



The Club

Club Run Report Spring 2002

Alton House Hotel Alton

Like climbing Everest, any journey starts with just one step.

Usually it's a careful yet measured step behind the poor unsung indigenous sod actually carrying all your possessions... with the exception of your mobile phone, a good quality camera, a toothbrush and a roll of soft toilet paper.

You will understand, I am sure, my trepidation at being courted by Alan Baker to take over the role of scribe just after the 2001 Llangollen Club run which is now tinged with the same sadness that we all feel at our combined loss. Having known Alan for some ten years, first as an MCI contact when I worked for Michael Evans, and then as a fellow club member, I must admit to having mixed emotions. I am sure we all agree that he is a damn tough act to follow and that the Club will be the poorer for his passing. Having attended his funeral, along with a raft of fellow club members, there is one thing I am sure of – he would be extremely upset were we not to remember him with anything but fondness and laughter.

In the same way that it is difficult to recollect a sad wedding then a happy

funeral is equally a rarity. But the tales of Alan's early life related with affection by his family and friends at The Chilterns Crematorium were as informative as they were inspiring. A fitting - if far too early end - for a much loved and highly respected man.

If Alan had attended the Alton run it would have been his **xxx**. We would now all be looking forward to yet another of his erudite ramblings on subjects as diverse as politics, town planning, geology, the established social order, modern values, public transport, the road systems and others to myriad to list. It is perhaps a coincidence, or possibly by design, that Alan almost insisted so

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early in his illness I consider the job of trying to sum up the images of two happy days in words. I hope you will see similarities in our enthusiasms as well as our disappointments with the "established conventions".

For those that attended the run report is a reference point for recollection. For those not able to make the run it serves, I think, as a gentle reminder of what they missed and a call-to-arms to make the effort to attend the next run.

Having received my “call up papers” some months before, I had decided to invite a colleague from Kawasaki as my guest on the Alton run. Glyn Fisher is the National Sales Manager for Kawasaki, and in common with myself on the marketing side, is responsible for both leisure and commercial products now that Geoff Selvidge is stationed at Kawasaki Europe, Holland, land of clogs and tasteless food. Glyn has been with Kawasaki for 19 years now and was looking forward to his first run.

I too was anticipating the run, but with a mixture of feelings. Having spent my formative years in the south east of England I was interested to see just where we would end up riding. I have spent more Saturdays than I care to remember behind a Volvo chicane on some otherwise glorious country road and I wanted to see if that magic club alchemy of “turning B roads into gold” would be in evidence. The route map – along with the all-important I.D. card for the bar - would, I expect, await us on our arrival.

At three in the afternoon the excitement got the better of us and we loaded up the bikes at Kawasaki’s HQ in Bourne End and proceeded to Alton via any twisty A or B road that was available. Apart from a few miles of the M4 it was fast and interesting “black top” all the way. Our diverse choice of mount performed faultlessly – mind you I would say that as they were both examples of Akashi’s finest.

Glyn quite sensibly took a ZZR-1200 for the run deciding that its combination of touring prowess and sporting ability would suit all conditions. For my sins, I decided on a VN1500 Meanstreak, a strange blend of cruiser come performance

motorcycle. Damn clever these Japanese when you come to think of it. As soon as they have dominated one market and squeezed every last yen out of it they go off and either hijack or invent another. One has to suppose that they will come a cropper one day and invent an across-the-frame six cylinder Enduro bike or a 200cc two stroke Tourer with optional heli-pad. But there again they said that big scooters were not going to work. (Naturally I invite contributions on the many failures of the Japanese motorcycle industry for inclusion in the next report !)

We arrived at Alton in hazy sunshine happy to find a petrol station to fuel up in and ask directions. Having alerted the good citizens of Alton to our presence by hooking a hard left on the exit and trapping the horn button for the umpteenth time against the tank bag, the S.S. Meanstreak was on her way again the mile or so to the hotel.

Upon arrival we were greeted by a familiar sight, around thirty motorcycles parked unfeasibly close to one another under a roof space that would normally shelter perhaps two small family cars. I remain convinced that there is something of a subconscious Club herding instinct at play in circumstances like this – or perhaps it harks back to the times when at the very hint of rain a motorcycle would, like a woman, remain beautiful but refuse to co-operate (no one said that these reports would be politically correct by the way !)

Anyway back to the elephants graveyard that was the undercover parking. You would not credit that we had machinery carefully cosseted in the concrete corral that would, according to the manufacturers, circle

the globe with little difficulty. It came as no surprise to see both Peter Sheens' immaculate F650 BMW and Dennis Bates' 600cc Diversion Yamaha firmly planted at the rear centre of the mixed and interesting collection of metal and ABS.

