

BEDS VMCC NEWS

KEEPING YOU INFORMED DURING LOCKDOWN



21 Bike Salute

On Tuesday of this week we had the sad honour of escorting our great friend Dave Watts on his final journey from his home in Shefford to the Norse Road Crematorium in Bedford. The high esteem in which Dave was held was admirably demonstrated by the turnout of twenty-one bikes to form a procession behind the hearse, with further members attending in their cars, despite the fears associated with the current state of the pandemic. The funeral itself was restricted, by law, to relatives and close friends but Richard Chambers did a great job in persuading the man on the crematorium gate to allow the bikes into the grounds, ride past the hearse and gather in the car park. The weather was perfect and the back roads route through Ireland and Cardington reminded us of the many section runs we had enjoyed in the company of David and Jennifer. Inside you will find the eulogy.

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& HQ NEWS**

**MIDWEEK RUN
REPORT**

**ALEX OXLEY
ILLUSTRATOR**

**WILL CURRY
ROAD RACER**

Section news

DETAILS FOR THE NEXT MIDWEEK RUN

Apologies but the date of the next run was inadvertently omitted from last week's newsletter (can't get the staff). It should have said Thursday, July 2nd. All places have now been allocated. Watch this space for details of the next run – possibly Thurs July 16th, and at two-week intervals. See also the note below about breakdown services.

Please let me know if you'd like to lead a run.

BREAKDOWN SERVICES

It hadn't dawned on me, but it was pointed out in Motorcycle News this week that motorcycle breakdowns are a real thorn in the side of the breakdown services under current restrictions. The problem arises if the bike can't be fixed at the roadside and needs to be transported. The bike is OK – up on a flatbed truck or trailer and off it goes. But, not so, the rider. Current restrictions mean they cannot be taken in the cab of the recovery vehicle.

I have emailed the AA to find out how such a situation would be treated but, as of yet, I have not had a reply three working days later.

Meanwhile, what the heck's going on at HQ...

REDUNDANCIES LOOM? MAIN EVENTS AT RISK?



“Trouble at t'mill”, it might seem. Rumours and counter-rumours have been circulating, resulting in the following statement from our President Mike Wills. I know Mike through the MCC trials, where he competed on bikes but more recently in a car because his grandkids want to come along. He is also well known for his interest in Bradbury motorcycles, riding in the Pioneer and Banbury Runs. Mike is a very modest man, I understand he is an eminent surgeon, and one I believe we can trust. This is his statement, approved by the Directors and containing contributions from the Chair, unedited:

Message from The President

Members will be aware that the Board of Directors of the VMCC are at present seeking to address the Club's financial losses, which are expected to be in the order of £100,000 this year. If significant action is not taken, this gap between income and expenditure would continue to increase each year. Within three or four years the Club's reserves would be exhausted and the VMCC would be insolvent.

The underlying causes of these losses are understood. They were discussed at the AGM, and in the Journal in April. They are the result of reduced subscription income from a declining membership, the loss of “sponsorship” from companies such as auction houses who no longer see it as good business to support the VMCC financially, and above all a very significant reduction in the level of insurance commission we receive with this being likely to drop to zero in 2021 as a result in changes in the motorcycle insurance market. The Board has looked at all suggested options to increase income, and has concluded that nothing has even the potential to deliver net profits on the scale required.

Something must be done: it is not an option to do nothing. Some weeks ago, the Board concluded that there is no alternative other than to limit the scope of the activities undertaken by Allen House, and thereby to significantly reduce costs. I am aware that a good many members have for some while felt that this should be done anyway, but understand that the Board considers it is now a matter of absolute necessity rather than desirability. Against this background, on 5th June the Board released a statement to Sections and members saying that it had begun a formal consultation process with the Club's employees in relation to a staffing restructure at Allen House which could lead to redundancies. The Board also said that because such a process is confidential, no further information could be given until it is complete.

In the interim, and during a period when the Board itself can make no comment, rumours have been widely circulated within the Club as to how the restructuring process is being taken forward, what the outcomes will be, and about the Board's longer-term plans. As President, I have held it to be my duty to carefully consider all that I hear, and to investigate where I feel it appropriate. This I have done, and can report that the Chair of the Board has responded in detail to all of my questions, and with great open-ness. I feel I am fully aware of all the facts, although the same legal and confidentiality issues as bind the Board mean that I cannot at present disclose much of what I know. I can, however, use what I know to provide Sections and members with some clear and confident reassurances.

