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On Two Wheels

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THE INSIDE STORY OF MOTOR CYCLING

On Two Wheels

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Montesa Cota 348 – *Mike Winfield*. We take a look at one of the best trials machines available today.

Monthéry – *Cyril Posthumus*. This French circuit was once a major centre of racing and record breaking.

Monza – *Christopher James*. Italy's famous high-speed road racing circuit with a tragic history.

Moore, Ron – *Andrew Edwards*. The long-serving speedway ace who later turned to four wheels.

Moped – *Doug Jackson*. The history of the moped goes back a lot further than you might imagine.

Morbidelli – *Steve Harvey*. The newest and most promising of Italy's Grand Prix road-racing machine manufacturers.

This week's contributors

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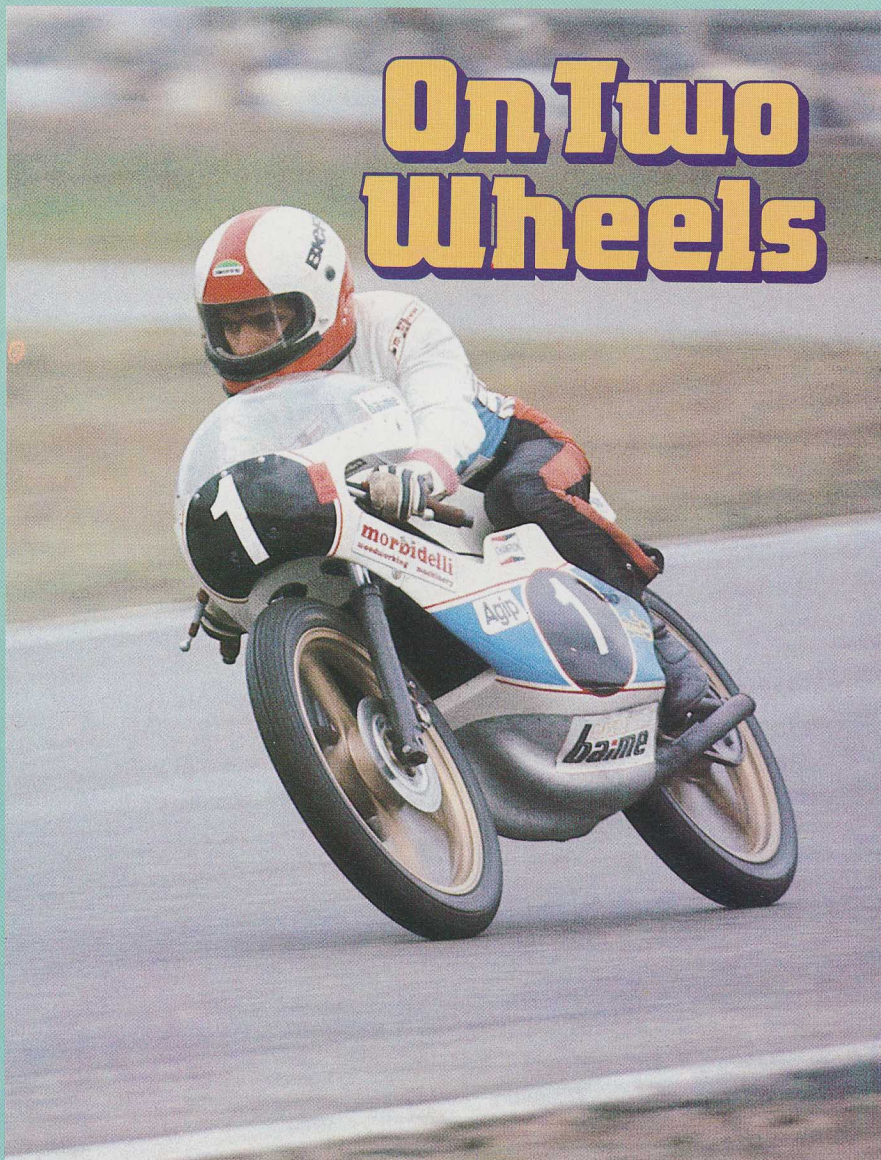
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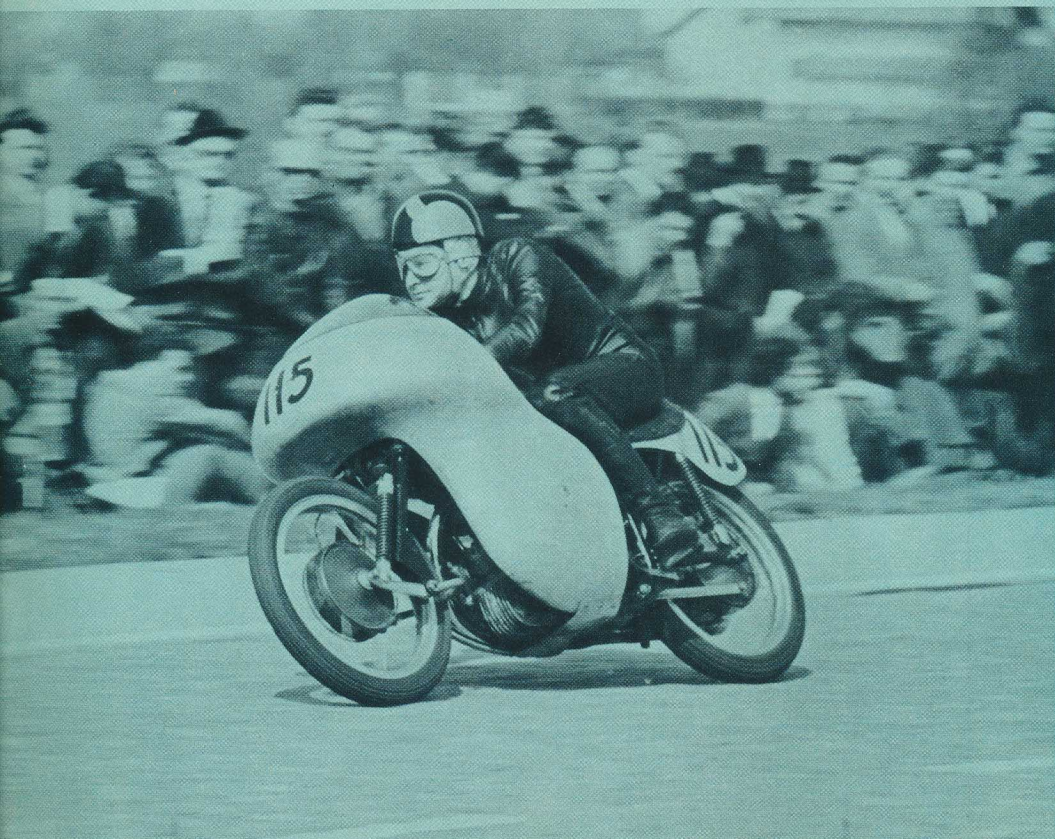
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Mister Perfection

