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# MOTORCYCLE SPORT

The quality monthly

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# A CORRIDOR WITH MANY DOORS

## Brian Thompson's Motorcycling Life

LIFE is a corridor with many doors. Open the right door and you may discover green pastures. I have never regretted catching the motorcycle bug as a 15-year-old schoolboy back in 1952. For my 16th birthday I took delivery of the only new bike to come my way until a Honda SL125, in 1973. I had grown up on dad's 1938 Panther outfit. As a family we had loped all over the Pennine hills despite rationing and war-time shortages. But careful dad would only allow me a humble 32 cc Cyclemaster moped on which to learn. Forty-five bikes later, I feel this was a sensible restriction.

Soon tiring of a 30 mph top speed, I pestered him into allowing me a 1949 Fanny B. 197, bought for £60 in 1953. A lot of money for an office boy on £2 a week. I then got the trials bug that continued until a serious accident (I overturned an outfit) in 1971 put an end to anything more athletic than trail riding. The FB was converted to trials and I enjoyed closed-to-club events. This was the day when one could enter with any old bike, and a trials Bantam was very little different from the road version.

The F.B., used daily and at weekends, was not too reliable, and a pocket full of plugs was essential. At 17, in 1955, I joined the Royal Signals partly to get my hands on a proper bike; but the Army gave me a radio set instead, and the odd ride on a BSA M20 or G3L was a rare treat. The M20 was too heavy and sluggish, with its 3in clearance always fouling on moorland rockery, but it was reliable. The G3L Matchless, in contrast, was superb and so much in demand. Two pleasant years in Germany followed with even fewer rides, though I bought a cheap 98 cc Hercules autocycle and had lots of glorious trips on traffic-free roads in the Eifel mountains. Other compensations were ample beer and women, financed by a little black market sale of cigs. (I don't smoke) from the NAAFI.

I was puzzled to see many pre-war DKW 125s in Germany that looked amazingly like our own Bantams. Back home, most of us still thought that the Bantam was a BSA design and the "see-no-evil" motorcycle press kept us in the dark. The German bikes were streets ahead of our own efforts — as, clearly, the Japanese were not slow to realise. Through a fraulein friend, I managed to have a go on most German bikes.



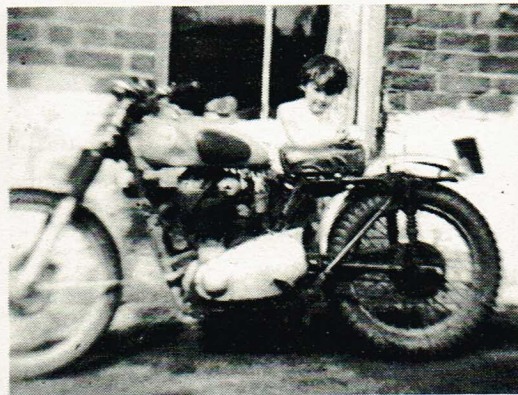
*The writer receives tuition on the importance of keeping the rear wheel down, in the Mike Edwards School for Sidecar Passengers. . . "I spent two happy years as passenger on Mike's AJS outfit, leading trail runs."*

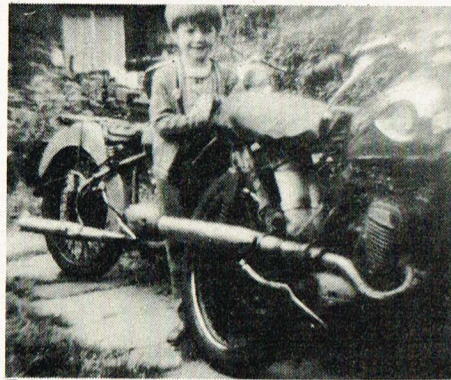
*Photograph: Peter Chambers*

Back to Blighty and demob. in 1958 and straight to police college. Having sold the FB I had a 1949 BSA C11 which soon showed its achilles heel with frequent dynamo failures, and I found myself explaining the deficiencies of Lucas coil ignition to the Police Commissioner at the College, for arriving after curfew. This led to a 1953 BSA B33 with plungers that cost £90, in 1958. A most happy choice it was; ultra reliable, though higher speeds there was some rear-end discomfort. A 1952 G9 500 twin followed. I kept it in the front room, much to my wife's disgust. Meanwhile, back on the beat in Sheffield, I progressed from foot to cycle to LE Velocette. Hardly a speedy, flashing lights criminal-chaser. Strictly PC plod on two wheels that could hardly catch a speeding Bantam —