There will be no ongoing secrecy. For a few short weeks the requirements of employment law will continue to severely limit what the Board can say, but once the current process has concluded I can assure you the Board will produce a full report. The Board Statement on 5th June promised full detail for mid July and publication in the August Journal, and I understand that remains the expectation.

The staff restructure and the associated redundancy consultations are being undertaken in a sensitive and methodical way, in full accordance with best practice in employment law. In this, the Board has been and continues to be advised by a qualified and very reputable independent specialist and has been carefully following the legal and human resources guidance it has received.

The Chair has assured me that when the Board Minutes covering all of this are published in July, they will show that all decisions have been taken by the full Board in the manner set out in the Club's constitution. He explains that a minority within the Board has consistently opposed the change process, and that certain Board Members have at times found it hard to accept the majority vote.

However, no alternative has been proposed by the minority Board Members.

Since I began to be involved with the Board late last year, I have seen no evidence to support the rumour that part of the Board's response to the Club's financial difficulties might involve selling off the Club's bikes or its heritage collections in the Library. I have directly challenged the Chair on this matter, and he assures me that no such proposal is even on the agenda, and that if it were even to be suggested he would be first in line to strongly oppose it. Indeed, he tells me that the Board is not far from being ready to put a consultative proposal to members, to change the Club's constitution in ways that would give legal protection to its heritage collections.

The need to make major cost savings at Allen House may have an impact on the way in which national events are organised in the future, but at Board level I see no sign of any lack of enthusiasm for, or commitment to, such events. What I do understand is that the Club simply can no longer afford to have as much done for it by paid staff as has been the case for many years, and in future members will inevitably have to do more themselves. To an extent, this takes us back to where we were before insurance commission, but that is the consequence of things outside our control and hardly the fault of the current Board. As I understand it, the Board's view is that once we know the situation with Allen House, plans for how things will work in the future should come out of discussion within the membership and with Sections, rather than be delivered from the centre as a set of instructions. This seems to me to be the right approach.

[cont'd from page 2]

First and foremost, we are a club interested in old motorcycles, and whilst we may wish that everything could remain the same, we are in a situation where we need to move forward and be financially sound to continue. I know that lies at the heart of everything the Board is doing. I am confident that the Directors are acting in the absolute best interests of the VMCC, and that members should let them do the job they were elected to do. I fear, however, that there is a move underway to undermine due process and cause as much damage as possible. I urge you all to wait for full details before commenting, speculating, and spreading rumours.

Mike Wills
VMCC President

Eulogy for Dave Watts

MALCOLM REYNOLDS

My Very Good Friend and Mate.

I have known David & his brothers Michael & Paul for many years. David was a very talented man, able to turn his hand to many things.

He was a committee member of the Bedfordshire Section of the "Vintage Motorcycle Club" for many years, always working tirelessly and helping others with any problem whatsoever with their bikes.

David always did the monthly raffle with myself, raising the funds for the club. If we were not collecting enough he would say give that tin a good shake Malcolm and let them know we are here. Yes indeed, we always collected enough to pay for the venue plus all the various activities we put on throughout the year. David also sorted the route for our Autumn Gold Run which everyone enjoyed. On Club runs David & Jenifer would normally ride in front of me, sticking up his thumb to make sure both me and bike were OK. Always reassuring that if I had a problem he was there to sort it out!

I spent many happy hours with David in his workshop doing various rebuilds and repairs. One of Davids comments to me was "I'm going to tell you something now" you could do it this way "without these bunking rubber gloves on"

David said the rustier the pile of bits the better. They always came out pristine machines.

David. Myself and the other club members will miss you tremendously, but we will always cherish the memories.



A tribute to Dave from an "ordinary" section member

Dear Jennifer and family,

I just wanted to say thank you for allowing us to provide an Escort on Dave's last journey.

The turnout was as expected for a true Gentleman. The numbers bore testament to the esteem & high regard in which he was held – not just the 20+ riders but others who came in cars.

Dave had been an instrumental member over the years making important contributions to the Bedfordshire Section of the VMCC.

I was also pleased to briefly chat with Dave's twin brother Michael, and to learn about their early days of using motorbikes, riding around the meadows (without their Dad's sanction ?!).

Also, to chat with another couple who had toured parts of Scotland with you & Dave.

I hope that you will be able to share in our Newsletter, The 'Tributes' for the Thanksgiving and Celebration of his Life.

God bless Dave - R.I.P.

Michael Ward, Gt Gransden.

