



Quarterly Quest

July 2010 Vol.17



Lot No: 3

A Matchless G45 petrol tank, in good condition, painted in Matchless burgundy

East London & Essex Section
News Letter

My First BMW

After completing my National Service in June 1960 I decided that my old



motorcycle a Matchless (50 G80S), was no longer suitable for the transport of my fiancée from my home in Wandsworth to her home in Sidcup Kent, so that autumn I part

exchanged it for a maroon '57 Isetta, which provided a more comfortable and dry ride across South London

It was the early type with a large bubble rear window and 4 wheels, with a 250cc BMW m/c engine. The bubble had a heater using warm air from the engine, four forward gears and reverse, electric start by reverse powering the alternator, a large bench seat and slide back canvas sun roof. Entry was by way of the front door, which when fully open one just stood inside to sit down and then pulled the door shut using the handle inside. Speed was anything up to 70 M.P.H with an economy of around 70 per gallon. Due to the 4 wheel layout and reverse gear a full car driving licence was required and road tax was as a normal car. (At that time about £12.50 per year.) The bench seat was just wide enough to fit three at a squeeze which I did on many occasions.

We kept the bubble for about four years and drove many thousands of miles both for pleasure and my work in London. When our first son arrived the parcel shelf was large enough to take the carry cot.

The only breakdown I experienced was when we were travelling along the South Coast Road. It was during a holiday with our son then aged 18 months on a hot day in very slow moving traffic and we gradually came to a halt. After over half an hour spent at the side of the road checking through the engine my wife quietly said, "I think Andrew has turned the petrol off." The petrol was fed from a gravity tank under the parcel shelf and the petrol tap was between the back of the bench seat and shelf. As on some bike tanks it had three positions, off, on and reserve. In the 'on' position the lever was vertical; he had unknown to us pushed it down to off.

I paid £170 for the Isetta and sold it to a Polish student for £35. I believe he took it back to Poland.

I always understood that B.M.W. bought the design of the Isetta from an Italian company which was called Isotta. The Isetta was a great solution to travel in its time along with its many competitors, but in today's traffic it would be completely out of its depth.

We had a lot of fun with the bubble car which at that time was not considered out of the ordinary; also the roads were better and less congested. Today's young drivers can't imagine what a pleasure driving was in the 50's and 60's.



Dave & Val Kewell

A Rotax Alternative

When the Devon built Harris Matchless G80 was announced in about 1987 to cries of, “It’s not a real Matchless” from the self appointed guardians of the classic motorcycle world I was quite interested and eagerly awaited the road test which appeared in Motorcycle Sport, not that I could ever have afforded a new one in any case but had hopes that a few years “down the line” one might find its way into my life. I very much liked the look of the bike – and still do. My first real look at one of these bikes though was quite a long time later when section member Ken Burton bought one in about 1998. At one club night Ken had a Rotax workshop manual with him and when I glanced through it I thought that the Rotax motor seemed to be really well designed and quite easy to work on. Unlike many engines a broken cambelt would not cause any mechanical carnage and if one did ever break it was so easy to change that it could be done in minutes at the side of the road should the worse happen and it snapped. While saying to Ken that I thought it was a very good design of engine Will Powell casually mentioned to me that Pat Gill had an ex-Army Armstrong with a Rotax motor that he wanted to sell – and so he did. Now all section members will know that a bike made in Bolton in 1986 was not only about 40 years too modern but built so far north of Plumstead that it wouldn’t even appear on Pat’s bike seeking radar. He had acquired it almost accidentally as part of a business arrangement and certainly didn’t intend to keep it.

Initially my thoughts went back to an Isle of Man holiday in the late 1980s when Pam and I, while sitting, eating an ice cream in the warm sunshine at Jurby airfield (which still had an MOD presence in those days) we watched a “squaddie” work himself into a state of near collapse trying to kickstart his reluctant Armstrong. I remember saying to Pam at the time that every road test that I had read of bikes with the Rotax engine had mentioned that kickstarting the motor was always a very “hit or miss” affair (with the emphasis on miss) and that I would never buy one of them if it didn’t have an electric starter. Pat’s one didn’t – so of course I bought it (I never cease to amaze myself that I always ignore my own advice when it comes to acquiring bikes). I immediately convinced myself that starting had to be only be a matter of a technique which I could learn quite easily in time. Oh boy! how I was to be proved wrong on that score.