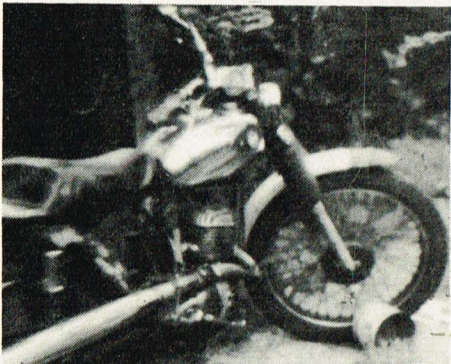
still, it was super quiet, smooth and shaft-driven, though the undamped rear yo-yo effect, plus heavy radio high on the pillion seat, made for dodgy handling. Later Enfield turbo twin Villiers came in that were much livelier. Top speed of the LE was 55 but on the Villiers twin I once had 90 downhill chasing an imaginary criminal at 3 am. Only snag were the clouds of smoke at large throttle openings. With a transfer to the Met. in mind, I went down to Hendon and tried a Triumph 650 Saint. What a let down! The front brake didn't work at all. "Don't worry about that, we only use the rear, it's safer" said the Inspector in charge. Shocked at this news, and thinking I had missed out somewhere in my education, I took the Saint on to the North Circular. Vibes were awful, especially over 70; a

*An AMC row . . . left and middle pictures show a 1952 AJS 500 single converted to trail spec., with BSA chaincase; at far right is a 1951/52 Matchless G9 twin*





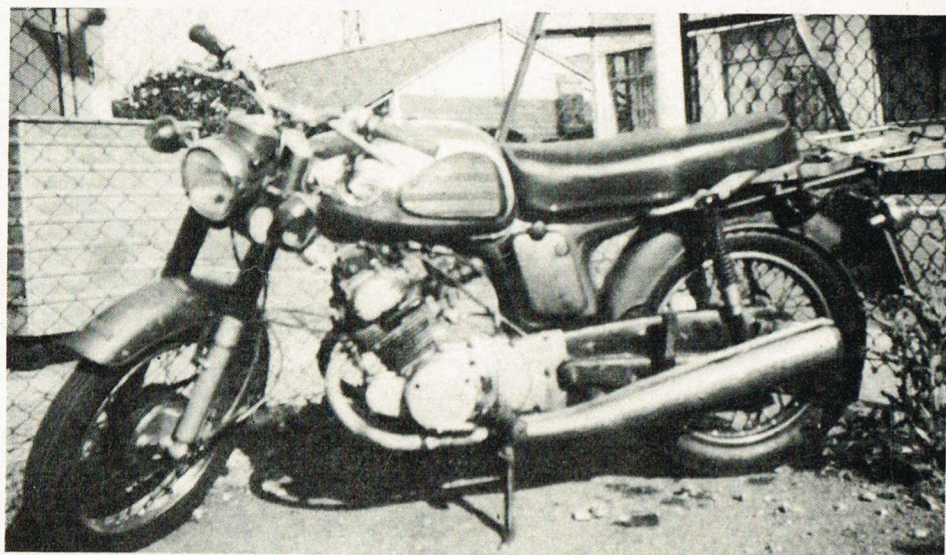
Above and below . . . some of the BSA Bantams owned by the writer; the one pictured below is a 1973 175 D7 with Hogan head. On the right . . . a 1967 CD175 Honda photographed in 1975 — "£35-worth of runabout"



most unpleasant machine. "All like that", said the Inspector. I hope the Met. Police riders are now using front brakes! Needless to add I stayed up North and later left the Force so that I could have a go at trials . . . unsociable police hours rule out any chance of normal life. I bought a 1955 197 Dot trials and took up trials riding seriously, though by 1963 the Dot was out of fashion. I then got an immaculate ex-works 350 Matchless trials from Comerfords. Three years old, it had been a second string factory bike and had all the mods . . . alloy tank, chaincase, engine plates, fork yokes, and so on, bringing the weight down to 260 lb, according to my local public weighbridge. The motor tick-tocked away like a steam engine, with one bang a lampost. It was all I had ever dreamed of. In the first trial the frame broke but Comerfords paid up, bless 'em!

I soon discovered that a good trials bike doesn't make you into a good rider and that a lightweight is less tiring and better for nadgery sections.

