

CLUB RUN REPORT

Spring 2008

Ballachulish

Choices, choices, choices! So well organised was the Spring Run at Ballachulish that intended participants were faced with a panoply of choices – to ride to the event independently; to borrow a bike from a choice of four venues; to stay at Kirkby Lonsdale on the way up; to have the liveried flunkey ride a loan bike to the start and pick it up afterwards (and perhaps, in the case of inclement weather, take it over during the Run – isn't that what Edward Turner was reputed to do?).

Anyway, having considered the options, and not being deterred by what turned out to be the somewhat disingenuous caveat in the calling notice sent out by co-organisers David Martin and Andrew Smith that 'This run will be the longest run ever, slightly over the 220 miles of the Fort William run,' the decision was made: We (that is my Guest, Peter Vallis, Peter Meek, Ray Battersby and his Guest, James Phillips) would assemble chez moi on the Thursday morning and have a leisurely ride northwards in the beautiful spring weather to end up at Kirkby on the Thursday night.

Then of course yet further choices to make – which route to adopt. Some in the party favoured the Westerly route, up through the Cotswolds and Vale of Evesham then meandering through Cheshire, albeit rudely interrupted on leaving that county by that city unfortunate enough to be the recipient of both Boris Johnson's maladroitness and to be deemed the Capital of Culture – Liverpool; another route, proposed by

Peter Meek, was the 'Middle Way'. Peter, having recently discovered the technology known as 'electronic mail', has surpassed himself by a rapid conversion to the joys of satnavery (despite previous scorn) and associated route planning opportunities. And the Middle Way won – a lovely route, via A5 and the Peak District avoiding motorways (but not, sadly, speed cameras). All that was needed now was fine weather and you can imagine the rest.

So what should have been an ethereal and pulchritudinous experience rapidly converted itself to a soggy splash, the visibility conditions of which were evidenced by Group Leader Peter Meek's reaction when, late morning, I caught up with him at a traffic stop. I suggested that we might stop for lunch at the amply signed 'TruckStop Bikers Welcome' a mile or two back down the road. 'What TruckStop' was Peter's response, but I was not hallucinating, we retraced our wheeltracks and were indeed welcomed royally in a traditional 'greasy spoon'. Here Peter Vallis demonstrated his encyclopaedic knowledge of such establishments and associated transport operations through his former business life and regaled us with 'fifty ways to fiddle your employer of fuel and how to stop them'.

Continuing northwards young Garmin did a cracking job and we emerged onto the A6 via country roads just down the road from the 'Whoop Hall'. Pulling into the bike park a quick

review of the bikes there showed a healthy-sized group had already arrived and, re-discovering the medicinal properties of externally applied hot fluids and internally applied cold ones, soon had us enjoying convivial company followed by a great meal.

Friday dawned and, filling up just north of Kirkby, tales of fuel shortages heading northwards because of a threatened refinery strike in Scotland prayed on our minds. As it turned out we experienced no problems whatsoever on the Run, which must have been a great relief to co-organisers Andrew and Dave and was no doubt in part due to their excellent recces and communications with the hosting garages. The Run also successfully trialled a new fuel payment system whereby the cost of fuel on the run was included in the Run price so that individual payments did not have to be made with all the associated delays.

The first part of the run northward was pure motorway and I much admired the ability of leader Dave to keep his FJR down to legal speeds. We then reached Glasgow and had a scenic (and, dare I say it, I suspect largely unnecessary) tour of congested city streets with what might be called the 'optional despatch marker system' in operation. In other words, some did, some did not – and the result was predictable. Having waited half an hour for 'Tail-end-Charlie' to arrive, and attempting to communicate with him by mobile – wot no Bluetooth? – we gave up and, picking up odd stragglers, carried on past Loch Lomond to the 'very nice lunch venue' promised by the organisers.

This turned out to be the 'Loch Fyne Oyster Bar'. 'A company owned and run by its employees' according to the bespoke menu, and it showed with delicious food and excellent service as well as being greeted by long-serving Glaswegian Honda dealer Victor

Devine (which, for those of an anorakish tendency, is identified by its website as originally being established as Weddell and Devine in 1948 and a Honda dealer since 1970).

All this time of course it was either raining, had just been raining or was looking as if it was about to start raining, a state of affairs contemplated by the organisers with a choice of after-lunch routes – 69 or 100 miles. Being a glutton for punishment the longer route around the coast via Ardrishaig and Lochgilphead held appeal, despite the weather, and what a great route it was too, although to many others the lure of bath and booze was clearly greater.

And so to our destination, the Ballachulish Hotel, beautifully located at the side of Loch Linnhe and Loch Leven and, with exclusive use and very welcoming hosts, a superb choice. A characterful hotel, and particularly appreciated under this heading was the ability of Scottish hotel modernisers to fit a 6'6" long bath into a 5'6" long bathroom – by utilising the former fireplace in which to recess the bath regardless of the head-hitting potential for the occupant when elevating from the prone position.

