

# CLUB AUTUMN RUN REPORT

3-5 OCTOBER 2008

STAVERTON PARK, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

At last (*writes Nick Jeffery*) ... having ridden my recently re-built Clubmans Gold Star BSA, complete with full-on RRT2 close-ratio gearbox, clip-ons and rearsets, from home it was a relief to arrive at the De Vere Staverton Park and park up. Mind you I could hardly miss it as the smoke screen left by Club stalwarts Martyn Roberts and Tony Dawson, who had coincidentally attempted to regain their lost youth by bringing those 70s iconic Elsie's (RD LC Yamahas for the uninitiated), was still lingering over the parking area. (Only joking chaps – synthetic oil and van transportation respectively prevented any such environmental pollution).

On entering the establishment I was looking forward to sampling the Health and Fitness Club which was promised by organisers Greg Elson and Nich Brown in the prospectus for the Run. But sadly the proof reader was asleep that day because what I actually chanced on was a Health and Fatness Club – the reason being that the St Johns Ambulance Brigade had decided to have their Autumn Jamboree at the same establishment and, apart from the obligatory oral resuscitation skills, it appears that only the larger sizes of the fairer sex qualify for membership of that august organisation. Anyway, we thought we would be in good hands (not to mention ample bosoms) should any slight inattention give rise to a gravitational incident.

Also promised was a 'comfortable and contemporary stay' – and so it proved to be, although the building itself is hardly likely to make an English Heritage shortlist. No doubt as part of the 'contemporary experience' the usual pretentious house magazine was laid out in my room for my delectation – you know the sort of stuff: all perfect tans, guest slot with Lord Charlie Brocket opining on vintage cars, 'Everyone deserves a little luxury in their life' and 'Expert advice from the editor of Psychologies magazine on how to avoid the blues and feel more positive everyday' set the scene.

Resisting this and not having been able to accommodate my golf clubs on the Goldie I made for the bar to imbibe some numbing fluid to deaden the effects of my ride and so that I could start composing my suggestions to the ergonomic consultant whom BSA hopefully will recruit on their Second Coming. Sadly my suggestions will have to wait another day as the usual Club bonhomie overtook me and it was all too soon that we were being summoned for dinner.

Interesting to observe from the attendees the musical chairs that have taken place since the Ballachulish Run – Steve Callahan of Suzuki now with Honda; David Taylor from BMW to MCIA and about to join Suzuki – plus Guests Miles Taylor from Aprilia, Ben Matthews from Watsonian-Squire, Scott Grimsdall from BMW and ex-Honda man Matthew Stone from Hill House Solutions.

Dinner introduced a new process for extracting money without menaces for kitty collection. Sadly Dennis Bates could not participate on the Run as late illness prevented this but Rick Parish kindly stepped into the breach and suggested that each table could simply collect the appropriate sum and hand it over en bloc. Worked like a charm – but did prevent the usual (good natured) verbal abuse to be vented on the hapless Hon Treas when collecting the cash.

Raffle disposed of and quiz papers handed out a further post-prandial quaff saw us well set up for the next day, promising to include the greatest number of hump back bridges ever traversed on a Club Run and hence requiring well-settled internal organs.

Breakfast was an interesting social observation phenomenon where the Health and Fatness fanatics, queuing in vast numbers for heart attack fodder, came close to deranging the closely-crafted Run time table.

And so for the off. For us oldie enthusiasts, apart from the aforementioned Gold Star, Alan Blake had brought along his lovely Speed Twin and Dan Sager appeared to have fitted false plates to a 1950s Enfield single – until I noticed the all-alloy engine, fuel injection, unit construction etc etc which indicated it had been manufactured on the Indian sub-continent.

Now here your correspondent must fade gently into the background – as did his Gold Star. Despite first-kick starting and only mild clutch abuse for the first 20 mph from each standing start the power faded as compression dropped. Strange, but no smoking, spitting back, overheating, tightened valve clearances or anything else to indicate a problem. Most likely diagnosis was a broken valve spring.

Finally, meeting the local hunt strung out along a narrow, uphill country lane necessitating several stops and gross clutch slip and excess engine revs, I was kindly given a bit of 'LPA' (light pushing assistance) by Norman Hyde, Peter Meek and Graham Goodman but then gave up the unequal struggle and parked up to await the arrival of the RAC van.

This was a whole new social experience, ensconced for the rest of the day in a steel box with Peter Bolton and street-wise patrol Lee, I learned a great deal of Men and Machines. Seriously Peter you must write a book on your experiences.

Now over to co-author Dan Sager as the RAC van route thereafter diverged drastically from the 'official' one. His story overlaps a little ...