The page 3 girl



"Our Vera"



Alex Oxley - Illustrator

BRYAN MARSH

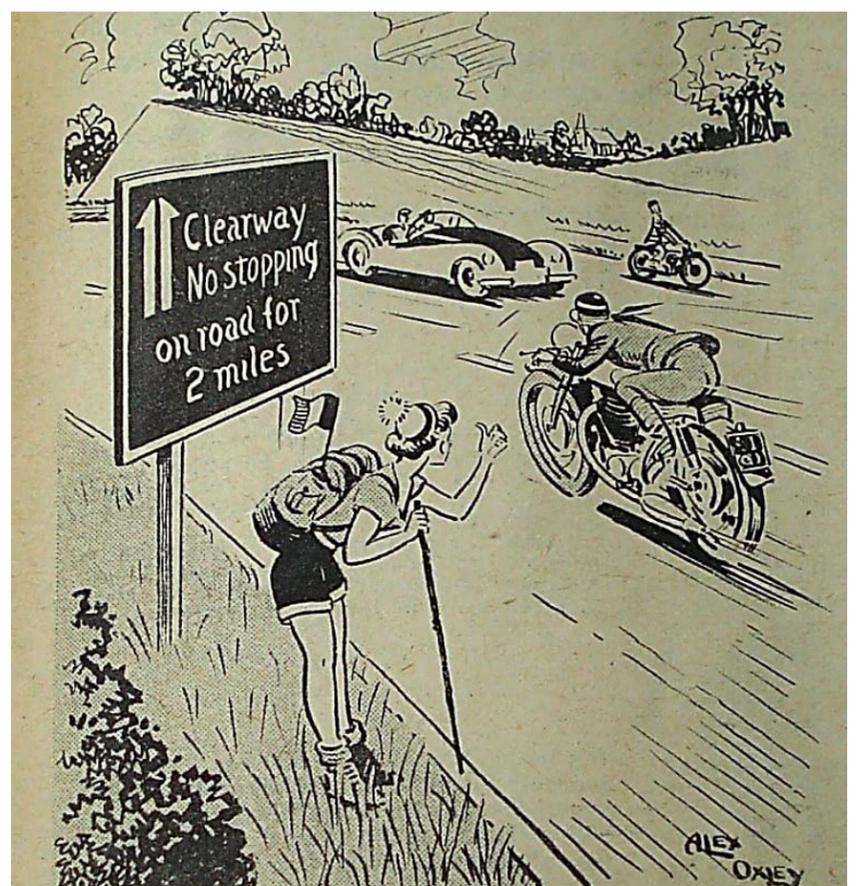
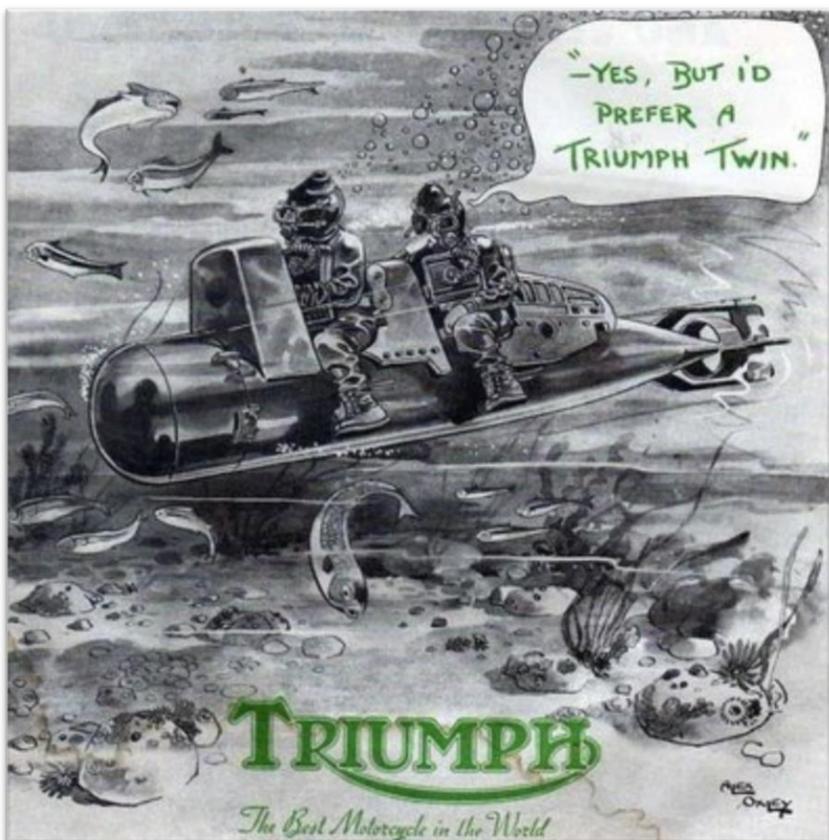


