

A FACTIONAL ACCOUNT OF THE FOUNDING OF THE CLUB

In the spring of 1960, a year after the first Honda 50 step-through arrived on British shores, Triumph chief Edward Turner visited Japan to see what all the fuss was about. He inspected the factories of Honda, Yamaha and Suzuki and concluded that whilst the Japanese facilities were better organised and more mechanised than British factories, the Japanese were fighting on a different battleground than the British; the entry-level 50cc and 75cc sectors. The British industry were masters of its own market, and in particular the big-bike 350cc, 500cc and 650cc sectors. It was unlikely that the Japanese would ever compete in these sectors where the British were invincible.

But that was then and this was now. By 1963, the senior executives of the British motorcycle industry had watched the merciless attack of the Japanese on the sub 175cc sector which made the Bantam look like the pre-war DKW design that it really was. Then it was the turn of the quarter litre class with the Yamaha YDS2 outperforming every British 250, many of its 500cc machines and even some of its 650s.

ET saw the writing on the wall. Rather than smugly convincing themselves that the Japanese would never - *could* never – mount an assault on the larger sectors, the British industry needed to wake up and smell the sake. The Japanese industry giants clearly had the ambition and the finance to conquer ALL the world's motorcycle markets. They had no intention of calling a truce after taking the 250cc class honours.

And as the Japanese ventured towards a head to head with the British industry on their 500cc battle-ground, Starley House, the Coventry HQ of the British Cycle and Motor Cycle Association, became a fortress to its beleaguered industry leaders. Here they came for their inspiration and

encouragement. But the news always seemed to be so very bleak...

Early in 1963, following one of their regular monthly meetings, the industry leaders had gathered around the bar at Starley House. Norman Aubrey, the CMCA's General Manager had opened the bar and a steward had charged the cut glass tumblers of the industry stalwarts with chunks of ice and sloshes of Scotch.

Edward Turner gazed around the room at his desperate competitors. He looked down at his glass and swirled the ice around as if seeking inspiration. Norman Aubrey took this as ET's command for a fill-up. The steward obliged with a splash of Black Label. "Well chaps," ET began in his strident tones, "we have a problem." He paused for effect. "And you know one of our problems is that we're not attacking the enemy with uniformity. The Japanese manufacturers are orchestrated by MITI who dictate how, what and when the industry acts as a whole." He slurped from his tumbler. The others

followed his lead.

"The Japs have a master plan that works for the entire industry whilst we meet here one day every month and for the next thirty days, we slash and cut and compete head to head in the marketplace. This is exactly what the Japanese want us to do and it's a guaranteed recipe for disaster. We need to work together to defeat the common enemy. To do this, we need to work like a team. What we need to do is to build a strong team amongst ourselves."

"I agree with you Mr Turner," said a handsome looking man, "and what we..."

ET ignored the interruption and continued. "The best thing I ever did to build a team of my own colleagues was to get away from Meriden and the factory and ride

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motorcycles. We lived, ate and slept together for five days on a trip that I believe young Wickes called," he stopped briefly to snatch a glance at the handsome man, "...the *Gaffer's Gallop* and I suppose that's what it was. We rode from Meriden to Lands End and up to John O'Groats and Wick. We did a thousand miles in five days and we certainly got to know each other intimately. We worked better as a team after that," Turner continued, gazing up at the chandelier as he remembered how saddle-sore he was after his 1,000 mile jaunt on a little Triumph Terrier.

"Gaffer's Gallop, eh, Edward? I rather fancy the sound of that," said a lanky member in a clipped military voice. "Socialising may actually drum up some extra business, what?" "So that's how you get a Norton to run on alcohol is it Hugh?" piped a bespectacled man with a pipe in his mouth.

"You deserve a Gold Star for that one Bert," cried a man wielding a slide rule. "There's strength in numbers my mother always said." "Trust an accountant to rely on numbers. That's the spirit!" cried Turner throwing the remains of his Scotch down his throat in a well-practiced way. "Now listen to me. I've got an idea for a sort of social, *motorcycley, clubby* thing..." he gesticulated with his hands twisting and writhing in a sort of harmonious disharmony.

Norman thought this was ET's way of asking for a top-up and prodded the steward into action.

"What do you mean, old chap," said a Teutonic looking man called Bertie. "D'you mean the sort of Club where we could let our hair down just once or twice a year?"

"Good man!" said Turner, hands clasped and gazing upwards and now noting the spider's web gracing the chandelier.

"Only twice a year?" spouted a froth-spattered mustachioed Groucho Marx

lookalike crouching behind a row of empty beer bottles.

But ET was on a roll and waved his arm dismissively, disallowing any intervention. "Sorry Bert... er we could meet up at - er - a *hotel* somewhere..."

