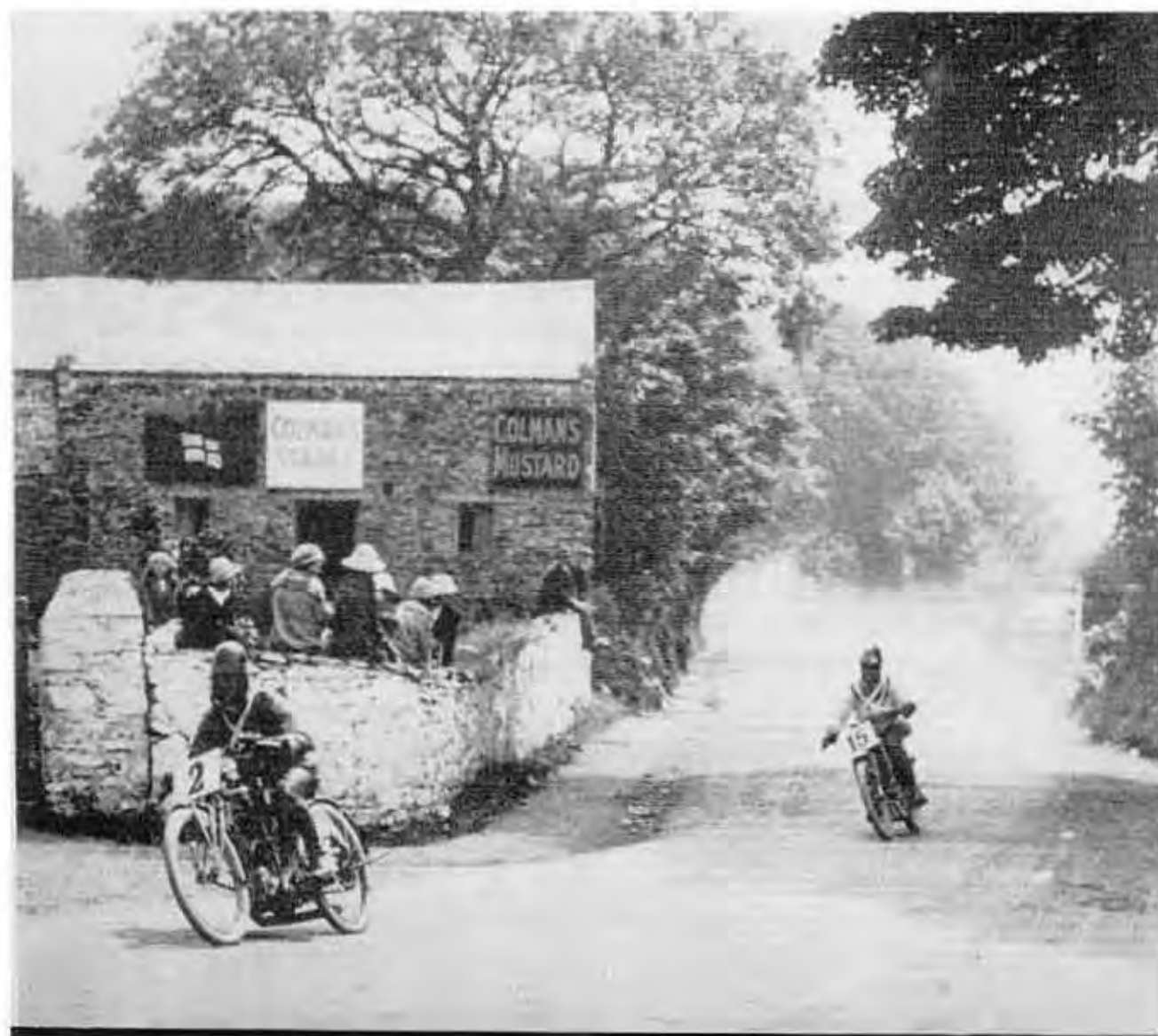




The Club Visits the Island
For its 40th Anniversary

10-13 April 2003





Nowhere in the world typifies the art, industry and pastime of motorcycling like the Isle of Man—Mona's Isle—set in the Irish sea and known throughout motorcycling simply as "The Island"

How fitting therefore that it became the location chosen by The Club to celebrate its fortieth Anniversary in the spring of 2003.

In the true spirit that pervades in our industry the planning, route finding and overall organisation was undertaken by two great ambassadors of the industry supported by their respective companies; Club members Andrew Smith of Yamaha and Bob McMillan of Honda.

No greater thrill exists than riding a motorcycle around the 37¼ miles of the Tourist Trophy circuit. Even on a normal roads-open day in early spring the joy is incalculable. But as we know the Island highways and byways cover mountains, valleys, open country and moorland. Members and their guests thus enjoyed one hundred and seventy-four miles of motorcycling on the most glorious and perfect of spring days.







Motorcycling today is vastly different now because of the huge advances in design, materials and technology. But changes were always present. How much faster was No 2, Howard R Davies on the clockwise circuit at Ballacraine on the Junior 350cc AJS to take the Senior race at the then record winning speed of 54.50mph coping with unmade roads, dust, discarded horseshoe nails on a course devoid of marker boards and very little in the way of course protection. So fast did he ride that calls were made that machines were getting too fast for the course---will that day ever arrive?



The Club

40th Anniversary - The Isle of Man

Spring Run 10th - 13th April 2003

-  Machines requiring fuel before the start can fill up in Castletown.
-  9.00am Depart Hotel. Ride North to join TT course at Ballecraine on Red Route. Commence lap of TT Course to gather at the Grandstand in Douglas for Group photo at approximately 10.00am.
-  After photo call continue on TT course Blue Route to Ballecraine, turn left heading South to end up at Morning Coffee stop over looking Call of Man.
-  After morning coffee continue North on Orange Route to meet at The Creek Inn, in Peel at approximately 1.00pm for lunch. (Petrol)
-  After lunch head North on the Turquoise Route through Ramsey to get to the Afternoon Tea stop at the Mountain Museum for approximately 3.45pm.
-  After tea follow the Green Route to Laxey for a photo shoot and then South through Douglas and onto the Castletown Golf Links Hotel.

NB: Total mileage 174

The Club Run contact: Andrew Smith: 07831 413032

Lunch at The Creek Inn (Petrol) 1.00pm approx.
Tel: 01624 842210

Laxey Wheel
(Photo)

Afternoon Tea 3.45pm approx
(Mountain Museum)

Grandstand (Group Photo) 10.00am approx

Start / Finish
Castletown Golf Links Hotel
Tel: 01624 822201

Morning Coffee at The Call of Man 11.00am approx
Tel: 01624 838123



The Machines ridden on the day

Dennis Bates	1967 161cc Honda CB160
Tony Dawson	1188cc Yamaha FJ 1200
Peter Sheen	652cc BMW F650 GS
Frank Finch	999cc Honda SP1
Tony Jakeman	1130cc BMW R1150GS
David Martin	1298cc Yamaha FJR 1300
Keith Blair	740cc BMW K75RT
Graham Goodman	1130cc BMW 1150GS
David Hill	645cc Suzuki SV650
Nick Hopkins	944cc Ducati 944 ST2
Alan Blake	599cc Yamaha FZS 600 Fazer
Keith Davies	892cc Yamaha FZS 1000 Fazer
Norman Hyde	850cc Triumph Bonneville
Bob Trigg	850cc Yamaha TDM
David O'Neill	1298cc Yamaha FJR 1300
Martin Lambert	953cc Kawasaki Z1000
Nick Jeffery	1171cc BMW K1200GT
Rick Parish	781cc Honda VFR 800
Dave Hancock	599cc Honda CBR600RR
Tom Waterer	599cc Honda Silverwing
Steve Mayle	998cc Yamaha YZF R1
Chris Ventress	998cc BMW K1
Mike Jackson	1298cc Yamaha FJR 1300
Martyn Roberts	745cc Triumph 750 Trident
John Nelson	2500cc Triumph saloon
Guests	
Martin Marshall	998cc Yamaha YZF R1
Mark Davies	781cc Honda VFR 800 v-tec
Andrew Tempest	916cc Ducati ST4
Jonathan Martin	897cc Yamaha TDM900
Graham Matcham	1298cc Yamaha FJR 1300
Andy Witt	1164cc Kawasaki ZZ-R1200
Matt Stone	1137cc Honda CBR 1100XX Blackbird

**This is why
we brought
you to the
Island.
Cheers!**



Bob and Andy enjoy a soft drink before the run that would take in most of the TT Course

What a joy for members taking the flat-out run down to Hilberry. In the race itself there are scores of viewers in a makeshift grandstand, but not for us. The TT competitor would be anxious not to lose time on the quite steep climb that follows up to Cronk ny Mona—the last hill before the finish.

Ray advises to keep hard against the low wall, drop a gear and go in hard. Like all the surfaces on the course the Hilberry section is in superb condition.

The original Manx name is Cronk y Berry that has become anglicised over the years.



The idea for a race for "touring motorcycles" was born in 1906 on a train journey from Austria. In the party were the Colliers brothers, Freddie Straight of the Auto Cycle Club and the French Marquis de Mouzilly St. Mars who lived in England. It was the Marquis who conceived the idea of a suitable trophy to be awarded annually to the winner of the race. Doctor Hele Shaw joined in with the promises of the premier award for the twin cylinder class.

The coveted trophy of the winged Goddess Mercury donated by the Marquis was won in the first TT in 1907 by Charlie Collier riding a single cylinder Matchless in a time of 4hr 8min 8sec at a speed of 38.22 mph for the race distance of 158 1/2 miles of the original St John's course.

Rem Fowler who has been immortalised as the first TT winner was competing in the twin cylinder class on a Peugeot-Norton twin. He took 4hr 21min 53 sec at a speed of 36.22 mph and was to receive the Doctor Hele Shaw Trophy. Alas, the good doctor never came up with the promised silverware and thus what might have run in concert with the Goddess Mercury Trophy never appeared to grace TT motorcycle racing.



The Club was greatly honoured to have as its official guests two people who have made their mark on the TT. Both have triumphed to receive the Goddess Mercury by winning a TT. Both have put back into the sport as a thank you to all those unsung, hard working people in the background that allows men and women to race motorcycles, both have made their home in the Island and both number many, many friends among the world of motorcycling. Perhaps, above all, they are jolly nice chaps.

On Friday evening our guest was Ray Knight whose contribution to the sport includes the unique *Riders Guide*. He is a journalist of repute being a professional editor in the business world before retirement, and a series writer on many aspects of racing motorcycles including testing for *Motorcycle Sport*, *Motorcyclist Illustrated*, *Road Racing*.

