



Welcome to the Notts & Derby Section's seventh Newsletter.

As we won't be meeting up for a little while, these are intended to be a way of keeping in touch at least until the restrictions end.

In this issue we have the story of one man's association with the section, an account of an old friend's experiences racing in the 1997 Manx Grand Prix and news about tickets for Stafford.

Newsletter goes on.

There has been positive feedback from a number of readers and contact from one member in particular highlights the fact that some members can no longer participate in Section events but love to hear what's happening. This has led to the decision to continue the newsletter monthly even after restrictions are lifted. Many members who can't attend won't have the internet but there are others who do. It will be published mid-month to avoid clashing with the Journal.

Stafford Show Tickets. Important information for ticket holders.

If you've bought a ticket to either of the previously planned April or October events, please read this post.

All tickets previously purchased for what was either the original April or October (that includes all postponement dates) will be replaced with a ticket to our July 3-4 event. These will be issued during June. If you do not wish to attend in July, please contact Mortons via 01507 529529 or email customerservices@mortons.co.uk before May 31st.

If you do wish to attend, you don't need to do anything! However, if you haven't heard from them by mid-June, please contact them using the above info.

Thursday's Evening Run.

If you are planning to attend on 20th May, please try not to come into any unnecessary contact with fellow members. This will be especially important at the start and finish of the run.

Bob Gregg.

Many of you will know Bob. This is just to let you know that he rang me recently and hopes to be joining us on runs again soon.

Norton Headquarters Development.



THE site that formerly housed the Norton Motorcycles production facility has been

bought by MotorSport Vision, and plans have been announced to turn Donington Hall into a luxury hotel.

MSV already operates six racing venues, including nearby Donington Park.

The 28-acre site encompasses the grounds of Donington Hall, the workshops that housed the motorcycle builder, and the Grade-II listed mansion that disgraced ex-Norton CEO Garner used to inhabit.

The mansion is reported to be getting turned into a luxury Hotel, presumably with large dash of motorsport history thrown in, as it is being touted as *the* place to go for well-heeled motorsport enthusiasts. The actual building that housed the Norton operation is also going to be renovated, with the completed building being turned into the Donington Hall Motorhouse.

MSV says it will be the "UK's most prestigious stabling facility for supercars, classic road and racing cars and motorcycles", and should be ready for its first clients this autumn.

Buildings at the back of Hastings House, called the Lansdowne workshops, will be let to "high-end motor engineering businesses" that will maintain and prepare vehicles kept at the Motorhouse and used on the race circuit.

One man's reflections.

It has been suggested to me that submissions to the section's Newsletter would be appreciated. I suppose this presumes the Newsletter will continue on a monthly or fortnightly basis. I would welcome this, as it keeps me in touch with what's going on in the

section, with more detail and content than goes into the "Vintage & Classic Motor Cycle".

An article on the restoration of my R52 has been suggested as a welcome submission. I am happy to do this. However, at the present glacial rate of progress, it's likely that a following article is not likely to be sent for several/months. Has anyone got a Ø8mm x 0.85mm pitch die I can borrow? I bet I won't be getting any offers!

While I am getting some information and photos together, perhaps I should tell members my background. I suspect many, probably a majority, will not know me, my not having been to any meetings in the recent past.

I moved to Derby in 1969 when work brought me here from the south coast. I come, originally, from the east coast then, via Wolverhampton, to the south coast. My allegiance then transferred from the KSS Section (KSS probably being Jeff Clews idea), and now the Surrey & Sussex Section, to the Notts & Derby Section. Most things, especially engineering, were booming at that time. Then Royce's went bust which changed engineering in the area drastically. Fortunately, this did not affect me.

I brought with me, as well as a wife and young daughter, my 1913 New Hudson VIIA restoration project, now restored with the help of Chris Welch, 1920 Sunbeam, 1922 Enfield 180, 1924 Enfield 190 restoration project, 1924 Enfield 201, 1924 James 17, 1928 Sunbeam 9, 1931 Enfield KS, 1934 250 Jack Booker Replica Enfield, 1936 BMW R12, 1939 HRD Comet, 1959 Triumph Thunderbird, and 1961 BSA DBD34. As can be seen I was then already well into vintage bikes. This interest is still strong, but anno domini, for which the doctor cannot prescribe anything, does restrict what I can comfortably manage. I do like to

continue working on bikes, albeit at a somewhat slower pace.