Four-strokes were rapidly going out of fashion by 1965, though 17-year-old Mick Andrews on a works 350 Ajay still showed how it could be done. The only award I ever won was by fluke. For the Hillsborough Trophy Trial of 1964 only three bikes were competing for the over-250 cup, and the others, on Ariel 500s, retired. I nearly did the same after a puncture but someone said, "Carry on, you'll win an award". It was my only success in 10 years' active trials and I never got out of the novice class! Certainly a big bike takes more skill and courage than I possessed. I ended my enjoyable bog-wheel career on a 128 cc Gaunt-Suzuki . . . The biggest contrast possible between the old and the new. With a weight of only 180 lb, handling was sensational. It was a machine with the three low and three high gears moved by a lever mounted on top of the gearbox and was based on the



## The average club rider will not give up one day a year to help organize an event

118 cc trail bike that Peter Gaunt modified. I remember it with fond affection as a lot of fun, with instant wheelies to aviate it over rock steps. The motor tolerated an incredible amount of abuse, competing as it did against 250 Bultacos and the like and being only slightly underpowered.

For my 6ft 1in it was very cramped and hard on the rear, and long journeys were a bore. Though the 65 mph top speed was good, it took ages to get there.

In the 1960s I became more involved in the organising side and played out the usual roles as secretary of the club, ACU delegate to boring meetings in smoke-filled rooms, and as clerk of the course and trials secretary for Sheffield North End events that took place high on the Yorkshire moors between Sheffield and Huddersfield. It was rare, then and now, for a young man in his 20s to become involved in ACU affairs, a world almost totally dominated by the non-riding middle-aged man.

The average club rider will not give up one Sunday a year to help organise a club trial. I would make it a rule that every competitor helps organise in some way, such as marking out the course at 6 am on a cold winter morning or struggling to get the results out late on a Sunday evening.

I remember desperately press-ganging unskilled and unwilling spectators as observers minutes before the start of a trial and despatching them on to some rain-swept moor for a lonely eight-hour vigil. I sold the Matchie after two years for another Dot. Unlike my time with the Villiers, I never touched the G3C once. It was trials at the weekend and off to the office on same bike Monday to Friday.

That was my life, all done on a shoestring income as a humble clerk. Then, disaster with the G9. Vibration and knocking forced me to take it to the AMC dealers, Frank Roper, in Sheffield. Although there was a reading of only 14,000 on the clock, the verdict was that the engine was clapped. Crankshaft, mains, pistons, cams; the bill came to £55; a lot of money in 1961. For the next 5,000 miles all was sweetness and pleasure and I enjoyed all the

thrills of a high-performance (92 mph) twin, highlighted by a week touring Wales with a new wife on the back. The only snags were the usual ones of a chaincase that no one could possibly keep any oil in (not even Jock West could do it) and dynamo trouble. Life was good with the G9, until the crankshaft broke.

I was dicing with a pal on his Speed Twin. Just as I pulled ahead a loud knock was heard, and it grew louder until I stopped and then pushed the bike home, to reveal that the drive-side crank pin had sheared. I sent it back to Woolwich, as it was a new crank with only 5,000 miles life, and they said, "Metal fatigue. Nothing we can do. Cheerio, goodbye, sell you another!"

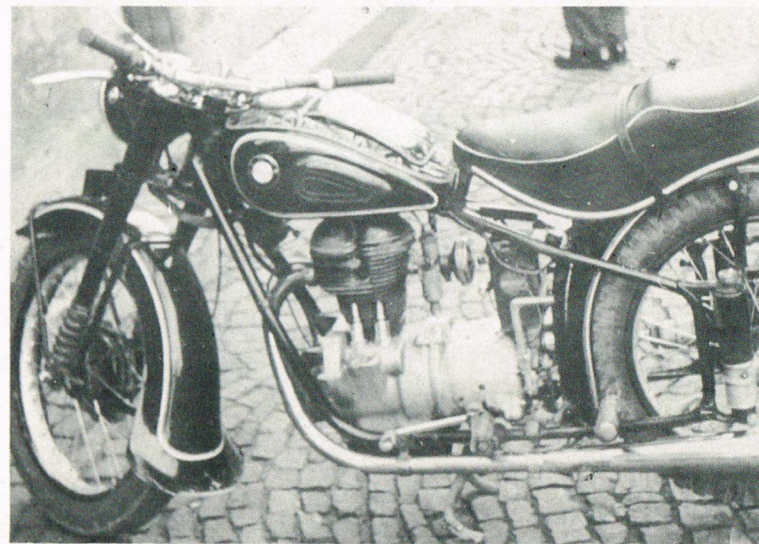
AMC was past caring by 1963, with the end in sight, but that was no comfort to me. I later bought a secondhand motor but it never again went as well.

