

Peter Sheen 1928 – 2020 R.I.P.
Member of The Club since 1967



A Gentleman....Friend....and so much more

A remarkable Gentleman sparks many memories.

It had been a wonderful summer and Peter telephoned me to see if I was attending a motor cycle event at Goodwood and if so, would I like to join him. He would pick me up at a well known Hotel just outside Croydon at about 9.30 am. I duly arrived early so ordered a coffee and sat on the terrace overlooking the spacious Lawn. The next thing that happened was a Helicopter landing in front of me!! Out jumped Peter, “Morning Maurice lovely morning “. As though he had just arrived in a 4 door saloon!

That was Peter always full of surprises. ***Maurice Knight***

Recollections of one of the UK motorcycle industry's special people. We first met at the very beginning of 70's when he worked for Shell and I was a young manager at Honda UK. At the time I was looking for technical support from an oil company when setting up Honda's Five Star Service programme. His

immediate enthusiasm for what I wanted to achieve was typical of everything that Peter became involved with. Even the first serious meeting between our companies - I was a bit taken aback when about 10 people from Shell turned up at Chiswick to meet just myself and one other! It was typical of Peter's commitment that he was very determined to get every department in Shell very thoroughly onboard and in those days they did seem to employ a very large number of people!

It was the beginning of a long relationship between Honda UK and Shell Oils, although later when I wanted to introduce a range of Honda branded lubricants, mainly to ensure availability of 10/40 engine oil at a time when the market was still wedded to 20/50, despite Peter's strenuous efforts Shell turned me down as did all other major oil companies who saw it as the thin edge of a wedge. This didn't affect our friendship or other commercial links and when in I started Honda Britain Racing in 1976 it was helped by significant sponsorship of all our sporting activities by Shell organised by Peter.

Peter was already a very active member of 'The Club' when I met him and keen that I should join. At that time it was still dominated by what remained of the British motorcycle industry and I think he met quite some opposition to the very idea of introducing someone representing the fast growing Japanese presence in the UK. Of course Peter overcame that and in 1973 I was delighted that he proposed my membership to 'The Club'. Ironically, it was seconded I believe by Chris Warner of Filtrate Oils who I had eventually turned to for my Honda Lubricants who also became a good friend.

My close friendship with Peter continued through no-end of industry and sporting events and of course 'The Club' until the early 80's when I found myself leading the restructuring of the MCIA. It was becoming a dark period for the entire motorcycle industry with increasing friction with the government and facing the prospect of licence restrictions and compulsory training. I found the industry body quite antediluvian and as the largest contributor of funds decided that the old 'Council' structure had to go. Also, after a period of having senior executives who neither rode nor knew about motorcycling I was convinced that above all else we needed someone with the right passion for what we were trying to do, the organisational ability to get things done and a safe pair of hands to boot. The result was we replaced the totally ineffective 'Council' with a small board of directors made up of executives of the core companies who contributed the funds to the association and Peter was the obvious choice to join as Director-General. We then set about producing through Peter a blueprint for the future of industry entitled 'The Way Forward' which set out (rather late-in-the-day) a number of initiatives to enhance the industry's prospects. Some people might have seen the job a something of a poison chalice but not Peter who threw himself into the role with his usual

enthusiasm and optimism. In the circumstances we could not have chosen a better person to represent our industry at a very difficult time.

I remember Peter as a man of great charm, integrity, humour and energetic enthusiasm for all that he became involved with including 'The Club' for which he organised so much. A truly very nice bloke. **Gerald Davison**

That is, indeed, very sad news. I'm sure he will be missed, by everyone who knew him.

I would certainly join the hearse for a memorial ride if that can be achieved.
Geoff Selvidge

Such sad news in these already troubled times. Peter was particularly kind to me when I first joined the Club. After the first dinner he took off his Club tie and gave it to me so I would not be fined in the future. A very thoughtful man, whose death is a great loss to us all. If it is possible to be part of accompanying the Hearse, I would like to show my respects. **Greg Elson**

End of an era... the people we lean on and rely on the most will be missed the most. Peter was in that category.