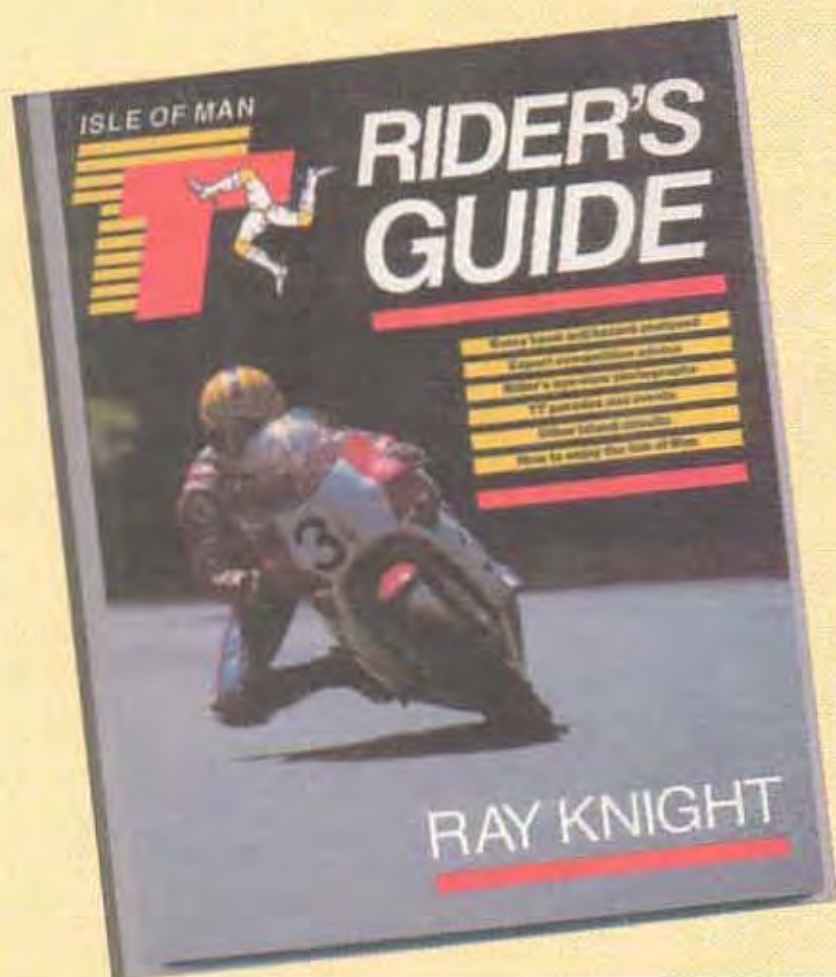
Geoff Duke OBE joined us on Saturday. Many times a TT winner, Double world champion in 350 and 500cc classes in 1951 among his five world titles, Freeman of the City of St Helens, winner of the RAC Seagrave Trophy—a rare honour for a motorcyclist — TT Steward He staged the ISDT in the Island—a brilliant achievement in 1965. He was a works trials rider for Norton making the first win on the new Dunlop trials Universal tyre in the 1950 Victory Trial. He also rode for Ariel and BSA and worked on developing an Enfield racer. He rode in scrambles and in that toughest of all off-road events the Scott Trial. Little known, too, was a brief period of sidecar trials. Geoff wasn't just a good all-rounder, he was a brilliant rider, a craftsman of immense skill and a riding style many grew to envy for its neatness and flow.



Ray Knight numbers himself among that happy and dedicated band of sportsmen whose enduring pleasure is to race motorcycles. He has raced on most mainland circuits but none compare with the magic of the TT course. Ray competed in the Manx Grand Prix from 1962 to 1966 and in the TT from 1967 to 1994. In that time he achieved 17 replicas and, in 1968, won the Production TT 500 class on a Triumph Daytona



The 1968 Production TT victors: Ray Pickrell who won the 750cc on a Dunstall Dominator, Ray (centre) and Trevor Burgess, the 250cc victor riding a Spanish Ossa,



By profession a journalist Ray has used his skills of observation and word craft to produce the true and only definitive guide to the 37 3/4 miles of the TT Course. With more than 600 laps—some 25,000 racing miles—of the course to his credit he is a man who has done it, won it and is therefore uniquely able to put into words what any and every would be TT competitor needs to know in order to master the intricacies of this demanding and world famous road race circuit.

Riders Guide is a life saver for anyone riding his or her first TT. At one point in the book the text says "If you don't feel fear here, stop riding.....". *Riders Guide* is also a work that takes its place in the history of the greatest road race in the world.



MRA Director and TT rider, Frank enjoys a joke with Norman Hyde, the Triumph specialist and Honda motorcycle boss Mark Davies. Shortly the trio will tackle the Bray Hill descent, Frank on the 999cc SP1, Norman on the 850cc Bonneville and Mark on the v-tec VFR800. These high tech machines are aeons of design-time away from the single camshaft, 348cc single-cylinder Model 40 Manx Norton with its girder forks and rigid frame. Here Norton star, P (Tim) Hunt pushes off in the 1932 Junior TT only to retire. But in 1933 he brought Norton a second place in this race.





The members line-up on the Glencrutchery Road, the cameraman ensuring that the Honda sign is in evidence. This is a spring day in April and normal traffic flows past. Come a summer's morning in June and another in August and the whole scene changes. This is the start of 1935 Junior Manx Grand Prix with No. One G W Webster (Sunbeam) pushing off only to retire. However, he finished 13th in the following Senior race, also Sunbeam mounted. The winner was none other than Freddie Frith, later a Norton and Velocette works rider. Freddie won the 1949 350 World Championship on the Spring-Wilkins Equipe works Velocette and an OBE for his magnificent effort.





Wheels and tyres

Ready to roll are wheels king, Tony Dawson, former Greeves works trial rider Mike Jackson (also Yokohama tyres) and Avon's motorcycle tyre expert, even though retired, Alan Blake.

Without exception they know about angles of lean, getting the line right, maintaining adhesion. The happy trio are Yamaha-mounted. Tony (FJ 1200), Mike (FJR 1300) and Alan FZS 600 Fazer.



OH! CALAMITY— WELL, NOT QUITE

Freddie Hicks (AJS No 30) in the 1930 Junior caught wet tar and demonstrated the art of control—probably the most extraordinary racing picture ever. Freddie picked up the works AJS and is checking with the marshals at Quarter Bridge to be allowed to continue. He later retired but had won the Junior in 1929 on a Velocette.

His antics were shortly followed by Norton team member Tim Hunt whose slide ended with bike and rider parting company. Tim went on to finish 9th thus justifying himself to the factory on this his first works ride.

A view from above



Rick isn't the shortest member, but Keith Blair may lay claim to being the tallest (unless Hugh Palin has a counter claim). What we see are two happy chaps pleasing the photographer by posing in this way. Reality is they are ready to get cracking on a beautiful spring morning for the ride of a lifetime.

Keith will ride his faithful 740cc BMW K75RT and Rick his 781cc Honda VFR800.

Of the thirty-four machines on the run the most numerous were Yamaha's (11), second were the Honda's, there were eight.

Handley's Corner, named after pre-war racer, Walter Handley who dropped it hereabouts in 1932. Watch over the riders here and here you stay for the duration. Ray Knight is leaving Handley's keeping close under the high wall to avoid running down the camber; it's the 1989 Senior TT and his bike is a 600cc CBR Honda



Ramsey to Guthries—a long climb up the side of Snaefell's 2,000ft peak



How was it for you? Tony describes his line through Guthries to Tom Waterer and Maurice Knight.. Earlier on the Honda Silverwing Tom had been in his element soaring up the A14 mountain road leading through hairpin bends directly from Glen Helen over the mountain to The Bungalow—more like Six Days going than road racing stuff! The one-line approach to Guthries through the left-right kink should be taken all in one radius, a long left, braking late right into the section. It's a marvellous spot for viewing the racing especially the side-cars. The Guthrie Memorial is just the other side of the hut.



In 1939 the memorial cairn was unveiled on the Mountain Road above Ramsey The inscription tells the story

Jimmy Guthrie famed Norton works rider in the 1930's was killed in a race in Germany. Such was this fame that the townspeople of Hawick subscribed to a statue of Jimmy in his leathers complete with plug spanner in the top of his boot. It stands to this day in their park—the only known statue to a motorcyclist.



Blake at The Bungalow



Alan dons his helmet ready to take the 600 Fazer on the next part of the run. The Bungalow is a favourite viewing spot for race fans. Although riding into the sun Alan will waft the Yamaha speedily through this section. The key to getting through quickly—and safely—is to take a tight line that avoids running out wide as the track of Snaefell Mountain Railway is crossed. Alan should start from the right hand gutter pulling hard into the greasy apex and keep the power on to cross the rails with the bike upright, then it's down past Kate's Cottage to the Creg and onward.



Leaving Guthries the rider is heading for the mountain proper—wide open spaces and sheep (that may graze on the verges during early morning practice!). Then it's the Mountain Mile, that is anything but straight, and course points are the Mountain Box, Stone breakers hut, then the Verandah, Graham Memorial, Hailwood Rise to arrive at the very fast left-hander of Bungalow Bridge. Here the rider has to spot the drain in the right-hand gutter on the way in as a peel off point

Downhill to The Creg



Friday afternoon: a restful or zestful time. Those who had arrived—most members—boarded a coach thoughtfully arranged, for a tour of the course. Kitty was started so funds became available for the inevitable stop to consider racing lines, gear change points and speeds off the mountain and through the right-hander at The Creg after the drop down from Kate's Cottage.

The book says that really fast men pull wheelies on this downhill swoop.

Purists pronounce this famous observation point as "Kreg na Bay" and certainly The Keppel Hotel standing on the outside of the corner doesn't mind which, but stocks up by the lorry load with barrels of foaming Manx ale to quench the thirst of the hundreds, if not thousands, that during TT week, swamp this desolate mountain site .

Nothing like that on this April Friday as The Club coach pulled in but a hefty dent was made in the kitty before repairing on board for the journey back to The Links Hotel and the pre-dinner get together that is a tradition of The Club's weekends.

Now members were all set for the morrow.

PIT STOP



Tony Dawson gives the twin carburetors of Dennis' CB161cc Honda a tweak while Bob Trigg looks on and offers advice. It all takes place just yards from where the riders line up for the start of the TT on the Glencrutchery Road

Pit stops in the race are fast and furious affairs, but in the 1959 Junior, New Zealander, Steve Cameron with his mechanic work feverishly to rectify a fault on the AJS 7R. It was cured for Cameron went on to finish 50th, his last year .



Joe Glazebrook works on his Norton in the front garden of an island guest house due to the shortage of workshop space. Is he about to exchange the girder forks for the newly introduced Roadholder set leaning against the hedge?

The year is 1947 in which he finished 21st in the Manns Grand Prix, but retired in the Junior race His TT career went from 1949 to 1961.





A Manx Trio



Triumph, like BSA, were late-comers to the racing scene although Jack Marshall rode a single cylinder Triumph to take second place behind Charlie Collier (Matchless) in the 1907 TT at a speed faster than Rem's twin-pot Norton. The next year positions were reversed with Jack as the winner and Charlie second. After that it wasn't until 1968 that Ray Knight gave Triumph a second TT win. Three years later and Slippery Sam (No.25 left, here ridden by Percy Tait) was the outright victor in no less than five consecutive Production TT's (1971-1975) and is probably the most famous Triumph racing motorcycle of all time. Damaged in the museum fire it is now undergoing restoration.



Norton won the twin cylinder class of the first TT with a Peugeot-engined machine. They were still winning TT's as the 20th century drew to a close—an achievement unlikely to be matched in the 21st century by any marque. Here Norton star, Ray Amm, typifies the splendour that immortalises a single cylinder, air-cooled Manx Norton. Rem's victory was a loner; not until G M Black finished 2nd in the 1923 Senior TT did they re-appear as a force in the races, following which Alec Bennett romped home in the 1924 Senior at 61.64mph, and again in 1927 claiming the premier trophy.



