

## Club Run Report Autumn 2005

### *Carrutherstown, 16-18 September 2005*

As I sat in my office on the Thursday preceding the Club Run, watching the rain pour down like a meteorological power shower, I was not filled with enthusiasm with the prospect of a 300-mile ride up the congested M6 the following day. Our destination was Carrutherstown in Galloway, just across the Border with Scotland, a nation not famed for its sunny skies or temperate climate. The Scots say that if you can see the mountains it's about to rain and if you can't see the mountains it's raining already. However, run organisers Frank Finch and Keith Davies must have a hot line to a higher being, or to Michael Fish at the Met Office at any rate, because when Friday dawned, it was bright, clear and sunny. Suddenly the epic journey North didn't seem quite so dreadful after all.

Planning the route to a Club Run is a central part of the ritual preparations for many members, along with checking that they can still squeeze into their riding gear and trying to locate a suitable raffle prize. I decided to head cross-country over the Cotswolds, taking in the magnificent piste that is Fish Hill, before joining the motorway at Redditch, spiritual home of Royal Enfield, (please excuse the gratuitous plug for one of my clients). As soon as I hit the M6, traffic slowed to a virtual standstill. Considering this government's love of public/private partnerships, I'm amazed that they haven't leased the entire M6 to NCP.

Buoyed with anticipation of empty roads, glens and lochs, I filtered between lanes from Birmingham to Lancaster, after which one leaves behind not only traffic congestion but also the scenery of industrial and urban decay. Nothing but sheep and mountains! I always find it tremendously exciting to crest Shap, 1,036 feet up in the clouds and to break out into the unspoilt, desolate countryside beyond. Fond memories of the Whoop Hall & Westmorland runs gave me second wind and with a twist of the wrist I was proceeding at full speed (which isn't all that fast on a Honda Transalp). Just inside the Border I caught up with the Dorset contingent of Keith and Richard Davies, Mike de Clifford and an unidentified VFR800 V-TEC rider. Soon we had rolled across the Border and in the blink of an eye were bumping up the drive to the hotel. Even with my amply padded posterior and comfortable 'rally touring' machine, I was desperate to get out of the saddle and into the bar after 288 miles, so it must have been even tougher for fellow-members travelling from Somerset, Dorset, Kent & Surrey. Although I didn't realise it at the time, it was to prove worth the journey.

On dismounting, as always, the first task is to discover what exciting machines are parked up and who are their riders. The mystery VFR's pilot introduced himself as Gerald from Yeovil. He was too modest to explain, and I was too dense to realise,

that this was Gerald Davidson, legendary boss at Honda during the 1980's. This is one of the many pleasures of the Club – meeting people who have been key players in the recent history of the industry.

Norman Hyde had driven up as he was delivering a rebuilt [Meriden] Trident to a customer from Skye – talk about mixing business and pleasure. It was inspiring to view such a varied selection of motorcycles. V-twins of all shapes and sizes seemed to be in the ascendancy and in an ironic twist, we had modern British bikes (Triumph Trident 955i) mixing it with classic Japanese (Suzuki GS400 twin).

There's nothing like an ironic twist to bring on a thirst, so it was straight into the bar. Situated just outside Carrutherstown in 18 acres of parkland and boasting glorious views over the Solway Firth, Hetland Hall is a solid country house of Edwardian appearance that would have appealed to the huntin', fishin' and shootin' gentlemen of that era. According to the local Tourist Board we were deep in Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott country, but then they claim that wherever you go in Scotland!

So to Dinner. With everyone seated around tables it became apparent what a good turnout we had. Our Chairman Geoff Selvidge, welcomed us warmly with a jovial routine. The most startling announcement was that Dennis Bates had found a comb in the ladies cloakroom. Guests were introduced. I brought along Geoff Travell from Knox, on his second run, whose body armour would protect me should I decide to fall off at any point.

Rick Parish had invited a first timer, Steve Callahan from Datatool alarms who, although we didn't know it at the time, had just been appointed Sales Manager at Suzuki. Paul Peters (the Technical Manager at David O'Neill's Hoco Parts) made a welcome return, while Peter Bolton had enlisted Geoffrey Pike, who competed in the 1952 ISDT on a DOT, as his chauffeur for the duration.