David Martin

The next time I met Peter was in April 1986 was when I joined the MCI. Peter had been appointed “Director General” (DG) of the MCI about eighteen months earlier when the Association was deep in financial doldrums. Effectively the Motorcycle Association (MCA) was bankrupt and had had to sell off the annual Motorcycle Show to Earls Court. The MCA was thus on financial life support courtesy of the four Japanese importers. A new MCA CEO had been appointed but turned the job down at the last minute. However, Peter who was an MCA director representing Shell, was approached by a couple of his fellow directors to take up the challenge of turning the Association’s fortunes around at a time when the motorcycle market was still contracting alarmingly. Peter was an expert at building positive relationships with the Association’s directors and “keeping them on board”.

An anecdote from his early days at Starley House; Peter had presented an annual budget to the MCA’s Board, only to have it savaged by the Directors on the basis that he must have “stuffed it” with extra items, perhaps because that was what they did. He hadn’t. His response was subtle, but appealed to the natures of the directors concerned. Each of the Association’s interest groups was given its own budget and individual directors were given responsibility for those budgets. No more savaging of the MCA’s budgets! Well done Peter.

Thinking back to his days as “DG”, I recall him being a fountain of ideas that he wanted developed. The key skill for his staff was to identify those that he was really

serious about! Life was never dull! Peter saw the MCA as the “Industry HQ” and as a research centre particularly for motorcycle safety. In his time there was the “Passport to Motorcycling Safety”, a coupon for which went out to each provisional licence holder (car and motorcycle). Then there was the “Characteristics of Urban Motorcycle Accidents” report which he lent the MCA’s support to. This showed that in the majority of accidents the riders were the victims rather than the transgressors.

Then there was the “motorcycle leg protectors (LPs)” crisis, when Peter Bottomley became convinced the leg protection concept devised by the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) should be made mandatory. He proposed that the police should trial machines fitted with TRL spec. LPs. My recollection is that the MCA advised the police of the industry’s evidence that the LPs were counterproductive. In the middle of a Board meeting at Starley House, Peter’s rather flustered secretary appeared with a message that “the Minister is on the phone and demands to speak to you immediately”. Peter coolly reappeared a few minutes later to advise the meeting the Mr. Bottomley was “not happy”. A series of rather tense meetings between Mr. Bottomley and the CEOs of the four Japanese importers ensued. Had TRL LPs been made mandatory the major manufacturers would have had little option but to abandon the UK market. Those were the stakes being played for by Peter and his team.

Peter loved the TT and one of his master strokes was to persuade the MCA/I’s directors to hold the June Board meeting at the Golf Links Hotel in the Isle of Man during TT week. Hence, one of the pleasures of working for the MCA/I was the annual trip to the Island. Peter had excellent relations with the Minister for Tourism and the Association enjoyed a good working relationship with his department.

One of Peter’s greatest successes was the buyback of the Motorcycle Show from Earl’s Court. The Show, ultimately relocated to the NEC in Birmingham became, for a number of years, the cash cow for the MCI’s activities on behalf of the industry.

Turning for a moment to the Club, an organisation to which he devoted a huge amount of time and energy to. He was a great Run organiser and probably holds the record for the number of Runs arranged. His attention to detail was remarkable, as the “Notes for Run Organisers” attests. Would anyone else have thought reminding organisers to set off to the west and return riding east if possible?

One or two other Peter and Club anecdotes:

- Peter loved the latest thing who can remember his “acid worms” riding jeans?

- I recall, to my shame, encouraging Peter to descend a horribly steep green lane near the Tarr Steps on Exmoor. He was riding his monstrous Paris Dakar Honda XL 650. His skills met the challenge! Why on earth were we there?

Other exploits:

Another of Peter's exploits was riding to the Elephant Rally on an Ariel Pixie. The BSA Beagle would have been a challenge but a 50cc Pixie!

Peter was commissioned into the RAF just after the war and posted to an Avro Anson squadron. His CO had a Spitfire as his personal "communications" airplane, and offered the young Peter Sheen the opportunity of a flight in it. Imagine, you are used to driving a Morris Minor and you are offered the chance to drive Stirling Moss's Vanwall. It speaks volumes of Peter's guts that he took up the offer and of his flying skills that he landed the beast successfully with no previous experience.