One of the smaller British manufacturers Greeves won major titles in trials, moto-cross and with this "Silverstone" model took first place in the 1964 Lightweight Manx GP with Gordon Keith setting a 4-lap race record of 86.19mph. Two years later Dennis Craine took the victor's podium with another race record of 88.37mph. In third spot was an up and coming future star, one Peter Williams also Greeves mounted with a race speed of 87.05mph. Glory in the Manx passed them by in the TT. In four years of racing out of 25 who started only five managed to finish the course.



Laxey wheel, still complete after our visit !



Nick bravely tries the "oh dear I've spilt something in my lap", trick.



Goeff Duke OBE.



Incoming President, Maurice Knight, speaks.



"I did my waaaaaeeeeey"



Graham Goodman successfully navigates the last ten feet...



Norman and Chris Ventress enjoy welcome Liverpool sunshine.



Tom Waterer wonders where he left his bike.



Ooops, a ferry minor accident.



Bob McMillan leads the charge to the ferry on his Valkyrie.



Andy Witt looks guilty while Peter Sheen consumes with alacrity.



Ready for the off, Dave Hill buckles up.



At the Grandstand having completed the mountain section.



The two Tony's and Tom consider Bob Macs nature notes.



Peel Harbour...and not a Zero in sight..



The Creek in, our Harbourside watering hole.



Keith Davies in reflective mood.



Dennis Bates shoots Martyn Roberts...with his camera.



He should at least be able to keep that upright...



Keith Davies opens proceedings.



Gentlemen may loosen their ties.



The genial chancellor - two words not often used together.



Andy Smith, he knows a thing or two about product placement.



"Oh good a thermos flask"



John Nelson enjoys (endures) the Irish/Argentinean chanteuse.



Mark Davies "wins" a Yamaha watch.



Dunlop man, Steve Mayle adds a spare tyre.



Health food, Isle of Man style.



"Were flat out down here"..(30mph in a coach 180mph on a race bike)



The Crosby Hotel, complete with restored Norton.



THE CALF OF MAN

is a world-famous beauty stop. Members relax, among them Run Scribe, Martin Lambert. He saw seals on the small island across the sound—whose familiar bulk seemed reminiscent of the generously proportioned manager at our Golf Links hotel (as he put it).

Leadership Board. The club's membership list is made up of senior executives in the manufacturing, importing and distribution of motorcycles, equipment, accessories and services—truly the leaders. In the group below Tom Waterer heads technical and legislative affairs at the HQ of the Motor Cycle Industry, Keith Davies is currently Club Chairman and is boss of Three Cross Motorcycles, the MV Agusta, Laverda and Peugeot scooter importers, Rick Parish heads Venhill, the power hose manufacturers, Keith Blair is a specialist agent for replacement parts for British motorcycles, also “Held” quality riding gear while Mike Jackson is now motorcycle consultant to East Anglian major auctioneers, Cheffyns and that international favourite, The Louis Vuitton Classic.

Leader Board Hero 1

Time Sheard was a veteran of the TT races by the time he brought his Douglas to the start line for the 1923 Senior. It was a day few would forget for torrential rain fell during the race. When he took the flag most spectators and not a few marshals had simply had enough and left for home. His speed of 55.55 mph was still only 2 1/2 mph down on 1922.



Leader board hero 2 Photographs of the Peel Course Leader Board do not exist but the times and speeds are well-documented.

To W.M. Heaton who rode in the 1907, TT twin-cylinder class goes the record of the greatest time for the race and a place on the Leader Board. Riding his Rex motorcycle the intrepid rider clocked no less than FIVE hours, eleven minutes and four seconds for the 158 1/2 mile race.



In its first year the pattern of Club events—two each year, spring and autumn—was set. Members would forgather at a selected hotel on the Friday evening, ride a route on Saturday and then sit down to a gala dinner. That hasn't varied. What has changed out of all recognition is the motorcycle from a utilitarian or pure sport two wheeler to a product catering for every type of desire and use. Where once ex W-D apparel was *de rigeur*, now Dave Hill wears a fully protective two-piece tailored suit, while Martin Marshall wears the brand-gear of his company—comfort, weatherproof, stylish gear is what rider expect.

It is April 1964, the occasion of the third run of The Club. The Ship Hotel, Alveston, near Bristol was the venue and a photo stop took place on Clifton suspension bridge. John Nelson is second from the left and second from the right is Hugh Palin. Peter Goodman brought the twin headlamp Velocette Vogue, Roger Boss the Enfield and Eric Brockway of Douglas, the Italian Vespa.



What are they like?



Hon Sec. Graham Goodman is a BMW fan. His latest mount the 1130cc R1150GS, twin, 6-speeds shaft drive. Peter Sheen's BeeEmm is a single cylinder F650GS. Chairman, Keith has a 892cc Yamaha FZS 1000 Fazer. Run scribe, and Kawasaki marketing man, Martin Lambert rides the brand—a 953 Kawasaki Z1000. Twenty-three years ago Peter, then a Shell executive is on the Tiger 100-engined Triumph Adventurer trail bike, built at BSA in the dying days before the collapse, the sit-in, the co-operative.





Bob Mc astride his personalised 1,520cc Honda FC6 Valkyrie whose official top speed is 115mph from the 100bhp flat six engine—a dragster/cruiser that few would care to hammer around the TT trying to stay with Bob. That's a rear view of Frank Finch who'll shortly be riding the SP1 Honda. It's perfect for former TT racer Frank with its 164mph capability from the eight-valve, v-twin, 120bhp engine. Described as powerful, desirable, thirsty—not surprising—but don't expect comfort. Comfort was not a critical consideration back in 1908. The 3 1/2 hp side valve, belt-driven Triumph was a standard touring model on which the rider carried spare drive belt, spare inner tube, tools. The course was on rough, un-made roads and the competition was ferocious. An ideal challenge for highly-trained Captain. Sir R K Arbuthnot, Bt .RN. possibly viewed by others as an eccentric. A serving naval captain he was a dedicated motorcyclist and in his one ride in the 1908 TT came home third behind victor Jack Marshall (Triumph).....

E V O L U T I O N



.....at an average speed of 38.22mph for the 158 1/8 mile "short" course. Later he created the famed Arbuthnot trial that has been resurrected as a vintage event. By 1967 small motorcycles had really grown technically advanced. The Hon. Treas' 1967 CB161cc Honda—161 is cast in the barrel—gives 16bhp, 10,000 rpm and a timed speed of 79mph. It is a single ohc, parallel twin, 4 speeds, 12-volt electrics and 2LS front brake. Nick Jeffery is aboard.



Work is pleasure, pleasure is work

Being in the motorcycle industry has a unique advantage—riding is part of the job. The boundless pleasure is to do it in the Island



Dave Hancock used to race and now handles the service side at Honda, Peter Sheen was a popular director-general of the MCI for ten years (now retired), Chris Ventress created Venhill, the power hose people while Dave Martin has been associated with Harley-Davidson and now creates high tech alarm and other bike-orientated systems. He doesn't know it but bearded Martyn Roberts, the design engineer, would shortly be nominated to be the next chairman of The Club.

Back in 1961 *The Motor Cycle* sent staffmen (and Club members) to report the TT. David Dixon got the TR6 Triumph and Peter Fraser a Velocette Viceroy.



Peel



It is 1908 and the second Tourist Trophy Race is under way on the short St John's course. H L Cooper weaves his single cylinder Triumph through the town with another rider in pursuit to finish in seventh place. In his TT career 1908-13 always riding Triumphs, he collected two seventh and one ninth final race position. Peel harbour remains much as it was although the town has gained modern shops, signage and a large array of marine pleasure craft. Just in view is the Peel Inn, our lunch watering hole, offering excellent beer, and delicious, fresh crab salad, fish pie or steak and kidney pie—then time to watch the marine life before setting off.



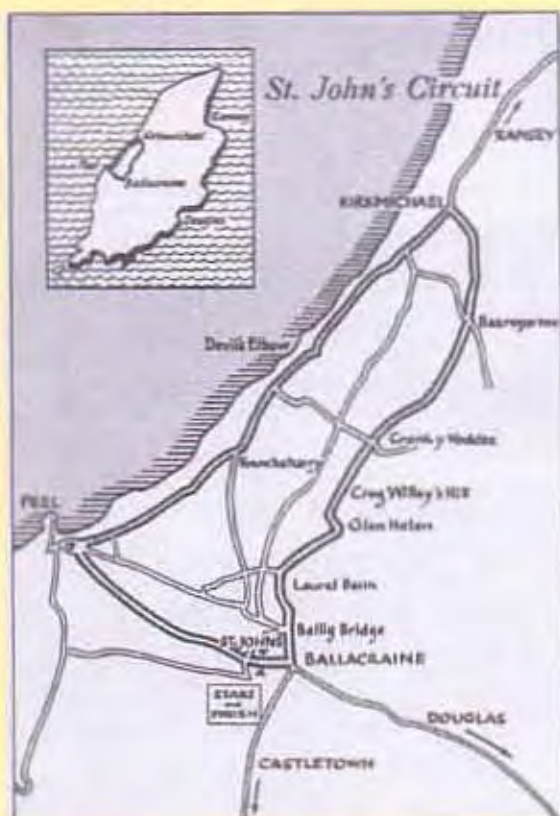
The assembled machinery drew quite a crowd. What a pleasure to be able to park without restriction

For record that's Nick Hopkins bewitched by the camera lens



The St John's or Peel course was used by racing motorcyclists before the first TT in 1907, but the races had been wracked with controversy and discord. A fresh start was made with new regulations, weight and fuel requirements and two classes—single and twin cylinder. The "short" course lasted four years until in 1911 the switch to the mountain circuit was made. This effectively removed Peel from the race scene except that it remains a popular meeting place for visitors to the TT and Manx Grand Prix for it is small, has an attractive waterfront with harbour an excellent pub and parking. And that is where The Club went for lunch to meet journalist, Peel-based Roger Willis, now co-owner with Colin Mayo of *British Dealer News*, the authoritative monthly journal serving the industry and trade.

Unlike normal occasions where the press is bought beer, Roger turned the tables and paid for member's thirst-quenching desires, most of whom plumped for the local brew. With Roger was his wife, Ruth, production editor of BDN seen here with Tony Jakeman. It wasn't long before another "journo" turned up, none other than Mac McDiarmid, no mean rider, an excellent photographer and, like Willis, a wonder with words; Mac has now turned to sailing!



The chronicler & others

Every Club Run has its built-in support organisation for the members who take on the responsibility, pleasure and hard work of the Run itself. Secretary Graham does all the committee paper work, the Treasurer collects the largesse (cash), Frank lists the riders and their machines, Hugh organises the RAC—and re-organises it yet again under new management (terrific—how does he do it?), the chairman, currently the inimitable Keith Davies, keeps order benevolently, Mike Jackson, or Norman or Dave Martin act as Sergeant at Arms fining members for (alleged) misdemeanours. Tony Dawson produces a mind blowing and popular quiz and Martin Lambert records the doings and events of the entire weekend in a style that is his and his alone. Not only is the Club the richer for all these endeavours but it ensures that we have a recorded history, a unique record not only of motorcycling, but of people who have contributed in many ways to the British motorcycle industry since our inception 1963.

Sergeant at Arms Mike Jackson “Announcing he was instigating ‘overseas rates’ he launched into me for spelling mistakes and himself for the incomplete Diss Run (1991) report”.

On post-dinner activities “I am not sure I regret missing Frank Finch singing an acapella version of My Way”.