My new acquisition needed some work doing on the electrics before it could be used on the road as some parts were missing. Like my Moto Shifty the Armstrong had Italian electrics (Who in their right mind would choose to fit Italian electrics to a military bike where absolute reliability was paramount, and who for that matter would also choose a kickstart only Rotax engine for such a bike – a non-motorcycling accountant presumably) which meant very thin wires badly connected to semi exposed bulb holders etc. At least the fuse box on the Armstrong had a lid on it, although the connections at the back were fully exposed. At some stage the Army had filled the back with silicone sealant in an attempt to prevent water thrown

off the back wheel from short circuiting all the fuses in the box. It looked messy but seemed to be successful. Anyway a new Japanese Honda 50 ignition switch and my own adaptations to the wiring circuits got the electrics almost working correctly (the warning lights remained intermittent despite regular bulb terminal cleaning) everything ran fine and an MOT was gained without problems. As for the bike itself, the Armstrong was very well made. The plastic panels, being to MOD specification, were very much stronger than any others I have come across. The paintwork on the frame and tank and the black anodizing on the alloy parts was so good that it had hardly suffered during its Army and subsequent life. It was particularly good on the engine and it needed to be as quite a few of the outer cases were made of magnesium and would have corroded very quickly if exposed. It seemed to be designed with regular maintenance in mind, the centre stand lifted the rear wheel high off the ground and the excellent Grimeca hub with inbuilt cush drive and brake was quickly detachable so the rear wheel could be dropped out and put back in minutes without disturbing the chain adjustment. Checking and topping up the engine oil was a bit tricky as it was via a small filler plug behind the steering head through which it was difficult to get the level right because it varied depending on how quickly you checked it after stopping the motor. The first check I had made was to see if I could make sure that the oil was circulating and with the engine running I took off the filler plug. This was a mistake as the oil circulation was much faster than I had been used to with old style oil pumps. Oil shot out of the filler hole with some force, covering both myself and the bike with oil by the time I had managed to replace the cap. The whole top and underside of the tank, frame and engine was now literally dripping with oil. I had wondered when I first got the bike why it had so much oil over frame and engine and assumed that someone had just been a bit messy when filling it up, but I then realized that I probably hadn't been the first to get caught like that. Still, I now knew that the oil was circulating alright.

One of my first trips on the Armstrong was to Ken Burton's house to compare my bike with his Harris Matchless and I was surprised to see just how similar the two bikes were. They shared the same Grimeca rear hub and drive arrangements, a good point. They also both had similar Italian electrics, not such a good point. The main difference seemed to be that the Matchless had a Dellorto carburetor instead of the Armstrong's Mk2 Amal Concentric. I had a run on Ken's Matchless to compare the two and found that, as expected, they were very similar. The Matchless had a less upright riding position and the suspension was harder, but the Dellorto carb' had an accelerator pump on it and that gave a quicker "pick-up" when the throttle was opened suddenly whereas the Amal on the Armstrong gave better control at very slow speed, otherwise they felt much the same and both handled well. Ken's Matchless had one important extra though, an electric starter (although the sprag clutches on these can be rather delicate and expensive to repair).

Because of its very tough finish with no brightwork or exposed alloy on it and therefore no fear of road salt corrosion causing a problem I intended to use the Armstrong as my winter bike – after all, wasn't that what the Army demanded of them and what "trail" style bikes were suited to? Unfortunately, my first trip in the mucky weather of winter ruined that opinion. The high mudguards (if they could be described as such) and minimal other shielding ensured that not only was the whole bike covered in road filth, but the whole of me as well, back and front. In fact I feel that I got dirtier on that one forty mile road journey than I think that I had ever been at any time on a bike. So a winter bike it was not going to be,

unless the roads were dry. I had obtained a dual seat from a friend and fitted it to see if Pam would be comfortable on it. She was until the engine was running, when the silencer ensured that her left leg started roasting within a mile or so, so not a touring bike for two either. In the meantime though I had bought Will Powell's Honda CB500 which fulfilled both requirements, so the Armstrong had already been demoted to a second string bike in any case. I had discovered that trail/off road/competition style bikes were not suitable for my needs and whereas a Harris G80 would have met my requirements the Armstrong did not, but I still enjoyed riding it - when it started!!!!