Next came a 600 M21 BSA and double-adult chair, in order to take protesting wife and kids out. My best memory of the Beeza is of one hot day, the outfit fully loaded with kids and camping gear, and off to the Lakes. The top speed was only 40 mph and it got so hot that the exhaust port and pipe were glowing deep red. It never gave an ounce of trouble but, boy, it was slow. . . I then got a "proper" chair outfit, a 1955 AJS 500 G80 and double-adult. Much better than the M21 in every way. A steady 50/55, 60 mpg, trouble-free, comfortable suspension. It cost me £35 in 1965 and I kept it till 1973, taking the family plus mother-in-law on holidays and weekend trips.

But dynamos continued to be a curse. I gave up removing the horrible thing and its diabolical chain drive and relied on charged batteries and short journeys in the dark. Staying with family transport, I bought a 1956 Bond Minicar for £30 in 1973. It had a Villiers 32A motor and ran well, pulling the four of us up all the steepest Derbyshire hills.

The electric starter often failed and the spectacle of me having to lift the bonnet, step inside and kick-start the motor amused all and sundry.

Another party trick was for the plastic windows to fall out, because of the awful



BMW R24 of 1953 on a cobble street in Nuremburg in 1956. The cup — non-award variety — that cheers at the 1962 Rotherham Trophy Trial; bike is a 1956 197 cc Dot

vibration, and passengers were given strict instructions to hold on to their window. A top whack of 50 mph was accompanied by a great deal of noise and discomfort . . . Still it served me well for three years and always aroused great interest. I wish I had it now.

A brief experience with a 1952 Mk III Douglas (in 1963) put me off the marque permanently. I would have gone bankrupt had I kept it any longer. After a £40 engine overhaul it did less than 8,000 miles before another one was needed. This engine was clearly a poor basic design with, I think, poor crankshaft balancing. It had neither power nor long life. The front brake was useless. Only the handling was impressive. An A10 followed. Heavy, fast, woolly, poor brakes — generally, a good bike. For five years I was a Bantam fanatic. I owned seven at one stage but got sick and tired of spending half my life in the hut replacing second

gear. A converted trials Bantam (I built three of these) was best, with C11 forks and 21in wheel. It was the best-handling bike for green lanes ever — but so sluggish and fiddly. I fitted a Hogan head and D14 barrel and for a short while it went like a bomb but second gear stripped every week instead of every other week and I cleared out the lot in exasperation. Then followed a long series of 350 and 500 single-cylinder Ajays in road and trail form. All sans dynamo, of course — that was a luxury I had long given up. In trail form a 1952 Ajay 500 18S went everywhere modern trial bikes go today, on standard gearing with good retard — except the super-rough Walna Scar in the Lakes, through lack of clearance. This was during one memorable weekend (in 1971) with three friends, and rates as my best ever motorcycle holiday with Brough Club king Mike Edwards on his clapped-out TRW Triumph and Mel

Bedingham on a converted T100.

We had to turn back on Walna Scar and both twins ran out of petrol on the Hardknott Pass in the dark, with only Mike having lights. I shared out my supply and did 20 miles in the black hiding behind the TRW to a lone petrol station in Windermere. It was closed but the owner was present, whom we knocked up. Most exciting, if a little unsafe!