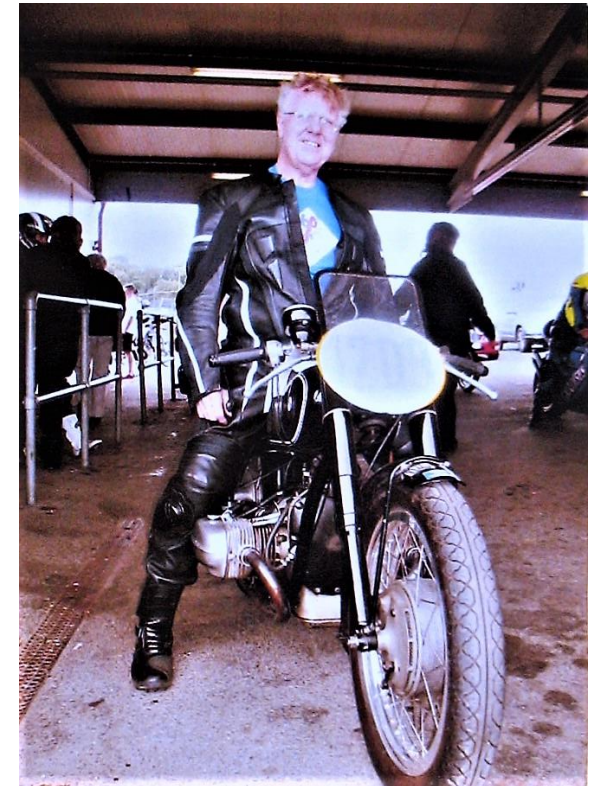
Over the last 25 years I dropped out of attending club nights due to starting a business. This kept me very busy, and evenings were taken up with paperwork. On the odd club night when I had no important paperwork, I just relaxed. Don't ask me what was on the telly. I continued attending various events at weekends when I was available. Nearly six years ago my wife developed serious health and mobility problems which means someone has to be at home all the time. Our daughter "holds the fort" most mornings, which allows me to get to my workshop and get some work done. Customers just won't let me retire and keep coming back with work or for parts. I don't want to retire completely; I want to keep the joints flexing and the grey matter at least ticking over.

During lockdown I have been catching up with jobs that have been waiting for up to 30 years, yes 30, to be completed. This included writing a series of articles for the BMW Club Journal. Work continues, on and off, on my 1928 BMW R52.

My 1920 Sunbeam is ready for the road, as are a few others. Whether I get to ride any of them this summer is in some doubt. I had an accident, injuring my back, which resulted in my doctor telling me I mustn't drive. At that time, I didn't want to drive, but my doctor also told the DVLA, who revoked my licence. I am in the process of trying to get it back, but you know what it's like dealing with the DVLA, especially during the pandemic plus when they're on strike.

This is the last photo taken of myself and one of my bikes. It was taken by John Bottomley, Brooklands Museum, at a Festival of 1000 Bikes, probably 2015?

The bike is a 1938 BMW R51RS 500cc. This machine is one of 17 OHV factory practice machines. It is even rarer than the Rennsports, where around 25 were made. This machine was successfully raced, with a sidecar, by Otto Kohle.



This machine has the distinction of being the first non-British bike to win a VMCC race. This was at Mallory Park, with a sidecar attached and John Joiner at the helm. It started at the back of the grid and came out of Gerard's first, on the first lap. In more recent times, the bike has been rebuilt, as a solo racer, more like it would have left the factory.

Now, I suppose, I must start getting some information and photos together of my current project.

John Lawes.

The following piece was originally written for the Velocette Owners' Club magazine, "Fishtail." I know Tony, and the Velo, from the 1960s and the bike bristled with ingenious mods even then.

Just practisin'...



Taken at the Bungalow during the race.

I've owned my Velo since 1964 and visited the Island on the bike to see the TT, Southern 100, the Manx and in 1970 on honeymoon with Carol, my wife. I began racing my Venom in 1985, and have raced in Classic, Vintage, Vincent and Velo Club High Speed Trials, during which time I have made many friends on the racing scene - some of whom had enthused about the Isle of Man and the attraction of competing in the Manx Grand Prix.