On Peter Sheen’s Grinall “as motorised soap dishes go these were the pinnacle of sophistication, his being powered by the latest fuel injection version of the BMW flat four ‘brick’ engine.”

On the TT course coach trip—“...two very special guests Dave Molyneux and Jason Griffiths, best known as Honda and Yamaha TT competitors. Both riders were worryingly relaxed about the dangers of the TT circuit (yet) fully supportive of the event”.



“Tony Dawson must spend six months or so between runs concocting the most difficult questions possible...”

On the mountain climb on the “charabanc of dubious vintage”. “Our cheerful and mechanically unsympathetic driver stirred the (rear mounted)gearbox accompanied by a rising crescendo that had all of us grimacing”. Gears were selected “via a 39ft cable which when shagged (which this surely was) costs a small fortune to replace. This news related by cable expert, Chris Ventress...was soon seen undertaking advanced calculus”.

On the run itself—“Fantastic roads, equally fantastic company and all sharing the same innocent passion for motorcycles — now that really is magic!”





The Club

Club Run Report
Spring 2003

Castletown Golf Links Hotel
Isle of Man

Written by: Martin Lambert

With thanks to: Graham Goodman – Dennis Bates
Run organised by: Andy Smith – Bob McMillan

Report Published with the kind support of Kawasaki Motors UK.

“Smoke and Mirrors”, I thought.

Smoke and mirrors, that’s how Andy and Bob are going to make 37 ¾ miles of TT course plus a few minor roads into a successful Club Run”.

Reasoning that magicians and illusionists for thousands of years had made anything from an emperors concubine to a live elephant disappear, I reasoned that a couple of “old fakirs” like Andy and Bob would resort to some kind of two wheeled slight of hand in order to create a whole days’ serious motorcycling from such meagre miles.

The day of reckoning was over twenty four hours away when I loaded a single borrowed pannier into the boot of my “smoker” for the daily drive to Bourne End and guest rendezvous.

Electing to ride to our first “port of call”, Liverpool, I had for company my erstwhile guest from a previous run, Andy Witt of Kawasaki’s retained design agency, Orchard Ltd.

Those of you who were at the Church Stretton run – or who waded through the ramblings masquerading as the Run Report – will know that Andy made around twelve miles progress last time he was with us before “corrupting a heat exchanger”, or knocking an expensive radiator to you and I.

Reckoning that lightning (unlike Ford workers), could not possibly strike twice, he was once more invited and attended this, our 40th anniversary Club Run.

The omens were not on our side when we were greeted by persistent and depressing morning snow. This continued for much of the journey to Bourne End, and for a large part of the day, until the arrival of Mr Witt who had previously collected a ZZ-R1200 along with the other pannier into which he would, like me, cram an entire weekends clothing and what advertising executives now call “male grooming products”.

Stormin’ Norman Hyde had previously called to suggest that we journey ‘oop North together. Patience had got the better of him by the time we had left and he was already making tracks to Lancashire.

It was not without reason that I listened to Normans advice on avoiding the famous section of the M6 to the East of Brum... and entirely no surprise to find myself in a equally sticky jam to the West having already filled up after Andy had nearly ran the ZZ-R virtually bone dry.

North of Birmingham, and wondering why the hell we did not fly to the island, we made commendable progress passing on our way the turning for Kirkby Lonsdale, site of the 2001 Spring run on which Dave Martin locked himself out the first “B” of his B&B and Nick Jefferey so nearly joined Exit at the dinner table.

Merseyside eventually merited a blip on the mental radar. With loins suitably girded we made one last lunge for the hotel. On the run in to the target it was only appropriate that we pass a German vessel. No not a Dornier but Graham "Greyboots" Goodman on his BMW "accessory platform".

As luck would have it, the man that can't pass a bolt-on accessory stall without dipping into his wallet had got his map askew and also had the pages of same generously covering his newly installed GPS system. Talk about having too much information, the only thing missing was a Mohican clearing him a path and he would have had the set.

Andy and myself used "courier logic" and fairly soon we were within two tenths of a gnats cock of the Hotel. Unfortunately what with genetic engineering, GM crops and the like our gnat was rather well endowed and we overshot by a mile or so....ooops.

Upon finally securing the hotel our spirits were once more raised by the sight of our fellow travellers, motorcycle professionals all and almost universally struggling to park a variety of machines overburdened with luggage and those little extras one simply must pack if going "overseas".

Smith A was in full flow scurrying around like a prep school retainer ensuring that his "boys" were parked and ready to ferry their possessions to the reception located on one of the upper floors of the magnificent structure.

And what a huge erection it was (© Ken Dodd 1958), being part of the Britannia Pavilion of Liverpool's famous Albert Dock complex forming the largest group of Grade One listed buildings in the UK.

The most obvious sign of trade, and therefore progress, of many of our coastal cities, docks provide a useful "timeline" of progress.

Monks from Birkenhead provided the first "ferry" service across Liverpool bay in 1207 to aid farmers in transporting cattle for sale. By 1817 steam ferries were in service and in 1847 the first floating landing stage was constructed at Pier Head. This small structure grew in size along with that of the famous ships such as Mauritania and Aquitania of the Cunard line and others that berthed alongside. By 1895 a railway terminus was in place amidst the serious building developments of the dock area, truly a gateway to the world in terms of trade and tourism.

The Albert Dock area itself was designed in 1839 exclusively for the processing of imported goods and utilising innovative hydraulic powered machinery.

Designed to be ostensibly "fireproof" the buildings are magnificent brick and iron vaulted structures and undoubtedly constructed to stand the test of time at a cost in today's money of £41,000,000.

Although the docks fell into disuse due to a combination of low traffic, insufficient dredging and the plain fact that ships became too big to enter them, the structural integrity of the buildings have allowed them to survive for another use – as an overnight venue for The Club, how thoughtful.

I checked into the old warehouse (no dyslexic pimp jokes please), and was amused to find that I was booked as “M. Lambert, Honda”, typical, still trying to buy market share!

The room was found eventually - even though I would have been better to have employed a laboratory rat to guide me there. I jettisoned my motorcycling apparel and set about washing the Lambert dominions

Being somewhat of a student of design I was intrigued by the careful and sympathetic conversion of this Grade one edifice into a hotel. The shower area was tres modern incorporating a large step for watertightness and no shower curtain whatsoever.

“How cutting edge” I thought as I stepped in, and “Christ look at all the water in my room”, I thought as I stepped out five minutes later.

Bouyed (nice marine reference there eh!) by the fact that Mr Smith had employed a “night watchman” to ensure the safety of our machinery I repaired to the bar to seek social interaction with my fellow travellers.... and to have a few beers at the same time.

Bob McMillan was already ensconced in convivial mood along with a smattering of fellow delegates as the serious consumption and “intelligent debate” began.

As a object lesson in how to grow old disgracefully Bob takes some beating. Looking to all the world like Ringo Starr, our Bob had grown a beard and enough other sundry facial hair to satisfy the most ardent Harry Potter enthusiast. Had the Welsh hills seduced him into this hermit like appearance I wondered, or had the futile nature of the daily shave finally become apparent.

In true McMillan fashion my fantasies were soon grounded by his gruff assertion that he was having the time of his life, enjoying the isolation, playing with his new boat and causing occasional mayhem at Honda HQ – no surprises on that last point then.

Adjacent was John Nelson who talked in a most informed fashion on the formulation of the English language and the derivation of a series of words. Nice to see that not all the pre-dinner conversation among us motorcyclists is all breasts and big ends – although Mr Nelson would do his unwitting best to prove us wrong later in the weekend.

In the early haze of this alcoholic warm front we were best placed to see our fellow travellers checking in.

Tony Jakeman hove into view and looked splendid replete in his BMW “flak” jacket having had his Suzuki circuit board removed some time ago to be replaced by a BMW version

following the dictate of his new employer.

Norman was next. Having left some hours before me and from a point many miles North I supposed that while I was accelerating down the fast lane he must have been trotting down memory lane to get here. With sideburns in place and his usual mischievous grin I detected an air of Terry Thomas about the self styled Lord of Leamington.

Dave Martin burst through the narrow door and signed in with the air of a man who had not experienced the best of days so far. Although his shirt and tie said "motorcycling executive", the tell tale trail of light green liquid suggested that he had either wet himself or holed a radiator.

With no incontinence pants available behind reception it was a comfort to know that only his radiator had copped it – and further good news to hear that it was on a bike borrowed from Yamaha; Mr Smiths day would not be easy !

Our numbers were swelled by Frank Finch, the weight behind the RMI. Joining also was Nick Hopkins complete with dog eared map of the sacred Isle. It wasn't buried treasure that Nick was seeking though, more like distant memories as he announced that he was revisiting the island for the first time having been there on his honeymoon some twenty years ago.

I wasn't altogether sure that his wife would fully understand him going back to such a romantic spot without her after such a break, especially in the

company of forty odd motorcyclists, but isn't that Nick to a tee ?

Having had our fill of fizzy beer the assembled crowd were further assembled by ringmaster Smith and frog marched to the waiting restaurant.

This being Liverpool rather than Lewes the place looked like a riot was in full swing. We were wrong, this was early evening banter, the serious partying would take place later.

With no Dennis to act as Chancellor it was Andy who "charged" each of us a £10 supplement to the kitty to ensure that the victuals were paid for. With £300 burning a hole in Andy's pocket we did what and self respecting motorcycle journalists would do and consumed £650 worth of food and drink.... although we did not run away without paying.

As the drink worked its way south the first of our merry band made tracks for the men's room. Like the majority of restaurants in the UK, the toilets were slightly less easy to find than Camelot. The first two "Knights of the night" to set off were Nick Jefferey and Tony Jakeman. Like a father and son merecat they darted thither and yon until directed up a flight of stairs to the Gents.

Witnessing their success I also made my way to the conveniences. "Relieved" I washed my hands and pushed the button on the hand drier. Talk about hot air, this was like all the MCI committees rolled into one; not so much a hand drier as the personal test bed of Frank Whittle.

With stomachs comfortably taught we repaired once more to the hotel where the awful gassy beer seemed a lot more welcoming given the hour of the day and the effect of the wine.

It was the next morning when I finally turned in. I felt sorry in a way for Keith Davies and the others who would fly over as they had already missed a great night out with the lads that would form the perfect springboard for a great weekends riding to come.

Scottish and Newcastle breweries kindly provided a free dawn chorus by way of a cacophony of the empty bottle collection at 06.30. No use trying to get back to sleep now as I would only have time to pack, make ready for breakfast and clear the second shower deluge from the room floor before it was time to depart for the docks.

Over a "continental" breakfast (read tiny portions and imitation orange juice) myself, Martin Marshall, Andy Smith and Jonathan Martin put the world to rights. It was nice to see that rather than being the three Yamaha types against the sole Kawasaki representative it was not turning into a gainsaying session. Having said that, if what we had said was written down and followed to the letter there would be whole strata of society missing, and not a few touring caravans, torched before nightfall.

Refugee like, we secured luggage, saddled up, and set off on the mile journey to the ferry amidst much good humour and motorcycle alarms – even if Simon Hill was not physically there at least he joined us in spirit.

For those who have read this far, and yet were not able to make this run, you would now be expecting an appreciative description of the new sea terminal building that replaced those Victorian goliaths.