**(Here commences Dan Sager)** To paraphrase Winston Churchill (actually it was General Spears who said it originally) "The hardest cross we have to bear is the Cross of St. John." So it was at breakfast on Saturday, with the queue of St. John's Ambulance delegates stretching from the canteen out into the reception area. Logic dictates that a large group of large people will require a large amount of food and I made a mental note to invest in shares for Wall's sausages and Danish bacon. Surprisingly there was no queue for either pastries or fruit juice, so I feasted on croissant and orange juice and tried to convince myself this was a healthy option.

For once riders and machines were not only ready and willing but also able to depart ahead of schedule. Perhaps some of the urgency was due to the fact that the misty drizzle was threatening to turn into proper rain. There was quite an assortment of machines, from state-of-the-art Japanese super-tourers with thumb-operated gears to 1950's British singles and twins with somewhat more rudimentary gearboxes, mounted separately to the main engine. Plus a sight to stir the emotions of any man who was a teenager in the early 1980's – not Bananarama, but a brace of 'Elsies'. The Yamaha RD250LC was a learner-legal machine capable of 100mph, which sparked political outrage and led to legislation restricting novice riders to 125cc machines putting out less than 12 BHP.

I was woken from my reverie by the roar of British singles and a puff of 2-stroke oil (“oi, are you calling my 2-stroke a puff?”) and we were off. If variety is the spice of life then Messrs Elson and Brown had cooked up a veritable vindaloo of roads for us to navigate. Initially we followed a figure-of-eight over narrow and winding lanes that took us deep into the foothills of Warwickshire. Speaking of feet, this county is allegedly the inspiration for Tolkein’s Middle Earth, home to the hairy-footed Hobbits. We travelled through improbably named villages, like Lower Shuckburgh, through Long Itchington and past Radford Semele (home to Alan Halford and Norman Hyde respectively, both of whom have hairy chins – I can’t vouch for their feet) and onto the Fosse Way.

Built by the Romans to link Exeter with Lincoln, although goodness only knows why anyone would need to travel between these two cities, it is the only surviving Roman Road to retain its original name. It may be long and straight but it is by no means boring – there is plenty to keep the enthusiastic rider on his toes. Having passed tantalisingly close to Watsonian-Squire, manufacturers of sidecars since 1912 and one of the few survivors of the British motorcycle industry (if you’ll excuse a gratuitous plug for a client) we turned off the Roman artery near to Stretton on the Fosse onto some distinctly rural roads. As Miles Taylor from Aprilia commented, it’s not often you get a chance to ride on a road with moss growing down the middle.

After a couple of miles we encountered lots of farmers and assorted country folk, many with quads, hanging around hedgerows and looking shifty. This was starting to look like a scene from the film *Deliverance* when a large party of hunters, replete with hacking jackets, came trotting down the road. The sight of plump posh girls in tight jodhpurs bouncing up and down on a pony is a sight to bring joy to any red-blooded Englishman. Alas their sport was cruelly cut short by a motorcyclist, who inadvertently ran over the fleeing fox when it jumped out in front of him. How Wilf Harrison managed to stay on his bike is a mystery to me, but he probably saved the fox from a worse fate.

As we wound our way along the Oxfordshire/Warwickshire border we must have ridden by the mysterious Rollright Stones, which legend has it turn to men and dance around at midnight. Dropping down through Over Norton we passed through the outskirts of Chipping Norton, home to not only Jeremy Clarkson, but also David Dew. They used to make Parker Knoll furniture there too. You don’t get this level of detail from Bill Bryson. Then our coffee stop came into view and not a moment too soon. Ma Larkin’s was an inspired choice – home made cakes and steaming mugs of warm drinks.

With our cockles suitably warmed we revved up and streamed out onto the A361 towards the Cherwell valley, turning off onto the B4031 before Bloxham, where Aston Martins were once made and where Charley Boorman went to school, which is worth remembering if ever you compete in a pub quiz in North Oxfordshire. This really felt like the Heart of England, with roads snaking through hilly countryside and every village steeped in history, like Deddington, with its castle built by William the Conqueror’s brother, Odo.

Crossing the M40 we rode North East into Northamptonshire, past Sulgrave Manor (home to George Washington’s family) and through Canons Ashby, a village of 50 souls with a parish church the size of Westminster Abbey. Then we turned South, running parallel with the A5 briefly, until stopping for fuel in Towcester (pronounced ‘toaster’), where Frank Finch lives. From there it was a swift sprint to Stoke Bruerne and lunch.

On riding into the village I was perplexed to see first a London Routemaster bus and then assorted locals dressed in clothes of the 1940's. As I was riding a Royal Enfield motorcycle ('built like a gun' and second gratuitous plug for a client) I felt very much part of the scene, for once. We had travelled the best part of 100 miles with nothing but a large cake to sustain us since breakfast, so fish and chips, followed by sherry trifle, was most welcome and helped to maintain the waistline. Emerging from the pub it became apparent that (a) we were beside the Grand Union Canal, which runs for 137 miles connecting London to Birmingham, and (b) were in a time warp. Apparently Stoke Bruerne is popular with Gongoozlers, people who enjoy watching activity on the canals, and for some unspecified reason they had all dressed in a Second World War theme. "I've just seen Arthur Lowe" muttered BMW PR man Scott Grimdsall and he had a point. At which point we left.