It's at times like this that one is forced to hypothesise about dear old Dennis. Not in mixed company of course, but nevertheless a series of loosely connected thoughts do arise. Does he, for example, actually set out for the following club run the day after the last has ended? I can never recollect him turning up or felt the exhaust pipes of his machine once I arrive and found them to be remotely warm. I concede that the reason for the second is that he may have trailered the machine there, but that still does not explain him being first on the grid so consistently.

While I am on the subject, have you ever noticed that Dennis is everywhere you look on a Club Run. Whether it be 6 a.m. in the car park or 11.30 p.m. in a far flung and forgotten hotel corridor there he is, as chipper as ever, and ready with a line of encouragement and abuse. I swear that I will pass in him a Hotel corridor at dusk one day and look out of the window and see him out in the car park at the same time. It's certainly one of the great benefits of belonging to the Club that it attracts and retains the enthusiasm of characters like Dennis and his ilk.

Upon entering the hotel one was struck by slightly eerie feeling of déjà vu. The Alton house certainly bore the credentials of a classic Club Run Hotel with the correct mix of maze like corridors, pokey bars and

staff all trained personally by Brain Rix. The receptionist was our first point of contact and she did not disappoint. Only minutes before our arrival she must have returned from her rooftop eerie having spotted us with her night vision U-boat commander binoculars. She had just enough time while we parked the bikes to loosen the shower-head, take a single leg off one of the beds and remove the copious towel selection and replace them with four carefully folded face flannels. It is only when she finally made eye contact that a simple flick of a switch under the reception counter dictated whether our shower was of polar or volcanic intent. (Luckily for us there was an informative sticker in the bathroom that actually read – "Warning, Hot Water is Hot")

I swear that I will pass him in a Hotel corridor one day and look out of the window and see him out in the car park at the same time

naturally after an hour and twenty minutes of riding she informed Glyn and myself that we did not have single rooms but would share and then proceeded to dispense the one and only key so that we would be playing "door key roulette" for the remainder for the weekend.

The valuable envelope of club information was produced at the exact moment that we had both hands full and, like most other Club runs, we proceed towards the stairs envelope in mouth greeting fellow members with a series of unintelligible grunts.

To our right now was the lobby area complete with old copies of the Times, leather sofa's and David Strathcarron. It looked so appropriate that wondered if there should not be a ruling that every Hotel in the land should one – a leather sofa I mean not

a peer of the realm. David must be psychic as he quickly cut my thoughtful musings down to size by enquiring of his companion (a certain G. Goodman), “who is that fellow, I am sure I have seen him somewhere before”. Suitably taken down a peg or four I retired to the room with Glyn.

At this stage you will, I hope, forgive me. Not having a skeleton key to all the rooms I cannot report on the activities – legal or otherwise – in any other of the guest bedrooms throughout the weekend. I will instead confine this part of the report to a record of our own billet. No soon as we were in the room then the male territorial instinct came to the fore. Beds were commandeered, draws were demarcated and precious bathroom space was “divvied up”. Once, and only once, an understanding of the relative territories have been established can phase two, the cleansing phase, begin.

Glyn is not the sort of chap to argue with being an ex night-club bouncer (an ideal former profession when you are trying to sell anything to motorcycle dealers). Sensibly I let him take the first shower. Having seen him put a fairly small toilet bag in the bathroom earlier, and observed him return to the bathroom ready for a shower the sound that greeted me next was somewhat of a surprise.

I expect that the cubic volume of the room and the materials used in its construction could have amplified the sound a little but nevertheless the cacophony that emanated from the bathroom was a fanfare to behold. It sounded like someone trying to demolish a fair sized terraced house with a sledgehammer such was the relentless pounding. After perhaps a minute of unremitting banging and

crashing it stopped just long enough for me to make enquiries. “Sorry Mart, just trying to get the bloody shower matt to stick to the bath mate. I think its down now”. I should say so. I expect they had to rope it to a Land Rover and tow the damn thing free after we left.

Now swiftly refreshed I joined Glyn for a typical Alan Baker style pre-prandial meander through the main pedestrian thoroughfare of Alton and reflect on the history of the town. Unlike its growing neighbour, Basingstoke, Alton has remained resolutely a market town with only the slightly incongruous Bass brewery and Sainsbury store about its perimeter to interrupt this notion. Dating back to pre Roman times, Alton grew steadily to become a noted market town in the Georgian era. Its name is derived from the Saxon name “Aewieluntun” meaning “Village of the great spring” referring to the valley of the river Wey in which Alton is situated. In fact the original road, which now runs past the front of the Alton House Hotel, was once part of the route of the Pilgrims Way from Winchester to Canterbury. Presumably pilgrims now use the much faster route via the bypass which being only recently surfaced is much kinder on the soft white underbelly of any self-respecting prostrate pilgrim.

