

## **CLUB SPRING RUN**

### **1-3 MAY 2009**

### **VILLIERS HOTEL, BUCKINGHAM**

The sub-30 mile distance of the Spring Run from home and good weather forecast tempted me to have a further attempt to successfully finish at least one Run on my 350 Clubmans Gold Star BSA following its ignominious failure on the last Run.

Those reading this who were not present at Buckingham will have to wait until later in this report to determine whether this was successful but the thought I insert at this point is a dictionary definition: ***'Masochism – a morbid gratification in suffering pain, mental or physical'***

Anyway the journey to Buckingham passed without incident and on arrival I could put into operation my memorised Google Maps-inspired aerial view of the hotel complex issued in the joining instructions. This served perfectly in enabling me to turn into the reserved courtyard bike parking space without overshooting. Hence I avoided an overshoot and the 48-point turn and excessive clutch slipping which the bike's restricted steering lock and 65-mph bottom gear mandate – a simple indication of the organisers' attention to planning detail which boded well for the run itself.

On entering the hotel I looked in vain for 'the Wolverhampton Connection' with the eponymous engine company but no prototype Starmaker engines in glass cases, bicycle freewheels or pictures of Charles Marston were on display. Instead the arrangement of the internals was yet another hotel's characterful variation on the three-dimensional maze of buildings, corridors, stairs and levels which run organisers take great pleasure in booking. Given that the hotel dates back to 1577 and used to be the main coaching inn of this county town it is hardly surprising that the facilities have developed in somewhat ad hoc fashion. Never mind, throughout the weekend we were splendidly served in first class accommodation.

Evening dining was 'across the road' in the somewhat pretentiously titled 'Villiers Conference Centre' but therein we had our own assembly room, private bar with specially imported cask of real ale and sumptuous Constable's Hall.

Massing for dinner Tony Dawson issued the latest product of his labours - a variation on the normal quiz whereby a fictional account had to be analysed for motorcycle-related content and relevant words circled.

A delicious meal, helped down with a modicum of alcoholic beverage and usual exchange of ribald comments associated with the Raffle ensued. Guests were welcomed: Jeff Bishop (a former BSA Umberslade Hall, now Rolls-Royce engineer no less, Honda Deauville-mounted and invited by Ray Battersby); Mark Hopkins (Dave Martin's guest riding 916 Ducati); and Roger Chown (David Taylor's guest) and Craig Carey-Clinch (Tony Jakeman's guest), both GS1200 Long Whinge Round-mounted. Nice too to welcome Honorary Member Ken Sprayson, Norton Model 18-mounted.

Briefing followed for the run where, to plan a c.200 mile route in this crowded part of England, run organisers Dave Plummer and Frank Finch had used amazing local knowledge. This enabled them to neatly circumnavigate every major town – Bedford, Aylesbury, Milton Keynes, Luton and Leighton Buzzard - yet covered no less than five different counties – Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire and, by my estimation, perhaps a smidgeon of

Cambridgeshire as well. Not only that, but 'boring' roads were proscribed as well. An incredible achievement.

Breakfast was fully up to the culinary standards of the evening meal and, saturated fats replenished and RAC support in the form of 'old hand' Dave Wheeler having arrived, all was ready for the off at 9 am.

Tactical error then followed for me – despite trying to avoid getting to be 'No. 2' in the convoy, and hence having to do point duty with the 'stop and restart' involved, I could not persuade anyone behind me to overtake and adopt this position. Hence a few roundabouts later saw me at rest guiding the column and waiting for Tail End Charlie Frank to catch up.

Re-start, into bottom and then the painful process of trying to convert engine power into forward motion without either cooking the clutch by excess slipping or killing the engine – a theme often repeated through the day!

A quick blast on one of Buckinghamshire's 'accident-rich' bikers' routes towards Winslow then off into the lanes and villages around Milton Keynes. What a contrast they make – centuries of history, village greens, churches and farms in close proximity to the not-so-old and not-so-pretty New Town.

Blessed with good weather we were able to enjoy these lanes to the full, together with the odd equestrian. Plus it seemed to be the day selected by a large part of the local population to get married on as the sight of freshly scrubbed locals in Sunday best was repeated through the day.

The main diversion on this part of the Run was to observe Norman Hyde, recently completed Hyde Harrier-mounted, metaphorically looking under the bonnet to try to discover the source of oil covering the rear of the machine. A breather/catch tank problem was suspected but discretion dictated that the bike was parked.