The best word to describe the gateway to the Isle of Man is Portacabin, or rather Portacabins as more than one have been herded here for some years. This is only while the authorities make up their minds whether the sea trade to the Isle of Man and a few other West coast ports is worth investing in – they seem very patient !

While we milled around in the car park Martin Marshall was having a bit of a "debate" with the port authorities. It seems that although we are all allowed luggage, we have to take most of it on board individually rather than in the van which has come here for that purpose. It matters not that we return the luggage to the van once on board but "rules is rules" and so off it comes and we all struggle to get aboard amidst our possessions and portmanteaus.

The bikes were lashed down in double quick time and we retired upstairs or "aloft" or whatever they call it on this boat/ship/Seacat thing.

As we made ourselves comfortable in the spacious saloon deck I looked at the dock and determined to find something of its history. The evidence of that research you have already waded through no doubt. But as an interesting footnote, the current floating structure, completed in 1976, would naturally be, "far better than anything that those backward Victorian engineers could conceive".

The Queen herself duly turned up to crack the bottle of Champagne and looked on, along with others, as it promptly sank.

It seems that some clever sod had decided the hollow concrete structure needed inspection doors but had errantly left them open; not a very auspicious start.

Like a caring proctologist, the Captain wished us a "comfortable passage" and we were on our way.

Past the lightships and proposed area for a huge offshore wind farm (a sort of floating MCI) we left Liverpool behind and made 33knots (or 38mph to us land lubbers) across the Irish sea.

With no major mishaps to report the crossing was only occasionally interrupted by the Captain reporting our position and encouraging us that we would "soon be there". I hoped so as if we missed it we would be lucky to hit Ireland before America, and I hadn't brought that much spare underwear with me.

Soon enough Mona's Isle dominated the view 'forard (as our Capt'n Bob would say) and we were docking eager to remount.

Things were not good on the car deck though as the bike lashing turned out to be more of a lash up and at least one machine was healing over at a crazy angle. Ferry staff were summoned and with the seasoned professionalism of people who don't give a monkeys they cleared up best they could.

The eventual damage was, thankfully, light and we readied to disembark.

Time now. I think, to describe the "motorcycle" chosen as day to day transport by group leader, Bob McMillan. An unholy alliance of Honda Goldwing, Cruiser and Drag racer, the Honda Valkyrie is a huge six cylinder beast. I had already assumed that should the ferry have sunk that the lutine bell would have been rung once for it and once for the Honda when Bob chimed her up – on six straight through pipes !

The cacophony in the metal enclosure of the car deck probably diverted Alan Baker from his heavenly pursuits, it certainly made a few of our fellow passengers focus front and centre as we streamed off.

Making sure of his place in the record books Dave Martin ensured the Sergeant at Arms would start with him by indicating left on the ramp of the ferry itself. Luckily he decided against plunging into the murky depths and joined us on the road to Castletown and the Golf Links Hotel.

Such an early start ensured the day would be spread before us and we arrived commendably early at the Hotel with no mishaps despite Tony Dawson taking a sneaky short cut on the way there. He may have had the right idea as a tricky mini roundabout had to be negotiated before we rode the last mile to our destination.

Now to you and I it would have looked like any one of thousands of similar pieces of road furniture, but this one had a dark secret.

News reached me that Messrs Smith and McMillan had recently passed this way on a pair of shiny Honda motorcycles to give the route one last check. Smith, ever the enthusiast, had exited the roundabout like he was negotiating quarry bends and had experienced an earth, sky, earth, sky, sequence all too familiar to those who don't heed warning about new and greasy tires. How we laughed – and how we all thought "there but for the grace of God etc."

The final half mile to the hotel was sheer magic. The curving bay to our left was a real life watercolour and the golf course to the right, a carpet of green. With some set ideas about the Island, I was already happy to accept they would change as the Hotel itself became larger and we parked up.

Reception was a fine wood panelled affair complete with lifelike stuffed bears for atmosphere. A fire blazed in the grate and all was serenity until the bear talked and shattered the moment.

To jump ahead of you dear reader, it was not a talking bear but a

receptionist of a size that would baulk no argument about room allocations or mis-delivered copies of the Sunday Times. A fearsome woman, she was soon joined by another proving that they certainly build 'em for comfort rather than speed in this part of the world.

My room was allocated and off I went with compass in hand playing out a woollen thread in search. Having ever so nearly missed it several times I finally found it and tried the key in the door. No luck. It fitted the adjacent door but that was for a tiny room with two bunk beds and no bathroom.

Weighing up whether I would ever find the room again, and if the receptionist would use me as a toothpick, I decided to retrace my steps and lock horns with the dear woman.

Armed with the knowledge that I had opened the door of the connecting room instead, I returned to the site of my error with head between legs but without the bruise over my left eye I had expected.

The room, like many in the hotel, benefited from quite the most spectacular view possible. To my right a promontory, to the left the gentle curve of the shoreline, and ahead the bay itself with the surprisingly quiet airport beyond.

Mr Smith, who had already created somewhat of a rapport with the hotel staff had been allocated the Fletcher Christian suite. If Andy would be playing the part of the able seaman then it would only be natural for Captain Bob to be Mr Bligh.

Like the best tales, there was actually less to this than met the eye. The MacChristians were of Scandinavian origin and were prominent citizens on the Isle of Man from very early days.

In 1408 John McCristen (the spelling changes) was Judge and elevated to the Tynewald in 1422.

Much later Fletcher Christian was born, not on the Island but near Cockermouth in Cumbria and educated at the same local Grammar school as poet, William Wordsworth. There is, however a stronger island link with Captian Bligh as he was stationed on the island for some time in the late 18th century and lived in Douglas with his wife, Elizabeth Betham.

Lunch was, to the confusion of Bob and others, "in the breakfast room", and begged the obvious retort, "so will breakfast be in the lunch room then?". We decided against open conflict so early in our stay and retired to the well lit room and were seated.

My guest Andy Witt and I were joined by, among others, Peter Sheen and Steve Mayle. Peter was, as ever, doing a good impression of someone thirty years younger and waxing lyrical about his latest acquisitions, a Grmall.

Regular attendees will know of this beast having been overtaken by the BMW motorcycle engine tricycle affair belonging to David Strathcarron on numerous occasions and seen Peter Agg's upright trike version. As motorised soap dishes go these, Peter assured us, were the pinnacle of sophistication, his being powered by the latest fuel injected version of the BMW flat four "brick engine".

Mr Mayle, complete in full racing suit and riding a fearsome Yamaha R1, did not complete the motorcycle athlete picture and instead ploughed into the fruit crumble and cream dessert with admirable gusto.

As a fitting endorsement as to the fulsome quality of the food served, we were joined by the "banqueting manager", a woman of considerable girth and equal good humour. Not even the bravest club member was tempted to ask for Jam Rolly Polly after this.

With time to ablute and make that vital mobile phone call, we were all soon assembled in the car park awaiting our afternoon treat courtesy of Bob and Andy.

A charabanc of dubious vintage turned up and we piled on along with two very special guests Dave Molyneux and Jason Griffiths, best known as Honda and Yamaha TT competitors respectively.

Making our way to the Ballacraine Crossroads and the famous Hotel once impregnated by George Formby on his "Shuttleworth Special", we were introduced to the two riders and who were to talk us round the famous TT circuit. Dave Molyneux is famous as a sidecar pilot whereas Jason has had considerable success on solo motorcycles; this was to be a treat indeed.

Both riders were worryingly relaxed about the dangers of the TT circuit and, like so many of the competitors who entertain us, fully supportive of the event.

Molyneux, as the rider of a 600cc sidecar outfit, explained as we made our way via Dorrans to Laurel Bank just how much momentum you had to carry on these lower powered and wider machines. To be inch perfect in his view is as paramount as squeezing every last horsepower from the CBR600 Honda derived powerplant.

Jason is employed locally by Manx Petroleum and has had the largest degree of his TT success aboard Yamaha machinery. Commenting on Cronk-ne-voddy straight he said, not for the first time, "I'm flat out down here".

We were not totally surprised. But when it was repeated on numerous occasions later in the lap by Jason and Dave we began to understand the skill and bravery need to negotiate a course which has remained very little altered since the days when Kepple Gate was really a gate, and riders took spare tyres and inner tubes with them to repair deflations along the way.

I was impressed with the outright bravery combined with intimate circuit knowledge displayed by both riders. I knew that we also had some previous TT competitors among our number including the venerable Tom Waterer who had taken part on a Combat engined Norton Commando in 1972 "proddy" race achieving a creditable 9th place with an average speed of 88.21.

Dennis Bates' previously published article on the first TT details the events surrounding the winning of the event in 1907 by Charlie Collier.

With his customary attention to detail, Dennis relates that H Rembrandt (Rem) Fowler won the accompanying twin cylinder competition on a Peugout engined Norton but received no cup as Dr Hele Shaw who had generously offered to donate the silverware came up short.

Conceived as a fuel consumption and machine reliability trial the rules favoured a subtle combination of overall machine integrity and speed allied to the need to achieve an amazing 90mpg.

Oh how things have changed. A deflation at virtually any part of the circuit now signifies a lost race. In those early days such problems were common place.

In fact in achieving his famous V-Twin victory of 1907 Rem reported that he had stopped ten times during the race—changed inner tube—changed two plugs—fallen off twice—wired up a mudguard—wired up the advance spark lever—dropped his pump and had to pick it up as he had to finish with a complete tool kit and twice to take up slack in his drive belt.

Each TT era should, I thought, be judged on its own merits, none being more important than others and all competitors, no matter how successful, deserving of our respect.

We started the mountain climb passed the Waterworks and approached the Gooseneck.

Not for the first time our cheerful and mechanically unsympathetic driver stirred the gearbox accompanied by a rising crescendo that had all of us grimacing.

Apparently the gearbox is rear mounted and ratios are selected from driving position via a 39ft cable which when shagged (which this surely was) costs a small fortune to replace.

The fact that this news was related by cable expert, Chris Ventress, and that he was soon seen undertaking advanced calculus must be seen as pure coincidence!

Jason told us that the Formula One Yamaha R1 machines producing 180bhp and can easily pull 12,000rpm up the mountain achieved speeds of 190mph. The accuracy needed to thread such a missile down a narrow asphalt corridor in a variety of weather conditions was mind boggling. We needed a drink and, as luck would have it, we swung left at Kates Cottage and the Creg Ne Ba Hotel was but a mile away.

Sure enough the hotel was there but the doors remained resolutely locked. Heron & Brearley Brewery 1, Smith and McMillan 0.

We debated which of the coaches four ratios would be selected at random, switched off our mechanical sympathy and made our way to another "watering hole".

This turned out to be the Crosby Hotel, a hostel of the sort that goes a long way to explaining why all day opening should be regarded as a prerequisite of a first world nation.

Like most other businesses on the Island, the Crosby Hotel welcomed us motorcyclists and even had a racing Norton of admirable vintage on display in a glass a case in the lobby.

I don't know it was of the garden gate variety but, appropriately, it had been restored by a lawnmower repair shop – and a damn fine job they made of it too.

The Hotel, established in 1840, and under the care of Proprietor, Claudius Morfin, advertised the sale of "buttonholes at the bar, Allsopps Burton Ales and bait for those wishing to fish in Peel, Glen Meay, Glen Helen, and the long drive to Ramsey". Considering how quick and easy it is to get round the island today this was a timely reminder that, for many, one side of the island may have been rarely, if at all visited, in ones lifetime not so many years ago.

