

TWO WHEELS AND A ROOF ON THE ISLAND

Royce Creasey hadn't been to the Isle of Man since 1965 until this year when he returned — on a Quasar . . .

In essence TT week in the Isle of Man comes close to the perfect party. The sort of trip where you arrive to find things pretty much out of control, get wasted to the point where you pass out, lie down until you feel better and then discover it's all still happening at full speed. Eventually you reach the point where you can't remember anything else. Dilettantes can even sit around and watch it end for a day or two. The committed devotee of sex 'n' drugs 'n' rock 'n' roll might find things a little dull, however. The sex thing was limited by the fact that most ladies still turn up on the back of somebody else's bike. A thing of beauty has a boy forever. If you bring your own it's best with two bikes; the circuit is less fun two up.

Rock 'n' roll was limited, being provided once again by *Bike* magazine, alone with Quasar fitting it as standard. The two rock events could usefully have been a couple of days longer and in the open air, and how about a subscription to get the Rolling Stones over for next year? I found 'Whose Next' about the best aid to flying my Quasar; coming out of the Creg excitingly close to the straw bales with 'I'm Mobile!' blasting out of the distorted speakers and the motor in the redline may not be good racing practice and comes over a bit surreal as a motorcycling experience, but it sure beats the hell out of getting cold and wet!

The reason for my somewhat unlikely move upmarket was to get as many Quasars as possible onto the Island. A rebuild of one of the prototypes and my presence brought numbers up to four, two in the hands of their new owners. As I'd done about 500 miles in the beast since testing it for *Bike* last year, and last saw the Island in '65, you can imagine how aware I was of the opportunities to blow it totally trying to keep up with some loonie on one of the Turbo-Rickman things that *Bike* keeps testing. In the event we arrived in Douglas late in the morning to discover deep craziness everywhere as thousands of bikers discovered bike jams, probably for the first time since last year. Within yards of leaving the dock I'd done a crash stop and without more ado the Quasars crept off in line astern to the quiet cottage 'somewhere in the south' that had been supplied by yet another of the strange coincidences that brought me to this mysterious island . . .

Weather on arrival was in the heatwave range and first move was to strip to the legal minimum and lie in it. I regard this as the starting point of any holiday, the sex 'n' drugs 'n' rock 'n' roll being indulged when I can't stand the sun any more. Unfortunately said sun gave up first and as the week wore on the weather got more and more unfriendly, culminating in a gale on the final Saturday that had straw bales and bits of tree blowing about



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the roads. There were times when I wished I'd brought a sweater. First day's biking consisted of unpacking the Quasar and making sure it was decoratively parked, but by the next morning I felt that I'd arrived in body and mind and took off in the direction of Quarter Bridge to inspect this here TT circuit and find out what all the fuss is about.

Since '65 I've driven round most of the world's major circuits and been involved in various forms of competitive motoring. So it was easy to imagine that I at least knew the theory, but, in spite of a surface with really first class grip, no cat's eyes, few drain covers and curves which have been developed for decades expressly for racing motorcycles, the TT course is still just a pretty bumpy country road. Riding round it at touring speed is really pleasant. All you have to do is keep between the well-marked kerbs and remember that the white line still means traffic coming the other way. When I started to move as for real it started to dawn on me why bikers are so straight. I've always been curious as to why the biking sub-culture, already outcast from respectability, shows so little interest in imaginative drugs. It's like this; every year yer average hippy does up some LSD and finds out who he really is. Every year yer average biker runs round the TT circuit and finds out who he really is. The risks are pretty similar and neither are taken lightly!