Everyone seems to know, or tells me, that a long swinging kick is all that is needed to start any single cylinder engine. This works well enough with my G5 Matchless but it is no good for a Rotax. This is a modern design single cylinder with light flywheels. The kickstart turns the engine over once and there is no flywheel momentum to aid a long swinging kick. A hard and fast, determined, kick is needed, whereupon the engine might burst into life at the first or second attempt. The problem is that if it doesn't then you have probably "drowned" the small 12mm spark plug so that no amount of kicking will produce results until it dries out. I found that out through bitter (very) experience. You then had the option of taking out the plug and kicking over the engine a few times to clear out the excess fuel then putting back a new plug and trying again - or going away, having a cup of tea while calming down and waiting until it had dried itself out again. In my case, if this happened at home I would put it in the back garden in disgust then get another bike out for my journey. If this unfortunately happened while I was already out somewhere I had no option other than take a handful of spare plugs and endure any ribald comments from the gathered audience, which there often was being that it was usually at a motorcycle gathering of some sort.

The unpredictable starting did tend to spoil the enjoyment of the bike somewhat as I spent a lot of the time once I had arrived anywhere wondering if I would be able to start the bike again when it was time to go home. This was made worse after I damaged my right knee whilst on holiday in 2003, after which I soon found that any more than half a dozen kicks would bring back the pain again. This was particularly so with the Armstrong which, being a trail type bike, had its kickstart quite high up in any case as well as requiring a very swift and firm movement of the lever if there was to be any hope of it firing. Thereafter I only tended to use the bike for runs out where I would not be stopping the engine for more than a minute or so at any time. Obviously this made it hopeless for any practical use whatsoever so, despite my regard for its tough finish and the fact that I actually enjoyed riding it despite the disadvantages, when in 2005 the opportunity arose to swap it with a friend for a Honda 400/4 he owned, which my son quite fancied, I did so without regret and the Armstrong passed on to the another "hero" who thought that they could master the Rotax starting technique. I hope that he succeeded, but he has been a bit non comital about the subject of starting whenever I asked him about the matter after his initial enthusiasm. Just like me, in fact.

However, I still liked the design and build quality of the Rotax engine, even though I knew that the starter sprag clutch would be a weak and expensive point on the electric start version that was essential for me. So when Keith Gray (who had by then become the owner of Ken Burton's Harris G80) wanted to sell his bike I must admit that I was half tempted by it, especially when I saw it sitting in that cold draughty autojumble hanger at North Weald unbought (at the time I asked) and seemingly unloved. It was probably a good job though that I had absolutely no space at all in which to put it as the last thing I really needed was yet another bike. I tried hard to persuade Keith to keep it for himself as a second string bike to his heavyweight single, to no avail though and I was a bit sorry when it finally went. Perhaps I was subconsciously more tempted than I thought at the time.



The ex Army Armstrong Rotax MT500.

Built in the Bolton works of CCM Motorcycles

Rugged and fine to ride – as long as you can get it started and the weather stays dry!!!!

Colin

Kettering Open Day 2010.

The telephone rang , “ Ok for the run Den” said Roy , “its only us two the rest have pulled out! “ The weather is iffy” say I. “No need to worry” says Roy “I have checked it out on my computer, the the bad weather wont start at Kettering until 11am

and will clear there by two pm, it wont rain at home until four pm. So iff we get to Kettering early and leave at two pm we will be home before the rain starts here.”

He is always talking me into these dodgy ideas you know, but what the hell so I say “Ok I will meet you at your place at 8.15am.

