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Mike Curtis had been thinking about a pre-60 scrambler for a while, not any pre-60 scrambler you understand, but a TriBSA built to his ideals.



**I·S·D·T**  
**Motorcycle**  
**Event**  
**AHEAD**



# ISDT – The Manx Decade

*The Isle of Man is no stranger to motorcycle sport though generally the action takes place on the 37 or so miles of the Mountain TT race circuit. However, three times a major international event has used much more of the island than the roadways.*

**G**iven the size of the Isle of Man it seems incredible that an event noted for long distances could be held there once let alone three times and, conveniently for us it was nicely bracketed in one decade.

Even better from our point of view it was an interesting decade, both technically and sportingly as far as the ISDT went and the three years it was in the Isle of Man coincide with changes in attitude towards the event. By this I mean its emphasis on being a shop window for the motorcycle industry as a whole took a back seat while the contest as a sporting one took a bigger role.

Okay, first up is honesty time, 1965 to 1975 is actually 11 years and a decade is 10 years but we're hoping you'll forgive us. Secondly the requirement for the Trophy contest – the main award – to be by teams mounted on machines made in their home country had been lifted in 1970 so the 1971 Manx ISDT had a more eclectic mix of

motorcycles and finally, by 1975 the event while still designated a 'trial' was really an enduro.

But, to go back to the first of the three events, in 1965 the British motorcycle industry still existed and while some of the smaller companies were being absorbed it was still a major force in the world's marketplace.

The industry could still field teams on the world stage, or in the ISDT's case, could provide the ACU with machines to build teams around. These teams were still performing well and it was clear as the end of the 1964 ISDT approached, the UK was likely to finish second to the host nation – East Germany.

Now, the winning nation generally has the option to host the following year's event, we say generally as the FIM – Federation Internationale Motorcycling – has a rule which prevents the event being held in the same place for consecutive years. In practice

## Some facts

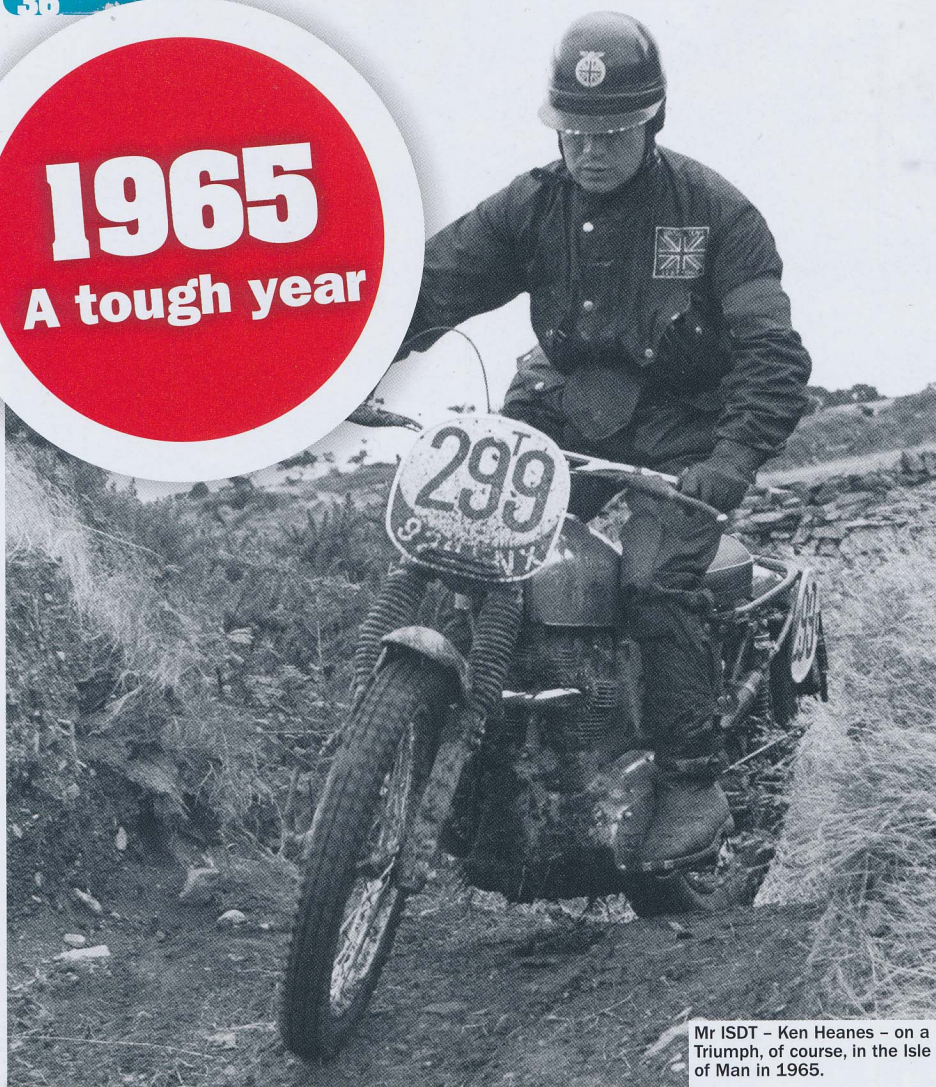
Everyone knows where the Isle of Man is... don't they? Well, just in case you don't it is a small island in the Irish Sea and almost exactly midway between the UK and Ireland. At its longest the island is 33 miles, at its widest it's 13 miles giving 429 square miles with around 100 miles of coastline and the recognised highest point is Snaefell, 2036ft above sea level. Though most famous for motorcycle racing all sorts of motorsports take place on the island on two, three and four wheels.