Another anecdote: the MCI organised an "international marketing conference" for the International Motorcycle Manufacturers Association (IMMA). It was customary to arrange some form of evening entertainment on these occasions, so a "Medieval Banquet" was arranged at Hatfield House. Peter was appointed "the King" of the evening by a rather charming Queen. Peter duly knelt to be crowned by the "Queen" but on raising his head his crown became entangled in her skirt! You can imagine the ensuing hilarity. Good on you Peter!

The first two years of my working with Peter were not the easiest of my career, but I can truly say that the happiest of the 25 years I spent at the MCA/I were those between 1988 and 1994 before Peter was taken ill. He had at last got the Association sorted out and pulling together as a team. Outside of work Peter was always good company, whether abroad at a European association meeting or on a Club Run. Peter attached the greatest importance to his family and he was also very mindful of, and concerned for his staff's family life.

Finally, I believe that we Club members have Peter to be grateful to for the continuation of the Club as I think that at one stage it was his interest and enthusiasm that helped to keep it going. Thank you, Peter. *Tom Waterer*

How very sad! I always viewed Peter as a very special man representing all that was good from a very special generation of Brits. As others have said he was kind, unfailingly polite, thoughtful and someone we could always count on for wise guidance. Despite his increasingly difficult health issues he never lost his magic power of enthusiasm. A lesson for us all there. God bless Peter.

Keith Davies

Very sad indeed. He was a very astute, kind and thoughtful man and it was a pleasure (and an education) to work for him at MCI in my early years. A thoroughly top chap. **Frank Finch**

Sad news spent many happy times with Peter on the RAC motorcycle committee and functions over the years. Always knowledgeable, immaculately dressed, impeccable manners with a twinkle in his eye! **Ian Kerr**



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Please put me down for the escort if we are allowed! **Ian Kerr**

A sad loss to the club and most of all to his family.

He always had a kind word and a smile, his runs were legendary with an amazing attention to detail.

Peter will be sorely missed. **Peter Meek**

So So Sad....another victim of the devils virus...as I'm calling it...RIP Peter Sheen ..,Our Ambassador..for the motorcycle Industry..and the Epitomy of an English Gentleman....GOD BLESS...**Bob Mac.**

Shocked and saddened by news of us losing our most respected Peter Sheen. I learned a lot from Peter when we spent a run together in my VW Transporter Van acting as RAC back-up! I tried my hardest to put the 'willies' up Peter trying to replicate the two wheels of a m/cycle round some very tight bends but he never flinched! He was a great inspiration to us all and will never be forgotten. With deepest sympathy to Peters family.

Tony Dawson

This is such sad news to receive about the passing of our good friend Peter Sheen. Peter was a key player during my year's in motorcycle racing during the 1960's/70's and 80's. He was an icon of the motorcycle industry and he represented what is so good about most people who are involved in our industry. It is so sad that he caught this awful virus that is affecting the whole World at this difficult time we are all living through. My thoughts go to Peter's family and friends and may he rest in peace. **Neil Tuxworth**

How very sad. His tone of happiness and optimism will always resonate with me from when I became part of the industry back in 1991. I'm sure a lot of us would like to know if your suggested idea can happen. **David Taylor**

Such sad news. I spoke with Peter only a few weeks ago and found him as enthusiastic as ever. As one of the 'senior members' I first met him in the 1970s when he was with Shell and subsequently his devotion to both the motorcycling movement as a whole and The Club in particular shone so brightly. I'm sure no-one who was on that wonderful Spring 1992 run to Normandy can forget his infinite attention to detail exemplified by the dayglo armbands issued so we didn't get mixed up with the hoi polloi! And those wonderful runs from Lake Vyrnwy. Truly a remarkable man. I would like to participate in the ride if possible. **Nick Jeffery**

Like everyone else, I remember Peter as the epitomy of the English gent. His Llangollen run sticks in my mind; I followed him out of the hotel on the Saturday morning, as he led us into the misty Welsh mountains. Eventually all I could see was the tail light on his BMW 650 single. When we stopped for coffee he was completely unruffled (unlike me).

I also recall spending very entertaining time with him at the recent Barnsley run, learning about his time at Francis Barnett.