In late 1995, tales of fun and excitement by

friend, Dave Longstreeth, Velo Club member and fellow racer, who'd ridden his Venom in the Manx in 1994 and 1995, (unfortunately suffering mechanical failure on both occasions during the race) prompted me to enter the 1996 Classic Senior Manx Grand Prix.

I have discovered over the years that good preparation is everything in racing and that you need to start early in the year to prepare the bike. I didn't and found too late that the big end on my race engine was slightly worn and was therefore unsuitable for the task. This obviously needed attention, the up-shot being withdrawal of entry, due to lack of time for full machine preparation.

The booking had already been made for me and my "mechanic" ex Velo racer Dave Wallington, so we became spectators and treated the 1996 races as a 'sighting' session staying in Ramsey with Bill and Pauline Mitchell. I'd worked with Bill for many years on the bike section of the Nottinghamshire Constabulary. He moved to the Island after retiring with back trouble. He was a TT and Manx marshal and helped us enrol as marshals, enabling us to get a perfect view whilst assisting with the races which were great, marred only by some tragic fatalities in practice.

However, although it poured with rain every time Dave (1976 Ducati 900SS) and I (1985 Kawasaki GPZ 600) went out, we still enjoyed ourselves. The only people who appeared to be interested in hard riding apart from us were a guy on a sixties Triumph and another on a rigid Triumph which appeared to be hinged in the middle, the rider apparently being totally unhinged. Where were the boys on their modern stuff? - pootling or posing, that's where.

On returning home in August 1996 I immediately

set to, preparing the Velo; the frame was powder coated, all other cycle parts prepared and painted, the swinging arm was re-bushed, brakes re-lined and a fortune spent on stainless fasteners. The engine mods already carried out to cams, followers and valve gear were supplemented by a ported, squished Viper head. It was modified to Thruxton down draught by partially boring out the port, then filling with weld and finally being bored to 1.3/8". I'd already had unleaded valve seats fitted by Kirby Rowbotham and used a Venom inlet valve and coil springs; compression ratio being 11:1 to run on an avgas and supergreen mix. I used an Accrilite piston blank, part machined by John Watson, owner/tuner of the Velo ridden by Ewan Cameron (winner of the 1997 Lavington race). All other machining work, including piston and cylinder head modification for correct squish clearance had been undertaken very competently by Andrew Walker, another ex-racer (known for his reinforced 'M' series Velo crankcases), who conveniently lives around the corner. I also used some parts supplied by his brother Brian and by Nick Payton, two more ex racers.

The flywheels were taken to Alpha in Dudley, where on being split, they found the crank pin had not been a perfect fit in the flywheel and had to machine the hole oversize. I wanted to use the same wheels as I'd already had a flanged mainshaft fitted; so to these they fitted a Carillo rod, INA needle roller big end (supposedly the bees knees), modified the oil feed to the latest spec and trued the flywheels. The crank overhaul cost approximately £300 - who says racing isn't expensive.

The complete bike was run-in at Mallory Park in July, and having read Nigel Lines' article (Fishtail 285) on extracting more power by use

of a dyno, I decided to take the bike to David Holmes for a proper job to be done on settings to the engine, carburation and ignition etc. This, I believed would save much time and money otherwise spent experimenting with various settings on the track, and largely guessing at the perceived improvements due to uncontrollable variations in weather and track conditions.

With David's help and expertise, the engine finally put out 39 bhp @ 6500rpm at the back wheel, and consumed petrol at the rate of 26 pints per hour. The first run showing 35 bhp. (He states that an average 500 Manx puts out about 45bhp, so he was impressed. Apparently, it was the highest bhp reading he's seen on a Venom, - not the highest torque reading, but you can't always have both). I trust David's figures. Neither of us are inclined to believe the figures normally quoted for standard road Venoms (36bhp) or Thruxtons (41bhp). I've seen David's Velos on the track and know how fast they are. I have also seen the work he's put in to make them so quick and reliable. Furthermore, I've found my Venom has more performance than most Velos regularly raced, or ridden in the clubs own high speed trials. David agrees with me and several other realists who disbelieve the claims of standard Venoms pulling a ton without recourse to the downhill sections! I wish I had an engine like Steve Chapman (Fishtail 288). Gosh! what must he have in that motor, or am I being cynical?