this wasn't such a bad idea as the running of an international event such as the ISDT was costly and it also meant different terrain for each year.

East Germany had won in 1963 in Czechoslovakia and thus hosted the 1964 trial in Erfurt, just over the border with West Germany. With the UK finishing second and the non-consecutive rule in play it was our first refusal for hosting 1965's ISDT. ▶

# 1965

## A tough year



Mr ISDT - Ken Heanes - on a Triumph, of course, in the Isle of Man in 1965.



Tarmac, rain and off-road tyres is an interesting mix at the first bend.

**H**ad he but known it at the time, the feature written by Peter Fraser, *MotorCycle's* staffman and off-road reporter, at the end of January 1965 could have been a prophecy for the coming year.

Fraser had just returned from the Isle of Man where Geoff Duke, clerk of the course for the 1965 International Six Days Trial, had invited him along to see for himself how a course of over 1100 miles could be laid out on an island 33 miles long by 13 miles wide...

Peter's story started the previous year when it was clear the UK was going to be the

host for the 1965 event as long as a couple of snags could be overcome. The main snag concerned the appearance of eastern European countries as the political situation at that time was a lot different to today.

It took a bit of wrangling but it was at last confirmed by the ACU that 'anyone who wished to enter, from whatever country, would be welcome' which is as nice a bit of politics as could be hoped for.

At this stage there was still no real idea for a venue, naturally the original ISDT's Lakeland base was fast becoming unavailable due to anti-motorcycling feeling among the public, nor was the Welsh base of many other UK ISDTs as clear cut a choice as might have been thought.

In the way of many things, it was a chance remark which brought the Isle of Man into the reckoning when the road racing was being discussed at the ACU HQ.

Once the laughter had stopped the question 'why not?' was asked and all the plus points were laid out... a government definitely not anti-motorcycle, plenty of accommodation and less restrictive legislation.

The big question now was could the necessary mileage be laid out? Who better to ask than race legend, trials enthusiast, Manx Trial course plotter and Isle of Man resident Geoff Duke. This was how Peter Fraser found himself leaning into a force nine gale and

being splattered by sleet in January 1965. He was helping to survey the routes for the ISDT, and as he admitted in the feature, by the time he arrived on the island it was pretty much a done deal as there had been plenty of ACU and industry hierarchy nipping across to the island to check it out.

So, how did Duke do it? To start with he centred the event on the TT Grandstand in Douglas then divided the island up into thirds, a line west from the grandstand to the coast then a similar one north from the same point gave three distinct areas with enough tracks to give two routes in each one for six days of off-road competition.

Each lap was 120 miles and was covered twice in both directions and gives a total course of near 1500 miles with only one mile common to each route, each day. This was a truly remarkable achievement for such a small place.

To test the plausibility and iron out teething troubles, a three day ISDT type event was planned on the course for June 1965. Apparently it was just as well this dry-run had been held as there were a few problems highlighted by the press of the day. Nothing major but enough to make the organisers thankful they had had this test a few months before the main event which, from an organisational point of view, was well-run.

As the press revealed though, the British effort was not such a success. After the high

## Happening in 1965

It wasn't just the ISDT y'know, other things happened in 1965...

