

**Far right:** Perhaps the most famous of all long distance off-road mounts the Swedish Husqvarna rarely fails to reach the results. **Right:** Relaxed and smiling, the king of enduros in Britain, Dave Jeremiah (356 KTM) scored a Welsh Two Day hat-trick.

**Below right:** Suspension plays just as important a part as horsepower in modern enduros. Swinging arm shapes and shock absorber angles are a never-ending source of experiment. Alan Cooper's 380 Beta proves the point.

**Below:** Fighting to stay upright Dave Hobbs took his 250 Bultaco into the silver awards.



**Above:** British bike with an Italian engine, the British Rival represents at least a part home-grown attempt for success.





# WELSH TWO-DAY TRIAL

Frank Melling gets into one of the greatest events in the enduro calendar. Sent to report on the men, the machines and their modifications, he came back with a Bronze medal . . .

**D**espite its name, the Welsh International Two-Day Trial is not a trial at all, in the sense of a feet-up event, but rather, is an enduro: a 340 mile test of stamina, speed and above all reliability.

Personally, I think that the "Welsh", as it is universally known in the off-road world, is the greatest event in the enduro calendar. In fact, if I had to ride a motorcycle only once a year, the burden would be made much more tolerable if my sole outing were on a quick bike trying to stay on time in the Welsh.

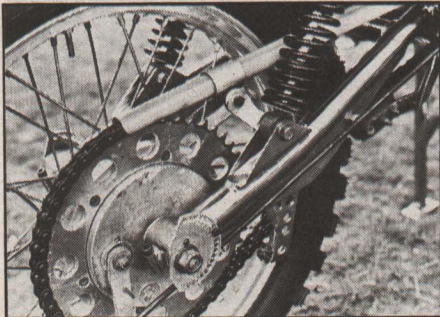
The Welsh is no longer the toughest enduro in Britain, that dubious honour now goes to the Beacons, and rumour has it that some of the Scottish events can rival the majestic scenery found in mid-Wales but what no other event can equal is the grandiose scope of the Welsh.

Imagine, two full days' riding, scarcely ever using the same piece of ground twice and taking in mile after mile of moorland tracks, rock-strewn roads and some of the finest forestry going in the world.

Four years ago, I came to Wales as an experienced racer with a fair few trophies to my credit and was immediately demoted to the status of the most raw novice. Everyone, it seemed, had ridden here



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This unusual chain guard was made by British Rival manufacturer Ken Sedgley. Note also the positively located cam adjusters for chain tension.

before. Every crew was familiar with names which were unpronounceable and were impossible to conceive. Eistedfa Gurig, Water-Break-Its-Neck, Forest Inn and Pontrhydfenigaid were real places to these old hands. How is it possible to remember any of a 400-mile route on which practice is forbidden? These men did, and were able to predict the condition of given stretches 40 miles away, which they hadn't seen for 12 months!

My PE Suzuki caused a minor panic when it only just scraped through the noise-meter test. PEs have the reputation of being one of the quietest machines around and out on the track it still sounded like one of the quietest bikes, which made the noise test even more interesting.

All around, other crews, from British ISDT team manager Ian Driver downwards were working more or less feverishly, according to their experience. The atmosphere of tense anticipation was beginning to build up into an almost physical force.

The bikes were locked in the parc fermé for the night and I took one last look at the PE while Carolyn, wet and tired, uttered a terse, "Why don't you climb over the fence and kiss it goodnight?" Females don't understand the racer/bike relationship. In any case my PE doesn't kiss boys.

Despite making a special attempt this year to remember detail, I can't really recall what happened between climbing into my riding gear next day and being about two miles out from Llandrindod Wells. Every body cell is tuned to the finish — 380 miles and two days away. In an enduro, to finish is paramount and unless your mind is focussed this far ahead you may as well leave the bike in the parc fermé.

The PE burbled along feeling as crisp and fresh as if it were brand new and we followed the markers south along the country lanes which led to the trial proper. The weather was cool, the bike fresh and I felt relaxed and confident. So much so, that when we came to the first bit of rough going, a grassy track made slippery by overnight rain, I promptly dropped the PE in a heap — much to the delight of two small lads who chortled, "That was good! We

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hadn't seen anybody crash until you came."