On the way home from the dyno session, we diverted to the home of Richard Adams, yet another Velo racer, and collected a spare engine, clutch and gearbox plus other parts which I was to take to the Island as spares. I declined Richards generous offer of his complete bike in race trim as I wouldn't have had

room in the van.

The trip was almost cancelled three weeks before the Manx when Bill died of a heart attack, aged forty-nine, the same as me. I was totally demotivated but Pauline persuaded me to continue for Bill's sake. He'd been looking forward to assisting with everything and she felt that having someone around would help her through the hard times ahead. Bill's son Paul happened to be on holiday from his engineering job in the Island and said he would be my assistant until Dave arrived later in practice week.

So, two weeks before practice, in company with friends from work I flew over for the funeral, but still felt unsure about racing in view of the situation.

Finally, I decided to go. What follows is my abridged diary. I travelled to Douglas on 15th August. On board the ferry I meet some friends who are also racing for the first time, together with Andy Reynolds and Len Clutterbuck, two previous Velo Club racers who had defected to G50's for the race.

I sign on in Douglas that evening and have my riding gear scrutineered, then drive to Ramsey to meet Pauline and family. It feels strange Bill not being there, but we decide that we will go ahead and take things as they come. Shortly before his death Bill had seen an advert for a free garage for TT week. He'd phoned to see if the offer was available for the Manx but was told that although that garage was taken, fortunately there was another one available.

Saturday morning - Paul and I drive to Douglas to meet Barbara, the garage owner. With typical Manx hospitality she hands me, a total stranger,

a set of house and garage keys, shows us the kitchen, tea, coffee etc., and leaves us to it. I ask when she wants us to take the T.V., video, hi-fi etc., given such a generous gesture and opportunity. She says it never occurred to her as things don't happen like that in the Island. I wish it was the same back home in England.

Lunch time is the newcomers briefing at the Grandstand; it is very informative, with the emphasis on safety. By 4.00pm, the bike is scrutineered and I'm complimented on its appearance and attention to detail. With it placed in the holding area, there is nothing to do now but wait and worry about what is ahead.

Saturday - 6.00pm, leathers on, lathered up, nervous? You bet, it feels like an eagle in the stomach, never mind a butterfly. Waiting for my turn to commence practice, I realise how lucky I am having the help of Carol, Pauline and everybody who has made it all possible.

Suddenly I get the tap on the shoulder and I'm off. Flat out down Bray Hill? You've got to be kidding. Remember what they said at the briefing, it's a different place with all the road to play with, but it's still easy to make a mistake. Cold tyres, warm engine, hot flushes! Never mind, concentrate and try to be smooth. I feel as though I'm going backwards as some of the fast men come by. The bike feels nice, but seems to be over-gearred, suffering megaphonitis out of slow corners, the gearbox appears to have the odd false neutral, and occasionally sticks when I try to change gear, but I persevere. Finally, Governors Dip, tighter than you think especially with the Thruxton fairing and limited steering lock. Accelerating towards the Grandstand I think should I stop? No, I'm enjoying it.

Lap two, faster this time down Bray, but still

need to slow more for Quarter Bridge. Even though it appears very open I notice that most people run out towards the low wall on the left - obviously a better line and correct speed is needed. Approaching Greeba Bridge the yellow flags are waved frantically and I slow to pass a fallen rider. From my experience as a traffic policeman, he looks in a very bad way. I note his number and see it's an Aermacchi.

Suddenly the clutch begins to slip, probably caused by slipping it when megaphonitis comes in, while trying to avoid the gear problems that keep appearing. As I approach Kirkmichael the box jams in top and the clutch cries enough. I stop and chat with two riders who failed to make the first lap. I watch the others race by and talk to the travelling marshal who says the fallen rider is Danny Shimmin; he's critical and sadly dies during the night.

You have to complete a minimum of 6 laps, one of which must average at least 81 mph in order to qualify. So far, I've one lap credited at only 73mph due to my lack of knowledge of the course and also the problems encountered. That speed may appear slow but believe me in a lot of places it seems quick, and fast enough to force the occasional "oh mother", as that famous racer George Shuttleworth was heard to cry.