Then over to Frank Finch, our 'Red Leader' for the run, for a briefing. We would cover 200 miles in four 50-mile sections. Lunch would be taken at the pub belonging ex Aprilia UK boss Steve Reynolds, who would be absent that day as he would be on Lifeboat duty. Clearly life after Aprilia needed livening up.

The Dinner menu proved interesting, with some tasty local specialities. I started with fried haggis balls, which I assume are sweetbreads, followed by Solway salmon and scallops! All very Scottish, although not a deep-fried Mars Bar in sight!

Then came the climax of the evening – the Raffle. Richard Davies and Martin Lambert were volunteered for the unenviable task of trying to add gloss to a selection of unwanted Christmas presents and corporate freebies. There is a saying in advertising circles that "You can't polish a turd" but Richard and Martin did some fairly spectacular buffing that evening. One glimmer of hope was that many Members had forgotten to bring prizes with them, so there were plenty of bottles of red wine, purchased at great expense at the bar. Some of the more noteworthy winners were Peter Bolton, who received an Ogri video, Tom Waterer, who gained a

shirt that looked suspiciously like those sold at motorway services and Norman Hyde, who received a Woolworth's workshop help kit. Some poor soul even won a free camera, minus the film. My ticket had yet to be called and I noted with delight that there was a lot of wine left, but ended up with travel backgammon, which I'm not entirely sure was designed for travel on two wheels.

Keith Davies, our Tail End Charlie for the weekend, added a novel twist to events by auctioning his prize, (a year's subscription to Classic Competition News).

They say that madness and genius are closely related and Tony Dawson's newly devised crossword quiz would seem to bear this out. He's a genius but he's driving most of us mad with it! It was definitely time for the Scottish three-step; (1) bar, (2) Scotch and (3) bed.

Morning dawned chilly but dry, with ominous clouds hanging almost within reach. Everything looked very grey, including one or two members of our merry band who may have stayed up a wee bit later than was sensible. Foraging amongst the heated platters at breakfast revealed yet more haggis, which made me wonder whether we'd be fed this delicacy at every mealtime. Fortified with fried food, it was time to saddle up and ride on out to discover the Scottish lowlands.

We filed out onto the fast A75 and it was full throttle to blast away any cobwebs. The Vikings must have sailed up the Solway Firth at some point, because we passed villages with distinctly Nordic names such as Torthorwald. Soon we

were skirting the bleak grey council estates on the edge of Dumfries, the dark dank weather exaggerating the depressing atmosphere. Then, almost as soon as we crossed the town boundary, we were out into charming countryside. We rode on sandwiched between dry stone walls, behind which were patchwork fields containing sheep and beef cattle, contentedly grazing, seemingly unaware of their fate. The villages were is sharp contrast to the industrial towns, lined with single story cottages, many of which were freshly whitewashed. All very cosy and inviting.

Just as we were becoming acclimatised to this bucolic idyll, we burst through a canopy of trees and out onto a bracken-covered moor on a loose single-track road. Those of us on motorcycles with off road pretensions thanked the Lord and cracked open the throttle. There was a brief moment of concern when I traversed a cattle grid, which in Scotland means only one thing – sheep! In my experience these hardy creatures regard English motorists as the enemy and stand in the middle of the road with a determined expression that suggests “come and have a go if you think you're hard enough.” However, today Lady Luck smiled on us for none strayed off the moor. Most of us seemed to have had a couple of ‘moments’ on loose chippings, which added to the sense of adventure, but everyone managed to stay upright. Our Tail End Charlie, Keith Davies, was clearly well equipped for this terrain on his 955cc Triumph Trident adventure sport bike, but why had our Run Leader, Frank Finch, chosen Munich's latest 1200c sports bike for such rough

terrain? Whatever his reasoning, it certainly wasn't slowing him down.

Our descent from moor was challenging, with hairpins and blind corners a-plenty, but fortunately we didn't encounter any on-coming traffic. Come to think of it, there was precious little sign of any human habitation and it all felt very remote. We rode on towards mountains in distance, which were little more than silhouettes shrouded in cloud & mist.

Once off the moor the B road that we were following (the B279) was transformed from a gritty track into a ribbon of tarmac heading straight off into the distance and time to speed things up a bit. Within seconds I was launched out of my seat by the first of innumerable bumps and ruts. This was the most fantastic fun and better than any bouncy castle. We joined the A713 for a final spurt towards Delmellington for our Coffee stop. We bounced up a loose stone track that Dougie Lampkin would have found taxing and arrived at the hotel to be greeted by half a dozen over-excited boys.