Alex Oxley was a well-known illustrator and cartoonist with a passion for motorcycling. His work went wider than just bikes but, in our circles, he is probably best known for his cartoons in *Motor Cycling* in the 1940s and 50s, including through the war, and the series of adverts he drew for Triumph just after the war. The story goes that Triumph didn't want to advertise specific bikes on the home market because they were in short supply, with almost all production heading for export. The adverts were intended to keep the Triumph brand in the front of the minds of the motorcycle buying public, ready for when more machines became available. Full-page cartoons adorned the front cover and inside pages of many issues of both the blue 'un and the green 'un. Several semi-ludicrous situations were caricatured declaring "It's easy on a Triumph" or "I'd prefer a Triumph twin".

I've long been a fan of his work, so I was really quite excited when, a few years ago, I spotted an original Alex Oxley cartoon for sale on that ubiquitous internet auction site. This was especially so because I'd been shown some of his originals that are hidden away in the vaults of the VMCC library. In went my bid and it was mine for a fairly modest sum (I can't remember exactly, but I recall not having that feeling of guilt when the bidding goes higher than you really expected). It's captioned "It's an ill wind" and clearly follows a similar theme to the earlier "Stranger in Paradise" cartoon in *Motor Cycling*. It's not dated and I don't yet know if it actually appeared in a publication, but I'm guessing it was around the time motorways first appeared in 1959.



"It's an ill wind – "



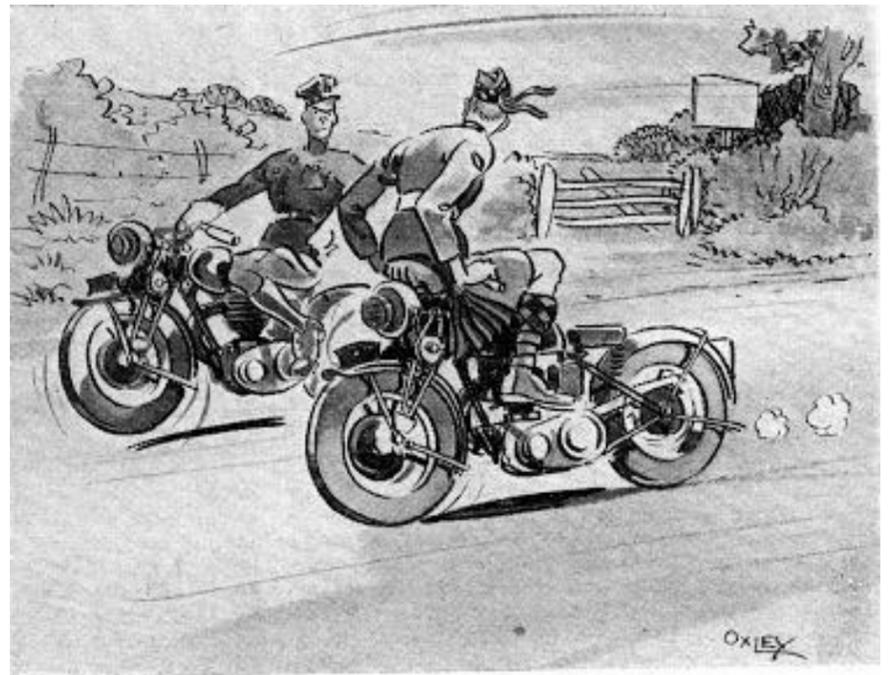
"Stranger in Paradise"

