

NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 3 Summer 2021



The Talking Chair

Issue three of The Club newsletter – we'll soon exceed the publishing record of Eddy Shah's newspaper empire! Today (appropriately), I sit here having returned from Barcelona. The PCR tests and paperwork were grim, but I got there and back and can report that the Catalan capital is functioning admirably. Likewise, several of us met under the umbrella of incoming Chairman Ben and the "PR Guru" Dan Sager for a trot around the countryside on our steeds recently. Chromers, paint shops, polishers and all allied restoration trades are snowed under with work, Ben reports encouraging interest in his three and two-wheel products (sidecars and caravans respectively) plus sales of motorcycles and scooters are booming. It's an ill wind etc. This, the Club Newsletter, shows all the signs of going from strength to strength, another welcome "happy accident" of lock-down and our inability to meet in person for so long. And, unless the much vaunted "Indian Take-Away" form of Covid has long lasting side effects, our next step along the road to Club normality will take place in September thanks to Andrew Smith. Then our first "actual, bona fide" post covid Club Run in Tavistock in 2022 ..much to look forward to then. Let's see how many newsletters will have accumulated by Tavistock. Best wishes to you all and enjoy your new found freedom.

Martin



Peter Sheen bequest

As the darkness of the pandemic spread across the UK we galvanised ourselves in readiness for it to touch our lives. For The Club it was the worst of news to find that we had lost stalwart and former President and Chairman, Peter Sheen, to Covid-19. As a personification of Club values there are few who could match Peter; a respecter of tradition, a stickler for protocol yet with a wry sense of humour and love of company from the most recent inductee to those time served members that are so highly valued.

And, as a mark of the place that The Club held in his heart, there was no more fitting tribute to Peter than the "Guard of Honour" of Club members and their machines outside his village church as part of a celebration of his life and work at his funeral. Now – in typical Peter style – he has displayed once more his affection for The Club having bequeathed the sum of £250 to Club funds as part of the resolution of his estate.

On behalf of The Club we thank MCI Chairman, Tony Campbell, who informed us of the donation and our thoughts turn once more to Peter Sheen and his generosity, a true "one off" who will live in our thoughts evermore.

Diary Dates

18 September 2021 – Salop Gallop, entries now closed. Organiser, Andrew Smith

2022 Club Run Dates

Spring: 22-24 April 2022 based in Tavistock (Craig Carey-Clinch, Ian Kerr)

Autumn: 16-18 September 2022 based in Fort William (Andrew Smith, Bob McMillan)

'The Cotswold Canter' – 22 May 2021

Your Scribe recounts...

"What sort of place is this?" asks I, as masked and sanitised I entered the The Evenlode.



"It's called a pub and people apparently come here to drink beer and eat chips" replies rideout organiser Ben. So long is it since I had been in such an establishment I had quite forgotten!

With no club runs in 2020 or 2021 thanks to the Chinese curse, the Government's further easing of restrictions on May 17th meant that finally, groups of up to 30 could meet outdoors. Ben Matthews and Dan Sager wasted no time in fixing up a route around the Cotswolds on the following Saturday, with suitable stop offs for tea and buns, and enough tables of 6 indoors in case it rained.

Around 11.30 the group of 16 set off with Dan as leader and, although overcast and damp, the early morning drizzle had abated. As we passed through Aston, with its wonderful pottery, and on into Faringdon, the sun came out and spirits soared even more. How good to be back out on the bike with good friends!

Close to a bustling Bibury - the most beautiful village in England according to William Morris, is a big boy's toy shop aka The Classic Motor Hub. Here well-heeled punters can spend the price of a modest house on a wide range of exotica including some 2 wheeled beasts too. We settled on pasties and cake...

Dodging what must have been a torrential storm after lunch, Ben donned the leader's bib and lead us through the 'Slaughters' and the 'Swells', more pretty Cotswold villages and the odd deep puddle before arriving at Broadway and on up a wet Fish Hill.