Having narrowly escaped knocking myself unconscious the revival technique worked again and soon I was experiencing the bonhomie, banter and opportunity to improve my knowledge of Central European languages that make such events so enjoyable.

Dinner was called and with it the proud announcement that the run would comprise a record 54 participants, albeit that Alan Blake and Peter Sheen had (very sensibly) decided to be conducted in roofed-transport. Raffle disposed of and quiz papers issued we repaired again to the bar, all in the interests of evaluating whether the Nanny State's figures for

the Recommended Daily Allowance of alcohol units have any foundation in fact.

An early (by Club terms) start was called for and 8.30 Saturday morning saw lined up outside what appeared to be every Moto Morini made since Maurizio Morini repurchased the family jewels and started production of a range of superb vee-twins together with most of Yamaha's world-wide Press Fleet. The Club owes a huge debt of gratitude to such supportive member companies.

A good job Yamaha did have a few 'spares' as Industry Head Honcho David Taylor was able to avail himself of an R1, his R1200 GS BMW having failed to function even before the off.

Need you ask what the weather was like? Well, not wet for 100% of the time, but not far off in the morning, somewhat better as the day progressed. This didn't detract from the pleasure of riding on the superb roads selected for our delectation but certainly prevented us being able to see the wonderful views and being able to appreciate all the majestic settings this terrain gives.

I was interested to hear Suzuki's guest, their demon hard-riding World Superbike winner, former multi-British Superbike Champion and GP-rider John Reynolds, expressing his trepidation at the forthcoming day's riding so long ago was it that he rode on the road. Mind you he had chosen that docile tourer, the GSX-R1000, for his re-baptism. But how nice to see him getting progressively more attuned as the day went on to the vagaries of erratic traffic, diesel spills, overbanding, gravel and all the other joys of modern traffic conditions. And what an ambassador for Suzuki he is too – it even prompted me to buy his autobiog which I will unashamedly plug (John Reynolds: The Autobiography, by John Reynolds with

Jason McLean, Haynes, ISBN 1 84425 355 4 – recommended reading if you want to know what drives such a guy). It's easy to forget just how alien the two cultures of road riding and road racing are.

Nice too to see Ben Matthews, Nick Palmer and Tim Maccabee (of importers/manufacturers Watsonian-Squire/Royal Enfield, Suzuki and Ducati respectively) appearing for the first time and all showing by their riding abilities that motorcycles are more than just a day job to them.

Well, after starting off I would have liked to say what the scenery en route was like – but I couldn't see it so I'll have to rely on Scottish Tourist Board publicity and past experience to describe it: in a word, superb. Glencoe, Rannoch Moor and Tyndrum passed in the mist till we turned east at Crianlarich along Loch Earn and then up the drive of the stately home where the Hilton Hotel at Dunkeld is based for our coffee stop (confusingly described as our tea stop on our route planner – but perhaps this was merely to deflect our thoughts from the fact there was no tea stop!). This allowed us to enter the genteel world of hunting/shooting/Tayside-fishing, but again we were received with traditional Scottish hospitality, embellished with the poshest washing facilities I can recollect on a Club run.

We then turned northwards at Blairgowrie on the A93 via Braemar and off on the whoops and swoops past Cock Bridge and Tomintoul. At least by now and during the afternoon the weather improved such that we could at last see some of the magnificent scenery and enjoy superb motorcycling with dry roads.

Then in to Aviemore, a busy highland town and a Club luncheon first although, given the culinary tastes of the organisers, a hardly surprising one. Leaving our bikes ranged along the main street like

horses in a cowboy Western here again reserved for our exclusive delectation was a complete curry house, imaginatively entitled 'The Taste of India'. A well-chosen and ample selection of varying viscosities and mixture strengths followed which, if we had spent the afternoon there, no doubt we would have consumed in full.

Venturing yet further north in the direction of Inverness we were then routed back south-westerly not via the 'main road' along Loch Ness but some wonderful traffic-free roads to hit Fort Augustus. From there along the 'Most Dangerous Road in Scotland' – the A82 – mixing it with the traffic down to Fort William and thence back to base to be greeted by hot punch and to prepare for the evening's entertainment.

All the while Jim O'Neill, our hard-working RAC patrol support, had his work cut out with such amusements as ailing Ducati electronics and a punctured tyre on Geoff Selvidge's Yamaha (quiz night impress-your-friends fact – punctures are more likely to occur in wet weather as the water lubricates the entry of the penetrating medium). Sadly, not having a portable remoulding plant in his van, he could do nothing for guest Trevor Flint's bald-as-a-coot rear tyre on his ZX9, no doubt caused by excessive wheelspin over the course of the morning.

After risking the head-bashing bath again I joined the assembled throng in the lounge where we were then regaled with a multi-media show hosted by a bagpipe-wielding be-kilted raconteur and comprising history lesson, music performance, recitation of bloodthirsty Glencoe deeds of Campbells against MacDonalds and a stirring dance display by two nubile sword-toting maidens.