- CDB editor in primary school
- Sir Winston Churchill dies
- Goldie the eagle is recaptured
- Sir Stanley Matthews, oldest football player, still playing
- BP strikes oil in North Sea
- Thunderbirds on TV
- UK 70mph speed limit introduced.

## The riders - UK

### Trophy Team

Ken Heanes (Triumph 650), Arthur Lampkin (BSA 441), Sammy Miller (BSA 343), Roy Peplow (Triumph 490), Bryan Sharp (Greeves 246), Triss Sharp (Greeves 246).

### Silver Vase A

Alan Lampkin (BSA 441), Dave Nicoll (AJS 497), Jim Sandiford (BSA 343), Peter Stirland (Greeves 246).

### Silver Vase B

Mick Andrews (AJS 497), John Lewis (AJS 497), Ray Sayer (Triumph 348), Bill Wilkinson (Greeves 246).

### Reserves

Scott Ellis (BSA 343), Peter Gaunt (Royal Enfield 248).



hopes for a good showing on effectively home turf, or perhaps more correctly 'home peat bog,' after their magnificent performance the year before things went awry and of the 14 riders in the Trophy and Vase contests only four finished.

Part of the problem was the mechanical failure of some team machines, some of it was down to conflict of interest but the two main UK papers of the time mentioned on more than one occasion the complete apathy of the UK industry chiefs.

The organiser's plans to bring the ISDT back to a test of endurance rather than a one decided on special tests were vindicated and the severity of the event was noted and expected. It was more severe than actually intended as the weather closed in and became unusually harsh for September.

If the organisation of the event was praiseworthy, sadly for our UK riders the checkpoints were less well organised. Where foreign teams had magnificent support supplied by their home authorities, the UK guys had to rely on volunteers, many pressed into service on the day and though not unwilling or capable, they too were poorly supported and couldn't even in some cases provide the bare minimum of assistance.

With morale dropping, performance suffered and riders retired, summing up in a feature after the event, Peter Fraser finished off with "...half measures are not good enough." ▶



BSAs struggled in 1965. Though here they seem to be okay.

Eric Chilton made a habit of being a successful privateer.

# 1971

## Slide rule selection



Herbert Scheck manfully hauled this Beemer round the course all week.



**T**hough they were the winners of the 1970 Spanish ISDT – held in El Escorial and featured in the Bruce Brown film *On Any Sunday* – Czechoslovakia declined to host the 1971 event and the UK took up the mantle, bringing the ISDT to the Isle of Man again. With the 1965 event still firmly in riders' minds there was a certain amount of trepidation, not for

the organisational point of view – which had been superb – but from the weather.

It is often said that, without the weather, what would the British talk about? This isn't so very far from the truth as it can be so changeable and 'four seasons in one day' isn't uncommon. Stick yourself out on a small island in the middle of the Irish Sea and the climate can be mind boggling.

Thankfully the weather played fair and the conditions were superb though everyone was convinced the weather was about to break 'at any moment'. The biggest complaint was, however, directed at the 'evaluation point' system devised by the West German FIM committee chief Otto Sensburg.

It was a complicated system of evening out scores by allowing the top performer in each class's bonus points to be deducted from the scores of every other rider in the class. Even jury president Count Johnny Lurani claimed not to fully understand this system brought in a few years earlier.

Other changes for the ISDT marked out a departure from the 'shop window' attitude of previous years as the stipulation for Trophy

teams to be on machines made in their home country was lifted. Ironically for the UK team they had, in the Cheney Triumphs, finally got superb machinery albeit a number of years too late.

Even more ironically, despite the proven performance of these dealer-provided machines Mick Wilkinson's bike melted its oil lines and seized on the first day. This had to be sheer bad luck as on similar machines Messrs Peplow, Pease and Sandiford took the manufacturers award for the UK for the first time in a long while.

The 1971 ISDT also marked a return to the competition for Sammy Miller who, along with Martin and Alan Lampkin, had extra special Bultaco Matadors provided by UK importer Comerfords.