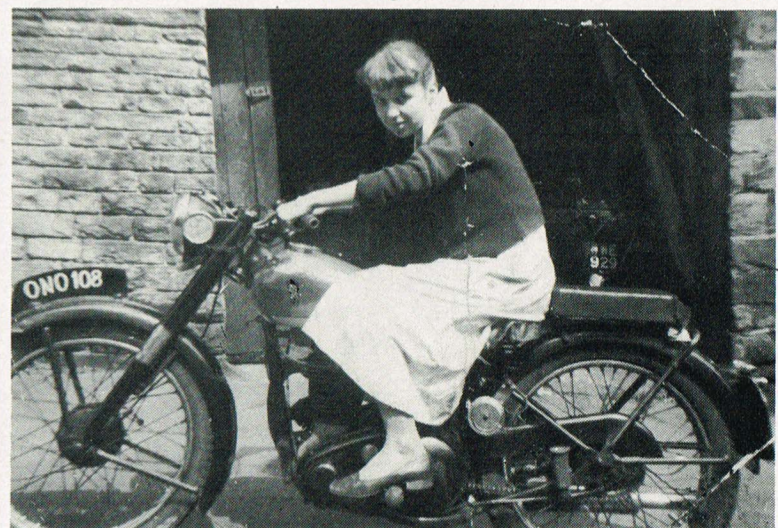
Next comes a vintage story. I was always on the lookout for old bikes and bringing home some 1950s heap, bought for a few pounds — usually another AMC Jampot single. But one day I found a very rare bike. In 1970, in the small Yorkshire village of Stannington, I stopped to assist a BSA A65 rider with smoke rising from the electrics which had fried, leaving him stranded. I mentioned my interest in old bikes and he told me that a local farm was rumoured to have an old bike in the barn. With unusual self-confidence I called on the farm and enquired from an old lady within. "Yes", she said, "there is a bike and it was mine and I last rode it in 1923." She showed me to a stone barn: alongside a 1934 Rolls-Royce, lashed to a wall, was a pre-first-war bike with direct belt drive, in an advanced state of decay.

The motor was covered in oil and the mag and carb were in brass, as was the tank. "Can I make you an offer for it?" I said. "Take it away for nothing, it's worthless now" she said. "What



On a 1961 ex-works 350 Matchless during a Workshop Centre event.

The writer's sister on his second bike, a 1949 C11 BSA; the year is 1955



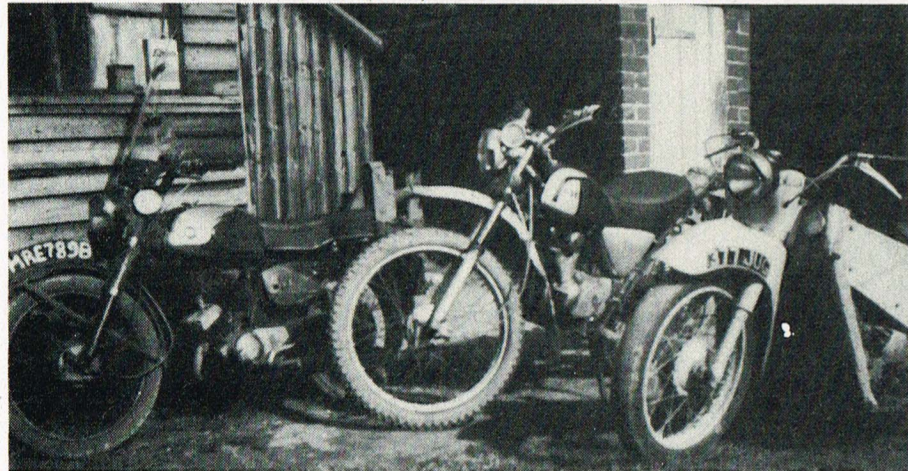


Easter, 1959; the bike is a 1953 BSA B33 with plunger rear springing

make is it?" "A Lincoln Elk, 1911, and it's done no more than 1,000 miles from new. It was my 21st birthday present!" I collected the prize in the M21 float and dismantled the motor, which was perfect internally with piston rings nearly one inch wide. But the cost of restoration was prohibitive and I later sold it to another Lincoln Elk owner in Kent for £25 who had been searching 25 years for another. A friend bought the Rolls, which looked in sound condition, for £500. We called later in his Land Rover to tow it away and set off carefully down the rough farm track. Half way I heard a loud crack and groaning sounds and watched, horrified, as the Rolls broke its back and settled down in the middle of the lane. This cost an extra £500 but it was still a good investment, and today the same car is worth over £10,000.

