



## Club Run Report – Llandridnod wells - Autumn 2006

The rain in Spain may well fall mainly on the plain, but the rain in mid-Wales falls mainly on the head and then trickles down the back of the neck! This was, without doubt, the wettest run I had ever experienced. Sources close to the Davies household reported that Keith returned home from the Autumn Run looking like he'd been through a car wash, minus the car.

To those unfamiliar with The Club this may not sound like a ringing endorsement, but in fact the weather was a small price to pay for some of the most exciting roads and diverse scenery in the British Isles, let alone the good food and comfortable accommodation that the Metropole and its workforce of eager (and slightly perplexed) Polish youngsters provided at the end of each day. Not to mention the camaraderie that makes our 'band of brothers' so special. To be fair, the portents had been ominous from the outset. As I sat in my office 'somewhere on the edge of the Cotswolds' on Friday morning, the sky darkened, there followed an enormous clap of thunder that caused a complete power failure and then the heavens opened!

One of the benefits of mid Wales as a venue is that there are several superb A-roads leading there – I chose the A44, which snakes through medieval towns and villages in Herefordshire before winding through the mountains once the border is crossed. As we pulled into the

hotel car park we saw before us an unusually large number of motorcycles. It transpired that the Civil Service Motorcycle association were also enjoying a weekend in Wales. It would not be unreasonable to assume that two groups of biking professionals in the same establishment could easily become muddled up, but once out of our riding gear it was readily apparent who were the civil servants. This was not, however, the only group with whom we were sharing our lodgings, as the North Wales Pensioners' Line Dancing Society were having their annual dinner dance at the Metropole too. Nice.

Having draped my sodding sodden waterproofs around my bedroom and changed into some dry clothes (isn't modern hard luggage wonderful compared to old fashioned top boxes, which leaked so badly they needed drain holes to let the water out!) I headed for the bar to meet the gang. Nick Hopkins was looking very at home, with his personal pewter tankard of foaming ale, while Rick Parish had discovered that the local brew was named after him (or vice versa) and was enthusiastically becoming acquainted with it.

### ***Absent Friends***

Once seated around the dinner table Chairman Selvidge made his welcome speech for our 45<sup>th</sup> run. There were numerous apologies for as many different reasons; Bob Mac, Dave Dew



and Martin Lambert were all at Brands Hatch for the final round of British Superbikes, David Dixon and Peter Agg were 'unfit to ride' (medically, rather than in terms of ability), Norman Hyde was recovering from an operation the previous week and Tony Dawson gave the most glamorous excuse, as he was on a hill climb in Spain. John Nelson and Chris Ventress had made donations to the bar bill in absentia and so were quite literally with us in spirits. Our thoughts also turned to the late David Stratchcarron, who leaves behind many happy memories and a seemingly endless supply of anecdotes from everyone who met him.

Nick Jeffrey had been deputised Treasurer in Dennis Bates' absence and Greg Elson was filling Tony Dawson's role as quiz master. For dinner we were presented with a choice of leg of lamb, sea bass or brie and broccoli parcels for the non-carnivores, followed by bread and butter pudding (heaven!) or cheese & biscuits or fruit salad (I don't think anybody chose the latter).

Tom Waterer gave us a comprehensive briefing; "The key word is concentration," he announced, startling several people who seemed to have drifted off. Nich Brown would be assuming the tail end position, creating an MCI sandwich effect.

Then it was time for the raffle and I noted that 50% of the prizes on offer were bottles of wine. Might I venture to suggest that everyone brings a bottle of wine as a prize and that way nobody will

be disappointed? David O'Neill ably assisted Andy Smith and they make a fine double act. "Have you ever tried to give away crap and make it look interesting?" bemoaned Smithy at one point. "Do you think he uses that line at Yamaha sales conferences?" I heard someone enquire. According to my records, Avon' Graham Matcham won a Dunlop watch and Dave Martin claimed a compass, to replace the Sat Nav system that detached itself from his handlebars while riding to the hotel.

