

# TRIALS — THE BRITISH EXPERTS

After 13 unsuccessful attempts — and runner-up three times — Peter Wraith finally achieved best sidecar performance in the British Experts. Peter is currently chairman of the ACU Youth Division.



**PICTURE** the scene on a cold Cotswold hillside in February, 1929. Watching the Colmore Cup Trial is a farm labourer, exasperated by the high proportion of failures in relation to the occasional clean climb.

Standing alongside the labourer is none other than Fred Watson, president of the Birmingham Motor Cycle Club and gaffer of Watsonian Sidecars.

The farmhand turns to Mr. Watson and asks: "Mister, why don't you run a trial restricted to experts? That would really be worth watching."

Fred Watson related that chance snatch of conversation when he attended the next Birmingham MCC committee meeting, and the farm labourer's suggestion met with warm approval on all sides.

Thus was born the British Experts Trial, and Graham Goodman immediately volunteered his services as clerk of the course. He selected the George Hotel, Bewdley, as starting point, and the Motordrome, Greet, as the finish.

Two handsome trophies were soon donated—the Skefko gold-plated cup for best solo, and the Palmer silver cup for best sidecar. The former was valued at a hundred

## Strictly for experts only

guineas—an extremely impressive sum in those days.

Birmingham MCC sought the AUC's approval to call their new event the Motor Cycle Championship, but this got the thumbs down. It was argued that such a title would be inappropriate if a British Trials Championship were ever instigated.

So "British Experts" was put forward as an alternative, and this received ACU blessing. The trial duly took place on November 23, 1929, with Birmingham riders Bert Perigo and Dennis Mansell the winners (solo and sidecar).

"The trial attracted many hundreds of spectators," recalls Perrigo (later to become Birmingham MCC president), "and several observed sections on the outskirts of Birmingham were included.

"They were old favourites such as Rue de Hofman, Sling Fordrough, Satan's Arcade,

Gay Hill, The Swamp and so on. Mostly mud, which called for flat-out tactics.

"This suited me fine, and my slender lead was increased on the very last section. I managed to beat Vic Brittain by a reasonable margin, and this was my first big win."

Perrigo thrived on flat mud, but he agreed with his Birmingham clubmates that the 1929 course lacked variety. So for the next ten years they chose Gloucestershire instead of Worcestershire.

Headquarters were always the Bear Hotel, Rodborough Common, Stroud, with the late Harry Baughan as clerk of the course (working in conjunction with Graham Goodman until 1935).

Rodborough was again the venue in 1948 and 1952, but the contest has been staged as far north as Yorkshire and as far south as Devon. Each area produced different



Rob Edwards, one of the best men never to win the British crown, beat Rathmell to win the 1971 Experts.



Yorkshire's Mick Wilkinson won the two controversial Experts in 1974 and 1975. In the latter event brother Bill was runner-up.

characteristics in keeping with local terrain.

Some of the events were surprisingly easy, but most have been of a daunting severity calculated to test a competitor's skill to the utmost. Eligibility (nowadays on a points basis) ensures an exclusive entry seldom in excess of 40.

Always there is a unique atmosphere about the British Experts Trial, whatever the venue; but some of the contestants seem unequal to the occasion and ride with less than their usual ability. Nerves play almost as big a part as skill.

Indeed, at the very first event, a farmer on whose land one of the sections was located asked a marshal whether the competitors

were experts. "Oh, yes," replied the official—"they're the cream of the country."

"Is that so?" commented the farmer with evident disdain. "They look a bloody poor lot to me. If they're experts, I'd hate to see the novices!"

But nowadays, with ultra-lightweight machinery, the standard of riding has increased. So has the severity of the hazards, which comprise rugged rockery rather than the hub-deep mud of half a century ago.

From 1963 to 1975, the event was held in Central Wales. Then, for a couple of years, its character underwent a change when pocket handkerchief "closed circuit" courses were tried—in Gloucestershire and Shropshire.