Much earlier than this During the English civil war Alton briefly became the focus of attention during the battle of Alton. What an amazing coincidence that they should fight a battle of such a name right near a town actually called Alton, the chances of that must have a million to one! Anyway, in mid December 1643 a fierce Royalist vs Parliamentary battle was fought out, like a Celtic vs Rangers match in the streets of Alton; presumably with the victors going

through on corpse difference. The end came when Colonel Bolle and the remaining defenders were forced into the parish church of St Lawrence where they were killed in a last stand behind a crude barricade of dead horses... charming.

Two of the more famous authors to mention Alton were the venerable William Cobbitt in his seminal work Rural Rides and later the author of Robinson Crusoe, Daniel Defoe. (Defoe, was actually born to Mr and Mrs Foe and effected the De prefix later)

Of course, if one was planning to miss a Club run then a suitable excuse is always polite; but selling your house and moving is taking things a bit far

One cannot mention Alton without reference to the most famous – or should that be infamous resident – Mr Frederick Baker. For it was Frederick, a solicitors clerk, who in 1867, murdered “sweet” Fanny Adams. It was later that the Royal Navy issued a ration of poor quality tinned meat and the servicemen suggesting that the meagre meat ration was the result of the murder coined the phrase “sweet F A”.

In an effort to leave the best ‘till last on the history front, Alton was, appropriately, at one end of the Basingstoke to Alton light railway. Why should this be of significance you will ask ? Certainly not because it was opened in 1898 by the president of the board of trade. Neither is it that the track was actually sold for use in France during WW1 and returned thereafter. The reason for highlighting this unassuming twelve miles of track is that one of its stations, Cliddesden, was transformed into the Irish station, Buggleskelly, for one of the funniest British comedy films ever made, Will Hay’s Oh Mr Porter – a comedy classic that bears repeated viewing.

By the time we had finished our brief walk round Alton and returned to the Hotel the bar was beginning to show signs of life and members were using their Club run “wino warrant cards” with gusto. The ever present Dennis was collecting money for the kitty with commendable enthusiasm if not accuracy. If he takes a shine to you, like as not, he will ask for your contribution to the drinks kitty two or even three times a night. The more subtle souls among our number have to virtually force their cash on him – can’t help thinking there is some kind of moral buried in there somewhere.

Naturally the ale soon began to flow and stories of business success and feats deringndoo achieved since the last run spilled like barley from a torn sack– any late comers or locals must have thought it was a piss up at the CBI conference.

And while all this jollity was brewing up, Mr Smith of Yamaha was probably labelling his umpteenth box of kitchen utensils, bathroom sundries or sofa cushions as he chose the weekend of the Club run to move house. Of course if one was planning to miss a Club run then a suitable excuse is always polite; but going to all the trouble of selling your house and moving is taking things a bit far – but then again “Smithy” was never one to do things by half.

While I was pondering Andy’s excess, Norman emerged corvette-like from a very effective smoke screen laid down by Mike Jackson and asked me formally to take over as club scribe. The beer must

have been good because I confirmed and plain forgot to tell Norman where he could stick the organisation of the raffle. With only a quarter of an hour until the diner gong was sounded I had little time to ensure that the raffle was totally impartial and that no one had tampered with any of the prizes or contrived their eventual destination. Just think what malpractice may result if we did not stick to our established practice in this our most popular post-dinner diversion

Returning to the bar I was introduced to two guests, Phil MacDonald and Rick Parish. Phil, it turned out, was a bit of a Moto-Guzzi fan but appeared normal in every other respect. He had connections with test cricket I heard later so I made a mental note to send him a lavish Christmas card come the festive season.

Rick on the other hand was riding a very sensible and ruthlessly efficient Honda VFR800i. It came as no surprise to find out that Rick was heavily involved in accountancy and could probably tell me the rate that his bike was gradually depreciating at any given time taking into account the relationship between the pound and a basket of major currencies. Both were already enjoying the Club run experience and enthusiastically looking forward to the unfolding events.

I turned towards the bar to replenish the alcohol content in my blood and was greeted by a familiar sight. Like a finely honed athlete, David Martin was preparing the mighty Cathedral that is his torso for the rigours of the evening. Having downed suitable quantities of ale he was among the front runners into the dining area ready for the

culinary delight that is a Club run meal. Never a man to miss a chance, I managed to feign a move into the adjacent room and wrong footed a few less observant members and graduated far enough up the “gourmet grid” to take my pick of table place.

With a guest like Glyn there are a few niceties to observe right from the very start. In the same way that you would not expect to see H.M.S. Ark Royal squeezed into a berth at Henley then likewise it is foolhardy to restrict the upper body and arm movement of someone with Glyns “healthy” appetite. In fact rather like an old fashioned engineering machine shop it is unwise to take supper with Glyn if you have any loose clothing on or hair below the nape of the neck lest you get pulled molarwards and suffer the consequences.