Mention the word legend and cynics will reach for their magnifying glasses to search for the cracks and flaws. There are those who hold the opinion that the concept of a legend exists in the minds of the fans rather than in the ability of the star. For those who want to hear the other argument, a study of Sammy Miller is recommended for here is the anatomy of a true legend. One feature a legend must have is resilience – resilience to competitors, critics, set-backs and of course time and in this respect Miller is a perfect example because he began his competitive career in road racing and, after living with the best, Duke, Surtees, Masetti, Lomas, he turned to trials and became the supremo. Even in 1977, at the age of 43 he said 'It's amusing but I'm still the man to beat in Hampshire'. When asked why this was so he explained critically, 'I think it shows the poor standard of the riders today, they expect success to come too easily'. If reaction to this remark is one of hurt pride it would be well to remember that Miller is a man



who set himself a very high standard to get where he is and it is only logical that he sets the same standard for those who wish to emulate him.

Sammy never courted popularity, therefore it is hardly surprising that he has his critics and enemies. He admits that he is a shy person by nature, and does not find it easy to be sociable, but at the same time realises that people at the top of their careers are expected to be affable to the public. Consequently he is often misunderstood, and some have taken offence where none was intended, but to those who are less touchy a conversation with Miller is usually a refreshing experience and quite often an education. His approach is forthright and accurate and one can rely on his opinion being an honest one, truly held without any ulterior motives.