We adjourn to the local that night to study tactics, and I speak with Ray Knight, well known TT rider, who now lives near Ramsey. He advised me to always carry a tenner in the lining of my helmet, and to tour to a pub if I intend to break down - sound advice.

Sunday morning - visit garage to change gearbox and clutch; strip-down reveals the sleeve gear bush seized solid to the mainshaft.

The plain plates are all blued and the friction plates have almost disintegrated. The mainshaft and cluster have been in use for years of circuit racing, never having previously given trouble. Presumably they've never run continuously for such a distance, nor got so hot, despite the correct amount of oil in the gearbox. Andy Reynolds later tells me a story about Geoff Dodkin, who prepared a gearbox for him, which appeared to have an excessive amount of clearance between sleeve gear bush and mainshaft. When he queried it, Geoff said, "Its right for the Island." Experience and knowledge are wonderful things! So is enough clearance for some oil.

Rebuild with gears courtesy of Richard Adams, and solid plates and flat steel plates from Goodman. What a shame to dismantle the box and chaincase as it is the first time that they have been truly oiltight! All that preparation has paid off. I usually run a light alloy chaincase in short circuit events and lightly oil the primary chain. For the Manx I have fitted the original Velo primary cases for better chain lubrication, in view of the race distance of approximately 150 miles.

Later in the morning we are joined by Roger Bowler, an experienced M.G.P. rider on a Seeley G50, who is to share the garage. He offers help and advice aplenty. We're Informed that Monday morning's practice is cancelled due to a lack of beds in I.C.U. at Nobles Hospital, should they be required. Down to the pits to buy avgas - 95 pence a litre!

Monday morning - modify the oil catch tank on Roger's advice; too close to rear tyre and the breather pipe requires securing. Then take bike to Jurby airfield to test/adjust clutch and gears, with the overall ratio lowered slightly.

Monday evening - practice, weather beautiful, very sunny, which can be a problem in the mornings as well as evening as it rises and sets. There are warning notices and flag signals for sun at strategic places around the course. I just have time to speak with Roger before I'm off. The bike is flying, as confirmed by mobile phone link between Paul at the pits and Pauline in her garden on May Hill, who have synchronised watches to help work out lap times. Then calamity strikes at the Verandah, where it seizes, with the big end locked up solid. Later, talking with Tim Johnson (another Velo rider in the race) he suspects too tight a running clearance between pin and rollers. Can you believe it, the only part built up by someone else. I will return it to Alpha and see what they diagnose as the cause.

After I stop, I sit dejected as Patrick Laroux, on a Velo Metisse rides by, it sounds lovely. I see lots of activity and flag waving near the Graham Memorial, an accident? Hope they are all right. After putting the bike in the van, it's down the pub to drown our sorrows.

Tuesday morning - drive to garage in Douglas, hear on the radio that Pam Cannel, 5th last year, crashed at Graham Memorial, and succumbed to her injuries. I then hear that Roger Bowler is in I.C.U. with serious head injuries, having crashed at Quarry Bends.

I feel pretty depressed at all this news. I hope he will recover, and try not to dwell on the subject by immersing myself in work, changing the engine. Richard's engine has an early "Walker" drive side crankcase with no mounting for the chain-case. Paul uses his metal-working skills, and fabricates a bracket to mount the front part of the chaincase off the engine plate. Richard's

motor uses a Ducati piston so his barrel and overall engine height is 1/2" lower than mine, therefore I cannot use my head steady. This is also used to mount the float chamber so I can't use the G.P and have to fit my Mk II concentric, last used in 1985, when I took the bike off the road for racing. We even have to alter the exhaust to suit.

The bike is fired up at 4.10pm, it runs okay. It's scrutineered by 4.30pm after which it sits in the pits for evening practice to start. Once underway, I decide to take it easy as the engine and carburation are an unknown factor. I settle for two laps, not exceeding 5500 rpm. 78 and 74 mph respectively, the second apparently being a slowing down lap - I don't understand how they work out the timing. The engine is leaking oil badly from the rockerbox/pushrod tunnel area - more work for tomorrow, but tonight it is time for food and ale, yet again.