I found myself running around with Mac McDairmid of the 860GTS Duke, last featured lying under some French Armco in June '77 *Bike* (coincidentally also the Quasar test issue) and we both got faster and faster, trying harder and harder as the week progressed. Eventually using every bit of power, most of the brakes and more courage than I knew I had, I worked down to 34 minutes. Mac, with another twenty miles an hour for the mountain and considerably more acceleration above 90, managed 31. The only rule was not breaking speed limits by more than 10 mph, and even at that moderate rate there are whole sections where the bumps blur vision and the sightlines run out at 100 yards. We figured that closed roads might be worth eight or nine minutes less a lap, but with nothing to look at but two blurred and dancing white-painted kerbs and a flicker of trees, walls and houses we were both at a loss to decide where the remaining five minutes needed for a competitive lap time comes from. Monaco is tougher, Spa much faster, but I've never come across any race track so cluttered with bends, curves and bumps. I'd arrive at Governor's Bridge, back into the real world, out of breath and spaced, after once again trying to find the nerve to hold it flat round the Veranda and seeing the Creg Na Ba Hotel hurtling up at a thoroughly obscene speed. Then Old Man Mike casually slips round in under twenty minutes, lap after lap, forcing the realisation that nearly all of us are just tourists. One thing for sure, the FIM can relax. About the only drug anyone sane enough to survive would use at the TT is natural adrenalin with perhaps a touch of coffee and white sugar. Even at 34 minutes the level of excitement is high enough not to require enhancement. Of course it's quite



possible to run round at lower speeds — so you can hear the tape deck for instance — and at that rate there are all sorts of possibilities . . .

With all this ruff tuff biking stuff going down the calm way that the Manx people accept being outnumbered by a cultural group noted for its capacity for rape and pillage might cause surprise. In fact they've got it pretty well sussed. First thing is of course that bikers are just people wearing funny clothes and like most people everywhere are polite and pleasant. In any case after a few circuits there isn't any need to look for other thrills. Secondly the pubs open just as most holidaymakers get up, and close twelve hours later (officially). Wild drunkenness rapidly gives way to quiet stupefaction. Leaving a Manx pub requires an effort of will unfamiliar to those reared on British Licensing Laws. The ultimate thrill of the circuit, the standard diet of meat, beer, potatoes and white sugar resulted in thorough overload by the middle of the week. Fortunately I discovered a packet of brown rice in the cottage and after a day or two I was ready for more.

In retrospect the visit seems like one long high of narrow roads rushing hilariously fast towards me, but I see from various notes taken in situ that to some extent it was a warlike nine-tenths boredom, one-tenth pure hell situation. The biking establishment had done its predictable thing, laying on an expensive microcosm of Earls Court, so real, so neatly preserved that inside time itself was slowed down and the main problem appeared to be staying awake. Down the road a bit and free, was the Hondarama show, yesterday's

bike tomorrow or something, very similar otherwise. Subversives could wander around shouting 'Taglioni' at intervals, which sadly seemed completely to miss the Honda people who were presumably unaware of Hailwood's Jedd Knight bit on the big Duke the previous Saturday. The reality gap between the media and this space/time continuum was nowhere more apparent than when, with Mike over a minute ahead, and Read's Honda dead by the roadside I heard Manx radio ads proclaiming the reliability and futuristic nature of the Hondabike. Nothing, not even a Honda advert can stand against reality in the Isle of Man.

They can at least take comfort in the knowledge that most of the fastest tourists seemed to be on the 550 Four, a bike not exactly noted for TT use. Of the dozen or so bikes that passed me on the circuit during the week at least half were this model, mostly driven by people demonstrating an enthusiastic knowledge of the circuit. Perhaps this is a 500 circuit. Obviously, there are plenty of places where the stomp and sheer speed of something bigger could be used, but equally there are plenty of other places where it's very easy to have too much of everything.

After my initial trepidation concerning Quasar performance when matched against the rest of the players on one of the world's toughest circuits, I was delighted to find it holding its own, and then some. It could be argued that the inventor, Mad Malcolm Newell, and myself are just a couple of loonies with insufficient interest in staying alive. But we're both in sight of forty and I think the truth is that it's very easy to ride it

very fast, continuously. I came across several people able to sit on my tail, and several more whose tail I sat on, but no-one seemed willing to keep it up for more than a couple of miles. Mac made the point that, while it was possible to get used to following a Quasar, finding it in the mirrors was always a bit much. Perhaps all the people I got past were suffering the effect of an imagined Close Encounter!