He'll be much missed and I'd very much like to pay my respects by joining the cortege (if we're allowed out). **Dan Sager**

Peter made such an exceptional contribution both to The Club and -- for more than two decades -- at our industry's HQ. There will be very few older Club Members who, over the years, weren't helped, supported, or simply "constructively re-directed" by PRTS...during his imitable *modus operandi*.

My favourite memory is undoubtedly the 36 hours we spent together at Lake Vyrnwy, one-to-one, a fortnight before The Club's 21st Anniversary Run in Spring 1984, piecing together that memorable gathering's final details. I was effectively just the gopher, and happily so, but it was immediately apparent that Peter's grasp and application ensured how this unique Run would indeed proceed smoothly. Given the day's ambitious itinerary, which he'd mapped out back home in Herts, it was nevertheless still vital that every furlong of the proposed route was "stage rehearsed" as close as possible to the Anniversary itself. Needless to say, and thanks to Peter's brilliant pre-planning, everything unfolded just fine "on the night".

From memory we had 50+ attendees that weekend, yet another logistic with which Peter had to contend; not only that, but within the next 48 hours it would be announced that Shell were losing their long-serving Service Dept exec...who was now appointed the MCIAs new Director-General. If anyone ever Set-the-Pace...it was PRTS! *Mike Jackson*

Very sad news, and condolences to Peter's family. Peter was very supportive and encouraging when I first joined MCIAs, a few years after he'd left. He used to come to the office from time to time and say hello to everyone. I would be honoured to join the suggested gathering, if this is allowable under the rules by the time it takes place. He will be missed. *Craig Carey-Clinch*

Such a sad loss - and especially at this time when movements are understandably restricted.

My first encounters with Peter were more towards the end of his illustrious career in the motorcycle industry as I, being recently taken on by Michael Evans at Westminster Communications, tried to understand the job of representing the motorcycle industry to the media and "getting people onto two wheels" - something Peter had a passion for.

I have to admit that naively I thought everyone in the industry was just like Peter, dedicated, knowledgeable, full of enthusiasm and ideas and with an abiding passion for powered two wheelers.

Echoing what others have already said, I found Peter to be a stickler for detail pushing people to do their best yet ready to let those best suited to get on and execute the task in hand. To some, at times, he may have seen officious yet that glint in his eye was never far away and, when something amused him, he could fall into a heap of giggles.

The Club and the UK motorcycle industry were blessed to count Peter among their number; a man who "walked the walk and talked the talk".

God speed Peter. *Martin Lambert*

I was extremely saddened to receive the news of Peter's passing particularly as he had just celebrated his 92nd birthday in March. In fact - due to the lockdown - fittingly he became a TV star on London news as many of his family and almost the entire village came onto the green to sing happy birthday to him. I

can still see his emotional, smiling face waving to everyone unaware he would be on TV later that dayhe was overwhelmed when he saw it !!
Like everyone, I have many precious personal memories of Peter both at MCI and during many of our Club weekends, especially during the one's he so meticulous organisedlike our Lake Vyrnwy adventures and who can forget the famous armbands on our first trip to France!!typical Peter!
I also remember his “call to arms” words during many MCI meetings when he said we should always consider to “Protect, Promote and Expand ”
motorcycling in everything we did or saidagain wise words from the DG!
.....Peter, was a real motorcycle enthusiast AND a very clever business man too hence his success as DG. Due to his character and experience he was able to keep the manufactures (who were major competitors and strong individual character's themselves) TOGETHERand at the same time engage with all Companies who were part of the industry irrespective of size or function to ensure we spoke as ONE voice whenever possible ...this was no mean feat!

Peter had so many success's during his time as DGwe should NEVER forget his enormous personal contribution which included , the above "togetherness "Getting financial commitment from the whole Industry to create a campaign to try and turn the market around at one of the most challenging periodsCreating a new exhibition Company inside of the MCI to secure it's future and finally Two Wheel Freedomwhich went to every person applying for a driving licence through the DVLA , has there ever been a greater and wider way to promote motorcycling to the masses .

Yes, we have MUCH to thank Peter for including all those wonderful memoriessimply a true gentleman, friend, advisor who made all around him feel enthused, special and valued...never to be forgotten and will always raise a glass in his honour during every future Club weekend!!

Andrew Smith

So very sad.

He did so well to fight off cancer & other problems for many years, only to be brought down by this Chinese virus.