Wednesday - up at 4.45am, I must be mad. I go with Paul to marshal from the Bungalow, where his brother John, a Manx policeman, is on duty. John has been acting as our 'go-fer' and pit crew when off duty. He's good at washing and cleaning the bike too. I don't want to risk riding the bike until the oil leak is cured; anyway, the forecast is poor visibility and I feel I won't learn much in the dark. Besides I'm dog tired after all the spannering involved in yesterday's engine change!

Des Evans, travelling marshal and Velo fanatic joins us and informs us that Roger Bowler died during the night. I'm upset. I've only just met him and he was helpful and kind. I volunteer to collect Roger's stuff and notify Race Office where it is stored, ready for collection by his friends. It's very foggy on the mountain and practice is untimed, to deter any heroics. I watch

Tim on his Velo, it looks and sounds a treat. By 9.00am, it's raining, so I refit the rockerbox (source of leak), adjust clutch and fit an extension to the screen, a common mod over here, to deflect all the flies.

At 2.30pm, I drive to Douglas for avgas, before it closes at 3.00pm. It's only 13 miles over the mountain, plenty of time. It's a bit foggy over the top, but traffic is very slow, around 15 mph. Then I discover I'm following a funeral procession driving to Douglas Crematorium, which is opposite the Grandstand. Arrive at 3.05, pumps deserted, aaagh! Fortunately, I've enough for this evening's practice.

As I unload the bike, I notice small cuts in the centre of the rear tyre tread, which has a larger radius (as recommended and fitted by Hershaw Racing Services) than the previously fitted tyre. Investigation reveals it's been rubbing on the top mudguard mounting, caused by my "softening" the rear suspension settings by one notch. This had been necessary to cope with heavy landing after Ballaugh Bridge, and the extremely bumpy surfaces which abound when flat out from Barregarrow to the Sulby Straight, and then from Kerrowmoar to Ramsey.

For safety, I have the tyre changed by Hershaw who then has the audacity to say it was too big for the size of bike, and relieves me of £107 for the correct tyre! Typically, this totally clears the mudguard mounting on full deflection. I think I want to cry - or strangle someone. The bike is scrutineered, once again receiving praise for its appearance and preparation. This is from a scrutineer who admits he doesn't like Velos, despite having owned one.

Wednesday 7.00pm - weather at Douglas is perfect, but apparently bad on the mountain. Whilst waiting for practice, I'm approached by the Chief Constable of the I-O-M, who

introduces himself, quote - "I understand you're one of us". I hope he means that he's seen in the programme that I'm a policeman. But I'm very polite and we have a chat. He says he recently travelled to London for a conference and wonders how he ever worked there after the laid-back life style of the Island, where he's now worked for a number of years.

The Clerk of the Course gives us all a lecture to ride safely, the accidents and fatalities are causing much concern. They declare the session untimed to encourage people to learn the course rather than go flat out against the clock. I settle for running in the new tyre and adding another lap to my tally, as visibility over the mountain is awful. I follow an experienced classic rider, signified by him wearing a white tabard, at a safe distance. I overtake him approaching Hillberry. I think he must have a problem, or he'd have blown me off. We're waved off at the end of the lap due to the deteriorating visibility. I now have 4 laps credited. So far so good.

Thursday morning - check fuel consumption. It's less than a gallon per lap. Richard's engine is certainly more economical than mine, which was using nearly 1.1/4 gallons. Afternoon practice, again untimed due to visibility, I just manage two laps before the session is stopped for an ambulance to recover a fallen rider. I saw him wading his way out of the gravel trap at Windy Corner, it transpired later that he had suffered a broken shoulder.

Back to Ramsey and collect the Kawasaki, then ride in perfect weather (typical) to Douglas to meet Dave Wallington. I'm pleased to see him. Although Paul has been extremely helpful, he acknowledges he knows nothing about Velos and I've had to do the spannering necessary on the various idiosyncratic parts that make up my

favourite classic bike. Dave's knowledge and ability will enable me to get out and inspect the circuit, whilst he tinkers with the bike, but tonight it's out for a Chinese in Ramsey with Dave and Pauline.