Above: Sammy Miller displays the concentration and determination that made him the undisputed king of trials riders. He is seen here competing in the St David's Trial of 1969

Left: Miller's 250cc CZ at the Austrian Grand Prix of 1962



Naturally this creates animosity but, more importantly, it also creates good friends and an army of dedicated admirers. Miller has a philosophy which is a good reflection of his attitude to critics. 'The successful person is always the bad boy. When I was at school the most popular rider then was Les Graham. He was a great personality who had the most terrible misfortunes, he seldom finished any of his races but the crowd loved him. For me it's totally different. If a rider beats me it's his life's ambition realised. If I finish second they say I'm over the top.' Perhaps the most painful moment for Sammy came in the 1969 Scottish Six Days Trial when he got into difficulties and some of the spectators jeered.

What is it about this man that causes these extreme reactions, why should such a successful rider generate this strange love-hate relationship? Finding the answer is tantamount to a psycho-analysis of Miller's desire to win, his thirst to be the best. First, there is his supreme determination to complete the task but this is not the whole answer. The real key is dedication, pursued with a tireless zeal and a monk-like concentration which has produced a perfectionist. To such a person winning is not enough, his machine must be beautifully prepared, assembled with the precision of a high-quality watch and his riding gear must be in good order. He has been known to get annoyed with himself for 'footing' where most of the other stars failed

miserably. 'When I ride it's 100 per cent all the time, it's the way I've always ridden, it's the only way.' This is his attitude. Couple it with his determination, dedication and dissatisfaction with anything imperfect and it can be seen why, after years of practice, he has reached a super-human standard which regrettably may not be seen again. Perhaps this explains why such opposing views of Miller exist. For those who admire such characteristics he is an inspiration but clearly for others he highlights their inferiority complexes.

It would be wrong to give the impression that Sammy has only one side to his nature for, while he is a serious minded chap a great deal of the time, he also has a keen sense of humour which those who know him better have discovered.

Some years ago Sammy was in Poland for the Tatra Trial which he won. Later at the prize-giving ceremony the huge auditorium was packed with cheering crowds as Miller was presented with a KTM motorcycle. In a moment of light-heartedness he decided to give a demonstration of his ability by riding down the steps from the stage into the centre aisle but as usual when someone is showing-off things go wrong. As Sammy put the front wheel over the top step the whole set of steps moved away from the stage causing him and the bike to do a glorious hand-stand. He not only hung on grimly and managed to stay with the



bike to the bottom but did it with such aplomb that the audience thought it was planned whereupon they collapsed in the aisles with laughter.

Samuel Hamilton Miller was born in Belfast on 11 November 1933 in the Antrim Road area. His father owned a painting and decorating business and had in his day been a sportsman both on two wheels and four.

Not far from the city of Belfast is the famous Clady circuit once the home of the famous Ulster Grand Prix where riders competed for honours by racing on 'real' roads. It was as a small boy that Sammy got his first taste for motor cycle racing when he went to cheer the great Irish riders of the day – Stanley Woods, Artie Bell, Ernie Lyons and the

Left: Miller tackles another difficult 'section'

Right: Miller poses on his Ariel at the Bemrose Trial of 1957

Below: Sammy Miller will be remembered as possibly the greatest trials rider of all time. Here he competes in the 1970 Scottish Six Days Trial



McCandless brothers.

In those early days young Sammy Miller was like most boys who become besotted with motor sport – he lived motor cycles during the day and dreamed about them at night. A scrapbook was diligently kept up to date with photographs and press cuttings and those relics of the past – cigarette cards. Artie Bell, who was then a member of the Norton works team, and Rex McCandless ran a motor cycle business in Woodstock Road in Belfast and one day Sammy with two of his friends decided to go to the shop and ask the superstars to autograph his scrapbook. When they arrived there were the two greats – Artie and Rex – deep in conversation. With the utmost respect the lads waited until the men had finished before daring to ask them to sign the book. Before they left Sammy plucked up the courage to ask Artie Bell what was the most important ingredient a racing motor cyclist needed. He got the answer 'enthusiasm' which left him feeling a little disappointed. However, he was later to find out exactly what Bell meant because when the going gets tough that is what you need most.