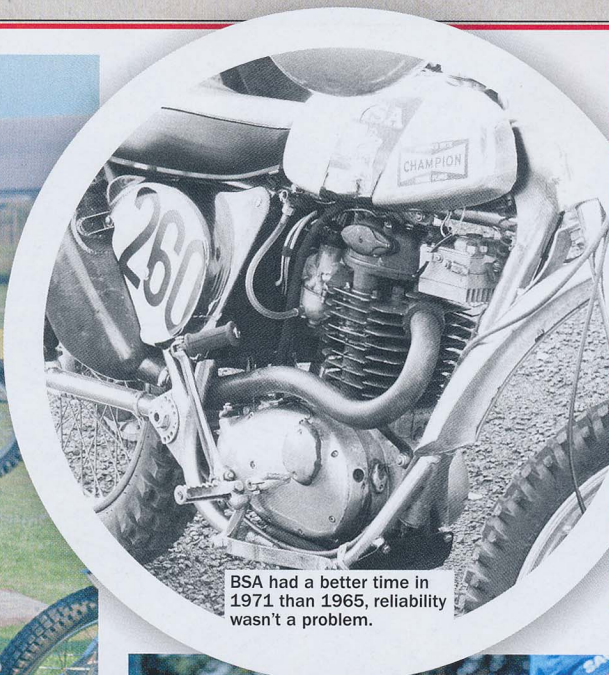
Miller was intending to earn the Maudes Trophy for the Spanish factory who employed him by using the same motorcycle in the production TT and the ISDT, a plan scuppered by the realisation Miller's international road race licence had expired. Miller did have a happier ISDT than the last one in the Isle of Man and he finished with a gold medal.

## Happening in 1971

- CDB editor hears about trials riding
- Open University begins broadcasting
- UK monetary system decimalised
- Jackie Stewart wins Monaco GP
- Yachtsman Chay Blyth circles globe 'wrong way'
- Harvey Smith makes 'that' gesture.
- Old Grey Whistle Test first aired
- Spaghetti Junction opened
- Diamonds Are Forever at cinemas



John Pease's 504 Triumph put him in the 750cc class. Not the tyre inflation bottle.



BSA had a better time in 1971 than 1965, reliability wasn't a problem.

## The riders - UK

### Trophy Team

Malcolm Rathmell (Cheney Triumph 500), Ken Heanes, John Pease, Mick Wilkinson, Mick Andrews, Jim Sandiford (all Cheney Triumph 504) Reserve – Arthur Browning (Cheney Triumph 504).

### Vase A

George Webb, Ted Thompson, Tom Fayers, Bryan Cowshall (all 441 Cheney BSA).

### Vase B

Tony Sharp, Mick Bowers, Dave Smith, Dave Thorpe (all 251 Ossa).



Swedish manufacturer Monark concentrates on small capacity two-strokes.

There were a number of hair raising incidents on the roads during the event and the organisers regularly reminded competitors to obey traffic laws. Even so, the German team still lost Kurt Distler when he slid off and went under a car, ending up badly hurt and lucky to be alive.

The excitement wasn't confined to the roads either as Arthur Browning admitted he was 'racing Malcolm Rathmell for the smallest gap on the island... and he won' Arthur hurtled up a bank and the bike ended up on its back.

As the trial neared its end it became clear the West Germans were leading and to quote the *MotorCycle* were 'Czech-mated.' Norman Sharpe in his post trial report told how the West German team's "...un-hatched chickens were counted, champagne on ice until a brilliant tactical coup was pulled off by the Czechs using the evaluation points system".

It was felt the Czechs and West Germans had ridden brilliantly and either deserved to win but the 'slide rule' calculation of the evaluation points changed the result rather than brilliant riding. ▶

# 1975

## A champion returns



All calm before the start. How many riders were nervously wondering if their bike would fire first kick?

**T**hough not the original choice, the ISDT in 1975 had been destined for Austria until that country withdrew its offer, it was somehow fitting the Golden Jubilee ISDT – though not the 50th year – be in the UK and the Isle of Man once again became the centre stage of the off-road world.

For the UK team it was not to be a happy experience as despite having probably the best bikes they'd had for a long time, or probably more suitable bikes for the type of event the ISDT had become, they were beset by accidents, injuries and downright misfortune. Take Dave Smith, originally in the

Trophy Team, he came down with a rash and was diagnosed with very contagious glandular fever, put in an isolation ward and there was talk of 14 days' quarantine. A further inspection by an expert in the field discovered Dave was allergic to the soap used in his hotel.

Other riders from other teams had similar misfortune as Dave but at least Tom Penton managed to start the event. He was belting along at a decent pace when Ernie Page caught him up and frantically gesticulated to a problem under the seat. The problem was Tom's bike was on fire and too far gone to save once the flames had been put out.

Geoff Chandler managed to put himself out of gold standard by hurtling along so fast he was early at the second check point having missed the first one completely. But spare a thought for Nick Jefferies, drafted in to replace the sick Dave Smith. Nick managed to ping off his Jawa, dislocate his shoulder and, after a heroic effort to get to the end of day one had little option but to retire in agony.