As I sank into a well-cushioned sofa, clutching a hot chocolate and a Scotch pancake, I reflected that we seemed to have experienced all of Scotland in the space of 50 miles. Tom Waterer was perusing various family portraits hanging on the walls and spotted a photograph of a young man in a Royal Marines Commando uniform. It turned out that he was the father of the landlady and had served in the Korean War. He was taken prisoner and at the end of hostilities was offered the choice of returning home or moving to China. Much to the outrage of

the British press, he decided to try his luck in China. He was branded a communist, although the reality was that he didn't fancy returning to Britain to spend the next 40 years working in a factory. Who can blame him!

Out in the car park the young lads had reached a fever pitch of excitement. Delmellington appeared to be a fairly sleepy community and 30 powerful motorcycles rumbling up the drive was a major event. When Dave Martin let one of them start his 1300cc Yamaha, you'd have thought Christmas had come early.

As we headed out of town and up into mountains towards the coast at Girvan on the B741 the cloud seemed to descend and a light drizzle started. In spite of the latest textile waterproofs, M&S thermals and a generous layer of 'natural' insulation, I began to notice the temperature. We dropped down through a pine forest that was almost Alpine and then into Girvan.

As you leave the town there is a large sign that asks "Whit's Yer Hurry?" to which the answer is, presumably, "To get out of this dump as quickly as possible!"

The scenery changed yet again, with tall grey cliffs on our left and the Irish Sea on our right. The wind whipped the green water up into white horses. Somehow the rain, now falling more heavily, didn't seem to matter, as we motored on and soaked up the scenery. Was I the only person to see swans in the bay of Loch Ryan as we approached Stranraer? After my claims of dwarf reindeer on the Dutch run I knew that I'd struggle to achieve credence for this and matters were made worse when I suggested that I'd seen Nich

Brown being served petrol by a woman in a burka. Further investigation revealed that it was, in fact, a pimply youth in hoody!

After a brief petrol stop we soon found ourselves in Portpatrick for lunch at Steve and Julie Reynold's pub.

I have been brought up to believe that members of the nobility are blue-blooded, but David Strathcarron appeared to be blue all over, a state that was exaggerated by his light blue-grey BMW leather suit. It took several minutes for people to realise that poor David was suffering from the early stages of hypothermia!

Lunch was in the best Scottish tradition – everything was fried, including the salad garnish. A few of the real ale enthusiasts complained that it is impossible to get decent pint North of the Border, but Nick Hopkins pointed out that the Scots put their malted barley to much better use!

We retraced our journey to Stranraer, where we passed a factory with a large billboard outside proclaiming that it was "The home of Cheddar Cheese". One can only assume that geography is not a compulsory subject in Scottish schools. This Run was proving to be exceptionally varied and we had a brisk gallop East on the A75 through farming country. Once past Newton Stewart we turned off into the pine forest of the Galloway Forest Park on the A752, where I had a knicker-wetting moment on some damp white lines. By this time the drizzle had lifted slightly and was just enough to create an authentic experience. Our route along the bank of Clatteringshaw's Loch was exceptionally

winding and led us to our tea stop at the Bridge of Ken. This was a setting to make the Tourist Board proud. The pub was situated on a river with a shallow pebble bank sloping into the water. There were anglers dotted around and a smell of coal and wood fires permeating the air. I'm sure that I overheard someone comment that this would be the perfect location for a spot of hunting, shooting and spanking. By a bizarre coincidence the Suzuki Owners Club were having some sort of mini rally at the pub. Even more bizarrely, their Chairman was riding a BMW.

The final leg took us down the A752, which followed the west bank of Loch Ken. There was a not insignificant amount of confusion caused when Keith was tempted to swap bikes with Norman Hyde. Several markers abandoned their posts to follow Norman, mistaking him for Keith, who arrived minutes later to find their situations vacant, as it were! I decided to head directly back to the hotel via the A75, while the majority decided to take a last look at the Solway Firth, travelling past Kircudbright & Dalbeattie. We had covered 200 miles, passing through the most astonishing variety of scenery and on roads virtually devoid of traffic and the dreaded speed cameras.