Some more of Alex Oxley's work

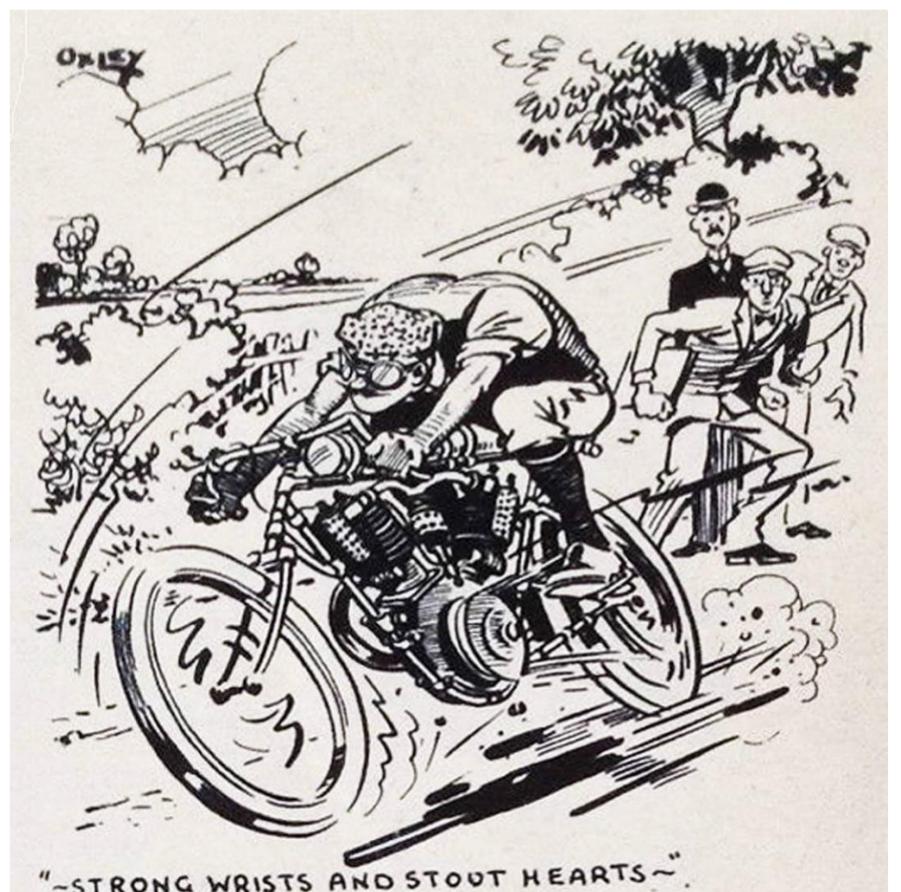


“He seemed to be obsessed with the short-cut idea”

The cartoon above came with my auction win. It's not signed but, to me, the style is Oxley's (compare it to "serenade for strings" below) and the handwriting in the caption also looks similar. It's annotated "Minnie Grenfell Trial". I've not found out when or where that trial happened, but Minnie Grenfell, on a 125 Francis Barnett, was one of eight lady riders, along with Marjorie Cottle, in the 1927 "Lakes" ISDT. Also in 1927, she made a run from London to Edinburgh, again on a Villiers-engined Francis Barnett, to successfully demonstrate that it was possible to make the 395-mile trip for less than four shillings (20p). Motor Sport magazine commented that, at ten miles a penny, a lightweight motorcycle was almost cheaper than shoe leather.



“What's a laddie to do when he's wearing a kilt?”



“Serenade for strings”



Will Curry, Road Racer?

This tale recounts my attempt to become a road-racer.

A friend of mine from school was the nephew of a chap called Bill Gwynn. I might not have the spelling correct but I'm sure someone will pretty soon correct me if I'm wrong. That's what usually happens.

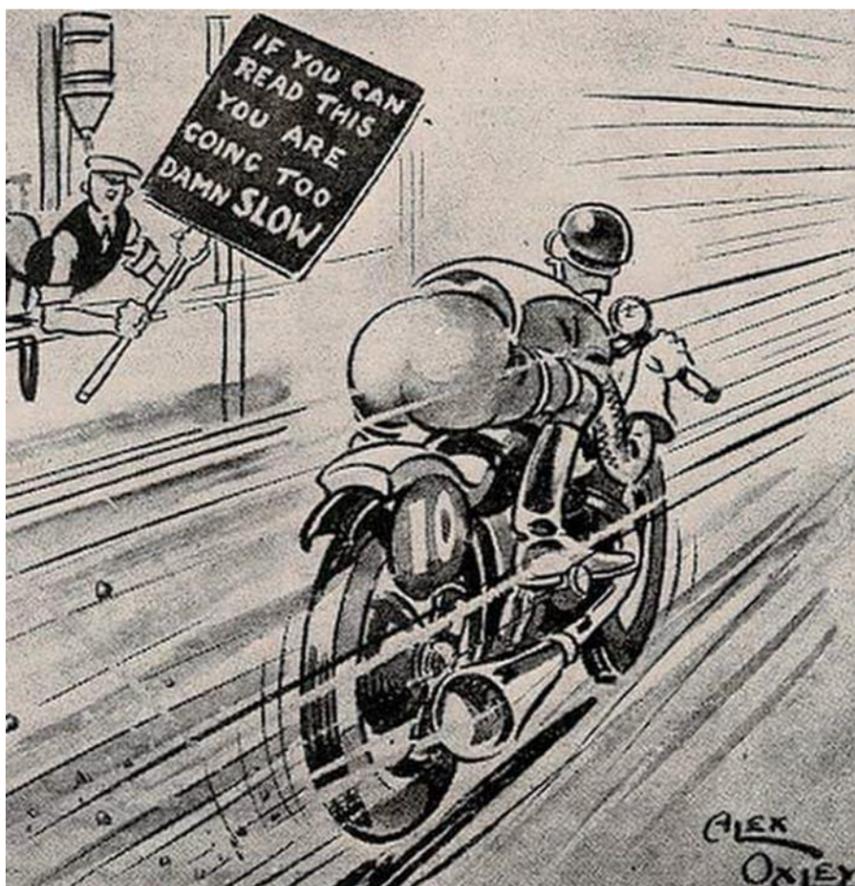
Mr. Gwynn was workshop foreman for a certain Eddie Dow who had premises in Banbury and is rightly considered to be an expert on the preparation and riding of BSA's famous Gold Star. Mr Gwynn was no slouch either with a Goldie.

