



The Club

Kerplop. Handcrafted on finest vellum, the invitation to the Club run landed on the mat. In these word processing days of "cut and paste", it was sweet to note that the old fashioned, Blue Peter cut and paste technique is still evident chez Sheen. The body text appeared to have been done on a typewriter and the reply address was a sticker evidenced by the faint lines left from the photocopier. Never missing a chance to score points, PRTS lists his cell phone as an "international mobile". The killer application to get us there was the promise of a "choir" night on the Saturday. Well, that is it - hand me a chequebook. Reading on, Peter wonders what "JB will make of that in his report". Who he?

Llangollen is an easy cross-country ride from Worcestershire with no dreaded M6 to spoil the fun. However, the amount of traffic on the move on a Friday afternoon for the whole journey was staggering. Every road was seriously full and, if you consider that Shropshire is not a through route to anywhere, personal mobility is a demonstrable "right". The number of vehicles registered has stayed within half a million of twenty seven million for the past five years, yet the congestion has worsened implying that people drive more, commute

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Hand Hotel Llangollen

longer distances and use their personal freedom machines to the full. Central planners and rail enthusiasts, please note.

Near Oswestry, I passed Peter Meek, Graham Goodman, Chris Ventress and Rick Parrish. They had pulled up on the side of the A5 to wait for Maurice Knight who had turned into Oswestry instead of following Graham who claimed to know the way. Talking to Chris later, I discovered that he had had a total ignition failure earlier in the year, which did not impress him much. Peter Meek is enjoying his Diversion more now that he has sorted out the damping at both ends.

The last five miles from Chirk into Llangollen on the A5 in warm sunshine was achingly beautiful and augured well for the weekend. We were now in hill country with a particularly excellent example on the right. One side of the hill was exposed in a sheer bluff with all the strata of rock and sediment evident. By its craggy nature, this appeared young as hills go. At the very peak were the ruins of the ancient castle of Dinas Bran. The huge lumps of stone used in its construction were dragged up there all those years ago, reinforcing my oft-stated views that our

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that the Bonneville is a nice try but the styling of the tail lamp, rear mudguard and tank seams spoil it.

Time for a trimble around town. The Dee was most impressive with the waters boiling over various rocks and ledges and swirling round the piers of the town bridge. You could almost imagine fly fishing for salmon. One of the coaching inns on the edge of the bridge was falling into the water. Peter Agg had his property/hotelier radar wound up and was giving it a quick once over when he remembered that he was no longer in that industry. On the north side of the bridge is the terminus for the Llangollen to Carrog Railway. This 8 mile track has steam trains and early '50s diesels running through "lovingly" restored stations. That may be but the station at Llangollen was a bit sad. Stopped in the tourist office for another bunch of superb flyers on the area. Well done, the British Tourist Board. However, I declined a 50 minute video on Llangollen for only £12.99.

Spotting Graham Goodman wandering around looking for a raffle prize. We came to the conclusion that a big, smelly, blue cheese from the arts and crafts shop next door might go well in somebody's panniers but I think he bottled out. Up on the main A5, I pondered the rationale of the Mushroom Shop. This shop had plaster mushrooms for sale by the hundreds. They were in dingles, arranged on hills and strewn all over the floor. You could even buy one with your name on it or as a souvenir of Llangollen. After due deliberation, I decided against. This shop occupied two frontages but was closed prior to 5.30 pm on a Friday with a note directing one to the factory up the road. Thank God for the nuttiness of the British race but, as a business model, something is missing.

Returning to the hotel, I was just in time to see the end of Round One between Peter Agg and the hotel staff and my first glimpse of the present day Molly the Bruiser in the shape of a really aggressive Scouser. It appears that getting a pot of tea for two at teatime was a bridge too far. Having finally pleaded, cajoled, entreated and threatened, the tea and two cups were delivered in the manner of a cluster bomb. The tea was cold. Round One went to the Scouser on points. It boded well for fun that night.

Rooms were allocated by putting one's hand into a bowl on the counter and fishing out a key, reminiscent of "those" parties. I had a fine and spacious room overlooking the church. Many people remarked on the notice on the electric towel rail - "HOT WHEN TURNED ON". Yup, just what I intended by turning it on but a sign of the times where one must prove a "duty of care". This was further demonstrated on the canal trip the next day where a notice forbade fishing and immediately adjacent was a warning to fishermen that the overhead cables carried high voltage.

Our Chairman was spotted sitting on the main stairs in his Mr. Toad togs, pint in one hand and a bottle of spirits by his side. He was reading the guest list and doing his pre-race checks for his introduction speech (which is why his off-the-cuff speeches are so well done). A very admirable vignette on its own but the looks he was getting from the American tourists as they passed him, going to their rooms, were fabulous and varying from disgust to solace. I quite expected one of the biddies to offer him an introduction to the AA.