I remounted and to the enjoyment of the two young fans, fell off again before I had gone ten yards. By now I was feeling far from relaxed and had to get a firm grip of myself as there was every chance that my Welsh was going to come to a very undignified end before it had even started. The best way to get in the groove is to have a really good scratch around; I rode the rest of the section like it was a special stage and arrived at the first check with a comfortable 20 minutes to spare.

Things were going well, the weather was dry and cool, there was mile after mile of superb, well-marked tracks and a schedule which I could manage. In conditions like this the Welsh ceases to be a race and becomes pure pleasure. Arriving at Lower Hall with five minutes in hand — a good margin for a special stage — I was beginning to dream of losing no time and riding for a Gold.

What I forgot was that the Welsh is fickle. Without warning the rain began to fall and the next run, to Forest Inn — scheduled as a relatively easy stage — became a deadly serious race against the clock as the dry moorland tracks became treacherously slippery.

All around, riders were crashing, my safety margin disappeared and I scraped in to refuel with seconds to spare. Through intermittent rain I struggled to keep a clean time sheet for day one. This was the first

time I had managed even this much but the second day is even tougher. Could my luck hold out?

A glance around the parc fermé showed that this "easy" day had taken its toll and there were many gaps in the ranks of what had been 250 starters.

Day two dawned on what looked like an action rerun of Noah and the Ark. It would be nothing short of a miracle if I finished the course and in a way I felt more relaxed. The pressure of trying to stay on time was removed, I knew I couldn't manage it in the conditions and the best I could hope for was to finish.

The initial stage, a 24-minute run to the base of Claerwen Dam, is tough at best and a killer in this kind of weather. Over the easy, first couple of miles of bumpy, potholed tarmac I screwed the PE along and passed a couple of riders before we hit the moorland going.

The mist closed in until it was impossible to see the track while wearing goggles, and the rain and mud lashed my eyes when I removed them. The PE was still going well but this was not fun. Trying to maintain an average of 24mph across rough tracks is difficult when visibility is measured in yards and you are blinded by flying mud.

I was arriving at the checks well into the two-minute time allowance but still with no penalty. I was tired and wet, my concentration waning and my eyes puffed up like those of a boxer; even the faithful Suzuki

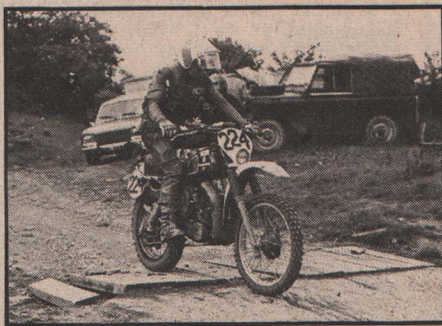
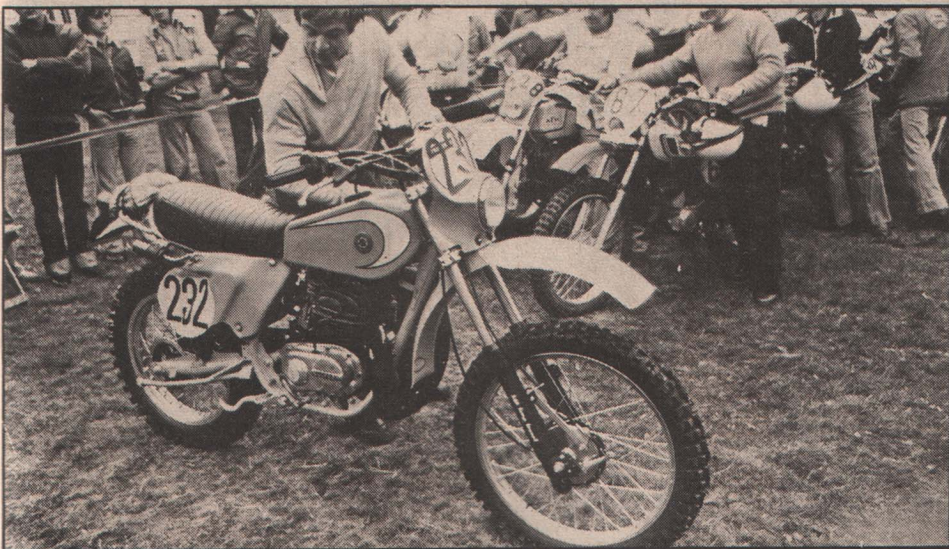