As a birthday present my friend was offered the chance to ride Mr. Gwynn's Gold Star at Brand's Hatch on one of the practise days. This was a Wednesday morning and cost 17/6 per bike. It was the opportunity for the factories to test out their latest developments and similarly for anyone else with 17/6. On this day the Norton people were there with half a dozen Manxes and so were the Bantam Racing Club of Great Britain. For these people - I use the expression 'People' as I think Brian Cornwell is a member and to include him in the expression 'Bunch of Nutters' isn't at all appropriate - a three-speed gearbox, plunger rear suspension and no more than 150ccs was all the rules they had. Anything else went. Most were water-cooled, some supercharged and all of them could only be recognized as Bantam by a very serious Bantam enthusiast.

Another friend and I were invited along too and so at an amazingly early hour we set off to furthest Kent. Alaska and Siberia may well be very cold in the winter, but Brands Hatch is the coldest place in the world at any time. It's also windy but the wind is strangely choosy where it blows. It completely ignores the toilets - well, the Gents certainly, I don't know about the Ladies. If Brands Hatch in general is cold and windy its Gents are the most noise-some anywhere.

As I remember it the Goldie was scrutineered but as we weren't racing there was no inspection of our riding kit. The Goldie had a number and we had had a quick explanation about flags.

After a quick discussion I was going last. Huge grins were the order of the day – until my turn. When the horizon seems to be going more-or-less up and down and the 'bike seems to be on its handlebar and footrest ends I'm not comfortable. Half-way round my first lap the Bantam Racing Club of Great Britain came by me, on both sides, on motorcycles a quarter of the size of the thing I was trying to ride, much faster than I was going. It was beginning to dawn on me that there was obviously a lot more to going fast than opening the throttle and clinging on.



I finished the lap and pulled into the pit area. Male pride decreed I needed an excuse for coming in before the end of my 5th lap. "I don't think the suspension is right for my weight - it seems to be weaving every time I open the throttle hard". Even in those far-off days I was significantly heavier than my friends, the 'why' being another story. I wandered off around the paddock making a nuisance of myself asking questions, learning quite a lot about motorcycles and quite a few new words to add to my growing technical vocabulary.

It was a wiser and reflective me on the drive back. In our own way we had all greatly enjoyed the day. I had met a couple of Norton riders who were quite talkative. One, from Belfast, remembered my Dad from just after the war and the other told me about riding trials as a way to keep fit and as a relaxation. They both proffered the opinion that Ariels were good and the Irishman said his friend Sammy actually worked for them.

The run that never was...

NORMAN LORTON

Report on The First (post lockdown) Bedfordshire VMCC Official Run, 18th June 2020

I was looking forward to the first 'official' run of the year and was appreciative of being accepted to join, being one of the first five to enquire. SECRET details were supplied regarding the gathering point for the start. Approaching the day, the weather forecast did not look good and the evening before it was absolutely certain to be pouring from 4:00 a.m. to around 10:00 a.m., and then probably dry for the day.

So, was I put off? Would I be a wimp and feign illness to avoid going out in the rain? No!! Us VMCC riders are made of tough stuff. Anyway, how could I skip the first run of the year and not take my valuable one-of-five spaces? And I don't mind a bit of rain, even a lot, if I am back home in a few hours to dry out.

So, on the day it was truly tipping it at 7:00 a.m. By 9:00 I was fully dressed in my best Halvarssons riding gear and my sandwiches and thermos were packed on the back, because I was determined to have a FUN DAY OUT. I set off at 9:15 a.m. for local BP fuel and the rain was heavy. Under the petrol station canopy I realised the accumulated water was running off my helmet and clothing and leaving a puddle on the nearly dry floor. It was about a half-hour run for me to the SECRET start location in a lay-by adjacent to the Clophill roundabout on the A507. On the way it was very wet, constantly, and there were deep puddles in the road all over the place. But I was dry inside, and the flip-front, full-face helmet kept all the water off my face, and my gloves were dry also. But a slight chilling in a certain trouser area made me think that the lining in my over-trousers might have been a nice addition.