"You'd need luggage - er, *panniers* - for that," somebody remarked helpfully.

"Now you just get back in your sidecar, Doug. If you think we're all gonna rush out and..."

"We could chat and socialise around the bar to the early hours. We could have a fishin' or golf competition..." suggested Norman.

"I was rather thinking we could ride down to Beaulieu and sail my yacht," said Turner with Triumph. "Are you keeping notes of all this, Pencil?" he barked at the handsome man (who never allowed such disparaging remarks to get on his Wicke).

"Er, yes I am Mr Turner," murmured the 'pencil', "but regrettably I suffer from ...er" he sucked through his teeth, "... *'mal de mer'* I think you sailors call it."

"And what about motorcycles?" barked the grieving man behind the beer bottles. "When do we get to ride motorcycles?" By now his long droopy moustache was dripping beer on the highly polished boardroom table.

"Ah yes. Thanks for that Bert. Yes of course, we'll all have to *arrive* on a motorcycle," said Norman, discreetly waving a finger at the steward who promptly removed the spillage with a deft swipe of his napkin.

"And maybe we could reserve Saturday for a ride and a gala black-tie dinner in the evening..." suggested the clipped voice.

"Er, no, Hugh," said Turner's 'Pencil', "We don't need a black tie. I'll design a club logo and we can have some ties embroidered that we wear on formal occasions - er - such as your Saturday evening gala dinner. I've designed logos before," he said with conviction.

"Now listen to me. I've got an idea for a sort of social, *motorcycley, clubby* thing."

"That's right," ET queried. "Wasn't it YOU that designed the Triumph staff tie, Pencil?"

"And what sort of logo were you thinking of, Jack?" asked Norman mischievously leaving ET's question hanging in the air.

"Well, let me see, maybe the front elevation of a rider on his motorcycle?" Jack responded, busily twitching a pencil into life over a scrap of paper. "Something a bit like this!" He held his sketch up for all to see. It was a simple outline – almost a cartoon – of a motorcycle and its rider heading straight at the viewer. "I'll produce the artwork next week if you like," he added helpfully.

"I just bloody well hope that's a Triumph you've drawn there, Pencil" shot Edward Turner. "I insist on it being a Triumph! This club was MY idea after all!"

"I don't think anyone really cares, Edward." said a man with a pencil behind both ears gesticulating with a flapping reporter's notebook. "Make it a Triumph Jack, if it makes your life any easier," this latter

remark mouthed whilst aiming his gimlet eye on ET.

"I agree with Arthur," interjected the man with the clipped voice. "I don't think it really matters...but I DO think we should stay the night and ride home on the Sunday when we've sobered up eh?" he queried.

"That's a good idea, Hugh," chimed a bright spark called Wood, "maybe we could stop for lunch somewhere along the way too? I'm sure I could persuade Mavis to make me some sandwiches and a flask."

"That's a *brilliant* idea," Bill said. "But we'd better be back before *darkness*, your highness!"

And so the banter continued, well into the early evening...

This then was the moment when Edward Turner, acting as its catalyst, first ignited the flame of the leading lights of the British motorcycle industry that was soon to flicker into life, first as the 1963 *Gaffer's Gallop* and shortly thereafter as *The Club*.

Actually, nobody can really recall the foundation of The Club in those sunset days of the British motorcycle industry, so the above account mixes the facts with a bit of imagination.

And the facts that we *do* know are scanty. Thanks to Bob Trigg, an early Club member, we know that Founder Member Edward Turner was heavily involved from the start. Bob also explained how Founder Member Jack Wickes – from whose drawing board the Triumph's sleek, stylish lines had come – had designed the original - single motorcycle - Club logo.

As far as the very early Club events are concerned, we know that in the Spring of 1963 almost twenty Stormgarded Club members went for a *Gaffer's Gallop* centred conveniently at Stratford-upon-Avon. Thanks to the recollections of Founder Member, Bert Perrigo, we know that the members stayed at Alvestone Manor and that the *Gallop* took the members to Silverstone.

Bert Perrigo also recounts the Club's second *Gallop* to Swansea in the Autumn of 1963. There, the members were hosted by British Petroleum who took them on a tour of their refineries at Angel Bay and also provided the buffet lunch.

The following year, these stalwarts spent a weekend with Geoff Duke and other guests at Kings Lynn sitting on their pudding basins alongside a cold river waiting for a bite. Whether Britax and Lucas ever saw eye to eye we'll never know.

But over the past fifty years, many a strong personal friendship has been forged by business rivals. It took over ten years before the Club members came out of Japanese denial by initiating Gerald Davison of Honda into *The Club* in 1975. Three years later, Nick Jeffery of Kawasaki joined the members' ranks.

How long before the Club enrolls its first Chinese member?