Well .... not quite. Ever resourceful Norman had clearly planned for this event as he had laid on a spare machine, picked up when RAC Dave trailered Grandson of Slippery Sam back to base with Norman so he could pick up the spare. Norman then did a bit of spirited catch-up, only to overshoot the party and eventually managed to rejoin the group for lunch.

Anyway, back to the plot. Having ridden through Whitchurch into Winslow and then, skirting the Quainton Railway Centre, we hit the A41 to pick up our coffee stop at The Bell in Waddesdon - a most welcoming establishment with obliging and attentive staff. There Dan Sager, who had obviously got lost while out with the local Vintage Motor Cycle Club chapter, chanced upon us riding the latest emanation from the Indian Enfield factory. Oxygen-sensored, electronic fuel injected, electric starting, electronic ignition, disc braked it still 'somehow remains as an analogue bike in a digital age' to misquote a US 'Cycle World' description applied to a recent Moto Guzzi. And all the better for it.

Then up the spine road into Long Crendon and, hitting the outskirts of Thame in Oxfordshire, through to join the old Lower Icknield Way at Longwick with the Chiltern Hills forming a backdrop. Again a nice easy run through to Aston Clinton, past an apparently very active Triumph dealership. Into Hertfordshire and past the reservoirs built to feed the 57 locks along the 400 foot drop in elevation in the canal network between nearby Tring and distant Brentford. Then over some of the humpiest hump back bridges known to man on the Wendover canal link. One even

having a sign informing us that the road had failed. Over the Grand Union Canal then up the long drag past Ivinghoe Beacon with fantastic views to the left. Into Bedfordshire then looping round Leighton Buzzard, past yet another active Triumph dealer and up to lap the Woburn estate. I wonder who got the contract for the estate's perimeter wall – there must be literally millions of bricks there.

It was somewhere around here that guest Mark Hopkins' Ducati decided to suffer a cush-drive collapse. Nothing daunted, while awaiting RAC Dave to arrive from Norman's rescue mission he contacted the local Ducati dealer 'On Yer Bike' and ascertained that the necessary parts were in stock. On arrival Dave did another quick trailer construction job and took the bike there. Parts fitted and AOK again. Mark then did his version of catch-up, missing the lunch stop but catching us up for the tea stop – but not before getting slightly dizzy in Milton Keynes by riding through the same road works twice by accident.

Apropos the lunch stop, the organisers had tantalisingly described it as a 'Special Visit'. And so it proved to be – the Shuttleworth Collection at Old Warden. The most incredible collection of flight-worthy (or at least as flight-worthy as they ever were!) historic aircraft. Having just finished reading a biography of Alliott Verdon-Roe (of Avro fame) mainly to trace his 'two-wheeled car' connections (on which see: [http://s286.photobucket.com/albums/ll87/micr0film/Films%20about%20Microcars/?action=view&current=67\\_10.flv](http://s286.photobucket.com/albums/ll87/micr0film/Films%20about%20Microcars/?action=view&current=67_10.flv)) this really brought to life the achievements and sheer guts of the early pioneers. Would you fancy strapping yourself to a steroidally-enhanced balsa wood and rice paper model aeroplane, fitted with a primitive engine that was likely to blow up or set fire to the device, and then casting yourself to the winds? Nice to see though that J A Prestwich and other bike-related engine manufacturers were also prominent with their engines being extensively used in the early days. .

The lunch here was also of a superb standard with a good choice of tasty mains and puds again served with a most welcoming attitude.

Sadly we couldn't linger too long ... but I will definitely return, especially when a 'flying day' is scheduled.

We then headed northwards to another 'bikers' route', the B660 - one of my favourites to get from home to Peterborough, but sadly promoted by MCN as a 'terrorise the locals' route and now decimated by speed limits, cameras and other traffic calming measures. At least they haven't taken the bends away.

Now heading westwards back into Northamptonshire briefly to hit the Bedford to Wellingborough road where we turned south into Bucks again and through the picturesque town of Olney – pancake race centre of the universe. Off to the right to pick up the tea stop at The Lamb at Stoke Goldington – well located opposite former BMW bike dealership Gardner and White, again a great stop had been planned at the 'CAMRA pub of the year 2008 for Milton Keynes and North Bucks'. A couple of 'proper' Vespas added class to the parking area and fine home made cakes again went down very well.

