20, only to completely disappear from sight. The M20 now resided at the bottom and Billy had swam to the side and walked to work. We took Sparrow Hawk's Land Rover down and with some Flems assisting pulled out the bike. Billy dried it out and had it running again in a few days.

Billy had been given an old WW2 sidecar frame and a steel BSA single seater side-car body. He gave these to me, and I soon had it all painted and fitted to my M120. It took about a week to get use to riding with a chair, and I soon became adept at riding along the flight line with the side car wheel a foot in the air, with a Flem in the seat. Alas, the Engineering Officer thought this was not a good idea and I was carpeted. Who would have thought there would be an officer out and about at 5am?

Billy was quite small, and I am six foot. I had little problem kick-starting a 650cc single. Billy thought that starting his little side-valve 500cc M20 easy. So, one day he tried kicking over my 650cc single-cylinder Panther without using the half-compression lever. I warned him it could bite back if he was not careful. Anyway, he could not get it over compression, as he was just too light. So, he jumped on the lever and the engine swung over compression, but not quite. It went far enough to flick open the magneto points and give a fat spark, but by then the piston had bounced off compression and was going the wrong way. It fired and threw the kick starter lever back with a vengeance. Billy was thrown about four feet up into the air. After that he treated my Panther with great respect. (To start any big bike with a magneto, you swing the engine just over compression with the de-compressor having fully retarded the ignition, then you give it a hefty boot. That way, the flywheels are going in the right direction when the spark arrives.) Billy was lucky not to break his ankle.

Another time I was ready to leave work, with the Panther ticking over whilst Billy chatted to me. He noticed the Panther engine had its oil in the sump, a 'wet sump system'. He bent down and unscrewed the oil filler cap and before I could stop him, he undid it. With a 650cc piston going up and down at about 400 times a minute, the oil was quickly blasted out of the filler hole, all over Billy. With his BSA's having dry-sump oil tanks, such a situation never arose. Lucky for him the oil was not very hot.

By 1984 when I left Valley for RAF Halton, I had moved away from Sparrow Hawk line, to be a Chief in the ASF hanger; by then Billy had been demobbed and moved to live in Holyhead. To be able to buy a house in expensive Bedfordshire, I sold the outfit.

A grand day out

BRYAN MARSH

As mentioned in the front-page editorial, I spent a highly enjoyable Thursday morning perusing the wonderful hoard of some 500+ bikes up for grabs in Bonhams Winter Sale this weekend.



Highlight of the sale for me is this "new" 1957 Triumph TRW, 14 miles

Free to enter for viewing – not even the need to buy one of their expensive catalogues – by appointment at allocated time slots to allow the proverbial “social distancing”. The bikes were well spaced out so everyone could get in and prod and poke to their heart’s content.



Another “new” Triumph – T140E Bonneville from 1979, with seven “push miles” only. Not sure what the red liquid was that had leaked from it in some quantity – ATF from the primary chaincase?

As an added bonus, even with 500+ bikes, there was room in Bonhams’ huge hangar for cars, vans and tractors for their upcoming “mph” sale, and a “greasy spoon” caravan serving an excellent bacon and egg roll. Life doesn’t get much better than this.



A Les Williams Triumph “Legend” – what the T160 Trident should have been. Yes, please.



A brace of BSA (engine) look-alike Kawasaki's



It must be Italian with style like this – a 1955 Motom “Corsa” racer



50cc work of art



1933 Triumph 148cc Model XO – fancy a Winter project?



1952 Triumph TR5 Trophy, horrid dual seat apparently fitted from new



Lovely Triumph Tigress scooter – the 250cc four-stroke twin version



Immaculate 1951 Triumph 6T Thunderbird



1914 Clément 4Hhp Autocyclette Grand Tourisme – interesting French machine



For once, “barn find” is accurate – ready for the “mph” auction



A highly original 1931 Triumph 277cc WS, complete with footboards and leg-shields (£2 5s extra at the time). Ride or restore?



The “power plant” and three-speed gearbox

Around the World on a Motorcycle, 1928 to 1936

BACK IN EUROPE

ZOLTÁN SULKOWSKY

[an interesting description of England in the mid-30s from the eyes of two world-travelling Hungarians – “no cafés, no outdoor pubs, or roadside restaurants”]

We could hardly wait for our two-week journey *[from South America]* across the Atlantic to be over. We had been away from Europe for seven long years of danger and discovery and we cried to see the cliffs of England emerge from the mist. We were back in Europe!