Owners of Wet Dreams were notably dedicated to blowing off the Quasar, possibly in revenge for all the rude things I've said about them. Fortunately for the integrity of your correspondent the Quasar came out quicker, on the TT course at any rate. The one that did get past did it going up the mountain where for once the 40 Horse Reliant engine felt a bit out of place. Perhaps the most fun of all was the way it could be ripped round Ramsey hairpin. The first time I went into it I was as unsure as anyone else what would happen; chuck it in and turn it on Bruce, at least it won't hurt. There was a brief impression of treetops visible through the right-hand side of the roof, a blur of road miraculously untangling itself and then Waterworks was next, easy. After a few laps it came down to how fast I could get off the brakes and onto the power; certainly it was as fast or faster than anything I went into the hairpin with. For my own taste I'd like lots less weight and more power. The touring output and weight were noticeable during the climb and descent of the mountain, but for my normal daily use I'd take a Quasar every time. This particular model isn't perfect, but it's good enough to demonstrate that the last sixty-odd years of biking development have been largely wasted. For ultimate speed perhaps a Jota, for ultimate traffic a Honda 50. Everything else is

obsolete, all right? Like Liverpool-Rugby-Bristol with stops for gas, oil, water and air and so on and on the visit to Rugby involving a £15 repair on a customer's typewriter. Oh, yeah, I also stopped in to visit Harry for a cuppa and chat. Total time five-and-a-half hours, mean consumption 70mpg. That says a lot more to me than 34 minutes round the Island. One day I shall take me Velo over there, but it will be because it deserves it, not so that I can go faster.

In between the biking and the beer and the other three things there's still time to inspect the mysterious Island. First impressions that it's a time warp, a place lost in some forgotten dream of the late fifties, break down under close inspection. It's like that 'cos the Manx like it like that. The empire lives, the police imagine they are in charge, the summer of '67 never happened. With over 12 million quid a year coming off the dock in Douglas, who needs oil? The end of energy is not in sight in the Isle of Man, and perhaps with their interest in wind and water power it never will be. Since the Victorians built the ludicrously oversized Lady Isabella wheel at Laxey, wheels in the Island have become a good deal more practical. I saw an interesting turbine installation too.

Entertainment in non-biking spheres tended to be pretty expensive, a serious limitation when no-one will tell you who's got all the EMAP expense money (*Me — Ed.*) I got lucky a couple of times, though! Fortunately Douglas has a skatepark, not especially radical but a good wooden ramp. Much too long, and a bit tight, but fine for the local kids and old fools like me. In fact *the* place to be on days like Mad Sunday when every bike in the world is trying to ride round 37 miles of

country road at once. Everyone else discovered the park around the middle of the week with the result that the ramp became a sort of continuous mid-air collision from which I eventually retired with a knackered ankle. The limp was evened up a couple of days later when a late night crash stop coupled with a hard turn left was the reason for me picking up the Quasar at Quarter Bridge. I'd stopped by the time I lost balance and the only real damage was to one of the tape cassette boxes. Somehow I sprained the other ankle. As Mac said, a picture of that would have been *real moody*.

Getting back onto the boat was enlivened by the fact that you can't pump out a Quasar tank with a plastic pipe. For the first time ever I came out ahead of the Steam Packet Co. Then we all got into the traditional 'land dropping away astern' bit and reflected on what had gone down. As parties go I prefer mine to be rather more private, substantially less inhibited and supplied with more convincing music, but then I'm a bike user rather than enthusiast. If you use yer tool for pleasure and go to the Island for a biking holiday I can't see you being disappointed. Serious high speed mania could be treated better out of TT week when there wouldn't be a cop on each corner waiting to bust you for falling off. But then of course you wouldn't have the atmosphere would you? I'm quite happy to add bikes to my list of sex 'n' drugs 'n' rock 'n' roll, but during TT week I could have done with a little less bike and rather more of the rest. I enjoyed going, I had a great time while I was there, and I was glad to get home. I just wish bikers weren't so completely dedicated to bikes . . .