There were happier times elsewhere in the entry and the 1975 event brought a welcome return to Jeff Smith – former BSA trials and MX star who was working for Can-Am – over to prove he still had what it takes even at his age. And prove it he did, taking a Gold Medal

## The riders – UK

### Trophy Team

**Trophy Team – Dave Hobbs (Jawa), Nick Jefferies (Jawa), John May (Jawa) Dave Jeremiah (Jawa) Ernie Page (Jawa).**

25 years after winning his first gold. He was by no means the oldest competitor as American legend Dick Man had entered his first ISDT and showed he too still had what it took by winning Gold.

He'd admitted to wanting to do the event for a few years but his racing commitments kept him away from it. Luckily Dick had chosen an Ossa for his first attempt unlike the Wankel engined Hercules models entered by the factory.

A much remarked on talking point for the trial was their sound and how they would cope. Equally unusual were the Rokons entered by some US riders. Featuring pull starting and automatic transmission they were certainly in the 'weird' category.

If anything typified the 1975 ISDT it was the high speeds necessary to keep on time

## Happening in 1975

- CDB editor begins trials career
- Hall and rain devastate UK F1 GP
- Jensen Cars lays off % of its staff
- Martin Lampkin becomes first world trials champ
- British Leyland introduces Morris 'Wedge'
- Manchester United back in First Division
- European Space Agency founded
- Norton Villiers closes



Two strokes were dominating the event by the 70s, being light and easy to ride.



Malcolm Smith on a Husqvarna of course.



## A tragedy

The event was tinged with sadness as American Bren Moran, riding for Canada, crashed on a disused railway track on the first morning of the trial and died of his injuries in hospital later.

and the subsequent ignoring of road traffic laws. It made for some spectacular action though as one of the Czech riders was seen to take Governors Bridge at full throttle on a big Jawa, sliding around until hitting the kerb and being bounced on his way. Apparently the police man on duty announced "these lads could teach TT riders a thing or two about cornering".

However, despite this, by the end of the week it was West Germany who came out tops in the Trophy and the Italians who made best of the Vase. The home team fared less well and all sorts of reasons were theorised. The main one though was our riders don't get time to specialise in this sort of event and rarely see their bikes early enough to familiarise themselves. A great shame. ■



Though riding gear evolved greatly, waxed jackets were still in favour.

## Reading the rules...

The whole concept of the International Six Days Trial was to prove the reliability of motorcycles as a viable form of transport. By 1913, the car had become established, but even though these were out of the reach of many people, the motorcycle was not a user-friendly alternative.

For good reason motorcyclists are generally enthusiasts and will happily accept things non-enthusiasts regard as ridiculous. A common constraint on motorcycle designers is where to put everything. Cars have a lot of room for big clutches, radiators, fans, electrical equipment, batteries and so on – not the case for the motorcycle.

By its nature a motorcycle is a visible and open machine so has to look good too whereas a car can hide all sorts of things away beneath bodywork.

This means components have to be smaller with form as important as function and the margin for error in their function is small. So, though the ACU, let's have an event where reliability is paramount. To do this the rules stated major components couldn't be repaired or replaced but consumables such as tyres and belts and cables could be.

This was felt to be a sensible way forward as an incident ending up with a motorcycle on its side and bending levers or snagging a cable could hardly be foreseen by a manufacturer whereas a frame braking due to normal use could. Punctures too were seen as a daily hazard thanks to horseshoe nails and un-metalled roads so tyres could be changed.

To prevent illegal substitution, a system of tagging and marking was introduced using seals and special paints. Naturally these regulations for the event were seen as challenges to overcome and the reports and folklore surrounding the ISDT are littered with instances where people were caught trying to deal with them or even circumvent them.

This gave rise to the theory 'it's only cheating if you're caught' where marked component substitution was tried and hoped to be got away with. In some cases complete bikes were swapped... In the main though, the enterprising talents of riders and team managers was limited to making it easier and quicker to change bits that could be swapped.

Ideas such as safety pins replacing split pins, tabs soldered into tail-light lens screws so no tools were needed to swap bulbs, throttle cables split so only the bit near the twist grip need be changed if there was an accident that all saw the light of day because of the need to keep going.

Even our columnist Jeff Smith had his expert eye on things with a special inner tube so punctures could be repaired without taking the wheel out.