Bert Perrigo and several of his Birmingham "elder statesmen" yearned for a return to the longer courses with observed sections linked by public roads. So for 1978 the trial went back to Rhayader and last year the venue was Knighton.

The British Experts has had more than its fair share of trouble. In 1969 virtually every solo competitor was excluded for lateness, the ultimate winner being a very surprised John Harrison (hurrying to catch a boat back to his native Ireland).

Five years later, Mick Wilkinson was best soloist of only six to escape the dreaded time limit—though he would have been placed 11th without the mass exclusions. Over 30 malingerers got the chop.

In 1975, Mick again won when 21 of the 29 starters went on strike. Wilkinson, ever an individualist, is no "union man"—and he preferred to press on in the face of suicidal sections and a tight time schedule.

But, since then, competitors have shown more sense and have got on with the job in hand. John Miles was clerk of the course in 1976, Mick Bowers in '77, Arthur Bates in '78 and Dave Vaughn in '79.

Under their guidance, the contest has regained much of its former prestige. But the sheer glamour of earlier British Experts Trials seems somehow lacking nowadays. It is still the most important event of its kind, yet by no means the best.

Ten years after its inauguration, the trial saw its one and only unresolvable tie—between 1932 winner Jack Williams and 1936 winner Vic Brittain. It could have been avoided if the chief marshal had correctly recorded the delay suffered by Allan Jefferies on Ashmeads.

Forty years later, a second tie took place. This time it was between John Reynolds and Malcolm Rathmell, but young John got the verdict on a "fewer stops" basis and achieved his first victory.

Reynolds almost lost the trophy by incurring an eight-mark penalty for lateness at the first time check. There are many enthusiasts who contend that this annual event should be won by good riding—not by good time-keeping.

Bert Perrigo was present at the 1979 trial in Knighton—his thoughts perhaps drifting back to that November day in 1929 when the very first band of 24 experts converged on Bewdley for the start of a world-famous series.

The British Experts has, in truth, changed but little in 50 years. Indeed, many followers of motorcycle sport contend that it is high time the event had some sort of a "face lift" which would increase spectator interest and heighten publicity value.

Any move towards turning it into a circus act would be resisted strenuously by die-hards who dislike any break with tradition.

#### Past Winners and Runners-Up

**1929 (Bewdley)** Solo: 1 Bert Perrigo (BSA), 2 Vic Brittain (Sunbeam). Sidecar: 1 Dennis Mansell (Norton), 2 Geoff Butcher (Rudge).

**1930 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 Len Heath (Ariel), 2 Vic Brittain (Sunbeam). Sidecar: 1 Stuart Waycott (Rudge), 2 George Stannard (Triumph).

**1931 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 Bert Perrigo (BSA), 2 Vic Brittain (Sunbeam). Sidecar: 1 Stuart Waycott (Rudge), 2 Jack Phillips (Douglas).



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**1932 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 Jack Williams (Rudge), 2 Len Heath (Ariel). Sidecar: 1 Harold Flook (Norton), 2 Jack Phillips (Douglas).

**1933 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 Fred Povey (BSA), 2 Vic Brittain (Norton). Sidecar: 1 Harold Flook (Norton), 2 Stuart Waycott (Velocette).

**1934 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 Fred Povey (BSA), 2 Jack Williams (Norton). Sidecar: 1 Harold Flook (BSA), 2 Stuart Waycott (Velocette).

**1935 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 Len Heath (Ariel), 2 Bert Perigo (BSA). Sidecar: 1 Harold Flook (BSA), 2 Stuart Waycott (Velocette).

**1936 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 Vic Brittain (Norton), 2 George Holdsworth (Royal Enfield). Sidecar: 1 Harold Flook (BSA), 2 Dennis Mansell (Norton).

**1937 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 Charlie Rogers (Royal Enfield), 2 Fred Povey (AJS). Sidecar: 1 Dennis Mansell (Norton), 2 Bill Hayward (Baughan).