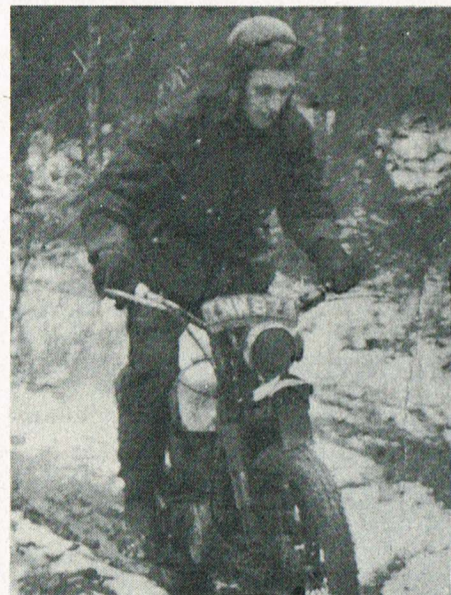
In 1969 I answered an ad for a Norton Villiers export executive based at Andover, building up sales of Nortons and the intended new range in Europe. To my great surprise I was asked to attend for an interview and rode down on the 1952 G80, NV putting me up for the night at a local pub. A promising interview with Hugh Palin followed next day, plus a tour of the factory, then assembling Commandos. The engine-gearbox-frame unit came already assembled from the Villiers factory in Wolverhampton, the rest from various suppliers. While there I saw a gorgeous batch of new Matchless G80CS 500cc singles with the 40 bhp all-alloy motor in ISDT form. Lovely great beasts, the best of British. A group of US dealers was complaining about the Commando gearbox. Apparently even the stout AMC box could not stand 60 bhp on flat-out burn-ups, and second gear was stripping. NV promised to beef

The writer's 1975 stable . . . 1963 Suzuki 80, '73 SL125 Honda, '58 LE Velocette



Mrs Louise Braham (middle), BBT barrister, Anne Riley, of the TRF, and the writer in 1980

## The Commando was obsolete even in 1969. All the grand plans were pipe dreams . . .



Club trial in 1955; the bike is a 1954 Dot



A shaft-drive Victoria 250 vee-twin and a Triumph 250 two-stroke in Munich, 1957

up the box immediately. A few weeks later I was called for a second interview and became excited about the prospect of attending foreign shows and liaising with dealers on behalf of Norton.

I met Bob Manns, one of my heroes and winner of seven ISDT Gold medals, who was home sales manager at the time. But I didn't get the job, which went to a BSA man, though Hugh Palin did promise me another job at Andover . . . but as things turned out it was just as well he forgot about that.

It occurred to me that the Commando was obsolete even in 1969 and that all the grand plans for new designs outlined by Hugh Palin were pipe dreams. The newly introduced Honda 750 four, I felt, was a serious rival at a similar price, as was the BSA 750 three. At Andover I admired all the many trophies and awards won by Norton, AJS and Matchless, going back decades. They had a great past, if not a future!

I mentioned to NV that I thought they should push the G80CS far more and let the Commando take second place, but this did not go down very well. Recently big singles have made something of a comeback but in 1969, it was pointed out to me, they were all but dead and buried.

I had a bad crash in 1971, when I overturned the AJS outfit on an adverse camber bend. The bike landed on my right arm and left it partly paralysed and brought my trials riding to an abrupt end. But every cloud has a silver lining. From that moment I devoted all my spare time to riding and preserving green lanes. A founder member of the TRF, I built up a group in Derbyshire and South Yorkshire and explored thousands of miles of abandoned ancient highways. These were pioneering days, with

Bond 250 Minicar (a 1958 model) in 1972



converted road bikes like my Ajay 500, and BSA and Velo singles, being popular — though the 500 Triumph was most popular of all. Breakdowns were frequent: usually water in the electrics or parts falling off. Sometimes we did abandon a bike. One was a MZ 250 ISDT Special with burnt-out electrics. Another a waterlogged G9 twin. Once Mike Edwards' trials HT500 Ariel outfit, belching clouds of smoke from a dicky oil pump, oiled a plug and while he was attempting to take the plug out it snapped and sheared off flush with the head. (The plug hadn't been disturbed for decades!) Every time Mike ventured out on a trial run, it was disaster! One day the TRW lost its battery and we all searched the muddy lane looking for it.

Then came a lost gear pedal, and it was back again over the soggy moor! His clapped-out Trials Cub was the *worst*. Indeed nothing on earth is more awful than a worn-out Trials Cub! One glorious weekend in the Lake District the Cub was playing ignition and carb tricks as usual. Calling at the first house, Mike confidently asked to borrow a file, removed the carb, filed a bent flange and the party of 10 then proceeded to the next green lane. The next year saw Mike with a new bike, a CZ175 trail.