**Far left: West Germans Romer and Schafer (passenger) at full spray on their EML framed BMW.**

**Left: One of the five 50cc Fantics entered skates through a stream crossing in the hands of Alan Brick.**

**Below left: Former British moto cross champion Vic Allan presents the 370 Bultaco which took him to runner-up placing for scrutineering.**

**Below: Bristol dealer Norman Rumbold opts out of gearchanging chores with his 390 automatic Husqvarna.**



seemed to be losing its edge. There was still the relentless pressure to go faster and faster but out on the moors there are no spectators to ride for and the temptation to ease up a little starts to take over. The pace would slacken, the pain recede and no-one would criticise.

Every time you brake a little earlier or a dulled mind doesn't make your hand screw peak revs from a labouring motor, an extra second ticks by. How many seconds can you waste?

An expert would find the going interesting — a clubman like me cannot afford the luxury of even the slightest respite.

Out on your own, with no help or encouragement, you find out whether you really want to race. It seems that I do like my racing and responded to this basic challenge of enduro riding by getting through the worst of the sections without losing time. Finally, it was up to the last check and then the going would be so easy it would be impossible to lose time. Dropping down from the moors I could see the rough, rocky road which signifies the beginning of the end. Only ten or twelve miles more and we will be there.

I threw the PE hard into a corner to scrub off speed and the next thing I remember is looking at the bike from the side of the road.

Shaken, I remounted and set off again, wondering how the crash could have happened; then the front end began to snake

about and I realised. When I hit the rocks at the side of the road I must have burst the front inner tube. The realisation hit me like a physical blow. A puncture so near to the end.

Ripping out the burst tube with the wheel still in place, I removed it through the gap left by taking out the wheel spacer. With a new tube and the spacer back in, it only remained to inflate it and we'd be on our way. Perhaps not a four-minute change but fast enough for an amateur.

I cracked the button on the Finelec and, to my horror, the plastic adaptor flew off. I tried to hold it in place but the liquefied rubber shot everywhere and the precious gas escaped.

So near to a gold and now I couldn't even finish. I saw the few riders still left in the trial go burning past, but for me the 1978 Welsh was over.

Then, just like in the very best fairy tales, I turned around to see who was about to scorch past and found "Bomber" Harrison tootling along on his SWM. The mere sight of a friendly face is prepared to stop and render assistance, much joy is generated.

Bomber, plagued by his own troubles during the day, was still only too willing to help solve mine. Although he had already used up his own air bottles he'd had the foresight to carry a pump as well and we managed to squeeze a few pounds of pressure in the front tyre.

With 15 minutes to spare before my exclu-

sion time I was continually hearing knockings, tinklings and other malevolent squeaks from the Suzuki — but it got to the end under its own power.

For my efforts I received a bronze piece of metal worth about 40p. The Welsh cost me £10 in entry fees, a chain and rear sprocket at £30, a pair of knobbles costing some £35 and about £25-worth of petrol. The question, "Was it all worth it?" becomes a key one.

The answer is an unequivocal, "Yes." The Welsh is a true enduro; a test of man and machine against the course. That's what we pay our money for and, in the 1978 Welsh, that's precisely what we got.

Technically the event did not throw up any major surprises. Like all enduros, even up to ISDT level, the top men were competing on bikes which were very similar to the standard production machines used by the clubmen.

The Welsh demands power, so it wasn't surprising to see both first and second places go to big-bore bikes.

The big KTM is as simple as it is possible to make a motorcycle, commensurate with winning enduros. It possesses neither disc-valve induction nor reed valves but despite the superficial simplicity it delivers 40bhp through a six-speed gearbox. This gives Dai's bike a top whack in excess of 100mph.

There are drawbacks in that the KTM is not exactly frugal in terms of fuel consumption. Ridden hard the KTM covers just over 30 miles to a gallon of two-stroke mix, giving a safe 60-mile range from the 2½ gallon tank.