Friday morning - A check of the bike reveals oil leaks from tappet cover, pushrod tunnel, rockerbox and rev counter drive areas, none major on their own, but cumulatively represent a lot of oil loss during a lap. But I know I can safely leave it all to Dave to fix, and so go out on the course to walk various sections and assess braking and peel off points.

Friday evening - more practice, I've already got the required number of laps, but need the speed to qualify, which has been difficult with the many untimed sessions. The weather is good. I try for my qualifying lap; the bike feels good and I realise that I'm riding it with the throttle wide open on most of the course. That is until I approach Ramsey, when the clutch begins to slip. Oh no, not again. I take it easy over the mountain and enter the pits, where Dave re-adjusts the clutch.

Back out into the start box, the attendant taps me on the shoulder, the signal to go. I feed in the clutch, crunch - bang, no drive. The primary chain has snapped, end of session for me. Worry turns to relief when I discover I've qualified at 82 mph. Let's all go down the pub and celebrate!

Saturday morning - pouring rain, back to the garage, clutch apart, new chain. Well actually it was Richards used one, or as they say in motoring circles - pre stretched. A new riveted link is fitted courtesy of Pirelli. I had considered fitting my spare chain, but as it's the same make as the broken one, I don't want to risk it. I also intended to put in one lap tonight to ensure the

clutch is gripping and the chain correctly tensioned, but it's pouring down. We decide it's daft to risk falling off in the wet, and plan to test at Jurby in the morning. We watch practice in the pouring rain from Quarter Bridge. I'm glad I qualified last night; it would be a tall order in such appalling conditions. Then we go out for a drink and meal in Laxey, after which we watch Paul's group play in a local pub. They're called Pigs on the Wing, a Pink Floyd cover band.

Sunday morning - I can't sleep, wake at six, Dave's driving them home in the next bed, perhaps that's what woke me really. I think about the race tomorrow and how I can improve. After breakfast I ride to Douglas over the mountain to collect my race numbers. My lap speeds show I'm slow compared with many racers, but even on the old Kawasaki I ride around loads of sad men on modern Jap mega-bikes. Just shows that such equipment is largely wasted on the majority of "bikers." Glad I'm a motorcyclist and don't spend a small fortune on carbon fibre go - faster bits to impress myself if not others.

I ride back to Murray's museum, for the Velo gathering and meet Dave and many other friends from East Midlands Centre. I also speak with Jeff Whitworth, (a very good racer) and Vic Pratley. We have already decided to have a rest from tinkering and intend to visit Castletown for the Vintage Rally after our Jurby testing session.

Sunday - Noon, Jurby. The clutch is perfect, plug chop looks good, but still an oil leak from the rev counter drive and rockerbox area. We've used silicon RTV, but it probably needs machining flat for a perfect job. However, the engine's not my property to alter without permission, and we don't have the facilities anyway. Dave makes the correct executive decision. We've been to Castletown many times

and seen most of the bikes before. A slight leak on one lap is tolerable, but four laps is unacceptable. So, it's back to Douglas for a further strip and repair.

Monday - The big day - the bullshit stops here! Drive to the Grandstand, the bike has to be scrutineered by 9.00am, then passed to the collection area, where it has to remain untouched until just before the off. I get my riding gear checked and then watch the Newcomers race from the grandstand with Dave and Paul, who are paying particular attention to the pits procedures. They're as nervous as me!

There is a speed trap between Governors Dip and the Grandstand, with a large screen which shows the speed as riders approach the start/finish line. Fastest time is 143 mph recorded by a 750cc Yamakwasuki, or something similar, I couldn't really tell. It looked as if it was still in its gaudily painted packing case, but it was quick, and he was still accelerating through the gears! We wonder what the Classics will do, particularly the Velos. After numerous trips to the toilet for a spot of personal fine tuning, it's into the leathers and time to warm up the engine. We then have to push the bikes down to our pits so that the spectators in the grandstand can marvel at the intrepid riders and their machines.

We've worked out a cunning plan - with a full five-gallon alloy tank, courtesy of Richard Adams, I shouldn't need to stop. Each lap as I exit Governor's Dip, I'll examine my boots and bike for any sign of oil, and stop only if I see some! The weather is perfect, not too sunny, roads dry and little wind, except in my leathers, where it's brewing up a storm.