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Mike Jackson did roll his bike off the trailer but self-propelled roll, it would not. Mike tried the standard practice of percussive maintenance (whacking the crap out of it) to no avail. Recommended read, Mr. Jackson, is "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance", particularly the second section. Two flat tyres and a flat battery showed a poor attitude to preparedness for a run. Tut. The RAC man, David Jones, was pressed into service causing Norman to caustically remark that Mike is a tightwad and fancy using the run to get a free RAC service. David got the bike going but the battery was kaput and gave up the ghost some 10 miles out. Mike had the ignominy of spending the rest of the run in the RAC van. In modern parlance, his day had gone "dome shaped" which I gather from the kids has replaced pear shaped.

Nick Hopkins, a wise virgin, had checked out the availability of some fancy electronics required for his Ducati ST2 only to be told that they were still out of stock after three months. He therefore wheeled out his trusty BSA B31 of 1947 vintage which started immediately, delivered him to the base camp and was sounding as sweet as ever on the whole run. Bike technology has advanced enormously but has reliability kept up? I was chatting to a local on the Friday night who told me that his Suzuki was off the road awaiting some ignition bits and pieces. I think there is some slack in the system which the industry should not totally ignore.

Just north of Llangollen, we had an immediate treat in the shape of the Horseshoe Pass. The very light drizzle while waiting for the off had abated but it is always a very evocative sight at the start of any run to see the bikes in a line, streaming away and peeling into the bends. I say bikes but this run had a

club first for, as far as I know, we had two scooters. Nick Jeffery was on a BMW C1 and David Dew on a Honda Silver Wing. These two examples demonstrate the scooter spectrum developing. The Honda has a 600 cc engine and the C1 150 cc and - boy! - could you tell the difference!. Both are excellent road riders but the C1 struggled a little on the open road whereas the Honda was permanently flying by, ridden by some loony or other (no offence, chaps).

I was following Nick Jeffery through a village on the B5431 and witnessed a superb example of survival riding. A lass was out walking her Doberman, using one of the new, extending leads. The dog was high above her on the grass bank on the left as Nick was virtually alongside. Nick saw the dog change direction and start to gallop down the bank straight into the road. Nick had perfectly judged the situation and had made all the necessary course and speed changes to avoid the potential accident. An inexperienced young rider without the battle-hardened peripheral vision would have been "fetched off".

A little further on, having been through one of those phases of "mind in neutral" riding, I found myself up with Dan Sagar on his Honda Dominatrix right behind our run leader who was intent on breaking the world "indicator on" record. Amusing to watch, to say the least, as he overtook cars with the left hand indicator going. Dan clocked him at 11 miles and would have put the record beyond reach if a furious Bob Macmillan had not come storming past both of us and Peter to correct the situation.

The caffeine frenzy was at the ambitiously named Lakeside Inn at the western end of a section of the B5381 shown on the run map as a Roman

Telford by this time that if he said he could do it, do it he would . Nobody questioned him. He just set about achieving.

Thomas Telford (1757-1834) was an amazing character. The son of a Scottish shepherd, he built bridges, churches, canals and aqueducts all over the country. In 1820, it is reckoned he was in charge of every major civil engineering project requiring public approval in the country. How did he get about the length and breadth of the country and investigate everything? He completed the Chirk aqueduct first then used the spoil to form the two huge buttresses at each end of the Llangollen Aqueduct. The span of the cast iron only aqueduct is 1000 feet, supported on sixteen pillars. Making a guess at the breadth and depth that is, with a laden barge, ONE HUNDRED TONS – in a bath!

He chose cast iron for its resistance to corrosion and mechanical strength and the fact that it was the known technology of the day. He had to solve the sealing problem of a series of cast iron troughs bolted together, full of water with boats bashing into the sides. The solution was a mixture of molten lead and sugar cast into the recesses of the joints. I have read references to molten lead and Welsh flannel but I do not know how the flannel would survive. It has been in continuous use since 1796 without a single leak recorded. I know this from the guidebook but when the boat bashes (just by your elbow) into the single panel of cast iron which is a few inches wide at the rim and which is showing its age, cast your eyes further down into the River Dee 126 feet below you and I defy you not gulp. About half way across, we had a cheery conversation with a local as he strolls by using the footpath on the other side.

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Surely it's the first time on a Club Run we have been overtaken on foot?

A local bus service took us back to the hotel in about 5 minutes, whereas the boat trip took nearly 2 hours. This lunch stop combined a coach, boat and bus trip but was well worth it for the sight of such bold engineering in such beautiful scenery. Back on the road at 2.30 p.m. with Tony having washed the dishonourable dirt off his bike and the C1 with a fully functioning stand, we struck west on the A5 to Corwen. Leaving the main roads, we used a series of B roads which were great as they were open enough to get reasonable vision, save the last little nagger from Llangynog to Pen-y-Bont, getting us across to the valley holding the lake of Vyrnwy, a club favourite. On this tight bit of road, Maurice Knight confessed to not feeling that comfortable. It was so narrow that he had to ride in the middle on all the crud from animals, grass, twigs and general detritus. Plus there was a terrible drop on the left. A tip, my boyo. Your double panniers were touching the edges on both sides so forcing you to the middle. Take them off, next time.