The ride ended at Ben's HQ, Watsonian Squire shortly after 3.30 where more cake was laid on along with a tour of the facilities. It was great to catch up with chums again and thanks go to Ben and

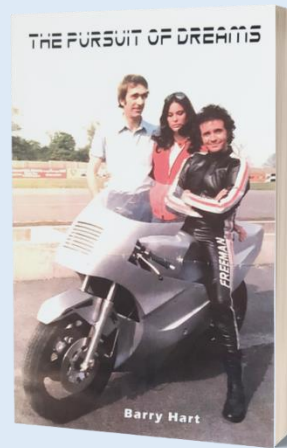
Dan for organising a great day out!

Who rode? Ben Matthews, Dan Sager, Nick Hopkins, Nick Jeffery, Andrew Smith, Frank Finch, Martin Lambert, Geoff Selvidge, Ian Kerr, Stephen Burgess, Martyn Roberts, Greg Elson, Dave Martin, Rick Parish, Graham Goodman, Norman Hyde.

Check out the pictures from the day on the website!

The Pursuit of Dreams by Barry Hart

Previous Chairman Tony Dawson has donated a copy of this fascinating book to The Club. It tells the story of how a British engineer designed a motorcycle that beat the best in the World.



The book follows Barry's struggles and achievements trying to help rebuild British pride in engineering in the 1960's through to the 80's. Founding Barton Engineering with Tony Ryan, learning how to design and develop highly competitive and advanced British

racing motorcycles. From Barry's formative years as a typical child of the 60's through to developing the vision and self-confidence to achieve the impossible and the reality of trying to rebuild the British Motorcycle Industry.

Included is the previously untold story surrounding the contract to build the Silver Dream Racer motorcycle and how it turned into a nightmare.

Unlike so many other books it authenticates the validity of all its contents using over 120 photographs and illustrations and 50 rare press clippings.

The final chapter brings the story up to date covering, amongst much else, Tony Dawson's involvement in turning down the Silver Dream Racer project as Rank Film would provide no budget. He went on to recommend Barry for the project, who was then trading as Sparton Engineering after linking up with Spondon .

I found it a very enjoyable read although you do have to make allowances for its self-published shortcomings. Any members who would like to borrow The Club copy please contact me.

Alan Halford - webmaster@the-club.org.uk

I'm a Celebrity – get me in the Newsletter

Writes Nick Jeffery...

It was back in August 2020 when near-neighbour Jim contacted me to say "Great opportunity Nick to star on TV. Michael Portillo is doing a new 'Great British Railway Journeys' series and will be including a visit to Princes Risborough which will feature the Kop Hill climb. Given lockdown restrictions the film company think it would be a great idea if he is transported up the hill in a sidecar rather than a car so appropriate social distancing will be maintained. And as you've got the ideal outfit (referring to my 1937 Brough Superior SS100 with pre-war Steib) you're the perfect candidate." "Thanks Jim but no thanks. I've dealt with film companies before and there will be a load of stupid questions before the shoot, I'll waste a day on the shoot itself and then they won't even show the footage." "Fair point Nick, I'll tell them."



Roll forward a couple of days and a phone call from John Biggs. John is head honcho organiser at Kop Hill. Now John is not a man to be refused as he is an early Ford aficionado and let me drive his 1904 Model A Ford. All these early Fords with epicyclic transmission are such a brain-fuddling experience that anyone who trusts me to conduct one must be a good guy. "And it would be good for promoting the Kop Hill Climb" he said. (The Kop Hill event raises serious money for charities.) "OK John, I can't refuse".

So were there a load of stupid questions before? Yes; one example: 'Please sign this non-disclosure agreement.' I (having this strange habit of reading documents before signing) said that the document referred to a programme about restoring old houses and involved builders and architects. It clearly didn't relate to this programme. Them: 'It's the agreement we always use.'

Anyway, I turn up on the day at 8.30 as requested. The film company turn up considerably later. Various other bikes had been arranged including Richard Duffin's wonderful original Series B Vincent Rapide. Michael Portillo was thoroughly professional, engaging and hands-on. The shoot itself was somewhat curious as

the way they'd lined the bikes up statically which meant that the Rough Interior was masked by the adjacent bike so my dialogue with MP was about the sidecar, not the bike. And they did indeed truncate a lot of the dialogue I had with him.

Anyway, judge for yourself, the finished version should be viewable on some form of catch-up TV under 'Great British Railway Journeys Series 12 Episode 2 Stoke Mandeville to Beaconsfield'.



My Favourite Tool – Martin Lambert

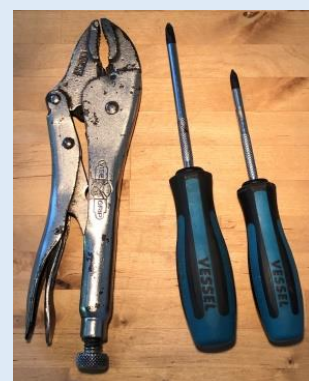
From opposite ends of the spectrum but equally useful are my two picks for "top tool".

First the almost ubiquitous vice-grip or "Mole" grip. I have had this particular vice grip for over 20 years and it gives as good service today as when I first bought it – despite the fact that I routinely weld the jobs I am clamping it with to the actual tool!

I have lost count of the numerous ways that this vice grip has come in handy and, in fact, I suppose that is its greatest virtue, it is like having an extra hand..... only about 100 times stronger and durable than your own - a garage "must have".

Second on the list are my JIS screwdrivers. Having had Japanese bikes for the majority of my biking years (we can forget about an awful pre-unit 6T) these are a relatively recent purchase and gosh do they make a difference! JIS (Japanese Industrial Standard) screws differ ever so slightly to western cross head screws and these little devils from Vessel slot into screw heads with a really pleasing security. Say goodbye to chewed heads with these babies.

Of course, being Japanese, there is a useful raised cross pattern on the shaft to make more minute adjustments and anti-slip handles of the highest quality. If you have a Japanese motorcycle these JIS drivers are an essential purchase for your tool box, believe me.



HAILWOOD'S SENIOR MOMENT – the 1979 Isle of Man Senior TT

By Ray Battersby – January 2021

In June 1979 I visited the Isle of Man for the TT races. I stayed with the Heron Suzuki team at the Hotel Majestic (the Magic Stick as it was known) overlooking Douglas Bay. A four-man team were there to support Mike Hailwood. This comprised of Rex White (team manager), race co-ordinator Martyn Ogborne and the young Aussie mechanic Dave 'Radar' Cullen. Martyn was just 25 years old and Radar certainly younger. Gordon Whitehead was the elder statesman bringing to Suzuki years of front-line Formula One racing experience with Connaught, McLaren and Trojan. Gordon oversaw logistics and the timely supply of parts to ensure that Martyn and Radar were able to work on a 24/7 basis as required.

Main bearings, and particularly their peripheral crankcase seals, were the BIG issue that year. Suzuki, Japan had changed suppliers and the seals of the new bearings would barely last one GP. Until a revised bearing became available, engines were being ripped out, opened up and new cranks inserted every hour of every day.

RADAR: [It was] one of those things where once you press the gear on you can't see. We had to pull it out, strip down the engine and put some other cranks in.

CLASSIC RACER - 17 April 2018 - Radar Part 2: On the roads by Norm Dewitt

Maurice Knight, Suzuki GB's sales director at the time and now an active 92-year-old, recently told me that after spreading machines and support across the TT that year, he had received a telephone call from Mike Hailwood asking for a bike to ride. "They're all spoken for, Mike. There's nothing left. I'm terribly sorry," he said. "And anyway, we've no budget for a man like you."

"Oh, I don't want paying, Maurice...I just wondered if I could borrow one of your bikes."

The salesman almost fainted. "Look, Mike. Let me get back to you," he shrewdly responded. "Let me have another look through the cupboards."

Maurice Knight called Martyn in the race shop. There was only one machine remaining in the race-shop that was not spoken for. It was the one that Suzuki, Japan had built mid-1978 as a special, just for Barry Sheene who was moaning about his latest XR22 factory machines. Martyn hired Donington Park for a private test day and he and Radar had taken the machine up there for Sheene to test. But Sheene was in his *'blame everything else but me for my crap performance'* year and after spending an age setting up the seat, bubble, handlebars and the hand and foot control positions to suit Sheene, he did a few laps before returning to the pits and throwing the machine down. "It's bloody rubbish!" he cried. "Worse than the rubbish I've been riding all year."

Sheene's special XR22 was returned to the race shop at Beddington Lane, Croydon where it gathered dust...until Knight offered it to Mike Hailwood.

And so, Martyn retrieved the machine, smartened it up and Gordon booked Donington for a pre-TT test with a new rider, Mike Hailwood, his first ever ride on a Suzuki. Mike jumped on the bike (still set up for Barry Sheene) and did a few laps and had soon broken the 500cc lap record (a feat that's admittedly easier on an empty track). He came into pit-lane. "How's the bike?" Martyn asked God. "How are the controls for you? Do you need them adjusting?"

"Nah! It's fine. I like them just as they are. It's a great bike. How did I do?"



This uncomplaining experience was a real eye-opener for Martyn and Radar who'd both become too accustomed to Sheene's constant whinging and demands. Mike had adjusted his riding position and his riding style to suit the machine and still broken the lap record.

And so that same machine was resprayed in Mike's own colours and taken over to the Isle of Man for Mike Hailwood to ride in the 1979 TT. I was privileged to be there too acting as a sort of unofficial observer.

The uncomplaining Hailwood on his Suzuki during his Senior TT-winning ride.

Yes. Hailwood was indeed a very cool guy. Our TT workshop was the old coach-house just inside the gates of the 'faded glory' Hotel Majestic. Mike would randomly pop his head into the workshop to check progress. Always chirpy and always cheerful.

Now that Mike had completed his last practice before the Senior race tomorrow, Martyn and Radar fitted the 'good' engine they had reserved for the race.

RADAR: Practice went pretty good and we put in the good race engine but it smoked. It pushed the spring off the main oil seal beyond the drive gear...

CLASSIC RACER - 17 April 2018 - *Radar Part 2: On the roads* by Norm Dewitt

Knowing the issues all too well, the two lads faced the job of stripping down the race engine and fitting new cranks. An all-nighter was in prospect though of course Hailwood would know nothing about it.

Martyn and Radar removed the race engine ready to perform this delicate operation not on an operating table sitting in a well-lit, pristine, clinically clean operating theatre but on the floor of a dingy workshop normally used to store hotel crap - furniture, cutlery, kitchen equipment etc. A filthy hole of a place with just two light bulbs hanging down from its roof and a great big sliding wooden door big enough to drive a coach and horses through. These were left open during the day but closed at night to prevent the light attracting the local kids to come and gawp.

The engine had been up-ended on the brick-lined floor and the lower crankcase half removed. Glistening crankshafts soon littered the filthy floor. We'd just eaten fresh fish and chips out of newspapers and thrown the remnants into a rubbish pile in the corner (the workshop was that sort of place).

It was probably just after midnight when a car drew up outside. A car door slammed and the workshop door slid open a few inches. Hailwood's face filled the gap. "Everything alright lads?" he asked while staring at the innards of the very machine he'd be racing in just a few hours... His Suzuki lay in pieces, splattered around the black hole of a workshop, looking a complete and utter mess.

"Yeah. We're fine," said Martyn. "Go get your sleep and your bike will be ready on the line."

I had a ring-side view of this interaction, sitting high on an old oven at the back of the workshop facing the sliding door. Between me and the door was the dismembered Suzuki with the two mechanics working in the harsh shadows of the lightbulbs swinging above their heads. Then I looked up and saw Mike's face peering in at the door. Oh dear.

It made me think. Here's a famous rider, a hero, a legend, an icon. A four-time world champion. He's about to entrust his personal safety to two relative unknown kids as he rides his Suzuki at 180-200mph around the world's most dangerous racing circuit. What a man!

The next day, Mike won the Senior at an average speed of almost 112mph. As he crossed the line, he slammed on the brakes to stop at the winners' enclosure. After the podium ceremony, journalist Chris Carter, acting as a TT live radio man, thrust a mic at Hailwood's face. "How did it go?" he asked.

MIKE HAILWOOD¹: *Well, the whole thing went a lot better than it did on Saturday and I'd like to thank Martyn and Radar who've been working on the machine. Because I know they worked all last night. They found a seal had gone in the crankshaft (or something technical) and they spent all night ripping it apart and putting it back together. I'd like to thank them for all their hard work.*

I know little of Mike Hailwood but those few brushes I had with him show that he really was the greatest and despite his wealthy background, he was unpretentious and always one of the boys, with great empathy for ordinary people. The final words are Radar's...

RADAR: Mike was a really great guy - there was no superstar stuff and he would call and see us on his way out in the evening. He'd drop in just to see how things were going and we really did enjoy working with him.

CLASSIC RACER - 17 April 2018 - *Radar Part 2: On the roads* by Norm Dewitt

Youtube link to Duke Video of the race:-

[Mike Hailwood's 14th and final Isle of Man TT Win - Road Racing Legend](#)



One year later (June 1980). Same time; same place though the rider was Graeme Crosby.

Left to right: Croz's F1 mechanic Dave 'Junior' Collins; Dave 'Radar' Cullen; Martyn Ogborne; unknown; Mick Smith, Rex White.

Despite its dirty, almost squalid, appearance, the Majestic Hotel's old Coach House workshop has seen some action and a remarkable number of TT winning machines prepared within its walls. [Photo: Ray Battersby].

"Speedway? I've always fancied a go at that" writes your Scribe

Those 8 words spawned a short and completely unspectacular career in Vintage Grasstrack and Speedway racing. Here's how it all started...

It was 1979 and I was chatting to Kawasaki's then Technical Training Guru, Mike Coombes; it transpired that we had a mutual interest in speedway. A few short months later, a small but happy band met in Kawasaki's car park for the trek to Barry and Ivor Thomas' Iwade training track on the Isle of Sheppey. Nick Jeffery and Dave Hill were in the group too...

Of course, before we could ride, we needed suitable equipment: leathers, sliding shoe; oh, and a bike! I sourced leathers from Kawasaki dealer and World Pairs Champion, Ray Wilson. He offered me 2 sets: one of his, complete with sponsor logos and an anonymous set. Needless to say, I chose the latter!

For the sliding shoe, Coombes just asked "Deluxe or Economy"? Nowt but the best, and I duly acquired a custom-built slider fashioned from ship plate. Others chose the economy option and shortly afterwards, Kawasaki's Parts Management were left wondering how boot shaped holes in their Dexion racking had mysteriously appeared!

With a borrowed 2 valve Jawa strapped to the company car I set off reflecting on the sage advice given to me by the ex-Swindon Robins and World Final hero George White, "Nothing to it, stand up on the footrest, and when you get into the arse of the bend wind it on." What could possibly go wrong!

It was a day of mixed fortunes and thankfully few injuries. During a breather Barry Thomas showed us just how good league riders were when he jumped on his Jawa and gave it large! This was memorable not only for his speed and grace but also the fact he was only wearing jeans, trainers and an old 'rally jacket'!

Much later, in 1987, I found myself racing Ivor Thomas at the VMCC Speedway Championship on the Kings Lynn track. In heat 20, he was second and I was third – I was on a petrol engined 350cc Triumph though and I am certain there wasn't much in it at the flag...

Right: Mike Coombes' 350 Triumph bitza 'The Killer' with your Scribe aboard.



The Scribe's Last Word

This newsletter is going from strength to strength, but it is *your* newsletter and without your input it becomes just an Editor's indulgence. So far, there has been no shortage of (hopefully) interesting items but as the summer hots up and lockdown restrictions (again, hopefully) ease, do keep the stories coming.

How's your piece of Meriden history coming on eh Tom? How many miles have you racked up so far this year Bob? And from you chaps not yet enjoying retirement, how's business?

Until we meet up again, ride safe!

Geoff scribe@the-club.org.uk