Then in the middle of it the star guest arrived - Robert the Bruce himself, an imposing hirsute figure

sporting a Tam o'Shanter, Highland Tweed jacket (but alas no kilt). A slight give-away was the Club tie sported by the unexpected arrival who transpired to be Norman Hyde sporting headgear no doubt worn by him when wishing to remain anonymous when attending Scottish football matches. How on earth he and the majority of the party managed to keep a straight face during this is a mystery.

To the swirl of the pipes off in to dinner and another delicious meal incorporating haggis and salmon intermingled with Quizmaster Tony Dawson's esoteric quiz responses. Then a masterly performance by Sergeant-at-Arms, Martin Lambert, ably assisted by Dan Sager collecting in the money. Martin revealed his spare-time job as a Special Constable by sporting his work headgear although fortunately for the miscreants he saved Taser and truncheon for a future occasion.

A further 'quick whip' gathered funds for the Club which, with the generosity of the Hotel, were raffled to provide a weekend for two at the hotel, won by Alan Halford.

The dire secret was then revealed – it was not 'just over 220 miles' we had covered, but well over 300! This, despite the foul weather, covered with no problems at all and a new Club record being set.

So records all round – greatest number attending, greatest mileage clocked up, perfect organisation, wettest run ever (or was it – I remember a very wet French run, though no doubt other members whose brains are less addled than mine have better recall.)

It just remains to thank David and Andrew for their fantastic efforts – just thinking about the planning mileage they must have done makes me come over all weak. Then not forgetting the other supporting cast for

what was a much more complex task than the normal Run – Greg Elson for once again providing R.A.C. cover in the form of Jim O’Neil, Dennis Bates (who sadly could not attend but performed his admin tasks with his usual impeccable conscientiousness), Rick Parish, who coped with sums

bordering on the ridiculous and whose financial notes are something to behold, and Graham Goodman for his constant good Secretaryship. We are fortunate indeed to have such selfless individuals.

Nick Jeffery. May 2008.

Photos: David O’Neil, David Dew, Graham Goodman.

Technical Postscript - Who rode what:

Andrew Smith	Yamaha R1
Tim Maccabee	Ducati ST3S
David Martin	Yamaha FJR1300
Jonathan Martin	Yamaha R1
Adam Busby	Kawasaki ZX9
Bob McMillan	Honda CBF1000
Tony Dawson	Yamaha Fazer 1000
Keith Blair	BMW K75RT
Maurice Knight	BMW R850R
Nick Jeffery	Yamaha FZ6 S2
Peter Vallis	Yamaha FJR1300
Peter Meek	Yamaha Diversion 900
Ian Kerr	Suzuki Bandit GT 1250S
Martyn Roberts	Yamaha TDM900
Frank Finch	Honda VTR1000 SP1
Andrew Tempest	Yamaha XJR1300
Tim Albone	BMW R1200GSAdv.
Wilf Harrison	Honda CB500
Steve Mayle	Yamaha YZF750R
Steve Callahan	Suzuki GSX-R750
John Reynolds	Suzuki GSX-R1000
Nick Palmer	Suzuki V-Strom DL1000
David O’Neill	BMW R1200GS
Paul Peters	Yamaha TRX850
Keith Davies	Moto Morini Corsaro Avio
Richard Davies	Moto Morini Corsaro 1200 Veloce
Norman Hyde	Triumph Bonneville
Phil MacDonald	Moto Guzzi V11 Sport
Rick Parish	BMW R1200RT
Matt Stone	Yamaha FZ6 Fazer
Nick Hopkins	Norton Commando Fastback
Graham Goodman	BMW R1150GS
Alan Halford	Suzuki SV650
Trevor Flint	Kawasaki ZX9R
Dan Sager	Moto Morini 9½
Ben Matthews	Moto Morini Corsaro 1200
Geoff Travell	Suzuki GSX-R 750
Ray Battersby	BMW R850R
James Phillips	Triumph 955i

David Dew	Honda VFR800
Martin Lambert	Kawasaki ZZR1400
Chris Simons	Kawasaki ZZR1400
Tony Jakeman	BMW K1200GT
Dave Plummer	Ducati 916
Luke Plummer	Suzuki GSX-R 600
Mark Hopkins	Ducati 748
Greg Elson	Yamaha XJR1300
David Taylor	Yamaha R1 (BMW R1200GS DNS)
Tom Waterer	KTM 990 Adventure
Craig Carey-Clinch	BMW R1200GS
Graham Matcham	Yamaha Fazer 1000
Geoff Selvidge	Yamaha FJR1300AS

Interesting that no less than 15 bikes, by my straw poll, were equipped with ABS - a useful appendage given the weather conditions - and, no doubt heeding the organisers' advice that machines of a more vintage tendency were probably not a wise choice, there were no single-cylinder bikes at all.