Norm, waiting, in vain, in the rain, for those who never came

I arrived at the SECRET lay-by at 9:55 a.m., a bit early for a 10:30 start but I thought that I could have a chat with whoever else was riding, visit the local hedge, and perhaps have a cup of tea. It was still raining, but perhaps not so hard; people were running from vehicles to the Burger Van in the lay-by across the road, and standing in 'socially-distanced' gaps in front of the serving hatch, because the little awning roof was only big enough for one at a time. I realised my phone was ringing in my jacket pocket. By the time I had got it out, etc, etc, it had stopped. I looked at the caller's name and realised it was someone from the club, who I knew wasn't coming on the run, and was obviously calling me about an email I had sent him that morning. So I rang, but his number was busy, so I left a message, saying I was standing in the lay-by, in the rain, waiting for the start of the run, and would call him later about what we had discussed.

By 10:10 a.m. I decided to make my cup of tea as no one else had arrived yet, and I figured that others might arrive nearer to 10:30 in view of the rain. I also decided to eat one of my sandwiches, just for fun, to make the wait more enjoyable. By 10:25 I had lost interest in the comings and goings at the Burger van. It was still raining, and the sky was very dark, so it was liable to persist being wet beyond the forecast finish. I formulated a plan such that if the Run Leader arrived and was on his own, because everyone else had chickened out, I might suggest that we call it a day and head home.

At 10:30 no one had turned up. I was Billy No-mates. I decided a picture was necessary to prove I was here, and I would then head off back home. It was still raining. It was quite a nice ride back, but I realised there were a couple of things to adjust on my just-rebuilt Norton ES2 and these are on the to-do list. Back home I found messages on my mobile phone and an email on my computer. The run had been cancelled by email at 9:36 a.m., and the call from my friend at 9:55 a.m. was because he had my number, and the Leader didn't, to say that the run was cancelled, and he hoped I hadn't left yet! Huhh! Perhaps my recorded message back to him that I was standing in the lay-by, in the rain waiting for everyone to arrive, was informative.

But I had a nice outing, did 37 miles, and I look forward to being mentioned in the Bedford VMCC proper-rider awards. The picture is of me, the ES2 and the Clophill roundabout on the A507, taken at 10:30 a.m. precisely.

That was the run that was...

NORM LORTON, RESUMES THE STORY

Two days after the first Bedfordshire VMCC run, there was a repeat attempt to stage the run in better weather. Now, I maintain that the first run took place, albeit with just one attendee, and will therefore label this second attempt as The Second Run. Some may not agree, but I am writing this report and will claim journalistic license.



At the gathering - all standing 2m apart!

We met at the same (no longer secret) location of the Clophill roundabout lay-by. Early arrivals were Will and 1928 Ariel, Gerald and Velo, plus Norm and ES2. Soon arriving were Gerry and Goldie, Bryan and blue Triumph, plus Don and (mongrel) Ariel. When we all arrived, did we exclaim how wonderful it was to see each other? Did we enquire after each other's health and fatalities in the family? Did we ask how we were? No, don't be silly, we all started talking motorbikes and what had been modified, etc., etc. Typical men!!

Don led us on a pleasant route to the west, crossing the M1, and exploring the area beyond Tingrith. The roads were a delight to ride, not at all busy, and quite dry. Bryan was tail-end-Charlie, sporting the brightest LED headlamp known to mankind - it was an intense, strong matt white but with no sense of dazzle, impressive. The five singles - Enfield, BSA, Velocette, Ariel and Norton made a superb noise and we seemed to attract several waves from families and envious glances from men of a certain age [I thought the Thunderbird sounded quite nice as well - Bryan]. At some point on the return journey, we must have passed near to Gerry's house as he quickly departed for a cup of tea. The remaining five pulled up on the Green in Clophill and there were three Thermoses (Thermi?) produced and two of the party were prepared with sandwiches. In now hot sunshine, we continued to talk motorcycles, and who did what on motorcycles - what else? Ahh, we did also comment on the luxuriant state of some member's hair. It was though that Bryan's hair on his head might soon exceed the length of Will's beard.



Norm - sandwiches and Thermos always at the ready

A super way to break our personal Covid isolations - we are all looking forward to the next run, which will be the same six of us we think.