No record of this Club Run would be complete without mention of the hump back bridges, which were capable of launching 300 kilos of motorcycle and rider into mid-air with relative ease. Heading North West, we seemed to hit one of these bridges every 500 yards, which was slightly unsettling after a large lunch. At Pattishall we reconnected with A5, AKA Watling Street, another fine straight Roman road, subsequently improved by Thomas Telford (whose magnificent Aqueduct we crossed on Peter Sheen's Run in Llangollen). As we sprinted northwards we passed through the Watford Gap, which engineers from the Romans onwards have found it to be a natural route connecting the North and South of the country. Did I hear Tony Dawson cheer at this point?

Leaving at the junction of the A5/M1/M45 we were back on country roads again, crossing the A14 and then turning west near Stanford Hall, which hosts classic motorcycle events. Having briefly flirted with the A5 we went south, over the M6 and arrived at Easenhall, home to the BEN charity and our tea stop. Here we were greeted by a town crier. Why anyone would wish to dress in 18<sup>th</sup> century costume and shout a great deal is a mystery to me, perhaps it's what people with Tourette's Syndrome do when they reach a certain age? Also present was a group of children, which was charming, but slightly surprising as this was supposed to be sheltered accommodation for retired car salesmen (of whom there was no sign). Mention must be made of the tea and cakes, which were splendid. A cheque was presented to BEN in thanks for their hospitality and we were off again. The blustery winds had kept the rain at bay and we had a gentle jog back to the hotel ahead of us.

Nearing to Brinklow village something unexpected happened. As we approached a sharp left hand bend I noticed brake lights coming on, so I slowed down and took the corner with caution. As I rounded the apex I saw Tony Jakeman sat upright on the grass verge on the opposite side of the road and a Suzuki motorcycle in the ditch. Incredibly both rider and bike were capable of functioning soon after - a testament to Suzuki's build quality and Tony's resilience. There was a collective sigh of relief and, with the thought that if it could happen to Mr. Jakeman it could happen to any of us, we resumed our journey.

Soon we were back in the swing, picking up speed down the Fosse Way, departing in a South Easterly direction for the last leg back to the hotel. This took us past Draycote Water, a reservoir that is by far the largest expanse of water in Warwickshire, holding up to 5,000 million imperial gallons of water. We were back at the hotel shortly after 5.00pm. It had been a long day and we'd covered many miles for an English Club Run, but there had been a fine variety of roads and we'd passed through many fascinating places. The blustery wind may have buffeted us but it had kept the rain at bay and we'd have plenty to talk about over dinner.

## ***Back to Nick Jeffery***

### Technical Postscript

Who rode what:

Andrew Smith	Yamaha R1
David Martin	Yamaha MT-01
Bob McMillan	Honda CBR1300S
Tony Dawson	Yamaha RD350LC
Maurice Knight	BMW R850R
Nick Jeffery	BSA Gold Star DB32 Clubmans
Peter Meek	Yamaha Diversion 900
Martyn Roberts	Yamaha RD250LC
Wilf Harrison	Honda CB500
Steve Callahan	Honda CB1300S
Keith Davies	Yamaha FJR1300
Norman Hyde	Triumph Bonneville
Rick Parish	BMW R1200RT
Matt Stone	Yamaha FZ1 Fazer
Nick Hopkins	Norton Commando Fastback
Graham Goodman	BMW R1150GS
Alan Halford	Suzuki SV650
Dan Sager	Royal Enfield Electra 500 EFI
Ben Matthews	Yamaha XJR1300
David Dew	Honda CBF1000
Martin Lambert	Kawasaki ZZR1400
Tony Jakeman	BMW K1200R
Greg Elson	Suzuki SV650
David Taylor	Suzuki Bandit 1250
Graham Matcham	Yamaha Fazer 1000
Scott Grimsdall	BMW R1200GS Adventure
Matthew Stone	Suzuki Bandit 1250
Miles Taylor	Aprilia Tuono
Alan Blake	Triumph Speed Twin
Nich Brown	BMW R80RT
Peter Sheen	Grinall Scorpion BMW
Gerald Davison	Triumph Sprint

POSTSCRIPT: For those faintly interested in the demise of my Gold Star I finally summoned the energy to remove the cylinder head. (For those unfamiliar with the design, two of the head bolts are almost totally inaccessible and require infinite patience, curiously bent spanners and a selection of appropriate expletives to aid removal.) Having done so I discovered that the inner exhaust valve spring had indeed broken, explaining the loss of compression and lack of performance. Hopefully it will soon be restored to health.

Nick Jeffery and Dan Sager  
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