Does the mother exist who is pleased when she hears that her son wants a motor cycle? Perhaps not and Mrs Miller senior was no exception. It was the year 1948, when Sammy was 15, that he got his first driving licence. That was the easy part. The next stage was more difficult – raising the price of a bike – but he did it. £10 in those days bought you a 1929 Francis Barnett but the hardest part of this venture was yet to come, winning Mum's approval, and this was one competition Miller lost. But still he did not give in, he coerced his aunt who lived five miles away at Glengormley to let him keep the machine there so that whenever he wanted to ride his bike it was always preceded by a tram journey. So Sammy Miller, the boy from Belfast High School had become a motor cyclist and that was the most important thing of all.

Being a motor cyclist, however, soon palled. What Miller really wanted was to be a competitive motor cyclist. The Francis Barnett had to go to make room for something with more velocity. This new machine took the shape of a 150cc New Imperial, not a pukka racing mount by any means but nevertheless with a little tuning and careful attention from Sammy it produced a respectable turn of speed. It was good enough to encourage Miller to enter for a grass track meeting right at the end of the 1951 season at Downpatrick. The event was organised by the Temple MCC and was a very muddy affair causing



Sammy to draw on what reserve of experience he had. It proved sufficient to win the 200cc class and in so doing Miller beat one of the local aces to begin what was to be one of the most colourful careers in the history of competitive motor cycling.

To tell the story in full from now on would take far more space than is available; indeed it would fill a book. Miller rapidly became more involved with road racing until in 1954 he bought his first real road racer, the ex-Charlie Gray 7R AJS, and won the Cookstown 100. After only three road races he got his first sponsored ride on a 250 NSU Sportsmax which set in motion a chain reaction he dearly loved. Over the next three years Miller rocketed to fame on the road racing circuits of Europe riding NSU, Ducati, CZ and Mondial machines. In 1957 he finished third in the World Championship which in so short a space of time is no mean achievement. By this time, however, all was not well with Miller. He found he was continually being rated number three in the works teams and so was not getting the best machines. With unreliable mounts letting him down he was unable to do his best every time he rode. Under the strain of sheer frustration he turned his back on road racing.