The KTM has the reputation of being a bit of a beast to ride and this infamy has a certain amount of truth in it. The stories begin with the early 360s which were violent in the extreme. The latest bikes are much more tractable but they still need to be turning at 2-3,000rpm before usable power comes in. When the urge does come there is an awful lot of it and many of the horror stories concerning the KTM stem from the fact that most riders simply cannot manage 40bhp on the rough.

Chassis design has been forced into very narrow confines in this field of the sport. ▶

Despite what theorists tell us, the cold, objective fact is that crude as the jumble of tubes and flexing forks may be, they function extraordinarily well when it comes to allowing a bike to do everything from 2mph trials riding to high-speed blasts along forestry tracks.

Both front and rear suspension on most enduro bikes is far ahead of road machines and this is obviously why the bikes are so adaptable. All front forks used by the serious makers are good but the Marzocchis found on the KTM are accepted to be a shade better than most. They offer ten inches of travel all of which is superbly damped right up to the last thou of movement, and they react to anything from a one-inch ripple to hitting a two-foot ditch square on.

Unlike motocross forks, the enduro Marzocchis do not have an air-assisted spring but rely on a multi-rate coil. Current thinking among riders is that ten inches of travel, front and rear, is about the optimum for enduro use. Motocross machines can probably make use of 12 inches or more but this demands a seat height in proportion to fork travel. Often in enduros it is only possible to clear sticky sections by energetic leg-work which is not made easier by a 35-inch seat height.

Some shades of opinion suggest that even ten inches of wheel travel is excessive but I don't subscribe to this. It's true that a bike like my PE is easier to handle and slides much better than a motocross design — but it's also true that I was struggling on fast, rough sections where riders with longer travel were not.

Given two similar riders, the bikes will decide the outcome and competition in British enduros is so close that literally every advantage has to be seized. If a rider can pick up a second or two on some rough going and not sacrifice the bike's handling in sticky conditions, he is well on the way to success.

KTM have judged the equation between power, suspension and handling so accurately that, given a competent rider their bikes will be in the medals.

Finally, the KTM is reliable. Occasionally you will see a KTM broken down but more often than not the failure will be due to rider error or just plain *force majeure* in the form of a puncture or a broken chain. Rarely, if ever, do you see a KTM seized or stopped with a broken frame.

Jeremiah's machine finished in pristine condition — more than a passing reflection on the fact that the KTM's are built for six days of this sort of going.

Bultaco's ISDT record is not so hot, the bikes seemingly lacking the stamina for a full six days. However their latest offering is quite an effective enduro machine and was good enough to carry Vic Allan to a 500 class win.

Vic's bike was a totally standard 370 Frontera. Just how standard can be judged from the fact that it wasn't unpacked from its crate until two days before the Welsh. The bike follows almost identical lines to the KTM regarding power, suspension and frame design. The real difference lies in the power delivery and this is worth discussing in more detail.

Possibly because the Bul is only a five-speeder, or perhaps it's a reflection of a more deep-seated racing philosophy, the power delivery on the Spanish bike is much smoother than that of the KTM. The Bul will pull hard from tickover and the transition from chuffing along amiably to full-bore activity is much easier to make. Incidentally, both bikes were far from light, weighing in

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at about 260lb ready to race — an indication of the safety margin which is built into these machines.

On the second day, when the going got really difficult, even a rider of Vic Allan's ability was grateful for the soft power delivery and, like me, he noticed that riders of fiercer bikes, unless they were top class men, were really struggling.

Although the premier awards went to the bigger bikes, the 250 SWMs proved to be virtually their match despite giving away 150cc. Like the KTM, these Italian bikes come straight from the ISDT proving grounds and their track record is impressive to say the least.

Unlike the other machines, the SWM uses quite a sophisticated power unit in the Rotax-designed, disc-valve motor which is very similar to those found on the Can-Ams. This engine is outstandingly the most powerful 250 on the market and has really strong mid-range power.

Despite being dogged by some inexcusably careless production faults — such as petrol taps which were too small to feed the engine on full bore, leading to fuel starvation and seizures — the SWMs have rightly earned the reputation of being the bike to beat, if you can ride them.