[see page 2 for information about forthcoming runs]



Preparing to disperse - still 2m apart

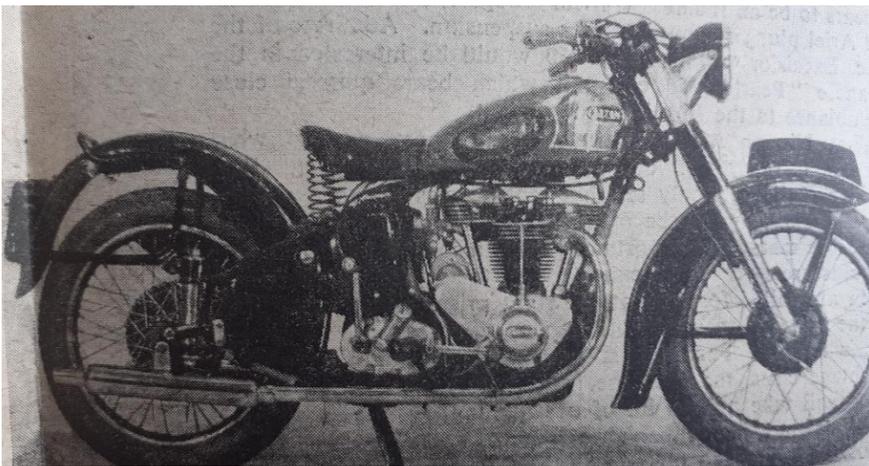
Seen in the papers:

MOTOR CYCLING – 11 FEBRUARY 1954

Editorial

“Remote Japan has never been looked upon as a potential competitor, so far as motorcycles are concerned...It is not thought that there is much likelihood of Japanese machines selling in serious numbers in Britain. Our own factories can turn out models which will be a sufficient defence against that.”

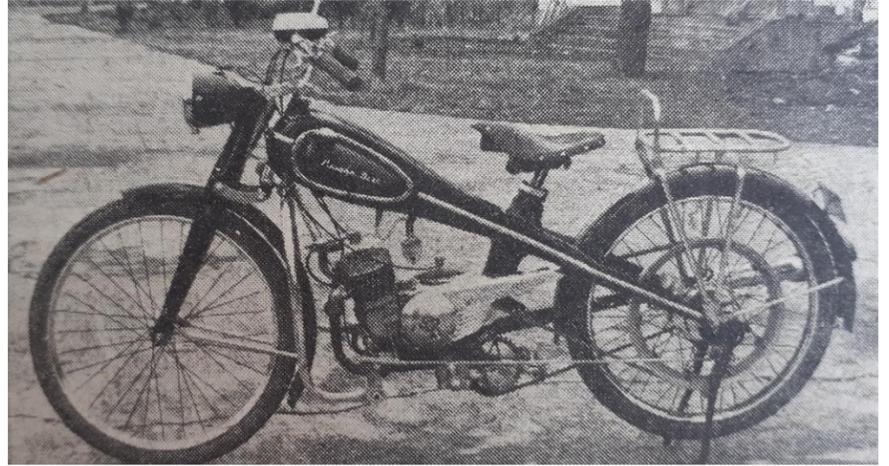
The pictures from the magazine show some of the bikes being produced in Japan in 1954 which didn't trouble R R (Bob) Holliday, Editor of Motor Cycling magazine, although he did think that the article, by C P Read, about the Japanese motorcycle industry would “cause a good deal of thought”.



Cabton 500cc vertical twin – with what appeared to C P Read as having an Indian “Warrior” engine, Norton front forks and Ariel plunger-cum-pivot rear suspension



Asahi 250cc side-valve, said to be hardly out of place among modern British models



Nissan 60cc belt-drive, not requiring the rider to take a driving test

It's that shed again...



I spotted these New Hudson and Bradbury reproduction ceramic signs on Ebay at a reasonable price – have you seen how much they ask for original enamel advertising signs? Makes your eyes water. Sent from Poland with lots of colourful stamps on the parcel. Rather nice signs.

Secretary's Scribbles – Brent's Bit

Hello Pals,

Terrific turnout on Tuesday for our great friend Dave's funeral. I felt very honoured that we were allowed to show our respect for our chum by following Dave on his final journey. No club ever had a finer man.

Keep as safe as you can everyone, err on the side of caution with this corona malarkey, it's a cruel disease to people of our generation.

All the best,
Brent

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks for contributions this week from Will, Norm, Mick, Malc, Brent & Nige. Please keep them coming.



Gotta get this article to Bryan in time for the next newsletter...

NIGE'S 'FROM THE ARCHIVE' THIS WEEK FROM PAST ARTHUR KING MEMORIAL RUNS