He was a great fund of ideas & was always bursting with enthusiasm.

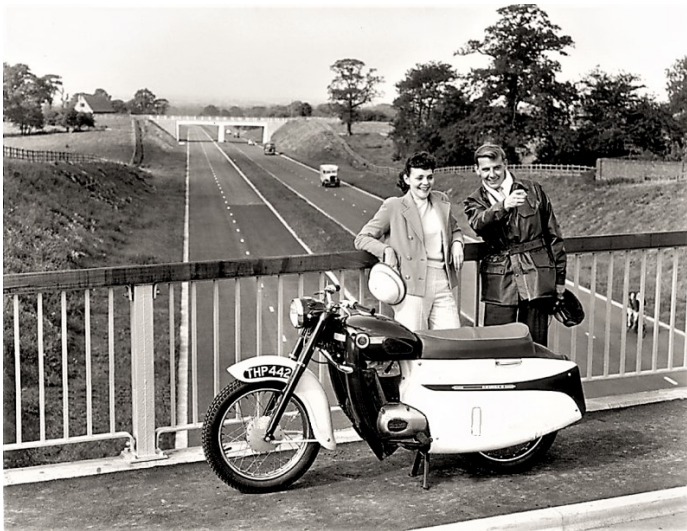
We all learned something from him. **Norman Hyde**

I first met Peter in 2001 when he was so incredibly welcoming to the Autumn Llangollen run which he was running.....organised to unbelievable and impressive levels of precision. **Rick Parish**

The email none of us want to read and you definitely do not want to prepare. But thanks for sharing Graham. How very sad. Others have already acknowledged his kindness and enthusiasm and as his employee for many years, I benefited greatly from his example. I have often requoted his real “gems” of

advice to others. “An hour in the field...” being my most oft remembered.
Bless you Peter. **Charles Smart**

I was saddened to read of the passing of Peter, who was almost the father of The Club (only founder member Roger Boss joining The Club before Peter). I first met Peter in the mid-1980s at the MCIA, but got to know him on a *warts-and-all* level when sharing the back of Maurice Knight's Honda car on a couple of Club runs. Peter displayed a meticulous, belt and braces approach by packing pens, pencils, sharpeners, knife and sharpening stone. He had a great sense of humour that belied the *gravitas* he could dish up as needed. When not leading from the front one of his many Club Runs, Peter showed great skill by darting his Grinall trike in and out past unwary riders with an aerodynamic whoosh. Looking for a picture, I came upon this publicity shot of Peter, as a dapper, 30 year old sales manager of Francis Barnett. I lifted it from Morton's (who I hope don't mind, given the sad circumstances). This late 1950s Francis Barnett 250cc Cruiser, suggests the photo was taken in 1959 on a bridge over Britain's first ever Motorway (the M6, known locally as the Preston Bypass) that opened in December 1958. The identity of the pillion passenger remains a mystery. The pith helmet and jodhpurs may provide a clue. Peter, your wise council and ready wit will be sorely missed. **Ray Battersby**



Very sorry to hear.

I did not know Peter very well (as a relative ‘newbie’) but clearly well-liked and respected. Sadly I am in ‘Lockdown’ at home and embarrassed to say I am currently without motorcycle so will be unable to accompany the hearse.

Thoughts are with his family. **Adam Kelley**

I can only agree with all the above comments, we have lost a true gentleman, a man with a strong sense of humour and an unbounded enthusiasm for life, and in particular motorcycling. **Graham Goodman**

Donations can be made to Cancer Research through an online donation page that will remain open for six weeks.

<https://www.memorygiving.com/peterrichardtaylorstheen>

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic few Members of The Club are able to attend the funeral service. The family have however, been able to arrange formal permission for a limited number of Members to accompany the hearse to the Church and to form a Guard of Honour as the coffin is brought into the Church

Graham Goodman

Honary Secretary, The Club.

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Our good friend Mike Jackson has supplied the following article.