Unfortunately we could not partake of the ancient sport of Hood Skittles for which the pub is renowned, although I understand from Acting Hon Treas that, when he came to settle up, two pints of fine real ale appeared on the bill so the opportunity to check out the CAMRA accreditation had not been totally wasted.

Looping back in over the M1 past yet another canal connection at Stoke Bruerne, where we lunched on the Autumn Run, then yet again managing to avoid a town, Towcester, back to base down another favourite route – the back road in from the A43 to Buckingham.

On arriving back chez Villiers we were greeted by the sight of WOW 67, Mike Jackson's well-travelled Peugeot, apparently held together by gaffer tape and road dirt but, more interestingly, also greeted by both Mike and Bill Colquhoun who had 'dropped in' for dinner.

Another superb meal followed, with quiz winner declared as Peter Meek and Sergeant-at-Arms frolics superbly performed by Dave Martin. A little more alcohol and so ... to bed.

So another Run completed. To organise the event with such aplomb and find such a seamless route Dave and Frank should receive several Maudes Trophies. RAC support in the form of the ever-helpful Dave Wheeler, and the RAC organisation itself deserve yet further thanks. And of course all the dedicated members – Hon Treas, Acting Hon Treas, Hon Sec, Chairman, Raffle and Quiz Meisters and Sergeant-at-Arms – without whom such an event could not be successful deserve all our thanks.

### **Technical Postscript**

Who rode what:

|                    |                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Andrew Smith       | Yamaha R1                |
| David Martin       | Yamaha MT-01             |
| Tony Dawson        | Yamaha FJ1200            |
| Maurice Knight     | BMW R850R                |
| Nick Jeffery       | BSA Gold Star DB32       |
| Peter Meek         | Norton Commando 850      |
| Martyn Roberts     | Suzuki Bandit 1200       |
| Wilf Harrison      | Honda CB500              |
| Steve Callahan     | Honda CBR600RR           |
| Keith Davies       | Yamaha FJR1300           |
| Norman Hyde        | Hyde Harrier             |
| Rick Parish        | Yamaha FJR1300           |
| Nick Hopkins       | Norton Commando Fastback |
| Graham Goodman     | BMW R1150GS              |
| Alan Halford       | Suzuki SV650             |
| Dan Sager          | Royal Enfield 500 Bullet |
| David Dew          | Honda CBF1000            |
| Tony Jakeman       | BMW F800R                |
| David Taylor       | Suzuki DL650 V-Strom     |
| Graham Matcham     | Yamaha Fazer 1000        |
| Alan Blake         | Triumph Speed Twin       |
| Gerald Davison     | Triumph Sprint           |
| Luke Plummer       | Suzuki GSX-R 750         |
| Mark Hopkins       | Ducati 916               |
| Frank Finch        | Honda VTR1000 SP2        |
| Geoff Selvidge     | Yamaha XJR1300           |
| Dave Plummer       | Ducati 916               |
| David O'Neill      | Yamaha XJ6               |
| Roger Chown        | BMW R1200 GS             |
| Ken Sprayson       | Norton Model 18          |
| Jeff Bishop        | Honda Deauville          |
| Craig Carey-Clinch | BMW R1200 GS             |
| Ray Battersby      | BMW R1150R               |

### **Gold Star postscript**

Some may remember that my first attempt (Autumn Run 2008 at Daventry) to try out my newly on-the-road 350 Goldie, complete with full-on RRT2 close-ratio gearbox, clip ons and rearsets, met with ignominious failure. This was caused by a loss of power and a possible diagnosis of broken valve springs. And so it proved to be the case. This latest attempt saw new valve springs and a Suzuki-based clutch conversion installed. The former has certainly restored the power and the latter has at least removed drag and slip. This just leaves the 65 mph bottom gear and the fact that the bike was not designed for someone of my stature.

I introduced the concept of masochism earlier in this report, and it is a perfect description of trying to cope with an excruciatingly uncomfortable riding position and a bottom gear ratio that requires clutch slip up to about 20 mph before you can accelerate with any vigour. The worst part is that, when getting away from a stationary traffic queue, the acceleration is pathetic initially – allowing all the car(s) behind to pass. Then, just as the acceleration is building nicely, the cars in front resume their pedestrian rate and you have to back off.

Anyway, at least I have now achieved the objective!

**Nick Jeffery**  
**6.5.09**