Proud Albion gave us an unexpectantly warm welcome. This was our first visit to England, and we finally discovered for ourselves the small kingdom that ruled over a colonial empire spanning the globe. We got to know the English, and, by the end of the summer, most of England knew the two Hungarian bikers.

We had nearly forgotten the ways of Europe, being away so long. Our first few days in England felt like the initial steps on a vast new continent. We had left Rio de Janeiro in the middle of a tropical autumn and arrived in England in the cool springtime of the year. Our light tropical wear was unfit for English weather, so we quickly acquired a whole new wardrobe.

Our stay in England was a triumphal march. Talks, movie clips, long

articles published in major papers, radio interviews, and the publication of a small English-language volume passed like a dream. The English, reputedly cool and aloof, exhibited incredible enthusiasm and excitement over our accomplishments.

The English in the colonies were very different from those living in the mother country. There were millions upon millions of Englishmen living in the British Isles who had never made it even so far as London. The British, upon closer examination, had their strengths, weaknesses, and strange customs; they were no better and no worse than other nations.

The smooth roads were an added treat. Although we travelled thousands of kilometers on our tour of the British Isles, never once did we see a stretch of road being repaired or under construction. It seemed that English roads had been built to perfection and built to last. English driving rules were practical, logical, and even more surprisingly, universally observed. Those who broke them were immediately taken to court.

British weather was the real killjoy of our tour. Although we were there in the summer and spent the entire season travelling from one seaside resort to the next, there wasn't a single day warm enough to persuade us to take a dip. The entire summer was chilly, windy, even rainy, and we spent most days huddled in our leather jackets. There were no cafés, no outdoor pubs, or roadside restaurants. Whenever we felt it was time for a drink of tea or more “spirited” beverages, we had no choice but to enter a rigid, somewhat unpleasant bar, inn, or hotel. When England began looking much the same in our eyes, we crossed the border into Scotland and later sailed to Ireland to stir things up a bit. Scots and Irishmen were somewhat more European than the English. What's more, the English were much more frugal, even to a fault, than the proverbially miserly Scots.

All-weather rider

WILL CURRY



Will prides himself on being an all-weather motorcyclist - not this day

Tim Kingham's Grumph



Ideal long-distance trials machine – probably sold by now



Albert Brown, caricatured in 1928 (nothing to do with the story below)

An authority on motors

AN ENTIRELY IRRESPONSIBLE STORY

GORDON MEGGY – PUBLISHED IN “THE TATLER”, WEDS
8 APRIL, 1903

I had a discussion with Perkins the other day as to whether motors should be taxed. Perkins is very hot on the subject. Of all the abominable concerns that were ever invented he thinks motors are the worst, and as for motor bicycles! Well, he is a nervous, excitable man, and on one occasion when he got on to this particular branch of the industry we had to send him home in a cab. When motor bicycles were first introduced Perkins, who likes doing things as well as possible on a merely moderate income, determined to have one. Now most people would go to a shop and make inquiries about price, arrange for a course of instruction, and then purchase a machine. But that would not suit Perkins at all. Oh dear no. His first step was to go to his tailor and acquire a magnificently baggy pair of breeches and a Norfolk jacket. Then he bought a large motor cap and a pair of blue dust glasses. Directly these were sent home he put them on, glasses and all, and started walking round and round his back garden to get used to the feel of them. On the fourth day he ventured out into the road as soon as it was dark and walked up and down for nearly an hour. After a week of this he seemed to feel more at his ease, and he then arranged with the local cycle shop to take some lessons. We used to see Perkins, assisted by two men and a boy, careering up and down our road for hours at a stretch, until his attendants, all of whom he insisted must run beside him in case he should fall, were ready to drop. On the second day they thought they would be knowing and brought the motor along with only enough petrol in the tank to last about half an hour. But this was no good to Perkins, and as soon as the fuel was spent he made all three of them push him along at full speed while he practised pulling the now harmless levers. After that they usually brought a supply of petrol on a hand cart. Quite a cheer went up from the whole terrace we used to watch him from behind the curtains on the first occasion when he went down the road alone, but the applause was so unexpected that Perkins, who is a fearfully nervous man, accidentally clutched the full-speed lever and was dashed against a lamp-post, which broke his glasses and knocked out several spokes. It took Perkins three weeks to fully master all the intricacies of that machine. Every day when he had finished riding he made the men explain all the parts to him and superintend matters while he took the motor to pieces and readjusted it in order to get a thorough knowledge of the mechanism. I had to give up asking Perkins into my