Suitably refreshed we thronged back onto the coach and motored back to the Golf Links.

The Hotel we left was splendid and yet the edifice we returned to was crap... well it certainly smelt of it.

To the obvious consternation of several Club members, including the keen nosed Dave Martin, there appeared to be what can only be described as a copious deposit of dog dirt on the shag pile atop the main stairs.

Being the man able to grab the bull by the horns, vis the horizontal BMW on the ferry, Nick Jefferey, ambled to reception and made overtures.

"Do you have any dogs staying in the hotel?", asked the lofty one in manner suggesting that his beloved Airedale had eloped with a crafty Cocker.

"No sir, why do you ask?"... "well there's evidence of one on the stair carpet", said the ever polite Nick.

The full might of the hotel human resource department then swung into action. Quick as a flash they had tracked down the youngest, most inexperienced and junior member of staff and the "dirty deed" was duly allocated.

I changed, admired the view (of the bay not the smelly carpet), and returned downstairs to the foyer and fire to write up my notes from this first part of the run.

Joining me was affable Welshman and man at the helm of the Big H, Mark Davies. A thoroughly likable chap. Mark is a keen motorcyclist and had a raft of tales of derringdo aboard his

Fireblade in the company of like minded petrol heads on the windswept and unfettered roads of Europe.

I know we feel it only right that the man at the sharp end of such a large company should be an enthusiasts - or at least in interest in all things two wheeled. Nevertheless it warmed the more "industry focused" cockles of my Kawasaki heart to know that he shared our passion for bikes and could see the wood for the trees when it came to the non enthusiasts that necessarily share our daily work lives.

Dennis was, unsurprisingly, at the bar fingers twitching ready to collect kitty monies.

Drinking, we compared travel routes with Dennis and Keith Davies discovering the latter had secured a blinding deal to fly from Bristol airport which made the prospect of the long schlep back from Heysham all the more galling.

With those who preferred the exercise of a walk up the beach persuaded indoors dinner commenced... in the breakfast room.

Entertainment on these events is always assured. The mixture and variety is refreshing and something I find as rewarding as the riding itself.

Ever the showman, Dennis insisted on ordering his meal standing up and insisted that his steak be prepared "rare to medium" and not "medium to rare". I would put money on him being the only human being able to tell the difference.

Melon, salmon, chicken or soup as a starter would be followed by a choice of cod, pork, steak or mushrooms accompanied by the "chef's choice" of vegetables – we sat politely in the hope that chef was discerning and in a good mood.

With such a panoply on offer, and an abundance conviviality, it was Tony Dawson who, unwittingly, crossed the line of acceptability and brought down on himself and others the displeasure of the multi ethnic waiting staff.

"Can I have cheese and biscuits for dessert" said quiz meister Dawson in all innocence.

Not having met the invisible five fundamental economic tests for entry into the dinner menu the dairy product was denied. The crowd grew ugly (well uglier) and I could tell that this was going to become a cause celebre.

Luckily before daggers were drawn the corpulent queen of the dining hall appeared and wafted across to the dilated Dawson. "Of course you can have cheese Sir she cooed" and left the room to introduce the waiting staff to the prospect of clearing up the next load of excrement that may appear on the hotel carpet.... without gloves.

Keith Davies rose before the diversion of food arrived and welcomed members and guests alike while thanking Andy Smith in advance for the Hotel and Run organization. While the smell of an application for the Yamaha franchise receded Jason Griffiths – who had joined us – was introduced and thanked for his able commentary on the coach TT lap.

So enthusiastic was Mike Jackson that he immediately suggested we leave the motorcycles at rest the next day and do the whole run using the coach.

Keith naturally mentioned "absent friends" and our thoughts turned to Doug Mitchenall and Tony Dennis who, sadly, would not be with us.

On a lighter note, the pre-dinner banter now centred on members and their guests:

The aforementioned Honda big cheese was joined by demi-fromage Matt Stone, the Honda Marketing Manager – these two being the guests of Bob Mac and Dave Hancock, the later who would join us on the 'morrow.

Jonathan Martin of Yamaha was present as guest of father, Dave, now soldering things to base boards at Acumen Ltd and continuing to display an innate ability to reinvent uses for coloured L.E.D's.

Frank Finch (who had forgotten a raffle prize for the umpteenth time) was joined by Andy Tempest, a golfing partner that Frank had persuaded to take up the equally expensive, sexist and satisfying pastime of motorcycling.

Alan Blake, who I swear was stolen from a travelling circus as a baby, stood on a chair to introduce his guest Graham Matcham, and Andy Smith tried unsuccessfully to highlight his guest Martin Marshal also of Yamaha.

With much harrumphing from the "Member for Bromley" it was discovered that Mr Marshall had secured a seat on the top table "on his very first run!" – what is the country coming too?

My guest, Andy Witt, was looking firmly pleased with himself having at least got as far as the hotel with no major mishap and was exercising his creative "bent" via the judicious use of a digital camera.

Dennis Bates spotted our motorcycling paparazzi and asked the simple and seemingly innocent question, "is that your camera Andy". Following a simple confirmation Andy was told, not asked, that he was the "official photographer" for the duration. Now that's what I call singing for your supper.

Arm twisting done it was time to be introduced to our special guest, Ray Knight. Having ridden the Island more often than most, Ray has a wealth of stories and interesting information to pass on as result of a forty odd year career.

His 1991 TT book, "Riders Guide" includes the following advice. "The sign for Sulby is a 90 degree right hander. Depending on your speed, a place to brake hard. If you cannot stop, there is a gap into a field just after the warning arrow" – no doubt worth the cover price alone if you find yourself without retardation having hurtled through Quarry bends.

Ray rode in the Manx GP from '62 to '66 and the TT from '67 to '94. For those, like me, numerically challenged,

this, with all his class entries, ended up at 80 races over the mountain circuit including 17 replicas and a production 500cc TT win on a Triumph Daytona.

With dinner, (including Tony's cheese platter) but a recent memory the cudgels were taken up by rafflemaster Smith for the traditional pot luck, totally unbiased, raffle (sponsored once again by the Zimbabwe election Ministry).

A TT videotape was won by John Nelson and augured well for the quality of the raffle prizes. With a flask for Nick Hopkins and Wine for Rick Parrish the signs were optimistic. Like a county class spin bowler, this was only Smithy "warming up", there were some googlies on the way. Explain, if you will, why Mark Davies mysteriously won a Yamaha watch. How Tony (deflated) Jakeman won tyre weld... and Alan Blake a "Multi tool".

Maurice Knight, probably to the disgust of Dawson T, won a huge cheese (not Mark Davies) and Tony himself a book on the Battle of Britain", as if he has not been fighting a one man Battle for Britain at the MCI these past years!

Norman Hyde won a selection of fruit and some spanners while Steve Mayle, Bob Trigg, Andy, Mr Goodman and Bob Mac had access to the "bargain bin" end of the wine and spirit racks from several mainland off licences.

The balaclava/tyre gauge combination that Nick Jefferey won seemed strange but not in comparison to Ray Knight unholy alliance of Honda cufflinks and brace of Manx Kippers.

Amidst the hubbub of people trying to give away or sell their hard earned prizes, Bob rose to talk us through the route and explain the wonderful colour route maps products courtesy Dave Dews' Motocom organisation.

Although delighted to be covering the TT course itself, the immediate feedback was appreciative that some of the less worn routes would also be explored.

A total length of 174 miles was certainly much more than the 37 ¼ that I had pessimistically 'reckoned on and would certainly take a whole day to cover if we were to stop for lunch and two coffee halts.

Ray Knight thanked the Club before we repaired to the bar and members went into full relaxation mode.

"Lounge lizard", or rather "couch potato", Norman Hyde reached for a brandy, loosened his flamboyant neck wear and effected a look which I suppose he allied to Frankie Vaughn. A little wide of the mark I thought, more like Frankie Howard, but no less amusing for it all the same.

Talking of relaxing, an Irish woman at the bar was "totally relaxed" and seeking eye contact with anyone in order to regale them. Poor old John Nelson was foxed by the "Irish eyes" and his entertainment – and ours – was secured.

Apparently the boisterous behaviour was due to having an Argentinean father and Irish mother. Adding to this, we were informed that her father had

fought in the Battle of Britain – on what side she did not say, but judging but the amount of Argentineans with Bavarian accents it is open to debate..!

Andy Smith, who now employs someone to sleep on his behalf, sat behind a bottle of Scotch and the binging began. I climbed the stairs, avoided the stain and repaired to bed.

Next morning the first flight into Ronaldsway woke me at 7.00 and I made my way down for breakfast a little more refreshed than some of my colleagues.

A quick chew and slurp later it was time to inspect my mount and make ready for the days riding.

Early golfers were, for the most part, a cheery bunch and not at all put off by the dawn chorus of thirty odd motorcycles and the Yamaha van alarm sounding its clarion call.

With Bob ahead on his Valkyrie, we moved off and towards Castletown itself. We gingerly crossed "Smiths" roundabout without any casualties and made our way back to the traffic lights at Ballacraigne where our tour of the circuit had started the day before.

Frank Finch, who I had been following while the bikes and brains warmed up, gestured that we should wait for the lights to change against us, he on his SP1 and myself on a Kawasaki Z1000.

The lights changed once more, and once more we waited. When next they went green we set off with a good few miles of clear road ahead. Dorans and Laurel Bank were negotiated with trees and low stone walls flashing past, Frank riding with one hand on the bars, myself gripping somewhat tighter.

Crunk-v-voddy and other famous parts of the circuit are virtually impossible to appreciate if, like us, you obey the speed limits - I think the many Duke video tapes available

actually give this a better impression of speed. (that must be worth a free tape Geoff!)

Through Bargarrow and past Bishops Court I imagined what it would be like in a race flitting in and out of sunlight (if it wasn't raining) and trying to remember what conditions lay ahead.

Ballagh Bridge was next and probably counts as one of the most atmospheric parts of the circuit. This is where many a rider throughout the history of the race on the famous circuit gets carried away during a race, leaps the bridge and breaks a chain. Trevor Nation was well known for his huge leaps from this bridge and was, by chance, on of the lucky ones that never seemed to break a chain - others were much less fortunate.

We now raced toward Quarry Bends, I think I saw a national speed limit sign but I couldn't swear to it. Franks bike had been set up for a previous visit to the island and tracked strait and true on the entrance to the well surfaced and maintained series of corners. To keep up at the near three figure speeds required the Z1000 to be revved quite hard combined with a careful selection of line - always allowing for the prospect of someone coming the other way of course.

I suppose we went through at 90mph+ and I remember thinking "I could have got through there a tad faster but not much" and reflecting on the fact that the top men like Hislop would take these at 140mph, just incredible.

If you read some of the commentaries you can just begin to understand the mental ability need to race at those

speeds on a public road. Riding on a strip of tarmac mostly half the size of a race track and often a lot narrower, bikes of nearly 200bhp are threaded between walls and trees at frightening speeds for six gruelling laps. I am not yet half way round one lap and already I am feeling the mental strain.

Into Ramsey and, for a while all is calm again. Observing the posted limits we climb away from the town and up to the hairpin which each year the doyen of motorcycle commentators, Fred Clark, makes his own. Often call "Solar Fred", Mr Clark is frequently heard talking knowledgably about motorcycle racing and racers from dawn's early light to the dusk that accompanies the departure of the last weary fan.