I try to remain calm and chat with Len

Clutterbuck, Andy Reynolds and Neil Larson, all ex Velo riders who have transferred to G50 power. Only Tim Johnson continues to fly the Velo flag regularly. They all offer the same advice. Take it easy and ride to finish, you can always try a bit harder next year. They also warn me to take it easy down Bray Hill, round Quarter Bridge and Braddan Bridge, due to the effects of a full tank and cold tyres. Then after Union Mills, when the engine is nice and warm, in the immortal words of our hero George Shuttleworth - "open 'er up a bit"

Finally, the time comes for the off. I'm on the last row of the grid and start alongside Patrick Laroux, on his very tidy Rickman Velo. Unfortunately, the only Velo bit in the whole bike is the engine. Being a realist, I don't anticipate overtaking anybody but decide to try and stay in front of Patrick. My plan appears to work for a time. I later found out he was delayed at the start when he stalled it. He passes me just before Greeba Castle and I get him back entering Cronk-y-Voddy. He repasses me as we approach Handleys Corner. I re-take him as we exit the bottom of Barregarrow. I don't see him again, but he does finish.

End of the lap, I check my boots etc., for oil - not a trace. Dave's done a grand job, finally curing the leaks, and any excuse for stopping has been thwarted. But it doesn't matter as I'm actually enjoying it. Lap two, this time really flat out down Bray Hill, the adrenaline is flowing. I press on, my only fright is when Bob Heath passes me like a rocket at Cronk-ny- Mona, but he did start at number one.

Lap three, I actually caught and passed two people. Still no boot oil. I realise that I feel I could use more speed, I must be improving. Last lap, largely uneventful thankfully, but I see more

riders in front as I climb the mountain. I catch one just as we reach the 32nd milestone, and just fail to catch another as we approach the finish.

It's all over. I see Dave doing hand springs on the finish line, he looks a happy bunny. I feel elated, just sorry that Bill is not able to see it. Push bike into the collection area where it must remain for an hour should there be any appeals, objections etc. I check the bike over and there is a small amount of oil in the alloy rear wheel rim well. Those flanges work a treat as oil catchers. I wonder if they were originally designed with Velos in mind? - joke!

Dave informed me that Bob Heath's fastest time through the speed trap was 121mph, Tim's 101, mine 100 and Patrick's 99. This shows that there isn't a lot in it, well not where Velos are concerned. For the record, my race average was 83 mph. There were 96 starters and 57 finish and I'm 54th. All the Velos finish. Everybody keeps telling me, to enter and finish first time out is a very good achievement. Apparently, I did it right by suffering all the problems during practice week rather than in the race. To those amongst you who think you can do better, why not have a go?

My plans for next year? - I've booked with Pauline and Barbara. I'm already working with John Watson on a belt drive for the clutch which should help to minimise oil leak and chain problems. I intend to take more of my own spares so that I'm less reliant on other people.

My thanks go to all friends and helpers, particularly Pauline and Paul Mitchell for their help and hospitality during such a difficult time in their lives. I only hope I have been of some help to them. To Barbara, Dave and Sally

Wallington, (well she did sign his leave pass) Andrew Walker and David Holmes for their help and expertise in preparing the bike. To Richards Adams for his help and advice, not to mention all his bike bits I wore out, and everybody else I've not mentioned.

My special thanks go to my wife Carol, for putting up with the months of midnight electricity burnt, the evenings she spent alone whilst I fondled away in the garage. The jobs promised around the house, but never done. She's the best sponsor I could wish for and she still loves me. Here's to the 1998 Manx, hope to see you there.

Postscript: Upon my return home, I dismantled the failed engine and found the big end quill to be intact. There was ample oil in the crankcases, I tested the oil pump which was also working correctly. The flywheel assembly has since been stripped and examined by Alpha; the problem was caused by break-up of the steel cage. It's the first such failure they've had. They are at a loss to explain why, but are supplying a new Velo type big end assembly with alloy cage, free of charge.

Tony Ainley

CONTACT US:

Please let me have any stories from the past, amusing or otherwise, concerning motorcycles, or any technical information, rebuild stories, photos or news of events by replying to this email.

Let us know what you've been up to by emailing me at:
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Use the same address and format if you have any items or motorcycles for sale. Don't forget to include a phone number and a price.