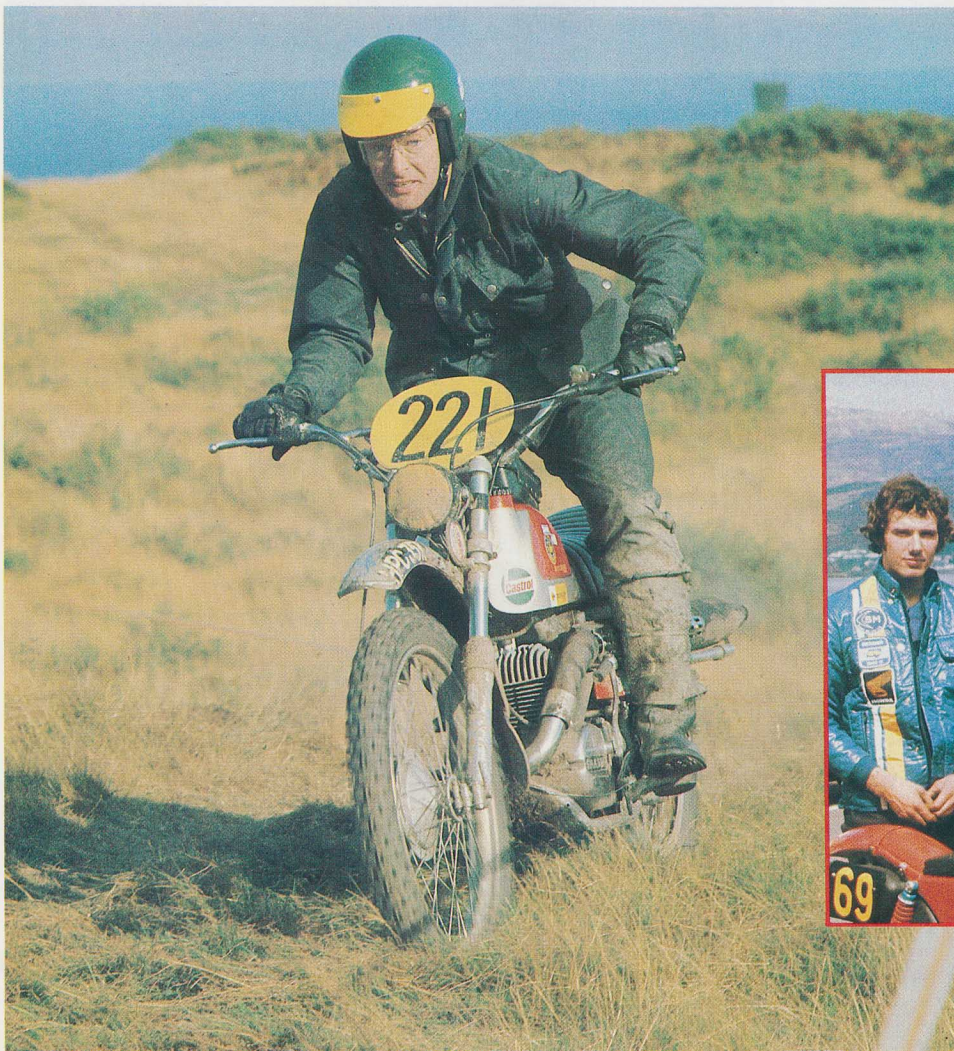
It was during this trying period of his life that Sammy used to take his trials

machine out into the wilds of the countryside simply to get some peace and quiet. The two branches of motor cycling, road racing and trials, had run parallel in Miller's life for some time. After 1957, however, it meant that he could now devote all his attention to trials. It was here that Sammy will always be remembered for no one rider has ever influenced motor cycle sport as he influenced the trials scene. His style has been copied, his machines have been copied, some say even his attitudes have been copied but one aspect of Miller which has not, and probably never will be, copied is his success. This is probably because Sammy Miller is a product of a certain social environment which is no longer in existence. It could be said that times have changed. No longer does a dedicated youth buy an old banger and worship it with his spanners; no longer does a budding star live as cheaply and roughly as he can to gain experience in the big events; no longer does a rider forsake all else to achieve his life's ambition; no longer does our soft, affluent society produce men of the Miller calibre.

If any part of Miller's professional career were to be singled out as being the most meritorious it must be his time at Ariel. It was at this period that the big lusty four-strokes were being disgraced by two-stroke machines of 250cc or even less. As a result, trials courses

were being made progressively more difficult to make the going hard for the 'stokers'. This in turn meant it was even worse for those who clung nostalgically to the heavyweights. Miller took the Ariel HT5 and transformed it into one of the most famous machines ever known in the field of motor cycle competition. Known affectionately by its registration number, GOV 132, it is now on display in the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu as a memorial to Miller's impeccable machine preparation. After Ariel came Bultaco when Sammy made the Spanish machine the standard by which other trials bikes are judged and today Honda are reaping the benefits of an association with Sam which must be priceless to any manufacturer.

Sammy Miller is now a businessman and a very successful one too. At New Milton in Hampshire he runs a motor cycle and accessory firm in Gore Road. Not far away, at Barton-on-Sea, he lives in a beautiful detached house with his wife Pauline and their two children Jane and Stuart. The house is immaculately decorated, but perhaps the most impressive decorations are the hundreds of cups, trophies and awards won by Sam during his reign as the king of trials, when for eleven consecutive years he was the British Champion and twice took the European title. RB



Left: Miller on his 250 Bultaco during the International Six Days Trial held on the Isle of Man in 1971

Below: Sammy Miller (third from left) poses with the works Honda team during the 1977 Scottish Six Days Trial. In 1974, Miller was signed by the Japanese Honda company to develop their range of trials models. The original contract was only for two years, but Honda and Miller have been associated ever since