With torrential rain all day we plunged through a 4 ft-deep ford near Keswick. The Hondas all emerged like submarines, still running with water up to the tank. But all the two-strokes gurgled to a halt in mid-stream. The Suzuki 125s and Bultacos came to life eventually but despite two hours of trying to dry out the CZ in pouring rain it never came to life again the entire weekend. It was all great fun. I got one of the first Honda SL125 trail bikes in the UK in 1973. In many ways it was the best bike I ever had. Nowadays many lanes are over-used and problems have arisen especially with noise. Joe Bloggs gets a Suzuki PE175 because he thinks his quiet Honda or Suzuki 125 is not fast enough. To keep up, his pals are obliged to do the same. Soon everyone is riding noisy enduro machines that belong on a racetrack.

I rode the Honda and later other trail bikes with one arm, a sight that continues to astonish fellow riders. A left-hand throttle takes some getting used to, but I was determined to carry on trail riding. Vernon Leigh, Manchester 17



Above: TRF treasurer Howard Wordsworth, XL250 mounted in 1975. Left: Ian Dunshire (Sheffield TRF Secretary) and Granville Smith in the Peak national park

stalwart, and Tony Davenport, of Leek, Staffs, ride the Derbyshire trails with one leg! Bob Humber, Harold Taylor and Jack Oliver rode with one leg in trials — even more astonishing feats.

During the 1970s I became more involved in rights of way. In 1972 I joined the Ramblers Association and quickly rose through the ranks of old tired non-walking officials. No money was available from the motorcyclists, so I used RA finances to open up blocked green lanes, but sharing green lanes with others was too much for the RA and when they found out I was a wretched trail rider they threw me out. Thanks to a solicitor friend who taught me everything I know about the law on rights of way, plus my own police training, I became the first TRF rights of way officer in 1975. When Norman Smith retired in 1977, I took over as rights of way agent for the ACU and BMF, thus uniting all three into a powerful force.

In 1979 I helped form the Byways and



Bridleways Trust with an office in Westminster convenient in the extreme. BBT is not a lobby for the trail riders or horse riders. The RA attack BBT and distrusts them because it is seeking to make byways and bridleways open to all users entitled to use them. BBT successfully preaches "give and take" policies and deplors RA plans to make all lanes exclusive for walkers only. Without the BBT I would not have been appointed to the House of Commons Rights of Way Review Committee or succeeded nearly as well in getting the Countryside Bill amended in our favour. Nice to have friends.

Any regrets? Of course. That crash in 1971, all my own fault. And not keeping some of my old bikes, like the Ajays. I have throughout the past almost 30 years kept going one unique pleasure: long-distance touring. Usually a full day out, off at 7am and back about 8pm, to the Lakes, Wales or, nearer home, to the beautiful Yorks Dales or Derbyshire. Four-hundred miles in a day I have done often, though in recent years a weekend away is more satisfying, with bed and breakfast at some remote hostelry.

To be 150 miles from home by 10am is a thrill. To be dependent on one's own bike, just an assembly of metal parts, to feel self-reliant, and above all to enjoy the freedom of the road, like flying, to swoop and glide, to explore unknown challenging green lanes not knowing what hazard is round the next corner . . . that's marvellous. The thrill of climbing a steep hill or mountain pass like Hardknott Pass, Wrynose Pass or even the Honister Pass, all in the Lake District . . . In the Dales, nearly as good, is the famous old trials hill (now sadly tarmac) of Park Rash, from Kettlewell to Leyburn. The climb to Cam Fell from Hawes and the steep drop down to Buckden. These rides will live in my memory for the rest of my life. The bikes best remembered for good handling are the 350 and 500 Ajay singles, despite jampots and 380 lb weight. The Supa Five comes near. Never had a Norton. The only Royal Enfield was a Flying Flea 125 of 1948 with a rubber band in the front forks and hand-change. On a long trip to Silverstone the engine mountings broke and I strapped it in using pieces of wood and elastic bands. My only Triumph, a 1952 Tiger 100 bought in 1971 for £10 in advanced decay after 10 years in a field. I sold the bits for a total of £30. The Ariel was a Leader that I bought for £30, due to a frame rusted and about to collapse (a common fault). Other snags were that awful front brake, and unheard-of 35 mpg. The "see-no-evil" press of the day never revealed this. It was years ahead of its rivals and nearly made it, but was shot down by Burman packing up. In 1973 I picked up a 1953 LE Veo for just £2, for restoration. This I considered Britain's finest, and unique and, thus most worthy of preservation but the 1974 miners' strike (I was a Coal Board clerk) put an end to such plans and the Velo was sold for £25 to a friend.