**1938 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 Allan Jefferies (Triumph), 2 Charlie Rogers (Royal Enfield). Sidecar: 1 Dennis Mansell (Norton), 2 Harold Flook (Norton).

**1939 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 Vic Brittain (Norton) and Jack Williams (Norton)—tie. Sidecar: 1 Harold Flook (Norton), 2 Stuart Waycott (Velocette).

**1946 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 Bob Ray (Ariel), 2 Fred Rist (BSA). Sidecar: 1 Harold Tozer (BSA), 2 Dennis Mansell (Norton).

**1947 (Skipton)** Solo: 1 Artie Ratcliffe (Matchless), 2 Bill Nicholson (BSA). Sidecar: 1 Harold Tozer (BSA), 2 Harold Taylor (Ariel).

**1948 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 Hugh Viney (AJS), 2 Tom Ellis (BSA). Sidecar: 1 Harold Tozer (BSA), 2 Arthur Humphries (Norton).

**1949 (Exeter)** Solo: 1 Artie Ratcliffe (Matchless), 2 Terry Hill (BSA). Sidecar: 1 Arthur Humphries (Norton), 2 Harold Tozer (BSA).

**1950 (Church Stretton)** Solo: 1 Bill Nicholson (BSA), 2 John Draper (BSA). Sidecar: 1 Harold Tozer (BSA), 2 Frank Wilkins (Ariel).

**1951 (Buxton)** Solo: 1 Tom Ellis (BSA), 2 Hugh Viney (AJS). Sidecar: 1 Cyril Kemp (Norton), 2 Peter Wraith (Ariel).

**1952 (Stroud)** Solo: 1 John Brittain (Royal Enfield), 2 Hugh Viney (AJS). Sidecar: 1 Harold Tozer (BSA), 2 Arthur Humphries (Norton).

**1953 (Newtown)** Solo: 1 John Brittain (Royal Enfield), 2 John Draper (BSA). Sidecar: 1 Frank Wilkins (Ariel), 2 Arthur Humphries (Norton).

**1954 (Newtown)** Solo: 1 Bill Nicholson (BSA), 2 Jeff Smith (BSA). Sidecar: 1 Frank Darrieulat (BSA), 2 Jack Stocker (Ariel).

**1955 (Winchcombe)** Solo: 1 Jeff Smith (BSA), 2 John Draper (BSA). Sidecar: 1 Arthur Humphries (Norton), 2 Peter Wraith (Ariel).

**1956 (Ludlow)** Solo: 1 Jeff Smith (BSA), 2 Gordon Jackson (AJS). Sidecar: 1 Frank Darrieulat (BSA), 2 Jim Sandiford (Ariel).

**1957 (Ludlow)** Solo: 1 Gordon Jackson (AJS), 2 Jeff Smith (BSA). Sidecar: 1 Frank Wilkins (Ariel), 2 Arthur Humphries (Norton).

**1958 (Ludlow)** Solo: 1 Gordon Jackson (AJS), 2 Pat Brittain (Royal Enfield). Sidecar: 1 Frank Wilkins (Ariel), 2 Frank Darrieulat (BSA).

**1959 (Llandrindod)** Solo: 1 Sammy Miller (Ariel), 2 John Giles (Triumph). Sidecar: 1 Frank Wilkins (Ariel), 2 Sam Seston (BSA).

**1960 (Llandrindod)** Solo: 1 Bill Wilkinson (Greeves), 2 Gordon Blakeway (Triumph). Sidecar: 1 Bill Slocombe (BSA), 2 Peter Roydhouse (Norton).

**1961 (Llandrindod)** Solo: 1 Gordon Jackson (AJS), 2 Sammy Miller (Ariel). Sidecar: 1 Peter Wraith (Ariel), 2 Peter Roydhouse (Norton).

**1962 (Ludlow)** Solo: 1 Sammy Miller (Ariel), 2 Bill Wilkinson (Greeves). Sidecar: 1 Ron Langston (Ariel), 2 Ken Kendall (Metisse).



John Reynolds, yet another top Yorkshireman, won the 1979 British Experts after a great ride on his Beamish Suzuki.