The Hotel was hosting a wedding reception with the guests just leaving. The looks on the faces of the bejewelled ones were wonderful as the rockers pulled up. Panic!! "Hells Angels Wreck Wedding in Mid Wales Shock Horror Story – see page 3". All was well when helmets were doffed and light intercourse commenced(?). Funny how every one makes a bee line for the two Harleys. Such brand awareness, unless Peter and John cut a dash with the public. As previously mentioned, the Hotel has changed hands and the new owners obviously do not know their place regarding THE CLUB. We were served

room that his jacket was burnt on the back where it had slipped during the ride up and touched something hot. The storm troops were let loose from the kitchen under the command of our Liverpudlian friend who stood in the middle of the room like an Italian traffic cop waving arms and pointing out in a loud voice "pork over there" etc. There was a large selection from the menu so it did take some co-ordinating, I grant.

Norman has a fetching way about him. As Keith Davies was absent, he said to Mike Jackson "In the absence of any intelligent senior member, would he mind doing the sergeant-at-arms?" He did a great job with typically "Old MJ" wit and eloquence. He was so determined to get everybody, at one point he asked for a show of hands from those who had not been fined and then fined them for being too good. Cheeky. It was the delivery that amused me. He did little mincing and bouncing steps, forwards and backwards, up and down the same bit of carpet while chortling to himself, gnome-like. Tony announced that Tony Jeffery had won the raffle with every question correct, including the one about the actual attendance to the Show in a particular year. You know Tony Dawson - the Yorkshire Man. Yorkshire Man? Aye, 'appen, a Scot with every ounce of charity squeezed out, an' proud ayit.

We had our own bar set up in the Denbigh so we sat around chatting. Keith Blair inevitably got round to the subject of the ecological disaster facing the planet. I recommended to him the book entitled "the Skeptical Environmentalist" by Bjorn Lomborg (a Professor of Statistics and Greenpeace

member) which I am reading. It refutes most of the exaggerated claims by relentless analysis of the published facts over sufficient periods of time. The world is getting better environmentally, not worse he argues, so the real question is whether it is fast enough and where in the priority list of education, public health etc., it should be. Keith promised to read it.

We retired to the main bar just after the billed "high-tech duo" had finished the cabaret. I know "high-tech" is a modern mantra but how does it apply to a cabaret duo? I have also seen this term used in the marketing of some "high-tech industrial units". When you look at them they are just the same as standard units but have higher rents, as the risk with a "high tech" tenant is greater, it seems to me. I sat and

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listened to Peter Agg exposing his views on public services and paying more tax for them. Why? When did any government show a proclivity for being a good keeper of the public purse? Apart from a few sectors, get government out of business is my mantra. The problem is that the public thinks the Health Service is "free".

Peter reminded me so much of a wife (of Russian, Irish, Greek and English extraction and a thespian to boot) of a famous Communist Trade Union Official to whom I was chatting in a post prandial situation. When quizzed over the dichotomy of how they lived high on the hog in St. John's Wood, she floored me with "Dahling, we can afford to be Communists". Just so Kommissar! She also added "Dear boy, act on the Left but always sup on the Right, they have a better table and more sympathy". As GBS said,

Members and their machines

Peter Sheen	652cc F650 BMW GS
Graham Goodman	1085cc BMW R1100GS
Dennis Bates	598cc Yamaha XJ600S Diversion
Nick Jeffery	150cc BMW C1 enclosed scooter
Alan Baker	649cc Honda CX650 Turbo
Wilf Harrison	798cc BMW R80
Norman Hyde	790cc Triumph Bonneville
Maurice Knight	848cc BMW R80R
Keith Blair	740cc BMW K75 RT
Tony Dawson	1188cc Yamaha FJ1200
David Strathcarron	987cc Grinall tri-car
Tom Waterer	1100cc CBX Honda Super Blackbird
Nick Hopkins	1947 348cc BSA B31
Peter Meek	892cc Yamaha Diversion 900
David Hill	996cc Cagiva Raptor
Mike Jackson	649cc Kawasaki 650W
Tony Jakeman	1402cc Suzuki GSX1400
Dan Sager	644cc Honda NX Dominator
David Dew	600cc Honda Silver Wing scooter
Chris Ventress	998cc BMW K1
Andy Smith	1300cc Yamaha FJR1300
Peter Agg	1375cc Harley-Davidson Deuce
Bob McMillan	999cc Honda VTR SP-I
Hugh Palin	(Navigator) Ford Transit RAC Rescue Unit
David Jones (RAC)	Driver

Guests and their machines

Rick Parrish	781cc Honda VFR800
David Plummer	1085cc BMW R1100RS
John Sangster	1375cc Harley-Davidson Ultra Classic

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