Ever the professional, Fred has stayed in the same Hotel, The Imperial, for what seems an age. He never makes a booking and always turns up expecting a bed for the duration of the TT. The hotel's understanding nature is returned in spades though as on every commentary the Imperial "comfortable beds, reasonable prices" is mentioned ad nauseam.

Like Ballaugh Bridge, the hairpin at Ramsey is famous for catching out the unwary. In on the right hand side of the rising road and slipping clutches through the tight uphill turn it is easy to see how a rider used to travelling at 180mph only minutes before can relax too much and simply tip off here.

With the Water Works below to our left, the Gooseneck emerges after a series of turns, a police car travelling the other way reminding us that we are

still in a speed restricted area of the Island, but not for long.

Holding the gears through the box, Guthries and the Mountain Mile appear as straights with kinks, the road weaving left and right under the bikes with the occasional dive behind a stream of traffic before resuming the run up the mountain.

With such a mixture its easy to see why some riders prefer the lower closed in sections while others find they can make up time on the mountain. Even at these speeds and with traffic closing fast in the opposite direction there are moments when it is actually quite lonely and desolate up here. In a race I would imagine that the expanse of the mountain is welcome after flashing within inches of so many houses and pieces of street furniture.

We dash over Hailwood Rise and onto Windy Corner, the Museum up to our right and tram tracks ahead, although we are understandably cautious through here both of us have a good line and plenty of drive out to Kepple Gate and looking right over the long corner towards Kates cottage to see who, or what, is coming the other way and where passing opportunities might be.

This section including the descent towards the Creg must be one of the most memorable parts of the whole TT circuit. Late in on the left side of the road we square the corner and fire the bikes towards brandish and the uphill right that is personally my least favourite part of the whole course. The natural bank in front is daunting and the corner shallow enough for the brave to power round at frightening

speeds. Not me though as sense takes over the nearer we get to the 40mph signs.

Down towards Governors bridge and past the sandy bank that has forcefully stopped many a bike we turn right at the roundabout and park up opposite the manual lap boards in-front of the pits, grandstand and TT press office. Parking, Le Mans fashion, we readied ourselves for the group photo amidst much enthusiastic banter about the nearly completed lap.

For all its inherent danger there is also something intoxicating about the Island circuit. Taking at least a few of its corners at high speed and running up and over the mountain itself can only reinforce the respect for all competitors, be they from the pre war era, the immediate post war halcyon days right up to the modern riders among whom a 120mph average lap is now commonplace.

Bunched together we benefited from the attention of several photographers and toggled up for the next part of the run, a blast over to Peel, fuel and a coffee stop.

Just as Gretels Mother must have said when she and Hansel had decided to take up orienteering, it is not wise to "stray from the path" on the island and expect billiard smooth roads.

The gallop to Peel must have shaved more than a few ounces of aluminium and steel from assorted "undercarriages" as we made smart progress.

Mike Jackson came into view riding in his customary economic style he was deceptively quick even though the amount of mud on his boots and lower legs suggested that a footing coat would be better than his conventional riding jacket.

Following Bob on his open piped Honda behemoth was tough. I didn't hear him ground it out once even though we were frequently pulling the legal limit and making some tight turns. The views ahead and to our left were nothing short of magnificent, this was the Atlantic coast and the weather was finally showing us its better side.

Nick Hopkins, who had remained composed thought the morning now decided to add a little spice to proceedings by indicting right and shooting straight ahead at an attended junction. With bunched riders the chain reaction is always a picture to watch and sure enough more than a little confusing arose in the wake of the distant Hopkins.

Riding on I spent a glorious few miles behind Alan Blake. How nice to have him with us again and what an education to see man that has his own particular interpretation of the word apex. It's a sort of movable feast for Alan. He will approach a corner throw his mental dice and decide where he think the apex is - you have to admire a man for taking physics head on and, for the most part, winning.

Stopping at a roundabout it was my turn to be the human signpost. Welcome indeed as it gave me a chance to write up some notes and take a breather. One of the first to hove into view was Matt Stone on what looked

suspiciously like a brand new Honda Blackbird. Stopping he swapped the massive 1100cc beast for my Z1000 and rode off with it looking like a moped under his business lunch physique.

You have to admit they build these Honda's well and it had all the whistles and bells. Full of contradictions it had Anti this and Pro that as well as a fuel system called PGM Fi. My favourite had to be HISS which is a security acronym for something like Honda Integrated Security System.... We are eternally grateful that Piaggio did not patent it.

The coffee stop was at the Calf of Man a world famous beauty spot and justifiably so. Steep cliffs dropped to a strong tidal looking sea that raced between islands in a fashion that suggested the knitted bathing costume should stay in the top box.

Across the sound, the lower reaches of the small island opposite were populated by a contented and altogether distracted group of seals who had a familiar bulk to them rather reminiscent of the "generously" proportioned banqueting Manager of the Golf Links Hotel.

Bob, who has obviously made fauna his passion since leaving Honda full time offered the scientific observations that "they'll be shagging in a minute" and crunched up the gravel to his bike.

The rookery splashed about oblivious to the fact that they were in the presence of a Club (not, thank God, a seal club) and we meandered en masse up to the recently rebuilt tea rooms.

Dennis was busily making adjustments to the idle speed of his little Honda while the remainder adjusted their waistlines with some sticky cakes. Tea, or indeed, coffee were off the menu, and so too was light or anything else that relied on electricity. Apparently power cuts were a familiar occurrence here and cranking up the generator would take twenty minutes so fizzy pop sufficed.

Peter Sheen could at least tell us about tea even if we didn't have a cup to drink. Having been here over a number of years he offered that when purchasing tea from the hut that previously stood here you could "look into your cup and read your fortune".

He then went on to describe just how grotty the place was and only convinced me that every fortune would be the same "You will take a short journey to a tin of Epsom salts"

Making our way back to Peel we seemed to criss cross and turn on ourselves like a knitting pattern before pulling up at a petrol station to refuel. Bob Trigg, who had obviously grown jealous of Nick Hopkins free form indication promptly indicated left and turned right. He joined Mr Jackson at the pumps, whereupon Mike, calculating it to be a very thirsty beast "over served" his 500cc Silverwing scooter.

David O'Neal left the fuel stop and parked up a little way down the route to wait for the others complete with what seemed to be a screw right through his rear tyre. Very unfortunate we all thought immediately dismissing the fact that this had occurred yet again

in the vicinity of Dunlop executive, Steve Mayle.

Now I am sure that the Bhurgers of Dunlop have quite a legal team on standby and would not, for a minute, suggest that Mr Mayle had anything to do with it. Having said that I seem to recall he was comfortingly close to Tony Jakeman when he also had a scare with his tyre. Could it be that, like children who are mysteriously first on the scene of a school fire, we have the beginning of a new Dunlop marketing drive on our hands? Coincidence or not we should at least ask to look in Steve's pockets on the next run.

Lunch would be served at the Creek Inn, Peel, an establishment well used to the sight of the representatives of the forth estate. No surprise then that we be met outside by Mac McDiarmid, Roger Willis and his loyal "right hand", Ruth.

Pushing aside traditional rules about journalists being persona non grata on these jaunts, we let Willis buy the first round and scrutinized the menu. Crab salad, Fish Pie and Steak and Ale Pie were all on offer and equally tempting. A half overheard conversation about the quality of the Crab convinced me that salad was the route to go and I found a seat facing the pool table.

The service was quick to say the least with food arriving before some of our body had had a chance to disrobe. If this was quick then the reaction of hungry club members was the sort of split second reaction Roy Rogers would have been proud of. The words "steak pie" had carelessly left the waitresses lips before a darting hand

had shot skywards or a hearty male voice had boomed "over here".

With table space at a premium those seated were in the right spot when it came to eating. More than a little brinkmanship was employed and Tom Waterer, for one, found himself temporarily distracted only to be relieved of his plate. I am reliably informed that the "voleur" was Mr Hyde who, in his defence, could have claimed the fish pie was merely "poached" salmon.

Ever resourceful, Norman Hyde and Dave Martin started a trend by using the pool table for dining and would soon be joined by Yamaha's Martin Marshall. Seeing his chance as our waitress arrived through the door he quickly identified a steak and ale pie and made an inspired grab for it.

What Martin had not considered is that kitchen staff are used to handling many meals fresh from the oven and generally have asbestos hands. Martin's were not capable of absorbing such considerable heat and the plate was soon on the floor with Mrs Marshall's husband dancing around swearing profusely and blowing on his ruby red digits.

The exit from the pub was certainly of more leisurely intent than the ingress and it took most members some persuading to don helmets and make ready for departure. More fine roads sped beneath us as we explored alternately the coastal road and then the hinterland culminating at Foxdale and quite the most fearsome hairpin bends imaginable.

Perhaps the salmon was taking affect and causing him to swim upstream. Whatever the reason, Norman went blithely on at a turn and promptly misjudged a junction manned by Graham Goodman and "ceased to make progress".

Norman did have others to keep him company though. Matt Stone had obviously confused Mike Jackson as he had also turned left instead of the indicated right. Then, "on the very cusp" of making his manoeuvre he reconsidered and attempted a further change of direction resulting in what can only be described as a "partial beaching".

Riding Normans café racer Bonneville, I was impressed with the ride considering the minor tweaks he had made. The somewhat ponderous engine was still in evidence but the change to the brakes and the elegant low handlebars and altered silencers made the thing a joy to ride – even over some roads which I would hesitate to ride my Kawasaki enduro bike down.

There are many ways to traverse the mountain other than the TT course. My favourite is via one of the many green lanes on which, if you are quick, you can catch sight of a rider on more than one part of the TT course during a race. Our destination Bungalow, we rode the A14 to the tram lines and turned left in to the museum parking area.

Run with knowledge and enthusiasm by a somewhat eccentric curator, the Motorcycle Museum is filled to overflowing with an array of motorcycles and two wheeled

ephemera. Some pieces represented motorcycling history, some stimulated dewey eyed reminders of times past and some were just downright silly. Into this last category was firmly wedged a Honda C90 complete with racing magneto that had frequently been ridden to the annual races all the way from Scandinavia.

Programmes, leaflets and photographs lined the walls and after only a cursory search revealed pictures of Bob's Trigg and McMillan. Amidst exaggerated rumours that Dennis Bates had been asked to keep moving as they were stock taking, we spilled out into the parking area for more photos and either to watch enthusiasts negotiating the sweeping bends or to visit the Joey Dunlop statue.

For many in the modern era Joey was the Isle of Man personified. Quietly spoken, relaxed, humble yet fiercely quick, the Ulsterman won a staggering 26 TT races including a "hat trick" of wins on three separate occasions.

Joey won his first TT in Jubilee year, 1977. Having won again on a Yamaha in 1980 he moved onto Honda with whom he became synonymous. In 1992 a win in the 125cc lightweight saw him equal Mike Hailwood's tally of fourteen victories, four more than the great Stanley Woods. His third "hat trick" of wins at the 2000 event was accompanied by his fastest ever lap of the island at 123.87, not bad for a man of 48!

Awarded an MBE in 1986 and then an OBE in 1996 for humanitarian aid to the trouble spots of Bosnia and Rumania, Joey was a diffident, hands-on philanthropist who would often load

his lorry with clothing and food and deliver them personally to turbulent eastern European trouble spots.