And so I did, “ better wear your wets before leaving” I suggest. “Nah I will stop for that if necessary” says Roy So off we went, me fully suited of course. We checked Crown Corner but no late arrivals at 8.30, and so set off at a smart pace. Now I had thought Roy would be on “Trusty Rusty” but no, an ex Chris Read G15/45 was his choice!! But he did remember that I was only on my M20 and did not really wind it up. We made steady progress and although not raining the roads were wet and slippy until we reached Cardington where it sprinkled on and off through Bedford and beyond, but ten miles from Kettering it deluged and Roy had not put his wet suit on! Oh dear! We finally arrived, (before 11am) and guess who had a soggy backside? We parked up with ease as there was not the usual large attendance of bikes or even cars come to that.

I did question Roy about the accuracy of his weather report and timings but he thought that because the rain had started early it would clear early, assuring me of blue skies by two pm for our return run! We met Colin Atkinson who had ridden up on his Royal Enfield and also Alex Burnett, Vic Sayers and Steve Webb who had all had the good sense to use their cars.

It was good to meet up with lots of old chums from distant sections and with free food and hot drinks laid on, as usual, a good time was had. But the weather had not improved, still raining steadily, although constant reassurance from Roy that all would be well by twopm! How I wished I had taken a bet with him about the accuracy of his forecast.

Jampot Spares were doing good business and also had some jumble stock on sale which was being checked over and some sales made. There were also a good number of bikes on display for sale with very interesting models, which generated some interesting conversations with complete strangers as well as clubmates. As the day wore on and with no let up from the rain, numbers were substantially down and I felt great sympathy for the local section and staff who had put so much effort into this event for it to such a letdown.

Two pm came and went Blue Sky ? NO! RAIN? YES! Reluctantly Roy struggled into his wet suit finally conceding that he had given me bad advice and we set off home in steady rain. Gradually though as the run progressed it did ease and by the Harlow area did cease. Altogether not pleasant riding but a run out anyway and with good company and a lot of laughs and chat at Kettering.

Dennis



Banbury and Bonham's

'Saturday 19th June, it's Banbury time once more, as last year Bonham's held a Motorcycle and Memorabilia at their Banbury premises.

Roy and I arrived at about 12.00 noon, to register and view the various lots, as far as spares were concerned there were only 9 lots.

Lot 3 was a Matchless G45 petrol tank, described as finished in Matchless Burgundy, complete with quick release filler cap. On close inspection it was not in perfect condition with some marks on the paintwork. The estimate was £300 to £400.

Roy decided that he would bid on this lot up to a maximum of £350, the bidding quickly went beyond this with a lady bidder and an American on the telephone, it eventually ended at £1,380 including the 15% buyers premium, the winner the Lady (in red). We later saw her with her husband for whom she was bidding, he wanted the tank to exchange with a friend for a G50 tank. See photo



The next lot number 153, was a 1960 AJS model 16 with an estimate of £1,300 - £1,700, which Roy was the winning bidder at £1,495 including premium, more than he had wanted to pay!

The New Owner.

The final lot of interest to me was number 181, described as a 1929 AJS 996cc model M V twin, on close inspection, the frame number could not be read (as usual covered in paint) and the engine number had an R prefix indicating that it was from 1930. Estimate £7,000 - £9,000. I decided that I would bid on this but only up to £8,000. The bidding started at £7,000 and the hammer came down at £12,938 including premium, in my opinion far too much for an incorrect motorcycle.

Finally Roy paid and collected his documents and the AJS, now the problems started, the trailer was full and already contained Roy's Honda 90 that he hoped to sell in the auto jumble on the Sunday at Gaydon. We duly re-arranged the trailer, loading the AJS backwards beside the Honda, but the front wheel was protruding from the trailer door, so we lashed this shut with a tie down and proceeded to Gaydon without being pulled over by the 'Plod'.

ON the Sunday morning Roy sold the AJS to a dealer resident in Austria for a profit, just as well as the Honda would not start and therefore did not sell. