



SCOTLAND

7th – 10th APRIL, 2016



Organisers
Jonathan Martin
& Adam Kelley

Broadford, Isle of Skye
2.45 PM
9th April, 2016

Author Bill Bryson is quoted as saying; "I always tell people there's only one trick to writing: You have to write something that people are willing to pay money to read. It doesn't have to be very good, necessarily, but somebody, somewhere, has got to be willing to pay money for it."
No-one is going to pay me for this so I warn you now; the following missive just won't be as good as any of Bryson's books!

Our two intrepid Organisers chose to arrange a run in bonnie Scotland because their first runs were Scottish – Jonathan at Fort William in mid-April 2000 and Adam at Nairn in Mid September in 2010. Both now fully-fledged members, Adam as Yamaha UK's General Manager, Sales & Marketing and Jonathan, as Suzuki GB's National Sales Manager, they thought that arranging the run in Inverness - which enjoys a micro-climate in respect of the Scottish Highlands (ie; it's 2degC warmer!) - would be a nice way of starting off their Club organising careers.

It has become a tradition for The Club, when on its way to Scotland, that it stops off at Kirkby Lonsdale on the Thursday night. For some reason we all need the stop-over on the Thursday, when we're fresh and keen – we don't need the stop-over on the Sunday night, after we have done c.1500 miles and may well be a bit worse for wear after 3 nights of imbibing. Being the true men that members – and guests – of this Club are, we all ride home in one hit on the Sunday – come Sun, Rain or Snow. Or all three.

But how did this come about? We can blame, or thank, Peter Sheen.

Peter arranged the "President's Run" in September 1998 and it was based at the Royal Hotel in Kirkby Lonsdale.



Note Peter sat on the front of the steam engine. Wilf Harrison & Hugh Palin – both now gone to The Club in the sky. Dave Martin's Aztec-inspired shirt, Norman Hyde sans-Barbe. How young we all look!

The run, as you would expect as one of Peter's, was perfection. As was the hotel. So good in fact that when David and Andrew decided to arrange the Club's first ever Scottish run they decided it would be a good idea to offer a Thursday stop-over for those chaps who couldn't leave work early enough to get to Fort William in one hit.

So, a question – why Kirkby Lonsdale? Simple – KL to Fort William is 261 miles – and from David's house to KL is 255 miles and Andrews house to KL is 267 miles – KL is as mid-way as you can get. Seeing as Peter had done all the hard work in finding a good hotel in that locale, it made sense to sponge off Peter's hard work. So the stop was at The Royal Hotel – read Alan Baker's brilliant write-up on Fort William on the Club web site – especially including David's "Comedy of Errors" in the 4th Para on Page 1. Even "The Bard" couldn't have made that up!

The second Scottish run was Frank Finch and Keith Davies' run at Carrutherstown in 2005 & the third Scottish run based at Ballachulish which saw us stopping over, again, in Kirkby Lonsdale; but not at The Royal. By that time, The Royal Hotel had "ceased to be", it was "an ex-hotel" and had closed its doors.

But another Club Member had saved the day. Martin Roberts had arranged a run based in Kirkby Lonsdale in Spring 2001 and used the Whoop Hall Hotel in the Lune Valley, a few miles East of Kirkby Lonsdale – and The Club has been staying here ever since. The original Whoop Hall was built in 1618 as "Upp Hall" and the current hotel allegedly retains some of the original features – including the fireplace. Though judging by the photo below I'd say it doesn't look 400 years old.

Allegedly the original Upp Hall, built on the same site, was changed to Whoop Hall (in 1794) because of its link to the local squire and his pack of hounds. The cry "Whoo Up" is apparently what the huntsman shouts at the death of his quarry. No-one knows for sure any more of course, anyone who did know is long gone! So, the 5th time we have stayed at the same hotel – a Club record and testament to the owners and staff of the Whoop Hall. Unfortunately the Whoop Hall has lost some of its magic. A slight disagreement over the evening meal and a pre-chilled breakfast didn't help. Trip Advisor certainly reflects this of late.



Anyone who still uses a map - as opposed to following the TomTom drums - knows the Whoop Hall is on the A65 road. Those of you who are old enough to know how to read a map will also remember the BSA A65; the bike that was 10 years behind the times when it was launched in 1965 & still in production 15 years after its sell-by date. The final attempt of extending the A65's life included the "oil in the frame" versions which raised seat height to 33" - only Nick Jeffery could have ridden one. Put this in perspective, the seat height of a Harley Softail is 26" – and Harley is still in business and the world's largest manufacturer of big-capacity motorcycles. Says it all, really - & sadly.



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I left Andover in good time. I thought I'd be clever and just zip up to the M5 at Gloucester and ride up the M5 and M6. I tell you, the M5 and M6 from Cheltenham to Manchester was a 20mph car park. It took about 2 hours longer than I had planned. Martin Lambert got into a fracas somewhere along the M6 as well with a White-Van-Man who didn't appreciate Martin's ability to weave through the traffic.

I was not on the MT01. After 9 years the MT01 had been sold on. The longest I have ever kept a bike. During a trip to the Italian & Swiss Alps in July 2015 with some chums I had such a great time that when I got home all I wanted to do was put Kim, my wife, on the back and do it all over again. At this suggestion, the conversation went something like this...

"I'm not going on that" sayeth she.

"And why? Because it will be uncomfortable?"

(It would have been really uncomfortable!)

"No"

"Because there's no room for luggage – such as shoes and hair dryer?" *(It has zero luggage space)*

"No"

"Why then?"

"Because it is the world's ugliest bike!"

(It is – was – such a beautiful bike!)

So, now you know why I now have a Moto Guzzi Stelvio.

This led to Keith Davies – ex Moto Guzzi UK National Sales Manager - going all weak at the

knees as he reminisced about being "Long-Legged & Easy to Live With".



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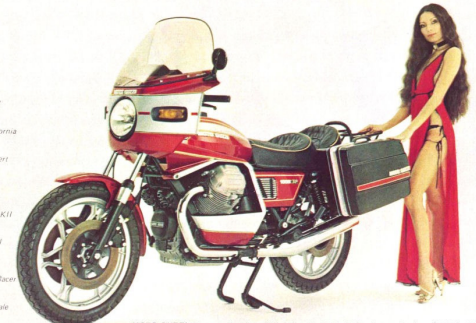
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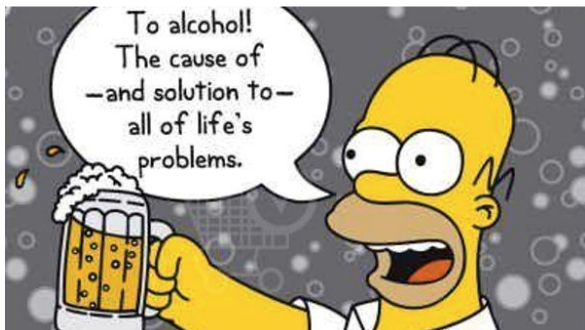
**Kirkby Lonsdale
7 April, 2016
7 PM**

What a sunset.



The evening meal was either Fish Pie or Pork Belly. With fruit crumble – or cheese to finish off. Or both. Jonathan welcomed us and gave us a small speech about starting at 9. Or should we start at 8.30? It was decided that because two people had not arrived, we should leave at 9.

A small group carried on into the wee hours – me, Frank, Andy Mayo, Steve Callahan and recently retired Nick Jeffery. Who knows what we were talking about except for the Landlord's choice of home-compiled music. If you didn't like Creedence Clearwater Revival (which I do, so that was OK) or Bob Dylan (which Nick did, so that was OK), you were, well, you get it. The Landlord went on to tell us about a report on Trip Advisor that someone had put there about his music – not approving of it apparently!



**Homer Simpson (aka Matt Groening)
2010**

**Nick Jeffery
2 AM
Asleep but still
determined
not to spill his
wine.**



And the Royal Hotel? Now reborn, back up and running again, and been awarded the Lancashire Life Hotel of the Year award, in 2015. Maybe another Club weekend...

We're all ready to leave at 8.30 on the Friday. But as we said 9.00, 9.00 it is. So, to pass the time we examined the extra fuel tank on Steve Callahan's KTM. Steve had never experienced the need for reserve on this bike so he didn't know how long reserve would last – so another 1.5 litres may be a life saver – well, worth 10 miles anyway. And it was CE approved as well! Anyone in the know, knows that CE stands for "Chinese Exports" at best, but more probably "Caveat Emptor".



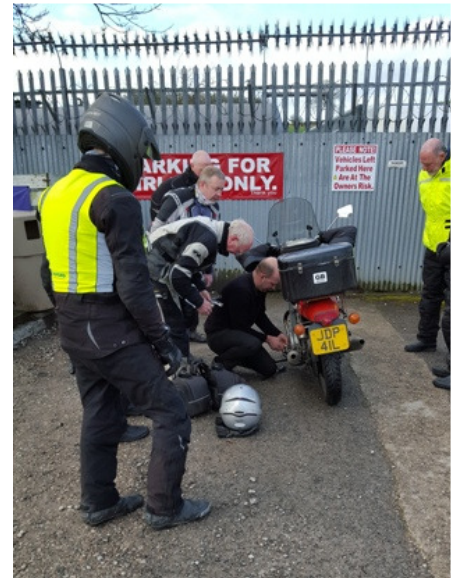
Back to the start of the day...

Nick Hopkins had trouble trying to start the "Trusty" Norton Commando. The bike has certainly done some miles and as Keith Davies commented, (*The Norton had*) "Lasted a lot longer than they did when I was selling them" to which Nick replied "I took a lot longer building it!"

But the bike fell on its left side and broke the bolt that held the footrest on. Thankfully it was all made of steel - not like this modern stuff made out of breakable Ally - so we left early to ride to the petrol station between Kirkby Lonsdale & the M6 where a workshop existed. Like a Far-Side card a "group of experts rapidly assembled"

British Engineering at its best!

And only a fiver....but Nick H couldn't get to his cash. Nick J tried to get to his and in the end I coughed up as I had a wallet. Nick H purchased the Held suit from Keith Blair (Not yet with us, he would join us in Inverness) and always said you needed a Workshop manual to get into, and out of, the Held suit.



Bystanders; Always Innocent.

So, although we had left the Whoop Hall early, we really started our slog up the M6 on time thanks to the workshop excursion. It always amazes me on these Scottish runs that when one gets onto the M6 at Kirkby Lonsdale the Sat Nav tells me the next turning is 134 miles away! The MT01 wouldn't have made the first corner, I would have had to walk the last 16 miles or so. But the Stelvio, with a 300 mile range, would easily make it but my bladder isn't 300 miles big.

The slog up the M6 and A9 is always a long one, but in general, once north of the Glasgow-Edinburgh line, Scotland - and therefore motorcycling - really starts. We were promised a traditional Scottish lunch by our hosts & so, with thoughts of Neaps and Tatties and the odd Sheep's lung thrown in for good measure, we went to Perth to arrive outside the Chatni Curry House. Jonathan and Adam had really struggled trying to find a restaurant to take 12 guys for lunch but the chaps at the Chatni came good - opening up especially for us and driving from Dundee to do that. Lunch was a mixed starter, then large and hot portions of Jalfrezi, Madras and Rogan Josh with rice and Nan.



**A rare sight...
Frank Finch and guest Andy Mayo in a
Curry House - and not a beer in sight!**



**A cheery motorcyclist (Frank Finch)
poses outside of a traditional
Scottish restaurant with TEC
(Tail-End-Chapati) Adam Kelley**

And then onto a ride through the Cairngorms. I had never been this way before and I never knew such fantastic roads existed north of Perth. What roads! Even in the cold and damp – it was around 4 degrees C at this point – we were all having one hell of a ride. The beauty of the Despatch Rider system means everyone can go at their own pace, no pressure to go faster, or slower, than a rider wants. Nick Hopkins later said “The run that I want to remember is the run up to Inverness on Friday” (though there is more to this statement than meets the eye – more to come!) and we rode the A93 until we ended up on one of the roads we had used on the Ballachulish run.



**Keith Davies & Rick Parish get ready to draw pistols.
Martin Lambert is thinking which bike to ride next,
Triumph or Guzzi.**



According to a run report from Autumn 1989, the Despatch Rider system was first trialled then at the behest of a young Dennis Bates. We have been using it ever since and with good reason. Dennis, we all have a lot to thank you for.

As we rode through the Cairngorms National Park I realised that most of it is glacial. You can always tell a Glacial valley by its “U” shaped cross section. We always tend to think of Ice Ages in terms of a picture of primitive humans, clad in animal skins, trekking across vast expanses of ice in a desperate search to find food. But in fact there have been many ice ages, most of them long before humans made their first appearance. And the familiar picture of an ice age is of a comparatively mild one: others were so severe that the entire Earth froze over; for tens or even hundreds of millions of years. It was called “Snowball Earth”. Yet at other times in the World’s history there hasn’t been any permanent ice at all. (Now, that really is Global warming). Only 10,000 years ago there was so much water locked up in ice that you could walk to Normandy. The Lake District was carved out by Glaciers, but there haven’t been any glaciers there for thousands of years. Yet we, as a species, continue to think that because we are now here on this planet, the world should stay as it is and not warm up – that Global Warming shouldn’t happen. Anyway, back to motorcycling..

We’re well into Scotland – it’s a different country! Put it in perspective – When in Inverness, Keith Davies, Ray Battersby & Andy Mayo (among others) were nearer to Norway than they were to home.

I ended up on point duty at a particularly busy roundabout just off the A96/A9 junction. After being beeped a few times a member of the local constabulary stopped his vehicle and asked me to “Move along please squire”. As I had no wish to be questioned around the groin and kidneys in order to be eliminated from his enquiries, I did as he asked & rode off. I met with Alan Halford at the next roundabout and told him I had to move but we all got fuelled up in the end and met at the Palace Hotel.

And so we arrive at The Palace Hotel and Spa at Inverness, overlooking the River Ness.

Greg Elson had driven up with his Triumph in the back of a people mover – a big car really. His bike was all shiny (wouldn't stay like that for long, thought I !) but then after extracting said Triumph he couldn't find anywhere to park the car. Others arrived who hadn't been at Kirkby Lonsdale. Graham Matcham, Keith Blair, & Bob Mac on a new Honda Cross-Dresser Tourer. Bob had recently had an operation on his hand and now prefers a bike sans-clutch. The "Honda is TipTronic" I was advised.

The Palace Hotel was built on the site of Ness House, a mansion that was destroyed in 1870. The building opened in 1890 to the designs of Dr. Alexander Ross (*No, I don't know who he was either! Ed*). It is a Baronial-style three-storey building, with two conical-roofed towers, connected by an arch. The hotel has a Scots Baronial entrance.

The hotel had a unusual bar arrangement – an island by the reception area but it worked – with lots of comfy seating and big picture windows looking over the River Ness. The rooms were in a 1960's style concrete add-on block at the rear of the hotel but were large, comfy and enough floor space for all the paraphernalia associated with motorcycling such as helmet, jacket and a tank bag, or in Graham Matcham's case, a suitcase the size of a sofa (he came in a van by the way!)



It was great to see Ray Battersby again now fully mended after his heart operation. Apparently he had the option of either pig's valves or Italian sealed-for-life valves which may have corroded...He chose pig.

The construction of the railway made Inverness a popular tourist destination and the Palace was one of the first tourist hotels in the town. It was built to accommodate the increased number of visitors to the area after the opening of the railway. During World War I it was used by the Navy as a billet for its senior naval staff.

Another interesting historical fact...The Nairn run was originally going to be based at this hotel. After the initial booking, but before the deposit had been paid, the manager (not the same one as now!) called David Martin and said he refused the booking because there were too many single room allocations. The manager said he'd rather have two people in a double bed, than one. David said that members and guests didn't mind sharing a room but sharing a bed was too far! "English gentlemen don't do that!"

Which leads onto some interesting stats for those of who are thinking of organising a run, or those of you who never have. Of the 24 people on the run at Inverness, 16 were in singles. You can understand what the hotel was saying, as most of the single rooms would be with double beds for single use. It doesn't matter how much we, as The Club, drink, we will never drink as much as a wedding party. The Club is changing to an extent that we can't all appreciate. The number of single rooms now being required and the higher standards expected are only two of the challenges that face organisers. Some people say these runs have got expensive – but they haven't in real terms. According to the run report for Autumn 1977 the run cost £25. Bear in mind that in the "good ol' days" dinner/wines/coffee/liqueurs etc were always donated by various manufacturers/importers (Which doesn't happen any more – Honda/Yamaha/Suzuki etc, what has happened?) so the £25 would become, with the kitty and amounts added in for 2 Dinners and wine etc, nearer £40. Using the web site www.thisismoney.co.uk – their "historic-inflation-calculator" - to calculate what £40 in 1977 would be worth today, it gives us a figure of £257.56. And this run - member rate - £255 in a four star hotel. You can play around with these figures as much as you like but the point is made; These weekends of ours are fantastic value for money and a credit to all organisers who put so much personal time, effort and expense into the organisation of such great weekends for our mutual motorcycling pleasure.

What really makes the organisers life difficult re the bookings is not knowing how many members are attending. Even after two emails in respect of this run, requesting "Let us know if you're NOT coming" FIFTEEN members couldn't be bothered to reply – not even a simple "Have a great time but I'm sorry I'm not coming". You know who you are! (*So do I*) - 25% of the membership not playing fair there.

The Friday night meal was a buffet which included fried fish, chips, Shepherds Pie and some kind of vegetable though I must admit I didn't give that too much attention! Keith Blair said grace and then the wine & beer flowed. "Run Leader" Jonathan (Adam Kelley would be TEC) told us where we were going and what we were doing on the morrow. I have to confess at not being as switched-on as our usual Scribe, Geoff Selvidge who wasn't with us this weekend. Geoff always keeps the menus and wine list and adds them to his report. Sorry chaps, I didn't. It was good wine though! I enjoyed a bottle.

Guests were introduced. Frank had two – Andy Mayo on his third qualifying run and also 1st timer Gavin McCaffrey from LS2 helmets who lived just 10 miles away on the Black Isle but still stayed at the hotel. Gavin was riding a Kawasaki Drifter 1500 with "Judge Dredd" mudguards (sorry; fenders) and which he rode very well. He had recently upgraded from the 800 version. Andy Mayo was on his Aprilia Tuono V4. Bob Mac introduced Mark Davis and made a small speech about membership – this was Marks' 6th attendance as a guest according to Bob (Applications to be made to the Committee, Bob!).

We had a small raffle – 3 Tesco vouchers, a tin of biscuits and a bottle of Whisky. And then to the bar – with Maurice Knight showing anyone who would give him time that his new iPhone would not work in Scotland. He was correct; his Virgin mobile had zero bars in Inverness. My O2 was fine...More to come!

Peter Sheen, Maurice Knight, Ray Battersby and David O'Neil had all flown up and hired two cars between them. Some would say "sensible" chaps.

After a late night previously at KL, I was off to bed at a sensible hour much to everyone's surprise but apparently the rest were not long after.

So, on Saturday morning after a very good breakfast, and right on time at 9am, we were led away for a day's riding of the Scottish Highlands by Jonathan on a product of the Hamamatsu Highlands.

We headed west along the A835 to Gorstan then past the Aultguish Inn – where we had lunch 16 years previously; almost to the day. It still looked the same. The roads were stunning & getting faster by the mile, past the dam and Loch Droma and turn left at Braemore onto the A832. The weather wasn't too bad. Drizzle and 4 degC but the road made up for it. Then the Gremlins struck...

Nick Hopkin's Commando was having a bad day. At a set of traffic lights he noticed that when he applied the front brake the fuse blew. Note the word "fuse" is singular. This causes a problem because everything stops working if it fails. A modern bike, with a dozen or so fuses would, in this scenario, only have resulted in brake lights, indicators and horn not working. Nick replaced the fuse and a short time later that one, too, wore out.

Also, at roughly the same time, Greg Elson's Triumph Thruxton 900 started firing on only one cylinder.

We were in a race between the two British Marques
– a race to see which one broke down the most times or until it would not run any more.

The Norton won.

Keith Blair, ever the gentleman, stayed with Nick Hopkins to assist in trying to get it to run. Sadly they never managed – and NH was RAC'd back to the hotel. Subsequent examination in the hotel car park showed the right handlebar wiring loom was virtually one copper wire – all melted together. The Thruxton made it back under its own "steam" so to speak, running on one cylinder most of the day due to a failed coil pack.



A sad sight. The Triumph about to struggle back on its own. The Norton now waiting help. Nick Hopkins in a fisherman's style hat.

A stop off at, I think, at about Little Gruinard to let others catch up and to bunch us up ready for the coffee stop. Cold and damp it may have been, but everyone had a smile.

Unfortunately the photo I took of the Guzzi rear tyre steaming didn't really show the steam well. Jonathan took a video of it which came out well. Surprisingly Steve Callahan's rear tyre wasn't steaming!



A Grey Sky merges with a grey sea. What a road! Love the mirror in shot Greg, perspective!

The four in a car... Maurice Knight, Ray Battersby, Peter Sheen and David O'Neill enjoy a cuppa, a Shortcake and a laugh before they get back into the warmth and dry of a 4-wheeled conveyance.



Morning Coffee was taken at the Sheiling Restaurant in Gairloch. What a shame it wasn't at least dry or we could have taken coffee and shortcake biscuits "Al Fresco" with a view of the Loch. Here was also the first fuel stop, 76 miles from leaving the hotel in Inverness.

Keith Blair was still trying to help Nick Hopkins while Greg Elson was struggling back to the Hotel.

Octagenarian Maurice Knight was heard to splutter "Where's my bloody virgin?" more than once. He didn't desire Olive Oyle. Nor anything fleshy. His flashy Apple iPhone wasn't working at all because there seemed to be no Virgin signal - anywhere. Ray found Maurice's wretched virgin by re-booting his phone. Or was that just booting?

Back on the road – again spot-on timing and along the A832 toward Kinlochewe and then onto Achnasheen (We had lunch here on the Nairn run, at the Ledgowan Hotel) and south through Strathcarron and into the Kyle of Lochalsh. Across **THE** bridge... the bridge of much controversy when it opened in 1995. There's only so much one can say about the roads in Scotland. Suffice to say they are Scottish roads, smooth (usually), twisty (always). **"Superlatives are Superfluous"**.

The roads after the Aultguish Inn were all like this one on the right.

Shame it wasn't a blue sky in the morning, but certainly atmospheric.



Keith Davies commented on how many Tesco delivery trucks we had seen in the middle of no-where. I pointed out that the rear of the delivery vans had painted on them (This might be paraphrasing but near enough!) – “Home delivery from £3 a month”. (My youngest daughter tells me that they all say that! What do I know?) All power to Tesco. My sister-in law told of a story of someone on her side of the tribe, unknown to me, who lives in the middle of nowhere, somewhere in Scotland. She is in her late 80's or early 90's (Not my sister-in-Law, though you wouldn't know!) & every week or so a Tesco man-in-a-van turns up and passes her the grocery order. One day, the delivery driver said something like “We are all impressed that someone of your tender years can use a computer and order on line.” “Oh no!” she says “I speak to my son every week. He lives in New York. I tell him what I want from Tesco. He orders it for me!”

So, an old lady in Scotland speaks to someone in New York who does an on-line order to an English company who delivers to an old lady in Scotland. Brilliant, this modern world.



Dave Martin (Guzzi) and Steve Callahan (KTM) on the A890, about to turn left at the junction to Strathcarron.

The mountains in the distance are still topped with snow.

Riding along these Scottish roads makes me think about many things and one of them was how dark everything must be at night. No street lights, few people therefore few house lights, no cars - nothing. So I researched it a bit (not while riding!). Put it in perspective, when you open the door of your refrigerator, you summon forth more light than the **total** amount of light enjoyed by most households in the 18th century. The world at night, for much of history, has been a very dark place indeed. Did you know that a candle gives the equivalent light of less than 1% of an incandescent 100 watt light bulb. Now, before you say "That's 1 Watt"; it isn't - because a normal incandescent light bulb is only about 8% efficient in respect of the amount of light it emits...and at 16 lumens per Watt a 100W light bulb will give in the order of 130 Lumens of light, whereas a candle gives, typically, in the order of 12 Lumens. But that is 10%! I hear you say, not 1%. Ah! That's because a Candle's light was measured in foot-candles, not Lumens, where 1 foot-candle was 1 lumen per square foot. This has now been replaced by the measurement of the "Candela"
 bla.bla.bla...ZZZZZZZZZZZZ.....



A "foot-candle"

And onto the lunch stop at The Harbour Restaurant in Broadford on the Isle of Skye. First a fuel top up for those that needed it (76 miles since the last stop) and then a short walk to the restaurant. A Spanish hotel in Scotland...?

Chef Christina and her team were all you could wish for. Freshly made soup (double helping for those that wanted it) and then baked chicken in a freshly made sauce, roast potatoes and vegetables. I had a small Wooha Wheat beer but Ginger Beer seemed to be the drink of the moment. FYI, Wooha is a small micro brewery based in Nairn, so fairly local. It was good to!



Two views of happiness. On the left, enjoying a drink with a great lunch in a great restaurant after a great ride with mates. Below - a genuine pleasure at serving good food to great customers who appreciated it. Christina and her team.

Jonathan said when they went to book a restaurant for lunch nearly everywhere was closed for the Winter. The Harbour Restaurant was closed and the staff was in Spain, so the restaurant was booked, by email, blind, 1600 miles away. This modern world!



Keith Blair had caught us up. Nick Hopkins was on his way back to the hotel. Christina had been made aware by Jonathan that one – possibly two – members would be late for lunch. Keith joined us toward the end of the meal and David O'Neill told me that Keith said he'd had a great ride and was as "Happy as Larry", as they say. Grinning away, ear to ear. He was served the same meal as we'd had, piping hot. As I left the restaurant I smiled to myself as Keith and Christina were having a conversation in Spanish. I struggle to even order beer in Spanish! (Why can't the Spanish just call it "beer" like the rest of the World?) Yet here was Keith, straight from a 165 mile bike ride in the wet & cool, having a conversation in a second language (or 5th, he was master of so many) as if it was his mother tongue.

We waited for Keith Blair in the car park by the petrol station while he filled up. Then on our way again on what is probably my favourite road IN THE WORLD - (And I've ridden a few; most of the EU; Oz Melbourne to Sydney to Ayers Rock, Perth; USA including coast to coast; New Zealand) - the A87/A887 road from Kyle of Lochalsh to Invermoriston. The sun came out and the roads were dry. A very pleasant 10/11 degC. We had used this road first thing in the morning 16 years previously and also on the Nairn run, but this was the first time we had ridden it, as a Club, West to East. It seemed so different in reverse – I mean West to East, not going backwards. At the junction of the A887 and A82 Jonathan called a halt so our Club, by now stretched out over many miles, could all group together.



Keith Davies told me he had decided to just soak up the scenery on this piece of the run and take it at a leisurely pace. Keith Blair arrived at the "halt", (about a minute after the photo above was taken) with a grin as wide as his helmet.

KD spoke to him and KB said something along the lines of "What a day! It couldn't better."

North along the A82 and turn off left at Drumnadrochit and then North on the A833 to the last fuel stop of the day, just prior to returning to the Palace hotel.

Formido, Trepidatio, - Pedicabo... Pedicabo... Pedicabo ...*

Most of us – 15 by my reckoning – are at the last petrol stop of the day. Everyone filled up to start the long ride home the next day with a full tank. We're 5 minutes from the hotel. Most had finished fuelling and had pushed our bikes forward 10 yards or so and we were just waiting for the last riders. Jonathan is on the phone to the hotel saying "We're 5 minutes away – get the Hot Toddies ready!"

TEC Adam arrives and goes straight to Jonathan.

They converse and I hear Jonathan say – almost a shout – "Keith Blair?"

"What's up?" I ask; I think something like Keith had made a detour to look at a Red Grouse or something and destroyed the Organisers spot-on timing. "Keith has been hit by a car."

What did that mean – that he stopped at some lights or junction and someone had hit him in the rear, perhaps knocking him off at 2 or 3 mph?

Adam says "Let's go back to the hotel". But there's no Keith Blair; no Nick Jeffery, no Frank Finch.

Back at the hotel...Adam is visibly in shock. Red-eyed. Speechless. Words don't come easily, but the story unfolds that he arrived to see Nick Jeffery and Frank already at the scene. Keith, lying in the road not moving. The bike some distance away. 2 stopped cars, 1 of which had gone off road. Police & Ambulance arrive. Adam could do no-more and he hadn't see anything anyway – so left Nick and Frank at the scene and moved on. We'll hear more later. We're all hoping all will be well.

In the bar, prior to Dinner, it is subdued. Not much banter about the day's riding. People cope with stress and worry differently. Some just talk, talk about anything. Some just stare into space, with their own thoughts. Some keep busy doing, well, not a lot. Some are asking – "Why aren't we hearing anything" "Someone should call the hospital" "Why isn't Frank answering his phone?" (Later we learned there was no mobile signal at the scene).

At 7.30 Chairman Graham asks us to go into the Dining room – 30 minutes before the scheduled time of 8 pm for dinner. I think we all knew, but we were all still hoping all would be well. A visibly upset Graham, with Frank Finch and Nick Jeffery still in their motorcycle clothing by his side, advised us all that our friend and fellow Club member Keith Blair had, that day, lost his life.

Nick gave a short description of what he saw as he had been following Keith. Between Drumnadrochit and Urquhart Castle on the A82 Nick saw the back end of Keith's bike step out, it then side-swiped a car coming the other way which triggered the side air bags. The car then left the road (the car had an American family on holiday in the Scottish Highlands). A second car, following the first, subsequently hit Keith; Nick emphasised there was nothing either driver could have done to avoid Keith.

There wasn't a dry eye in that room at that moment. People made their way back to the bar for the 15 minutes until dinner was ready. I stayed with Jonathan and Adam for a short while in the dining room but there was nothing that I, that anyone, could say and after a couple of minutes left them to their own thoughts. I went to the gents to be on my own, and I shed a tear or three for Keith, for his family.

And also for everyone and everything. There's no easy way to say this - What a crap way to end such a brilliant day. As I came out of the gents, I met Gavin going to the dining room to see the organisers to try and console them - which I appreciated as a really nice gesture. Thank you, Gavin.

At dinner Graham made a short speech and we toasted Keith. Some made their own private toasts along the line of "It had been a pleasure to know Keith". David O'Neill provided the whisky for the toast.

By fate, or providence, or whatever you want to call it, Nick and Frank assisted at the scene. I can't think of anyone finer to be there in the last moments of one's time on this planet. Thanks, chaps. There was no Sergeant-at-Arms...

(* Latin for Terror, Horror, Bugger... Bugger... Bugger...)

That was it, really. The end of what was – tragedy aside - a perfect weekend. Perfect roads, hotel, food, drink, weather and company.

Most people left Inverness at an early hour on the Sunday. Keith Davies – because he couldn't sleep - at around 2 am, but most left around 6am. Nick Jeffery headed toward Aberdeen to visit friends. I had planned to leave fairly early and make a "politically correct" visit to my brother-out-law and his wife who had recently purchased property near Inverness. I was late of course! I finally left the Inverness area around 10.30 or 11am and went a favourite route of mine, the west bank of Loch Ness and then Glen Coe which added almost an hour to the journey. Once again I proved to myself that my bladder is not as big as the Guzzi Stelvio petrol tank.

What is it about Shap – that at only 1000 feet above sea level it is always horizontal rain or blowing 100 mph winds. Keith Davies said that at 5 or 6 in the morning everything was so white with frost that it looked like snow. At least the bike wasn't at 45 degrees riding over Shap – that's a first!

On the way south I overtook a chap on a Harley - dressed (if you can say that) in jeans and a leather jacket – Jeans when it was so cold? We met up at the services and he told me that he had been in Inverness, rode the Applecross Pass which was still covered in snow. He'd heard of a biking accident in the area. He hoped all was OK. I denied all knowledge of such news. I don't know why. 49% of me want to say "Yes, I was privileged to know & ride with that fine man. A real gentleman." but 51% of me suppressed that urge. I don't really know why to this day.

After the 300 miles without a turn (Garmin was telling me my next turn was in 286 miles) my mind went through a kaleidoscope of memories and emotions. Keith and his family, of course. His friends – us. Our families and their concerns for us, as motorcyclists. I thought of the occupants of the two cars and in particular the American family on holiday - their once-in-a-lifetime vacation in the Highlands of Scotland will, forever, be remembered for all the wrong reasons.

Some Club members felt this report should not have been written. Some of us believe that Keith would have wanted us to remember why we all meet, why we do this in all weathers – not just the motorcycling but the friendship as well. Keith was a big mileage rider – he enjoyed his motorcycling.

The Aussies have a word for this bond. Mateship.

And; I thought of Ronnie Biggs, the "celebrated" train robber – he may have wandered around in the warmth in Rio, but I bet he regretted his life and that he yearned for a pint with his chums in South London. We had that pint – and more – with our friend, Keith Blair. No regrets there.

Because of Keith's selfless actions in Scotland in assisting Nick Hopkins & the broken-down Norton in the middle of nowhere, after everyone else had moved on, there isn't, as far as I know, a photo of Keith Blair on this run. I think it fitting to leave it at that and remember him as we all wish, in our own way.

Gordon Keith Blair. RIP.

It was a pleasure, an honour, to have known you and ridden motorcycles with you.

Photos – thanks to Keith Davies, Greg Elson, David Martin, Jonathan Martin

Donations received from;

Keith Davies, Frank Finch, Nick Hopkins, Tony Jakeman, Nick Jeffery, Geoff Selvidge, Roy Pinto, Peter Sheen, Tom Waterer, Graham Goodman, Craig Carey-Clinch, Rick Parish

David Martin. April, 2016

Run what you Brung...

Jonathan Martin Organiser
Adam Kelley Organiser
Graham Matcham Chairman
Nick Hopkins
Alan Halford
Bob Mac
Tony Jakeman
Rick Parish
Mark Davis (Guest of Bob Mac)
Steve Callahan
Gavin McCaffrey (Guest of FF)
Martin Lambert
Andy Mayo (Guest of Frank Finch)
Keith Davies
Frank Finch
Nick Jeffery
David Martin
Keith Blair
Greg Elson
Ray Battersby
David O'Neill
Peter Sheen
Maurice Knight

Suzuki DL100 V-Strom
Yamaha Tracer
BMW GS1200
Norton Commando 1971 (year, not cc)
Suzuki GSX650F
Honda Cross-Tourer
BMW F800GT
BMW R1200GS
Honda Africa Twin
KTM 990
Kawasaki Drifter 1500
Kawasaki Versys 1000
Aprilia Tuono V4
Triumph Trophy
Suzuki DL1000 V-Strom
Yamaha Super Tenere
Moto Guzzi Stelvio 1200
BMW K75RT
Triumph Thruxton 900
Boeing 737 and Vauxhall Insignia
Airbus A320 and Vauxhall Insignia
Boeing 737 and Mercedes A Class
Boeing 737 and Mercedes A Class

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The Route – 257 miles