Having found a “corner plot” for Glyn where he could (if he ate at the correct speed), be served from East and West alternately, I settled with my companions. To my right was the Oz Clark of the Club, our venerable friend Maurice Knight. Maurice, as we all know, is a man who has come to expect the best in life and I have no doubt he has a cellar in his palatial Epsom home to rival that of the Rothchilds. It is has therefore, in the past, become a ritual of mine to ask his opinion on the wine before indulging.

So long as he does not sell you a dummy – which can happen if stocks are low – Maurice can be relied upon to always pick the better of the vintages offered.

Thus charged with the fruit of the vine we looked forward to

So long as he does not sell you a dummy-which can happen if stocks are low-Maurice can be relied upon to always pick the better of the vintages offered

Norman's preamble and blessing in advance of victuals. .

Norman called us to order and started how he meant to carry on, with a mixture of quality information and humorous ramblings. Reporting on the whereabouts of non-attending members his comments were entertaining and varied.

Frank Finch - never a man to turn away from a challenge - was trying to out talk some Irish dealers while Bob Macmillan had travelled further afield to South Africa. The aforementioned Andy Smith was moving house and Martin Roberts was not about to let the cat out of the bag simply describing his situation as "busy".

Norman continued in his usual dry tone with a characteristic self-deprecating mention that his arrival had been delayed by the loss of his luggage from his motorcycle en route... for the second time. Geoff Selvidge was described as having "taken over Europe" which I suppose has a degree of accuracy about it and at least explains the moustache.

Meanwhile Dave Martin interjected and announced that the run attraction is only 500 yards from his house - and you never even knew there was a British Kebeb Museum.

Mr Hyde continued without missing a beat by dryly observing that Tony Dawson was sitting in the valley being between two Hills, Simon and Dave, a comment that would have seen him hit by a bread roll in lesser company - or if Glyn hadn't already eaten mine.

Like a department head in a Sheffield Secondary modern, Tony Dawson distributed the I.Q. shrinking Club Quiz papers with a stern warning for them to be completed by the next evening's repast. I don't know how Tony researches his questions but they have a wonderful way of reminding one just how wide and diverse the world of motorcycling actually is. Naturally he always adds a trick question such as "How many people work at the MCI?".

Apparently both the aforementioned Tony Dawson and Nick Hopkins were late but had provided plausible excuses. Tony was seeing "a girl" and Nick was waiting for some cider for Keith Blair to be fermented - just as well Keith is not partial to 12 year old Malt don't you think ?

Appropriately we rose for a toast and special tribute to our friend Alan Baker and dining commenced.

As meals go it came and went amid a flurry of intense conversation and laughter. The only slight interruption to the notion that this could have been the dining room of any self respecting gentlemen's club was the head waiter shouting "Oooo warnts more rarst potaaytars ?" repeatedly until told where he could stick his potatoes roast or not.

During a slight lull in proceedings I took the opportunity to attempt to despatch the raffle like a horse with a broken leg - quickly and with as little pain as necessary. The situation was not ideal with a table of what can loosely be called "prizes" at opposite ends of the room. An enviable selection of Chateau bottled wines

-a variety of folio editions of "pre-owned" weighty tomes and good intentioned gifts fashioned in tiger economy plastic and the less expensive and resilient metal alloys.

were interspersed with a variety of folio editions of “pre-owned” weighty tomes and good intentioned gifts fashioned in tiger economy plastic and the less expensive and resilient metal alloys. I look forward to the efforts of the next raffle caller, you have my sympathies who ever you are.... And yes Keith Blair did “win” some cider by some strange quirk of fate.

Following desert and some very welcome cheese and biscuits retreat was sounded and the majority repaired to the bar to talk about motorcycles, or in the case of Dave Martin, food. God knows where he puts it but after two pints of foaming ale he was after going into Alton for a “curry or kebab”. I may have misheard him though as he may have recommended a curry and a kebab!

Like finely honed athletes, the majority of the Club rose early to partake of breakfast.

In typical Club fashion, and somewhat reminiscent of a “how to deal with tricky customers” training video, we all filed in and asked one of the two pre-school aged waiters a different yet equally urgent question. The sight of the poor fifteen year olds running first for some tea, then for milk and finally for orange juice even before the first of the hot dishes appeared makes one realise just how far the service industry in the country still has to come. When the required feast was assembled, a hearty breakfast was had by all. It would be at least another hour before coffee and biscuits and then a further hour or so before lunch so cramming the calories was of the utmost importance.

It was perhaps thirty minutes later that we formed up in the car park ready for the off. David Hill was fittingly Suzuki mounted, while UK

Benelli Chief, Dave Plummer, rode a BMW presumably while he waits for his Benelli Tornado to be built. Neither Keith or Richard Davies quite made it to the litre class by riding a 995cc Triumph and 996cc Cagiva respectively. With Dan Sagar mounted on what, for a change, looked like a UK specification motorcycle we made ready for the off.