Being a sensible lad I retired to the bar for a nightcap before heading off for a good night's sleep on the right side of midnight. Unfortunately my room-mate, Suzuki's Steve Callahan, had been tempted to a 'midnight feast' at the local curry house by Smith and Martin, which needed washing down with copious lagers back at the hotel, and I was woken by him crashing into the room and performing 'the trouser dance' at 3:00am. Apparently Martyn Roberts had accompanied them as far as the restaurant, before realising that he wasn't actually hungry!

### ***Reservoir Sheep Dogs***

Saturday dawned dry, if not bright. Breakfast was a traditional English affair, served in Wales by eastern Europeans. I opted for the black pudding, which our German cousins call 'blood sausage' demonstrating a distinct lack of imagination in the euphemism department. There was much excitement in the car park, where one of the Davies' new Moto Morinis had a pool of oil



beneath it, which turned out to be a 'fake leak' courtesy of Mr. Martin. Meanwhile Rick Parish had a very real problem with his BMW R1200, which absolutely refused to start, in spite of the RAC's best efforts. Then we were off, thundering out into the misty mountains, with Rick looking very cosy sat in the passenger seat of the RAC van. We followed the B4358 over blind crests and round tight bends, with a brief gallop along a section of the A483, before turning off onto a single-track road surrounded by dense woods. We stopped to admire a waterfall, or something similarly scenic, at a place that may have been called Welshpool, and then Tom roared off on his big bright orange KTM and we all followed. I tried to take in the scenery but this route demanded maximum concentration, as predicted by Tom. The road ran like a ribbon along the side of the mountain, covered with loose gravel and occasionally loose sheep too, some of which were being half-heartedly herded by a weary sheep dog. At the summit we stopped again to admire Llyn Briane reservoir, which was incredibly low, especially considering the previous day's rain. It was an amazing site, with the expanse of the waters in the valley, surrounded my mountains and not a hint of human habitation apart from glimpses of the road running around the summit. Tom asked if somebody had a map, which was slightly unsettling, and off we went, skirting the south side of the lake. We passed a group of trail riders, who were completely covered in rich brown Welsh mud and chugged steadily along roads filled with deceptive bends and

treacherously slippery cattle grids and sheep droppings. We were now deep into Welsh Wales and all the road signs were now written in Welsh (don't these people use vowels?). Eventually we descended toward Llandoverly and parked up at the Castle Inn, in the shadow of the village's ruined Norman castle. We were served coffee and scones by a bevvvy of giggling Charlotte Church look-a-likes (and talk-a-likes) who one or two of us (who shall remain nameless and who should know better) attempted to chat up. Suitably refreshed we were about to venture outside when the rain came down in bucket loads.

Having slipped into rain suits and remounted, we roared off. We all passed a gaggle of new BMW HP-2 enduro machines by the level crossing on the way out of town, except for Tony Jakeman, ever the professional marketeer, who stopped for a chat. There was a fast run down the A40, parallel with the railway line, then we turned North West onto the A482 and headed for the Coast. According to my notes, we passed through a 'verdant valley', which sounds even better if said in a Welsh accent. Before we knew it, we were passing University College in Lampeter (the UK's third oldest university) and in the blink of an eye we were out the other side on the A485 and heading for Aberystwyth, lunch and the sea! Then it appeared, causing more than one double take. A sign to Llandewi Brefi, made famous in Little Britain as home to Dafydd Thomas 'the only gay in the village'.



Lunch was at the Plas Antaron, which could best be described as a 1970's themed venue, complete with quiche and pan piped muzak. On the plus side, the staff were very welcoming and the food was very tasty. When we came back out ... it wasn't raining! Heading east on the A4120, Tom suddenly made an apparent wrong turn, heading down what appeared to be a gravel drive. We bumped and bounced after him, crossing a narrow gauge railway line. This belonged to the Vale of Rheidol, which uses the classic Welsh gauge of 1ft 11¾, unlike the Isle of Man's wider 3' tracks, in case you were wondering. We emerged on the shore of a lake at the bottom of a steep incline.