2010 edition of **TRADER** [or was it called M/C TRADER?...I've forgotten?], following a leisurely discussion over lunch with Peter at Elstree Aerodrome in May of that year. Club Members will note the odd change since then: e.g. the MCA are known now as the MCIA, and certain other 'adjustments' may also be required. MJ

The History Makers

Peter Sheen

Peter Sheen is one of life's agitators! No, he will not be in Trafalgar Square this weekend, protesting, but, with whatever he is involved, there's this passion to

change things for the better. During a quarter century spell at Shell an astute observer reckoned Peter resembled a Catherine Wheel sparking in all directions at once. [In agreeing that, your scribe also sees a similarity with Bernard Woolley, the rebellious PPS in *Yes Minister*, superbly portrayed by Derek Fowlds. MJ] When Peter was at one of several interviews with five industry captains, discussing terms for the unenviable position of MCA Director General, there was a standoff over the contract. In addition to relinquishing a secure job at Shell he knew he needed plenty of time to re-shape the MCA; sensibly, he was seeking a 4-year deal. Five pairs of eyebrows shot up in surprise. “*I’m sure you’ll want to sack me within 18 months*”, said Peter, “*but, if I’m going to change all that’s wrong with the MCA, I’ll need longer than that.*” Well, he got the desired contract, but it was much less than 12 months before some of those board members were angling for his departure! He hit Starley Towers like a tornado, needless to say, reducing staff levels, cutting thru the inherent “committee culture” and, more importantly, instigating a plan to ensure the MCA owned and ran the annual Motorcycle Show, retaining the generated profit. But, let’s face it; apart from the Show the majority of issues with which the MCA deal are instant turnoffs. Such matters as Draft [note surplus letter ‘r’...MJ] Compliance Proposals, EU Directives, liaising with a flawed TRRL, these matters are understandably of minor interest to the majority of folk making an honest living in the bike trade.

Twenty years ago, when Leg Protectors loomed large on the horizon, our then Transport Minister, Peter Bottomley, determined they would be compulsory for all new machines. He was dismissive of every reasonable objection, whether technical, medical, or commercial, and it was looking like he might win the argument. Imagine the effect of such a policy? Peter [Sheen] assessed the scale of the problem on Day One; he knew the MCA was the sole body capable of mounting a properly co-ordinated resistance. It is a harrowing story, dutifully absorbed by your scribe; it is also a tale that could easily stretch to the back cover of this publication! It can truthfully be stated today that if he and the MCA team had not been so pro-active, UK motorcycling would have received a knockout blow.

So, what of Peter himself, as opposed to Sheen the executive? An early memory was watching the 1948 TT while stationed at nearby RAF Jurby. It made such an impression he has missed but six TTs over the next 45 years. Always on bikes since his teens he had amassed quite a substantial stable approaching retirement, with a leaning towards street/trail. At that time the Sheen machines were dispersed between his home in Herts, an away-from-it-all residence in Majorca, and USA, but, after successfully surviving the removal of a lung, a trauma that annoyingly curtailed his last crucial years at the MCA, the present fleet is confined to a 125 scoot in Spain, plus a Silver Wing and a 3-wheel Grinnall in UK. His BMW-powered Grinnall – called *Grim Hold* by the

cautious – sports a buttercup yellow finish. Knowing his passion for change no one will be surprised if this 3-wheeler shortly reappears adorned with a paintjob promoting Fyffes’ bananas! In early years Peter had a useful learning curve in the Francis-Barnett sales office, a fondly regarded period typified by this fine family firm loaning him an AMC-engined 250 to use on honeymoon in the south of France. For a less loyal employee this might have been grounds for divorce, but Peter followed Comp Manager Ernie Smith’s instructions to the letter, belted it for a fortnight, and it never missed a beat. F-B’s shift from Coventry, to integrate with James in Birmingham, triggered his move to Shell, a benign giant with rigorous standards that remain ingrained. Participants in the 1970s 2-wheel social scene will remember how Peter slipped smoothly into the role of Company Man, perennially immaculate with appropriate tie and lapel badge; Shell’s ambassador personified. During a wide-ranging career he was responsible for lubricants, service, and training, yet forever exploring ways of increasing Shell’s links with 2-wheel sport and trade. Who remembers the Shell Caravans, an archetypal Sheen initiative? Numbering ten in total, each equipped with banners, direction arrows, basic catering, plus a loud hailer and typewriter, these caravans contained every requirement for outdoor events. Readily available to recognised clubs [ACU/AMCA etc] they were towed along on the day by Shell’s regional reps. In lobbying for this investment Peter had to convince the directors that the caravans could also be utilised for car rallies, steam fairs, or a church croquet contest. They were not, he assured them, just for motorcycle events. The idea was accepted. Over umpteen seasons the Shell Caravan was a very popular fixture at scrambles and road races.