Returning to eastern Europe for a Tallinn road racing event in 2000, Joey had already won two races when he lost control of his 125cc Honda and hit a tree which ended his life. As an example of the mixture of risk and reward that road racing delivers, Joey is an extreme yet poignant example.

Any ride round the TT course, and enjoyment of it, should also be tempered with a thought for all those riders lost and families who have paid a price for our spectating and competing enjoyment.

Remounting I swapped machines with Frank Finch and rode to the Laxey wheel on his Honda SP1, the production machine on which one of Joey's last race bikes was based.

Compared to a four cylinder this was very compact and had a tendency to "stand up" if you gave it loads of throttle coming out of tight corners. We progressed down the edge of the island with the sea on our left and then, suddenly, took a right onto some very thin and tricky roads ending up at the famous Laxey wheel just in time to see another somewhat eccentric caretaker type shut the gate and refuse us entry.

The combined diplomatic skills of Andy Smith and Dave Martin saw him retreat further into the bosom of his little hut and adopt a siege mentality. He wasn't coming out while we were there and he certainly wasn't going to let us walk the twenty or so yards to the base of the wheel itself. He was on his own and couldn't be sure that we all weren't carrying a Whitworth spanner ready to dismantle his charge and make off with it into the early evening sun to sell to some "wheeler dealer" on the adjacent island.

Thus chastened we assembled in front of the gates to the wheel with the still erect mining artefact behind us. Taking it in turns, the few photographers among us took another commemorative snap and it was time to remount for the last gallop to the hotel.

Once more I swapped machines, this time with the venerable Tom Waterer who had charge of a Honda Silverwing, the same 500cc scooter on which Mike Jackson had effectively

circumnavigated me on mid corner earlier in the day.

It took a while to get used to the "point and squirt" approach but once adopted the little Honda was surprisingly swift and agile. Hooking onto the back of Dave Hancock I kept her open come what may and managed to get a tow behind his CBR600.

As the speeds rose it was a simple case of ignoring the brake lever and continuing the momentum into the coroner or other "hazard" that lay ahead. I must admit to testing the suspension of the Silverwing quite seriously over the tramlines near the site of the Groulle Glen steam railway. The unsettling effect of the tram rails followed by some rather poorly prepared road works had the stylish scooter in knots and me well out of the chair – mind you it was pulling well over 70mph at the time so you could hardly blame it.

Through Douglas and onto Castletown the late afternoon sun chased us towards the hotel and the golfers on the links. Once parked up I returned to my room for a quick wash and brush up before retuning to the parking area to help Andy Smith and Martin Marshall with the loading of the Yamaha van. You have to hand it to the man he is certainly "hands on" and would not ask anyone to do anything he would gladly do himself.

Van duly loaded there was an hour or so before the formal dinner to reflect on the days riding and, for me, try to make sense of my notes. Shame I didn't take up medicine I thought, certainly got the handwriting for it.

The convivial atmosphere in the bar and general high spirits indicated that all, including guests, had enjoyed a successful day without mishap. The general feeling was that Bob and Andy had invested wisely in their magic kit and conjured up a run with variety, spectacular sights, demanding roads and pure good riding that would be almost impossible to better.

Jackets and club ties on we filed into the lounge to enjoy each others company once more.

With all seated Dennis formally welcomed our guest Geoff Duke OBE. Like a 1930's costermonger Dennis launched into an appreciation of Geoff's career. In one breath he announced that Geoff was a road racer, trials star, successful businessman, holder of the OBE, freeman of the city of St Helens, holder of the Seagrave trophy and World motorcycle road race champion six times. We tried to breathe but Dennis was straight back at us with a classic line - "Am I right? - I am!".

On went Dennis in combative style to tell us about the demands of immediate post war competitions, petrol hard to find, no camper vans, no team of mechanics or press officers.

Geoff notched up a Special first class in the Scottish, and Norton had wins in the Trade Opens in the Colmore Cup, Victory, Kiekham, the Hurst in Ireland and the Cotswold Cup.

Norton also dominated the NW200 Senior and Junior with Duke third in the latter. Geoff also won the Senior

race at the Clubmans TT on a garden gate Norton at 82.97.

The combination of Dennis' meticulous fact gathering and the breakneck delivery had shaken us somewhat but following a brief disarming reply from Geoff Duke himself we made ready for the meal.

Fruit cocktail, crab, salad or soup was followed by tuna, chicken breast, sirloin or the interesting "vegetarian chilli con carne", which to most people must be just "a plate of beans".

The usual wine shenagins started after most of the assembled had spotted that bottles were getting low but, for the most part, all were adequately merry in time for the quiz results and Sergeant at Arms.

Tony Dawson, who must spend the six months or so between runs concocting the most difficult questions possible, made an uncharacteristic mistake.

In asking about "USA machines" he had not reckoned on the more competitive members of the club working their way round his "blind side". More than one member nominated a car manufacturer and Tony, fair as ever, was duty bound to accept the answers.

Dennis Bates was the eventual winner and received his RAC membership prize before we moved onto Mike Jackson, the Sergeant at Arms.

There is a frisson of nervous tension when Mike rises to deliver his acerbic

observations and resultant fines. Small change in neat little piles, and loins suitably girded, we awaited his pleasure.

Announcing that he was instigating "overseas rates" for the fines he launched into me for spelling mistakes in the last report and himself for the incomplete Diss report (1991 in case you were there).

Chris Ventress was shopped for falling off on the way to the Isle of Man and Keith Davies for finding a flight from Bristol £40 cheaper than anyone else.

The Yamaha boys were fined, in Andy's case for trying to bribe a dock official in Liverpool to take an overloaded van on the ferry, and in Martin Marshall's case for overtaking on cross hatches.

Bob McMillan was singled out and had to pay up due to his resemblance to the country singer, Willie Nelson and Dennis Bates for constructing quite the most complicated booking form ever conceived.

Frank Finch was next. To universal applause he chipped into the coffers for having a silver crash helmet and a silver head. This was followed by Dave Martin - the inventor of many electronic aids for forgetful motorcyclists - being fined for leaving his indicator on.

Alan Blake joined Keith in the sin bin for booking a cheap flight and the seemingly irreproachable John Nelson for forgetting his raffle prize.

Yamaha, and therefore Andy, were seen hump starting a bike and Tom Waterer was shopped by person or persons unknown for speeding at Ballaugh Bridge.

Dennis and his cute little Honda were fined for producing an "oil mist on the mountain" along with Matt Stone of Honda for crossing a white line and frightening the bejeozas out of an oncoming motorist.

Norman Hyde was so eager that he shot the lights at Balachrane and the run organisers had to pay up for selecting a modern looking stop with "Lucas electrics."

The lunch stop produced monies from the "Honda trio" of Matt Stone, Mark Davies and Bob McMillan who all fell asleep.

Rick Parrish hardly had time to get over being fined for reporting his ex boss Chris Ventress when he had to cough up again simply for being an accountant. (bet he claimed the fine against tax though!)

Bob Mac had to reach deep for pissing off the locals with his loud pipes while Frank and Mike Jackson himself pitched in for overshooting and beaching respectively.

Bob Trigg was in focus for criticising Mike Jacksons riding style which cost him a double fine and Peter Sheen joined the overshooters club at Castletown so was duly asked to dip into the Shell pension fund.

He had only just reached for his florin when he was fined again for marking NSU down in the quiz as an American motorcycle manufacturer – shame on you Peter.

The final round of contributions were to be from Dennis and the Chairman Keith Davies. Mr Bates did not mention the Geoff Duke was an ex-scrambler, which must be a hanging offence in the Jackson household, and Keith announced the quiz to be hosted by Tony Denis and not Dawson.

With coffers raised by those that had “coughed up” the formal entertainment for the evening drew to a close and the bar beckoned.

Our female chanteuse from Ireland was “in residence” and made tracks for us straight away.

Her opening gambit was that myself and Frank Finch were related which was tempered by a forty five minute investigation that resulted in correctly placing the father and sibling Martin relationship. It was going to be another long night I thought and made my way upstairs.

I am not sure I regret missing Frank Finch singing an acapella version of My Way, or missing out on the majority of the Irish Rotarians 70's themed night. The bed was comfortable and the ride tomorrow long so sense happily prevailed.

The next morning was cool, misty but fresh as we rose for breakfast and to make ready for our departure. For our "air males" the return trip from Ronaldsway to wherever would be a formality as Yamaha would be repatriating their bikes.

For the rest of us it was time to push, shove, coerce and cajole our possessions back into panniers, top boxes and ruck sacks ready for the sea crossing and journey home.

Having returned room keys we went into a full scale amble towards the parking area. Greeting us were not only the earliest of the golfers but Andy, Bob and the Hotel Manageress on the first tee conjuring up a celebratory photo for the archives.

In such a relaxed atmosphere Andy was at ease waiting for a pre-booked taxi which would take him ahead to the seaport to receive our tickets and aid an efficient au revoir to the island.

He, and we, should have known better. Manx philosophy had come into play. The cab company had been booked to bring some staff to the hotel for their shift. Trying for some efficiencies, and no doubt to maximise profit, they assigned the same cab to pick up Mr Smith. No problem, except that the staff were due to arrive after we should all have left on the Seacat.

With Andy riding shotgun to Bob on a borrowed Honda 1100 we galloped to the port like a posse in a B movie western. We arrived to find the ferry ready to sail and staff in a state of confusion. The first guy asked us for tickets, we had none. The second had

the tickets and gave them to us. He then promptly asked for them back again. I suppose it would be beyond the wit of man (or should that be Isle of Man) to coral us, count us and just count the tickets.

We boarded to the familiar strains of the Yamaha van alarm and found some seats to relax in for the crossing to Haysham. On arrival many of us were low on fuel and in groups of two three or four we made our way to the nearest petrol station at Lancaster avoiding the M6 which had been temporarily shut at our natural joining point.

With tanks brimming myself and Andy joined the M6 South for the blast to Birmingham and home. Making swift progress we were due to part at Newcastle Under Lyme where Andy would visit friend for the remainder of the day. With the majority of my clothing in his right pannier the strain of riding an unfaired bike at three figure speed was somewhat more acceptable.

I waved goodbye to Mr Witt (and my dobie) at junction 16 and carried on alone. Expecting the remainder of the ride to be low key I was actually in for a big, and unwelcome surprise.

Just North of Stafford the M6 south curves uphill right. Coming the other way in the corresponding fast lane a Japanese saloon driver looked to have fallen asleep at the wheel – or worse.

After several yawning skids he slammed into the central barrier about 200 yards ahead of me at which point the front of the car disintegrated and carried on at the same speed but now in my lane.

The drivers mirror struck a glancing blow to my right arm and the whole plastic front bumper shot over my head. With other debris to the left and right, and a closing speed of well over 150mph I naturally counted myself very lucky to ride through the carnage without a scratch.

I think anyone would be forgiven after this for taking a bit of a breather. In my case so much so that I had passed my scheduled petrol stop before I knew it and then, soon after, the "low fuel" light came on.

Suffice to say all the traffic I had passed in the last hour came streaming past as I crawled to the next gas station at 50mph. Having said that, at least I had not received a Honda Prelude to the solar plexus, so all was not lost.

Small mercies counted, I returned home and reflected in the 40th Anniversary Run.

Another great weekend.

Fantastic roads, equally fantastic company and all sharing the same innocent passion for motorcycles – now that really is magic!