### ***Our Friends Electric***

This brought us to our designated place of interest, the Rheidol Hydro-Electric Scheme. We all had to don hard hats (God love the HSE people) transforming our appearance into delegates at a Bob the Builder convention or possibly failed applicants for a Village People tribute act. It was the last day of the season and Barbara warmly welcomed us, probably because we weren't a party of misbehaving schoolchildren (how little she suspected). I noted lots of facts, some of them interesting.

- The station was built in the 1950's.
- It is at the source of the Severn and Wye rivers
- There is a fish lift at the Cwm Rheidol dam (I kid you not) so that

spawning salmon and sea trout can get up river

When we emerged the rain had abated and we headed back around the shore of the lake then back up the mountain for a gallop to the tea stop at Devil's Bridge. The tea and homemade cakes at the Hafod Arms were enough to satisfy the majority, but not for Tony Jakeman and I, who yomped up the road to catch a glimpse of the last steam train to Aberystwyth. We knew it would cost us 20p that evening, but it was worth every penny. According to legend, the lowest bridge was built by the Devil himself to let a local woman rescue her cow, which had somehow got to the other side of the gorge. Expecting the woman to walk across to get it, his one condition was that he received the soul of the first living creature to cross the bridge. However, he was tricked by the lady who got her pet dog to run across first - thus leaving the Devil with a soul of a dog!

Our last leg was every bit as remarkable in terms of environment as the first. We followed the B4574 under an archway and descended into what can best be described as a post apocalyptic industrial wasteland. This was the result of Cwmystwyth Mine, an open cast operation that had been worked from 1500BC. We climbed back up between barren hills and passed the wreckage of a crashed Yamaha Thunderace, a poignant reminder of the potential for things to go wrong in the bat of an eye. Graham Goodman displayed great restraint by riding past a dead sheep without



stopping to skin it for a replacement seat cover. Having joined the fast and flowing A470 at Rhayader there was a full-scale charge back to the hotel.

This may not have been the best attended Club Run but the bar was positively buzzing that evening with tales of adventures on the Welsh roads and this sense of excitement continued as we sat down to dinner. Nick Jeffrey performed Grace while holding a wad of bank notes, which was certainly unconventional. The menu proved every bit as enticing as the previous night - chicken in peppercorn sauce or blue fin tuna steak for the carnivores or woodland mushroom gnocchi for the herbivores. Chairman Geoff thanked Tom and Nich, while trying to make himself above the racket of some hyperactive infants in the corridor, and noted that the weather had been kind. Certainly we had been spared the previous day's deluge.

### **Quiz Masters**

Greg Elson took the floor for quiz time and demonstrated his worth as a disciple of the teachings of Dawson (Tony, not Les) with some prior assistance from the master. He offered two options, a 'coffee time' and a 'cryptic' quiz. After a tie-breaker Nich Brown won both. How anyone could deduce that a 'controversial dwelling' is a 'bungalow' is a mystery to me, but then this is the

### **What They Rode**

man who informed me that 'unbifocated living' means 'trouser-less' in other words.

Next up was our Sergeant at Arms, Mike Jackson, assisted by his bailiff, Keith Davies. Peter Sheen and Tom Waterer proved to be 'bankers' for his onslaught and notable fines included;

- Wilf Harrison for failing to laugh at the Polish plumber joke
- Gerald Davison for getting soaked en route to the run having tried to convince Mike not to drive
- Peter Sheen for his 'Napoleon haircut'
- Rick Parish for his non-starting BMW and BMW's Tony Jakeman for failing to offer his as a substitute
- Dave Hill for arriving with a pattern part clutch lever on an industry run

Still chuckling we repaired to the bar for a succession of nightcaps.

The rain returned with a vengeance on Sunday as if to remind us how lucky we had been the previous day with its occasional showers, but it didn't matter. We headed back across the border with broad grins and happy memories. I apologise for any errors or omissions, but you can't expect a factual account if you ask a PR man to write the report!





*The Club*