place because his hands made my wife quite ill. At last the eventful day arrived when Perkins considered himself proficient, and he called and asked me if I would accompany him to Holborn to purchase a machine. I said I didn't mind, so we set off next morning, Perkins in full dress. It was a little awkward for me now and then. People kept stopping me to inquire what it was I had under my charge and where I was taking it. One man who was driving down Newgate Street in a hansom took the trouble to pull up and hand me his card. He kept a private lunatic asylum out Norwood way. Perkins didn't seem to have any fixed idea as to what make of bicycle he wanted he said they were all much the same so we went into the first shop we came to. It was a relief to me to get inside somewhere as I am certain we should soon have got into trouble for stopping the traffic. There was an "air" about Perkins as he walked into that shop which immediately attracted attention. Here," they said, is a practical man. One able to criticise our machines we must be careful." The half-dozen young men in attendance sprang to attention, and one of them approached him, bowing profoundly, and intimated that if he would have the goodness to sit down for a few moments the manager should be fetched and would attend to him personally. Perkins, who is distinctly a nervous man, was a little flustered by so much attention, and sat down on the stove, where he would probably have remained had not the young man, after hesitating a moment while he debated whether this was merely bravado on the part of Perkins just to show what he could do, politely pointed out that the backs of his stockings were getting badly scorched. Now, in my opinion, if that young man had not been so officious Perkins would never have got into trouble. The word, "stockings," suddenly called his attention to the fact that he had got no gaiters. How could any self-respecting man attempt to ride a motor bicycle without gaiters Nothing would suit Perkins but that we should visit the boot shop over the way, and there he was fitted out with a brand-new pair of the puttee pattern. When we returned the manager had arrived on the scene. Perkins said he did not much mind what sort of machine he had as long as it was a fast one for he did not like being passed on the road. (Perkins, as I remarked before, is a nervous man and this was lite rally true.) Several machines were brought out, but Perkins found some fault with all of them on principle, I think, just to show he was a connoisseur but he finally selected the first one, a handsome, substantial-looking contrivance, and paid for it on the spot from a roll of notes he had brought for the purpose. The manager was much impressed, and while the cycle was being prepared expressed a hope that Perkins would buy bicycles for the rest of his family on similar terms. By the time that motor had been got ready and wheeled into the road Perkins was trembling all over with excitement. He said he preferred mounting from the step, and as soon as there was a break in the traffic he made an attempt. But he was not used to those gaiters. The strap got caught somewhere and over he went, bending the left crank to an angle of forty-five degrees. It took them half an hour to straighten it, during which time Perkins fortified himself with several brandies and sodas at a neighbouring hotel. Then he made another effort, but this time the buckle of his right gaiter became entangled in the mud guard, and we had to wait another twenty minutes while the other crank was straightened. He said he would try mounting from the curb then, and with the assistance of the six young men he got off, and for some forty yards worked laboriously at the treadles to try and make the machinery start. But it would not go and he had to wheel it back amid the cheers of quite a small crowd. What did the manager mean, he demanded, by palming off on him a machine which would not start properly He had paid money down and meant to get value. The manager seemed cowed by Perkins's displeasure and remarked meekly that he was quite at liberty to try all the machines in the shop if he would pay a deposit on account of damages, but that he was afraid none of them would work till the starting lever had been opened. Perkins made no mistake this time. He pulled the starting lever with such vigour that the handle of the "top-speed" lever got knocked off, and away he went towards Oxford Street, his feet waving about in the air in a vain effort to find the pedals till he was checked somewhat rudely by a 'bus that came across from the Gray's Inn Road. The near horse lifted Perkins from his seat and deposited him gently by the roadside some ten yards away, while the off horse, after trampling for a few moments on the still vibrating bicycle, kicked it under the 'bus and pulled the wheel over it, crushing out the last spark of life. As soon as I saw Perkins get up unhurt I went home I had had enough of motor bicycles for one day. Poor Perkins In addition to the loss of the machine the remains of which were carried off on a barrow by a coster to the tune of Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road he had to pay the 'bus company damages and was fined for furious riding into the bargain. He rides a tricycle now.