There was still the usual mixture of normal (easy to start) machinery and the esoteric which was typically bloody impossible to persuade to spark in any regular fashion.

Chief among the offenders was our very own man at the MCI (Ministry of Curious Information), Mr Tom Waterer. His choice of steed for the weekend was a typically arcane looking piece of tin and iron from the Enfield India company, a Bullet Classic ES. In an attempt to cash in on the utilitarian retro fashion vogue, Enfield had produced this instant classic to resemble a WW2 despatch riders mount complete with tin panniers the like of which would not be out of place as ammunition boxes on the flank of a Tiger tank.

Tom, who like any game rider, started off trying to start the machine fully clothed and with helmet on quickly re-enacted the “Full Monty” and gradually divested himself of garments as his temperature- although not that of the bike – steadily grew. Having owned some old nails myself I knew virtually to the second when the Enfield would chime up. Sure enough as soon as Tom played his trump card and took his helmet off she fired up sounding as sweet as ever (just like a Lister stationery engine in fact). I felt sure that as a result of this display the ES model code did not stand for Easy Start!

With Tom, and his bike, chuffing away we were ready to make tracks and with run leader Peter Meek and co-organiser Graham Goodman at the head of the gaggle of riders we crossed the road and proceeded to our right. Having met with tradition and woken every soul within half a mile, we followed in our usual orderly fashion and proceeded to the A30 for a quick blast and a chance to get some wind into our faces and look forward to a days fine motorcycling. The third co-organiser, Maurice Knight as Tail end Charlie, was followed by the RAC van piloted by Peter Bevington with Hugh Palin as Navigator and John Nelson in the ball turret.

The first roundabout came and went with no drama as the efficient club marker system came into play and the sweeper motioned the last man to join the tail end of the pack. The only real shock at this early stage was to drift up behind Tony Dawson and find that for the first time in my experience both wheels on his FJ1200 Yamaha matched and were as non experimental as the Japanese manufacturer had intended, a red letter day indeed. After two or three miles we all veered left off the A31 for the first of the many stunning country lanes we would encounter that day. The single lane track, with tall beech trees to one side rose over a shallow bridge to reveal Isington Mill, the first of several delightful waterside buildings we would encounter during the day.

We climbed steadily now through open arable country crossing the A325 at Wesson past Alice Holt wood, an area of carefully maintained ancient woodland that has nothing to do with someone called Alice at all. Like so many of the local landmarks, it owes it

-for the first time in my experience both wheels on his FJ1200 Yamaha matched-

existence to the Church. Created by Aelfsige, Bishop of Winchester, it supplied oak for shipbuilding for many hundreds of years. Its name has gradually evolved from Aelfsige into the Alice that we recognise today. In fact the forest is still actively managed. In addition to providing recreational facilities it provided much of the oak for the replica of Shakespeare's Globe recently built in London chiefly through the efforts of American actor Sam Wanamaker.

We were gaining height now and the arable land made way for the forest and welcome gaps in the trees where we could see some stunning distant vistas. At Frensham we turned south with the vast Frensham ponds to our right. The ponds, as you may have guessed, were created in the middle ages to provide fish for the Bishops of Winchester's estate, the Bishop not presumably being able to muster up the required number fish and loaves as part of his day job.

After a brief sojourn at a set of temporary traffic lights we spurred left off the A287 along more delightful country lanes towards Thursley. These single and twin track lanes were on the whole very well maintained and comfortable to traverse so long as speeds were kept at a respectable trot rather than a gallop. Perhaps like cavalry officers who have not charged into the vast and dusty valley of death for at least ten minutes, it was pretty much certain that at some time or another the sand would claim a victim. Eager to avoid disappointment, it was Peter Sheen who took the bull by the horns finally and launched himself into the sandy median moraine at one of those "shall I go where the chap is pointing or straight on" junctions. Fortunately "Lawrence of

Landoor” and his F650 Sanduro remained unblemished but sadly not unseen in their predicament.

A loop avoiding the picturesque bottleneck that is Hindhead had us skirting Haslemere on our way south now to Fernhurst whereupon we encountered one of Dr Gatso’s roadside box brownies. Reassuringly no one triggered it – although I am sure that Mr Waterer would have been proud to have done so on his Loyal Henfield. Slowing to pass the camera was indeed a great chance to catch one’s breath before turning right along a stunning valley which would ultimately end with a rise through a tree lined ridge and the coffee stop at the Jolly Drover on the outskirts of Petersfield.

Matthew Hyde flashed past on a Suzuki GSX750F and within a short time so too did Chris Ventress on his immaculate BMW K1. It is always an education to ride along a while with Chris. Although his approach is clinical, you should never fall into the trap of thinking he will concede road space – he is just as competitive as the rest of us I am glad to say !