Being genuine ISDT replicas they are not

easy to tame and many hopeful clubmen will find them more of a hindrance than a help since a 250 which will loop itself on demand is not a toy for riding around the back garden. It's no fault of the bike, but it is worth noting before you part with the £1200 the bike costs.

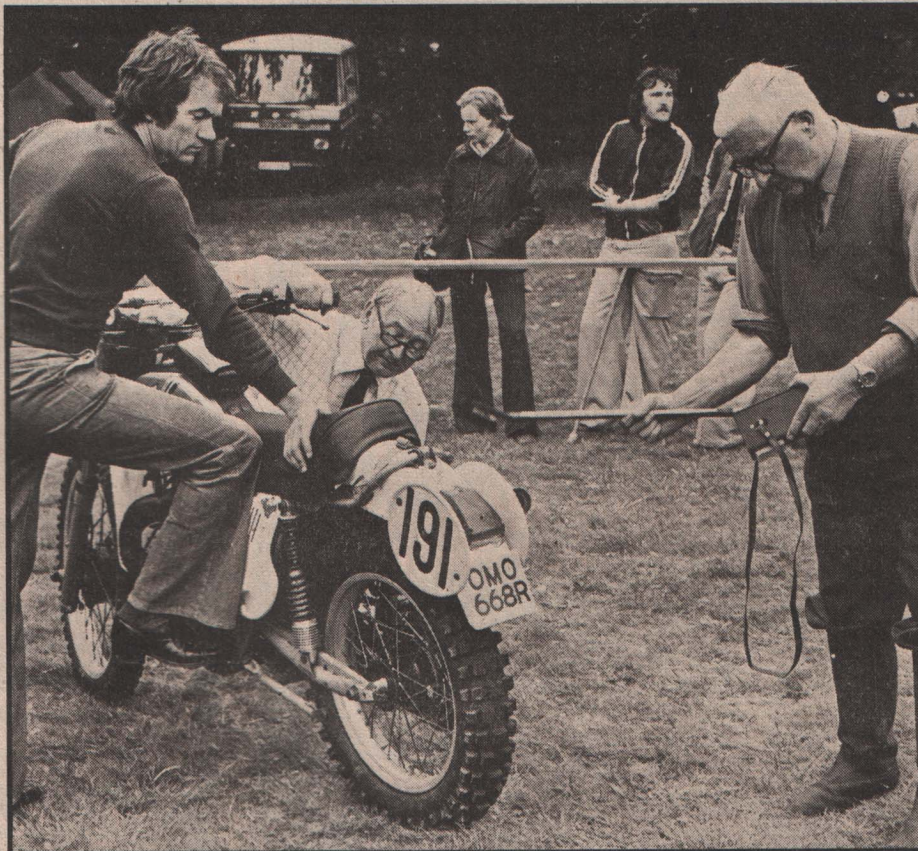
With its six carefully-chosen gears, the SWM can cope with anything from 5mph trials-going to flat out forestry roads. Its biggest weakness is its fuel consumption and small tank which meant that SWM service crews could be seen stationed at every alternate tree.

Third man home, "Bonkey" Bowers solved this problem with a large capacity alloy tank which he plans to market as an accessory.

The first Japanese bike home was a PE Suzuki — a new model with longer travel suspension, new hubs and a six-speed version of the well-proven reed-valve motor. The bike certainly gives Suzuki a challenger for the 250 class. It may not match the SWM at the highest level of riding but it is a machine which is relatively easy to handle.

My own Crooks-Suzuki has been set up with emphasis on light controls, clean power delivery and general smoothness. The result is a bike which is so easy to ride it defies description. It can, through rider error, be forced into terrible tangles and it will come out in one piece. Above all else, it is immaculately reliable.

The final word must go to Yamaha's DT175MX, which has set new standards in the off-road world. At about half the price of a thoroughbred enduro bike, the DTs were entered in hordes and the most common sight in the trial was that of clubmen riders lauding their Yams. Certainly the DTs are not winners but so far as a truly competitive ride for the clubman goes, they are the complete answer.



The moment everybody dreads . . . . the noise meter inquisition.