Quite early at Shell he was seconded on a temporary basis to the MCA as Assistant Director under unflappable Hugh Palin, MBE, from whom Peter confirms he learned a great deal. Hugh always went the extra mile encouraging and supporting his lieutenants, albeit one boldly conceived Sheen project, *Safety Pay Scheme*, failed to gel. Back then the Chancellor would cool HP commitment levels by raising deposit percentages; in this instance deposits were 33%. Sales to first time buyers were at an all time low. Sheen figured that a Learner who had passed a Driving Test under RAC/ACU auspices deserved to be rewarded with the amount of the deposit. After bouncing this concept off RIGP and other major finance houses only one company, Forward Trust, was prepared to proceed. Such a positive response earned them a potential exclusive. “*It would have dramatically enlivened the market,*” muses Peter today, “*but, when I outlined the scheme to Raleigh’s CEO, he killed it at a stroke. Raleigh was very influential, so I found myself back at Shell several months sooner than expected!*” Another commendable Sheen adventure during that first MCA incarnation was a mid-winter publicity ride to Germany’s Elephant Rally, two up, on a 50cc Ariel Pixie. He and his companion, a Coventry copper, took it in turns to ride to the Eifel Mountains, encountering hundreds of miles of black ice

and snow, suffering several ‘unloads’ *en route*; much bruised they nonetheless returned in one piece. While not quite on the Boorman/McGregor scale the ride was deemed a worthy stunt, nor did it deter Peter from tackling other formidable trips. Asked if he thought he would ever return to the MCA, in the role of *Grand Fromage*, Sheen comes over stern, pointing to his interviewer? “*It was your ***** recommendation*”, he accuses, now laughing, “*We were on an industry run at Lake Vyrnwy in north Wales, remember?*” (Decca declined The Beatles; Ratner said his stock was “crap”. Was this successful spot of lobbying MJ’s solecism? It is a provocative question.)

Peter’s stint at the MCA coincided with a year-on-year market decline. The fall was never attributed to the MCA, although an ever-shrinking market did eventually evolve as their responsibility. In comparison with the automotive industry association for example they do not expect the SMMT secretariat to revive a reducing market. Ford *et al* are traditionally large enough to organise their own sales recovery, which is why the motor industry never enthuse about coalitions. The UK bike scene is far more intimate, inter-company communications usually range from good to excellent, with the personalities involved harmoniously tackling universal problems. Given this background, the MCA found itself in 1984 endeavouring to regenerate the market. Show revenues, and a levy on new sales, were harnessed accordingly. Peter and contemporary industry captains devoted endless hours pondering an improvement in sales. The IMC start-up was one positive spin-off; their attractive 3-letter logo, whose graphic represented a motorcycle, was effectively used on the literature they so widely circulated. One of Peter’s more imaginative ideas did not make it through, though, yet is still worth chronicling. He subscribed to the prospect of using a well-known *persona* to carry the industry’s message; who better than Barry Sheene? Bazza had made the breakthrough by then; every household knew of him through TV adverts and chat show appearances; he was popular, despite that he often cavorted in nightclubs. Peter suggested Barry became our industry’s Front Man, and he be paid a generous retainer, although it would consume a fair slice of the budget. In prelim discussions eyebrows were again sharply elevated; then put on hold pending Bazza’s stint on an upcoming BBC Breakfast Show. It was agreed that the ‘eyebrows’ would monitor his performance...and then decide. Screening began with talk about learner riders. Barry did well stating he thought they should have access to bus lanes albeit pointing out their power was often inadequate for sharing the same slice of road as vans and lorries. Warming to his subject he went on to his despatch riding days, and the difficulty of being properly noticed by black cabs. So far, so brilliant, then Shock/Horror as he revealed his solution to these cab driver’s lack of vision: “*I had two golf balls in this bird’s stocking, right, so when a cab came too close I’d swing the stocking*”

*and dent his ***** roof; it worked a treat!"* Oops, every eyebrow plummeted; Peter returned to the drawing board.