Some miles before, at my previous marshalling point, I had swapped machines with the venerable David Martin. Having never ridden a Honda Pan European I was left to see what a “well run in” example would be like. Additionally it was going to be entertaining, to say the least, to hear what David thought of the Meanstreak. David’s ST1100 certainly had a lived in feel – even if the brakes required an almost telepathic sense of what may or may not require a reduction in forward velocity. Most amusing though was the onboard arcade that David had constructed. As a man who’s previous experience of electronics was the gift

at a tender age of a do-it-yourself train set (a roll of fuse wire and a platform ticket), I wanted to see what goodies he had fitted. First off was a curved piece of plastic encasing about a dozen LED’s. These gradually lit up with rising engine revolutions until it was time to change gear when the final series of red bulbs glowed. This apparently innocuous piece of nonsense has almost certainly kept the coffers at Hill towers suitably stocked over the past few months and ensured too that Mr Martin continues to live in rural splendour. Augmenting this was a piece of kit that may end up being required fitment for all machines used for a Club run – an adjustable indicator bleeper. This natty piece of kit would cut in after a pre-determined distance should either indicator be left on. When you think about it Keith Davies could have paid for one by now in sergeant at arms fines alone.

After one frantic dab too many at an Uphill junction I was happy to give the Bed Pan back to Dave who was comfortingly reluctant to return the Meanstreak. The missing undercarriage aluminium attested to the fact that he had enjoyed his bend swinging while the red hot disc brake rotors were allowed to cool in the car park at the coffee stop.

The Jolly Drover was our first chance to regroup following our departure from Alton. Pretty soon all seats were taken while steaming coffee and sugary biscuits were consumed in a fashion which belied the fact that we had eaten about an hour or so earlier. Sharing a sofa with Simon Hill I learnt that he had said goodbye to the Moto Guzzi that had been one of the more unconventional stars of the much-admired Scottish run. Having noted that the bike was rewarding but for the slight wind buffeting at high speed,

Keith had sold a quality screen blade and fitting kit to Simon. It turns out that this screen was still a tad too low and another was recommended and purchased. I cannot recollect whether Mr Davies had managed to foist a third item on Simon but concluded that rather than Californian, his Moto Guzzi should be called an 1100 Multiplex given that it was entertaining and had so many screens.

Having spent part of a previous run delaying us with a crisis of a bent brake rod Peter Meek was determined to go unnoticed on this occasion. This would have been a perfect strategy if he had not been “overserved” on the previous evening. I am reliably informed that while most of us were sipping coffee and nibbling on our Hobnobs, Mr Meek was taking on water like a steam engine at a furious rate in order to avoid dehydration or worse.

After old money bags, Hon Tresh, Dennis, had coughed up for the bill we assembled in the car park and tottered off towards Petersfield and thence across the railway line to Steep – which wasn’t. More great roads followed now as we left the intimate forested stretches of the Surrey/Hants border toward the more open chalk downlands of rural Hampshire. Tony Jakeman sailed past on his Suzuki V Strom with speed and precision not caring a jot that V Strom has been translated as “storm of wind” which could lead to some very unfortunate nicknames. Crossing the A32 we navigated a lazy loop and, despite the variety of stunning scenery and empty roads, were only about 10 miles south of our start point. On through Ropley and Ropley Dean we emerged at the A31 and after a mile or so encountered a classic piece of club run devilment.

It is usually Mr Sheen that takes the assembled throng down very narrow lanes but this one must have shocked even him. Riding along with elbows in and hoping not to meet oncoming traffic we climbed towards Bighton, passing under the Mid Hants railway and on, via a snaking path, through Old Arlesford and Swarraton towards Born Candover and a bridge across the M3.

Roads like this should be compulsory on club runs. The mixture of completely undiscovered routes crossing familiar byways is an intoxicating brew. I think we all feel just a little bit special by riding a bike in the first place. This feeling is only amplified by being on a Club run and looking down on the countless tin boxes running along the M3 while we only rush towards the inevitable pub lunch.

Blasting briefly down the A33 we pitched to the left for a small looping turn that saw us cross the same A road again and end up going through a series of delightful villages such as Stoke Charity and Sutton Scotney. It’s sometimes hard to know where to look on these delightful byways. Naturally the road ahead is of the utmost importance but the landscape and well kept cottage gardens are of equal importance. You know for sure that upon returning to the hotel you will hear of a famous landmark that you missed while looking the other way. Riding into the picturesque village of Wonston I encountered the exact opposite of what I describe.

Local boundaries had apparently conspired to ensure that entry to the village from the east was via a tortuous “chicane” which had to be navigated with some caution. There was a kind of escape route straight ahead which comprised a private

driveway. Imaging my surprise at finding myself arriving at this chocolate box Hampshire village and upon slowing for a tight corner having to avoid Hon Treasurer, Dennis Bates, relieving himself at the side of the road. He did have the good grace to turn away from oncoming traffic but nothing could stop the old devil from looking over his shoulder, smiling and waving using his unoccupied hand.