**1963 (Llandrindod)** Solo: 1 Jeff Smith (BSA), 2 Sammy Miller (Ariel). Sidecar: 1 Ron Langston (Ariel), 2 Alan Morewood (Ariel).

**1964 (Llandrindod)** Solo: 1 Sammy Miller (Ariel), 2 Gordon Adsett (Greeves). Sidecar: 1 Ron Langston (Ariel), 2 Ken Kendall (Kenman).

**1965 (Llandrindod)** Solo: 1 Scott Ellis (BSA), 2 Sammy Miller (Bultaco). Sidecar: 1 Ron Langston (Ariel), 2 Peter Wraith (Ariel).

**1966 (Llandrindod)** Solo: 1 Sammy Miller (Bultaco), 2 Mick Andrews (Bultaco). Sidecar: 1 Alan Morewood (Ariel), 2 Ron Langston (Ariel).

## 1967-No trial (foot-and-mouth disease)

**1968 (Llandrindod)** Solo: 1 Sammy Miller (Bultaco), 2 Gordon Farley (Greeves). Sidecar: 1 Alan Morewood (Ariel), 2 Ron Langston (Ariel).

**1969 (Llandrindod)** Solo: 1 John Harrison (Bultaco)—no other finishers. Sidecar: 1 Roy Bradley (Ariel), 2 Phil Mountfield (Ariel).

**1970 (Llandrindod)** Solo: 1 Malcolm Rathmell (Bultaco), 2 Rob Edwards (Montesa). Sidecar: 1 Alan Morewood (Ariel), 2 Phil Mountfield (Ariel).

**1971 (Llandrindod)** Solo: 1 Rob Edwards (Montesa), 2 Malcolm Rathmell (Bultaco). Sidecar: 1 Ray Round (BSA), 2 Alan Morewood (Metisse).

**1972 (Llandrindod)** Solo: 1 Malcolm Rathmell (Bultaco), 2 Dave Thorpe (Ossa). Sidecar: 1 Ray Round (BSA), 2 Ginger Budd (BSA).

**1973 (Rhayader)** Solo: 1 Clive Smith (Montesa), 2 Mick Andrews (Yamaha). Sidecar: 1 Arthur Lampkin (Bultaco), 2 Jack Mathews (CCM).

**1974 (Rhayader)** Solo: 1 Mick Wilkinson (Ossa), 2 Alan Lampkin (Bultaco). Sidecar: 1 Jack Mathews (Ossa), 2 George Greenland (Wasp).

**1975 (Rhayader)** Solo: 1 Mick Wilkinson (Ossa), 2 Bill Wilkinson (Ossa). Sidecar: 1 Colin Dommett (Kawasaki), 2 Harry Foster (Metisse).

**1976 (Lypiatt)** Solo: 1 Rob Shepherd (Montesa), 2 Malcolm Rathmell (Montesa). Sidecar: 1 Colin Dommett (Suzuki), 2 Adrian Clarke (Suzuki).

**1977 (Burrington)** Solo: 1 Martin Lampkin (Bultaco), 2 Rob Shepherd (Honda). Sidecar: 1 Adrian Clarke (Honda), 2 Roger Martin (Suzuki).

**1978 (Rhayader)** Solo: 1 Martin Lampkin (Bultaco), 2 Rob Shepherd (Honda). Sidecar: 1 Adrian Clarke (Montesa), 2 John Turner (Suzuki).

**1979 (Knighton)** Solo: 1 John Reynolds (Suzuki), 2 Malcolm Rathmell (Montesa). Sidecar: 1 Adrian Clarke (Montesa), 2 Mick Wilkinson (Montesa).



Rathmell, rear axle-deep in thick Manx mud, blasts his Mont through a section at the 1979 Manx Two-Day trial to add yet another premier trophy to his collection.



Characteristic determination from "old iron-jaw" — the one and only Martin Lampkin pictured urging his Bult forward in the 1978 British Experts trial at Rhayader.