

## THE CLUB 25TH ANNIVERSARY RUN - NORTH DEVON

### A PERSONAL VIEW

Part of the enjoyment of the Club Run is that pleasurable anticipation of getting together with old friends, and enjoying some really good motor cycling in company.

I was lucky enough to have arranged to come down with Martin Roberts, of Triumph, and after a departure initially delayed by the need to re-arrange the trailer to take two big bikes, I found myself enjoying a journey that slipped past in deep conversation with the distance and passage of time hardly being noticed.

The location of the 25th Anniversary Run was the Manor House Hotel, about two miles to the west of Okehampton, and about a mile to the north of the edge of Dartmoor.

This somewhat rambling establishment specialises in catering for families on holiday, and we were sharing with groups of sweatily enthusiastic exercisers, who should have, but failed to make us feel guilty in any way about our powered transport. Indeed, the more keep-fit minded Club members had every opportunity to get exercise, either trying to find their rooms, or in the Exercise Room or swimming pool.

Friday night passed, as usual, with a good meal, followed by a briefing for the Run and some vintage videos.

Anticipation is often an uneasy bedfellow, and as a result I found myself waking at some ungodly hour, and as sleep would not return I went to the window to check that it wasn't raining. Drawing the curtains, the situation was worse! There was no view! A thick, dank, West Country mist encapsulated the countryside. God knows why I decided to get up and go out for a walk. It was with the greatest relief that 20 minutes later I witnessed the watery orb of the sun begin to break through the mist and by the time we were assembling for breakfast, the mist was rapidly burning off.

Some 30-odd machines, followed by two cars and an RAC patrolman on a motor cycle set off in a mile long column towards Okehampton at precisely 9 a.m. It wasn't until the Run was over that I discovered that the first 'incident' had already taken place, when our unfortunate Chairman had kissed the tarmac in the Hotel car park, shortly followed by an immaculate Square Four piloted by Bert Thorn. This was definitely a portent of things to come, as ten minutes later, at our fuel stop on the outskirts of Okehampton, a BMW crunched to the deck while waiting to be re-fuelled.

On leaving the petrol station, the Run returned to the centre of Okehampton, and began climbing up on to the Dartmoor 'ring road'.

The 'ring road' is reached by climbing steeply up out of Okehampton, over the old southern region line to Plymouth, now truncated at Meldon Quarry, passed Okehampton army camp then through gates on to the Dartmoor ranges and across a ford, where the 'ring road' proper starts. The 'ring road' itself is single track road, that loops out across Dartmoor ranges about 6 miles into the Moor, with spectacular views of the Tors and this last southern wilderness on all sides.

Halfway round the 'ring road' is a cobbled ford with tarmac approaches, now breaking up. This ford had been a cause of concern to Nick Jeffrey and myself on our reconnaissance run. However, on balance, we agreed that it should be included, in view of the spectacular views afforded from the rest of the 'ring road'. Rider after rider approached and negotiated the ford with varying degrees of confidence. The Aspencade came through in style piloted by Bob McMillan, Mike Reilly treated us to his expertise, while others less confident and with less expertise, successfully negotiated the obstacle. The unfortunate Alan Blake confidently approached the ford on his BMW, but on exiting selected the wrong line, stalled the machine and we had our third faller of the morning. Reassembling after the ford crossing, we set off to the far end of the 'ring road' where the stunning views were responsible for the downfall of our guest of honour, who slid to earth with aristocratic aplomb. In the ensuing traffic jam, the unfortunate Tony Tranter, who is blessed with short stature, put his foot down only to find that the ground wasn't beneath it, and the 25th Anniversary Run claimed its fifth victim.

Blissfully unaware of these dramas at the head of the column, Graham Goodman and I stopped, perplexed, to find nobody behind us. This seemed somewhat odd, as only half a mile earlier we had been able to look down from a hill over a column of motor cyclists stretching back for over a mile of twisting Dartmoor road. It was several minutes before following riders appeared to explain the carnage wrought by the spectacular scenery.

The next section of the Run was down from the 'ring road', through Okehampton and on along the A30 to Whiddon Down and thence through the lanes to Fingle Bridge, and the coffee stop at the Anglers Rest.

Fingle Bridge is an Exeter Trials Section and consists of a steep, unmade zig-zag track up the side of an almost alpine valley, complete with pine forest. Perhaps unwisely, I encouraged Geoff Clew and Dennis Bates to take their respective BSA B32 and AJS Trials Bikes up the track. Both managed in fine style, but Geoff became the Run's sixth victim on the way down. Needless to say, the attractions of such a section proved irresistible to some members, and I was a privileged witness to Mike Jackson and Nick Hopkins storming up through the tricky bends on a Yamaha V Max and BMW K75 respectively. Mike Reilly overlooking the passage of years, completed the upward trip feet up, but found that the years had caught up with him on the return journey.