A short blast down the A30 and we joined the B3420 on the final run in to the lunch stop. Graham and Peter had planned this well. If our attention was becoming less focussed on the surroundings and more on beer and lunch we were soon reawakened to the delights of the English countryside. The run down the test valley via Longstock that ensued was quite magical and certainly one of the highpoints of the run so far. It would come as no surprise to see a taxi style meter on each house recording its hourly rise in value such must be the attraction of this relatively unspoilt part of the country.

At Stockbridge we crossed the A30 under the expert eye of Simon Hill. Complete with his BMW system helmet and authoritarian stance he looked to all the world like Mr Plod on our approach and had us all across the junction and onto the lunch stop at Houghton with an “arresting and efficient” performance. Houghton was, as Nick Hopkins was keen to relate, the birthplace of fly fishing. Having listened to stories that Geoff Selvidge has related about going fly fishing and catching a 7lb blue bottle, I was necessarily intrigued. Nick is very nearly right, Houghton in fact being the centre for the development of dry fly fishing a branch of the sport

instigated by Frederick Halford in the late 1800’s.

On arrival at the The Boot Inn, Houghton, we parked up and made our way into the hostelry – well nearly all of us. Wilf Harrison, like 007 James Bond, believes in the right standard of dress for every occasion. Although perhaps the boot was one of the only pubs in England that almost expects you to walk in wearing green Hunter wellies, he commendably took time to change out his traditional club run footwear and into a pair of brown loafers. Very right and proper and entirely characteristic of Wilf’s thorough approach.

Inside the pub we were greeted with our own dining area and pretty soon beer and other fluids were flowing – not from Dennis as we all know he had heeded nature’s call earlier. An impressive Ploughman’s lunch was accompanied by soup, served quite unusually in mugs. I must admit that I see this as yet another sign of a crumbling empire. If God had meant soup to be drunk he surely wouldn’t have put lumps in it.

It may just be an eccentricity of mine but I am firmly in the bowl and spoon camp. I wouldn’t mind wagering that this was just the implement that Captain Oates was after when he tragically disappeared on Scotts expedition and not the cup of sugar that everyone had suspected until now.

Suitably refreshed and with Wilf “re-booted” we continued the relatively short distance to Middle Wallop and the Army Air Museum. As attractions go I was looking forward to this having passed it so many times en

He did have the good grace to turn away from oncoming traffic but nothing could stop the old devil from looking over his shoulder, smiling and waving with his other hand

route without stopping. Of course however good it would turn out to be there was the nagging doubt that I would inevitably have to do the rounds at some time of the Navy Tank Museum and presumably the RAF Submarine collection. From a distance the car park looked scarcely able to cater for our group occupied as it was by a selection of gypsy caravans. It was only as we drew closer that I realised it was a herd of Honda Gold Wings and their proud owners. Thank god we don't have the same motorcycle tests as in Japan where riders have to lift their motorcycle from the prone position as part of the test. As it seemed that a re-enactment of the 1960's mods and rockers altercation was not on the cards we made ready to enter the museum.

Joining us for this feast of Army flying would be Mr Michael Evans, occasional motorcyclist and collector of low mileage German automobiles. His latest, a very smart black Porsche 911, squatted ominously in the car park as we made our way to the exhibits.

There now followed one of the more dangerous aspects of any club run, the post pub lunch presentation. Sure enough as soon as the room descended into darkness and the videotape chimed into life heads were already nodding. Nick Jeffrey led the charge and must have had at least eighty winks before light and order were restored and we departed for the main body of the collection.

The vast array on offer had those of longer tooth than myself reflecting on personal experience and considering, like us all, just how fortunate we are all things being considered.

For my part, I was amazed at the sheer ingenuity of the wooden Horsa gliders and the undeniable bravery of those who would first risk a flight in one and then get out and fight straight after. The development of both the Army air corps and powered flight was well illustrated culminating in today's battlefield helicopters, which have proved themselves so effective in recent conflicts.

Leaving the museum the public were treated to two familiar club sights. Firstly there was the usual motorcycle feeding frenzy at the nearest petrol station. This was accompanied by Dennis, camera held firmly against good eye, wandering around a busy A road impervious to traffic and seeking out the best angle for a picture. Personally I would not like to bet against the old goat being indestructible seeing as he has not aged a day since I first met him over ten years ago!

The gallop back to the Hotel was via Stockbridge and Kings Sombourne where we left the A 3057 and ascended a ridge at Farley Mount which afforded stunning views north eastwards in the direction of Winchester. At the highest part of this ridge is a pyramid shaped folly built on an ancient burial mound. It actually dates back 200 years and commemorates a horse which survived a dramatic fall into a chalk pit with its rider onboard. Stretching credibility to its very limit, the horse recovered sufficiently well to win a local race and was named.... "Beware Chalk Pit" – I kid you not !!