It never ceases to amaze me how swiftly 30 motorcyclists can be transformed into respectable businessmen when there is the prospect of a good meal, a few drinks and an entertaining evening ahead. Within what seemed like minutes of our return, the small bar was packed and positively buzzing with excitement. As the day's events were recounted, with

embellishment that increased in direct proportion to the alcohol consumption, I sensed that the Sergeant at Arms would have his work cut out to keep up with all of the misdemeanours.

Dinner proved disappointing in that haggis was off the menu, although the local salmon, duck and lamb compensated for this. It was announced that in Mike Jackson's absence Dave Martin would act as Sergeant at Arms. Maurice Knight set the tone for proceedings by fixing the imposing figure of Sgt. Martin with an icy stare and demanding "Who are you looking at, you b\*astard?" Completely unmoved, Dave launched into a barrage of fines for assorted sartorial outrages. Steve Callahan was apprehended for sending his clothes to the hotel via courier, Norman Hyde for sporting a 'common' necktie, rather than his distinctive 'dickie bow'. Tony Dawson found himself on the wrong side of the law thanks to his white boots, while I was singled out for wearing a kilt (surely everybody else should have been fined for failing to adopt the Scottish national dress?).

By now Dave was really in his stride. Frank fell foul for his last minute pre-Run instructions advising us to turn EAST at Gretna. Mike de Clifford attracted attention by attempting to dry his textile gloves next to an open log fire at the tea stop and setting fire to them. As the list drew to an end, Dennis had to pay up for reserving the last kipper at breakfast and finally, Keith Davies was congratulated for keeping death off the roads and penalised for doing so by riding on the pavement.

Our chairman stood up, thanked Frank and Keith and declared himself 'formally moist'. Geoff continued, with the help of his cherished copy of the Kenn Dodd joke book, to welcome Richard the RAC man (with us courtesy of Greg Elson), along with Martin Roberts and Gerald Davidson, who he was delighted to see back with us. Nick Jeffrey was appointed official quiz-marker, as he was no longer permitted to enter due to his encyclopaedic knowledge. With the aid of a flip chart the correct answers were revealed and Martin Roberts declared the winner.

Sunday, like Friday, proved to be dry and clear. At our morning meeting, when the apologies were read out, we learned that Peter Sheen could not be with us as he was learning to drive a steam locomotive. Geoff suggested that this was an odd career move.

The return journey often provides an opportunity to catch one's breath and reflect on the weekend's motorcycling. I had expected the run down the M6 to be tedious but it proved to be filled with pleasant surprises. I bumped into Tom Waterer on board his unfeasibly tall KTM950 Adventure while filling up with petrol. At the top of Shap the sun broke through the clouds, bathing the hills in bright light and warmth and then I found myself riding alongside Martin Roberts on his trusty Triumph Trident. Almost as soon as Martin had turned off the motorway I spotted a single headlight approaching at speed in my rear view mirror. As the bike flashed past I realised it was Frank, filtering through the slow moving M6 traffic like a London courier on a tight deadline.

By the time I reached Birmingham I was desperate to escape this multi-lane madness. The entire M6 seemed to be filled with male youths in clapped out Vauxhall Novas. This reminded me of a definition of male youth that I heard recently; they have a brain and a willy but not enough blood to operate both simultaneously. So I turned off the M42 onto the A34 and suddenly found myself in the Heart of England, all half-timbered houses, thatched roofs and inviting hostelrys. In spite of the distance travelled and fatigue it had been a fantastic experience and I was already looking forward to our Spring Run in the Eastern Counties.

**Dan Sager**

March 2006

Pictures

Dennis Bates



“AARRGGHH! I should have bought a bigger balaclava!”



John Nelson tries to impress Tom Waterer and Nich Brown of his map-reading credentials.”



Martin Lambert pretends to be interested in the Dutch market while surreptitiously checking out the competition.



Rick Parish’s accountancy training comes in handy – by applying advertising stickers he can claim back the tax on his BMW.



Why is Tom smirking? What has he done to Norman’s Bonnie?



Tony Dawson remains impervious to Martin Roberts attempts to gain answers to the quiz.





An inclined in-line 4 from BMW – whatever will they think of next?



The offending white boots attracted a record fine that evening.



Greg's CB1300 with 'rorty' exhaust sounded every bit as meaty as it



The tea stop at Ken Bridge.



“So I just gave it a gentle squeeze and then Princess Anne said ....”



The MT-01's reserve fuel tank was not its strongest design feature..