Richard Negus of Norton, who had been delayed the night before, managed to catch up with us at Fingle, and we were able to enjoy some fast motor cycling between Whiddon Down and North Tawton. Then it was off along the A.3072 and then right at Exborne, where half the village turned out to see the assembled multitude of bikes, we turned north on the B.3217. Thence through Monkokehampton towards Idesley and our next crisis! For, on checking my mirrors on the uphill approach to Idesley, I was alone! I stopped, waited, but no-one appeared. I had thus become the first, and hopefully the only Run organiser to lose his entire Run! Returning half a mile, I found a small group of perplexed members, consisting of Graham Goodman who had been immediately behind me, and the last two or three members in the column plus the cars. Graham explained that inexplicably the man following him, had led virtually the entire column down a turning to the right. Twenty minutes later, one by one, the lost sheep began to return.

It appeared that confusion was caused by myself riding with my right indicator going, and that one of the following riders, held up by a bus in Monkokehampton, had failed to see Graham Goodman, which resulted in that nameless person disappearing up a lane with virtually the entire column behind him. Much as I like indicators, they do have their drawbacks!

Further on, one of our number failed to station himself at a junction, resulting in several riders overshooting a turning near Winkley Radar Station. Nonetheless, these riders quickly rejoined the column. This section of lanes, between the radar station, and the valley where the A377 which runs from Exeter to Barnstaple, was the one section which I was unsure of. Needless to say, on leaving the two-way lane to Burrington, and confidently diving off down a single track lane, I was confronted by an unexpected 'T' junction. Determined to show no lack of confidence in my navigation, I turned left, and thence followed four miles of single track and very gravelly lane. While negotiating this lane, we were unexpectedly confronted by a car and I almost found myself sprawled across the bonnet. However, thanks to the inherent stability of the Transalp, there was no serious incident. How the car managed to pass the Bob MacMillan Aspencade only those in the immediate area know.

On final arrival at the Exeter Inn at Chittlehamhold, we enjoyed an excellent lunch, pictures were taken, and I took the opportunity to swop the Transalp for a Honda XBR. I had previously ridden the XBR briefly after the Malborough Run and had not been very impressed. It was therefore with some surprise I found myself revelling in the XBR's character, for here on the West Country by-roads, the XBR is completely in its element. With virtually no power band and a lovely close ratio gearbox, it was a positive joy to ride briskly up the Taw Valley road towards South Malton. Just before this small market town, we turned off on to the B.3227 and then right towards Cobberton and the Military Vehicles Museum, which was to be our visit of the day.

The Museum at Cobberton, started as one man's hobby which outgrew itself and became a Museum. The proprietor started collecting military vehicles, and now, not only has motor cycles, bicycles and soft skin vehicles, but also a number of tanks. Included among the latter are a British Churchill, an American Sherman and a Russian T.34. The Sherman was rescued from an army range, and is thus riddled with shell holes.

From Cobberton we returned to the B.3227, crossed the A.377 at UMBERLEY and set off towards Great Torrington. It was on this piece of road with its two spectacular dives, that I was able to exploit the performance of the XBR to its best. Through the fast twisting bends of the Torrington road, and then plunging down into the spectacular valleys, the XBR was completely at home. However, every time I glanced in the machine's mirrors, they were filled by the shape of Bob McMillan's Aspencade. Bob's pursuit of the XBR spoke volumes for his precision and expertise, gained from the hard school of police motor cycle instruction.

Great Torrington saw a further embarrassment for the organiser, when he overshot the turning to the town centre. The resulting perplexed expressions on the faces of those in the second half of the column, were worth it all as the first half went past. However, there were no further incidents, as we parked our machines in the car park at the top of the spectacular escarpment which plunges 600 ft. to the Torridge valley.

After a cream tea at 'Rebeccas' we set off on the final stage of the Run, again the opportunity was taken to swap machines, this time with Geoff Nicholl of Honda, who took over the XBR, and in return loaned me his 600 Revere.

This is another machine which is at its best on fast twisting roads, such as those we enjoyed between Torrington and Stokes Cross. My only criticism of the machine would be that the distance between the footrests and seat is very short, resulting in a rather cramped riding position.

From Stokes Cross the route ran cross country through Black Torrington, then left on to the A.3072 to High Hampton, and right across Graddon Moor to North Lew. North Lew is an ancient Saxon village, and still retains its original layout with a defensive square in the centre, into which the local farmers could drive their cattle and women, against rape and pillage by marauding Vikings!

From North Lew, it was a short step to Bogtown (of all names), thence Ashbury and return via Thorndon Cross to the Manor House at Fowley Down.

While there is always a sense of anti-climax at the end of a run, there remains the opportunity to ride other machines before supper, then the evening dinner, and that wonderful companionship that we are privileged to enjoy as members of the Club.

So, at the end of a Run which saw a record number of tumbles, and an organiser who lost his entire Run, are there any lessons to be learned? Yes, certainly.

First, avoid too many single track lanes with high hedges, also loose surfaces.

Secondly, the inclusion of some quicker motor cycling, can only be accommodated at the cost of some additional stops.