One of numerous policy changes was the drawing-in of various peripheral 2-wheel groups for a regular dialogue with the MCA. Notwithstanding their specialised connection such bodies as the ACU, AMCA, BMF, and MRA, claimed that prior to Peter's arrival they had never visited MCA HQ. It could be said that Sheen erased the acrimony from the acronyms!

His reputation for efficiency triggers this late 1980s anecdote. Peter was making a special effort for that year's TT trip; car and trailer booked well in advance, or so he thought, transporting a 'Barnett for the VMCC Run, a KTM for gentle trailing, and his K100 for highway work. Ten days before sailing the travel agent folded, whereupon the Steam Packet Co denied the existence of any booking. Faxes were sent, calls made, "*It's the Director General...*". "*Yes mate, they all say that, sorry, but everything's fully booked.*" In despair Peter turned to the late Gill Griffith, back then the MCA's permanently serene Secretary. Just one hour later, beaming broadly, she announced, "*You, together with car and trailer, are on the boat.*" Peter asked the obvious question. "*Oh, I told them you were Barry Sheene's dad!*"

His greatest disappointment was undoubtedly the abandoning of *TWO WHEEL FREEDOM*, a very readable 52-page publication that with DVLA endorsement had begun to be sent by the MCA to every recipient of a new 2-wheel Driving Licence. Peter had somehow managed to persuade the DVLA to send names/addresses of all new Licence holder to Starley Towers direct. What a coup! Aimed squarely at newcomers, *FREEDOM* was an attractive 'magazine', including everything a new rider needed to know about clubs, sport, accessories, servicing, spare parts, insurance, oil, helmets, plugs, you name it. It had taken many laborious months to arrange, after which MCA members were invited to contribute editorial and/or ads, but which had to be phrased in 'neutral' mode; e.g. Avon, Continental, and Dunlop composed interesting copy about tyres, and so on. Industry ads helped diminish the cost of a 6-figure print run. The main hurdle of course was obtaining the DVLA's approval but, quite remarkably, this had been achieved. The last part of the Sheen jigsaw was to secure Content Approval from every contributor, and that too was eventually gathered. At long last the light went Green! MCA-funded postcards with crucial names and addresses thereon began arriving at Coventry. Off went the *FREEDOM* envelopes. The initial response was looking encouraging when came the bombshell. Pat Myers, MCA President, who later resigned the post over this issue, demanded the *FREEDOM* scheme cease forthwith, prompting a flurry of tense, high-powered meetings. What happened? Ah, within the text, you see, beside their two small ads, was a full-page article composed by Motorcycle

City, a paid-up dealer member of the MCA, and whose copy had been approved by everyone involved. The article itself, entitled “Think Before You Buy”, was deemed innocuous. Unsurprisingly, it mentioned the various outlets, but was thought “too advantageous” by Myers. Peter negotiated a revised edition, *sans* the City page, but too many corns had already been trodden upon. Ultimately, he was forced to cancel the project, pulp the pyramid-size print run...and sigh. Peter’s opposite number at the SMMT could not believe how our industry captains managed to lose such an opportunity...

A delightful penultimate item, revealing Peter’s self-deprecating side, stems from Barnstaple’s *Down Memory Lane*, a highly regarded Reunion for trials and scramble riders where Jeff Smith, Johnny Brittain, Les Archer, Dave Bickers etc, biannually gather to ‘bench race’ and out-exaggerate each other. Peter was persuaded to attend in 2004. His reaction to the function, “I was the only one there I hadn’t heard of...”

Reflecting now on those turbulent MCA times he remembers that once the “dust had settled” a great deal of positive support was provided by Ray Ross, Denys Rohan, Bill Hawker, and especially Gerald Davison. Ironically, GD left Honda soon after the new Dee Gee began. Peter also recalls the inevitable straight answers from Bill Smith. “I didn’t always hear what I wanted, but Bill’s insight over dealer reaction was always spot-on!” With Wimbledon currently about to share the sports page with football his metaphor for monthly meetings with the industry’s Executive Board is descriptive. “I was on one side of the net, with 14 opponents on the other!” Peter Sheen: exceptional player, and schemer supreme.

ENDS