The roads after crossing the M3 again at Otterbourne were well up to standards set earlier in the day and made way finally for the traditional "Strathcarron dash" back to the hotel

and whatever hot water and fresh towels were available. At this point I swapped machines with Keith Blair judging him to be an entirely appropriate pilot for this “relaxed and long legged” machine. Keith appeared to enjoy himself enormously and soon disappeared at an unlikely rate into the distance enthusiastically chasing a rapid group of riders leaving me to pilot his immaculate BMW K75.

Back at the hotel with machines parked up, and after a suitable period of relaxation in our rooms, we eventually made our way to the bar for pre-dinner drinks and convivial chat. All talk was of bends taken at high speeds, impossible angles of lean and heart stopping manoeuvres to avoid head on collisions – and that was just the bar staff. With the assembled throng all suited and booted it was, as ever, impossible to determine that we were only a few hours ago tearing round the lanes of Surrey and Sussex on such a varied selection of machinery all intent on screwing the maximum fun out of the days’ ride. Norman Hyde held court at the western end of the bar while Mike Jackson attempted to add more of his customary wit to the eastern end while making sure that all fellows, including guests, were ticked off the “must have a few words with” list. The Davies “twins” occupied the centre section of the bar amid much low voiced debate as to whether Keith was getting younger or that the punishing schedule he foists on number one son is accelerating the ageing process.

Although some members remained outside it was, in the main, only to admire the assembled machinery such is the reliability of modern

motorcycles. The most represented brand at Alton was BMW with seven machines present including Peter Agg’s splendid trike manufactured by the same Grinall company as made David Strattcarron’s often admired three wheeler. Sure that all machines were secure we all made ready for the more formal Saturday evening meal.

With jackets, and where appropriate, club ties worn, the meal commenced with grace and observations from the top table by Norman who regaled us much as he sings – with no real notes. He began by observing that the run had originally been slated for organisation by Dave Hill and Geoff Selvidge who had demurred in favour of a heavy workload for Kawasaki Europe. No matter, Norman concluded, it had given the Club the chance to have a Royal flavour to the organisation, listing a Knight (Maurice) a Good man (Graham) and a Meek person (Peter) to save us from ruin.

Special mention was made to Universal applause of the contribution to the Club made by Peter Agg and Michael Evans both of whom were able to take part in at least part of the weekend’s activities. It was also only natural to thank the RAC and their driver Peter Bevingdon for their outstanding support

All talk was of bends taken at high speeds, impossible angles of lean and heart stopping manoeuvres to avoid head on collisions – and that was just the bar staff.

which, as we all know, is due in no small part to the efforts of Hugh Palin. In his summary of the day I was glad to hear Norman mention at length the outstanding natural beauty of the countryside we had all enjoyed. To still find pockets of unspoilt fauna, and seldom used roads in this particular corner of England was a treat indeed. The applause for the efforts of run

organisers was once more well deserved and hope paid back in some small way their outstanding efforts.

Once dinner had been despatched and we had given the waiting staff “the clap they rightly deserved”, our attention was focussed on the Sergeant at Arms, Mike Jackson

I challenge anyone to display a drier wit than Mike’s and have to admit that such was the impact of his acerbic delivery I hardly had a chance to write down many of the names and misdemeanours of his unfortunate victims. The most notable fines of those committed to paper were Keith Blair for confusing the sugar lumps for croutons, Peter Sheen for overshooting the previously mentioned sandy corner and Mike himself for having no vehicle road fund licence. In a customary, yet still popular move, Keith Davies was fined once more for a two mile indicator incident to universal applause all of which did little to wake Tony Jakeman who had decided to catch forty winks at the dinner table and steadfastly refused to wake. Simon Hill, although speaking the truth, was somewhat unfairly fined for accusing Norman Hyde of talking gratuitous bollocks. Finally in keeping with the gloriously irreverent nature of the evening, Keith Blair was fined for having large feet which, like the

gentleman he is, he paid up for without protest.

However, Keith soon got his own back by winning the quiz despite the fact that Tom had protested that one of the questions was inaccurate – he did not live in Warwickshire as Tony had assumed but in “the west midlands” which he seemed to decide was preferable for unfathomable reasons.

After the good-natured verbal rough and tumble of the sergeant at arms, the evening drew to a close in the bar with the last few hardy souls drinking in a new day. Whether we went to our rooms or stayed up for the one last drink “for the road”, I think we all concluded that this was, again, a wonderful experience for all concerned.

At breakfast on Sunday morning farewells were being to be made by those, such as myself, who had other engagements and plans made to meet up again on the next Club run.

Dennis would probably just pop home for some fresh clothes, a wash and shave and be at the next Club run a good two months ahead of the rest of us...

Martin Lambert