For a while I used a 1964 Suzuki 80 during a spell of low prosperity. With lower gearing it served as a useful trail and ride-to-work bike. A Sheffield journalist, Frazer Wright, called round one day in 1972 with an ISDT 75 cc eight-speed Simson that Wilf Green had borrowed from the factory as a possible addition to the ISDT MZ 250, then the first purpose-built ISDT or trail bike on the British market. Frazer let me borrow the little beauty. It had a similar performance to a Triumph 200cc Cub! With four low and four high gears (like 2 x 3 of the Suzuki 118 trail cat), it had a very narrow power band and amazing acceleration. Best of all was the handling, with a weight of 150 lb. Yet it was stable, and thanks to



The writer on the Honda SL125 in 1975

Earles front forks, it floated over green lanes. I quickly understood how easily Simson had won so many ISDT gold medals and why East Germany dominated the winners' rostrum. Sadly, the price would have been the same as the MZ250 ISDT, so Wilf Green decided not to import it.

I tried a BMW R75/5 in 1975. This was my first-ever BMW and I was disappointed with the mechanical noise and vibration. A 1959 R50 was borrowed for a week in 1976, and though 30,000 miles were on the clock, this was more like the BMW I had imagined. Rolls-Royce qualities of silence, smoothness and an air of lasting quality, the black finish, still sparkling. In 1977 I picked up a 1967 Honda CD175 for £35; the only fault was a broken kick-starter shaft. For over a year it carried me about, leaking oil from too many bodged engine repairs, and yawing away like a sailing ship on the back end. I never did get the kick-starter fixed, as it easily bump started, and I sold it for £30, proving something about motorcycling on the cheap.

Looking back on those happy years in the 1950s and 60s with British bikes all at least 10 years old (this was before the throwaway era), I find that my memory tends to filter out the bad times. Real breakdowns were rare. The C11 dynamo packed up and a flat battery forced me to abandon ship one dirty night on the Derbyshire moors. A 197 DOT trials submerged in five feet of water, that had to be towed home. Bodging and fiddling was a daily routine and Villiers, Joe Lucas and BSA (Bantam) have a lot to answer for!

My love / hate relationship with MZs from 1977 to 82 is well documented in the columns of MCS. Suffice to say that I admit to going somewhat overboard in praise. No more MZs for me! Yet in 1982 I bought an MZ for £200, 2,000 miles from new and sold it recently for £50! So low are MZs now regarded that a three-year old 150 is lucky to fetch £50, while a Honda CG125 of the same vintage will fetch £250. This final MZ in its short 4,000 miles life was a long series of disasters costing over £100 in bills. Gearbox failure, mains (of course), coil, speedo, regulator and sundry other crimes help this bike to earn from me the title of the worst bike I have ever owned. My stable now comprises a Honda XL185 trail, which is very good despite a coil failure recently, and two, yes two Honda CB400A Automotives.

I have just bought a second one for £300 with 5,000 miles from new and in showroom condition. This is out of respect for the first Auto which has now done over 20,000 miles and is still running very well, which will be used till it drops. I heard that one Auto has done 60,000 miles and a recent survey of messenger bikes used in London showed the CB400A as the most reliable bike. I am very satisfied with the CB400A . . . a constant joy. I would love to have enough time and money to build up a 1952 Matchless 500 jampot single, my favourite machine of the past. I sold one in 1973 for £35.

With Scott radiators changing hands at £400 each, vintage bikes are an expensive hobby. I have no car and rely on the three Hondas for local and long-distance transport. My spare time and holidays are taken up with rights of way matters, and I spent three weeks last year at Public Inquiries in the Lake District. I long to do a proper job on a full-time basis but despite millionaire Ron Amey (Amey Roadstone) offering £10,000 to start me off, this remains a pipe dream. Despite many difficulties, I am pleased and proud to have made a real contribution to saving green lanes and through my committee work in the House of Commons to have influenced legislation (for once) in favour of motorcyclists.

I don't do much serious trail riding these days due to gradual worsening of the consequences of the 1971 crash, but I am organizing several green lane runs this year in Derbyshire for vintage and pre-1965 machines. Drop me a line if you are interested. Certainly the Vintage Club is keen and Sheffield branch chairman Wilf Green is coming on his 1938 Norton. Now there's a good story for you, for Wilf is truly one of the great characters. Wilf holds me responsible for turning MCS into the MZ monthly!

That is it, then, for the first 30 years on two wheels. The next 30 should be just as fascinating!



Derbyshire trail riding on the Honda XL250S  
Robert Sulley, TRF rep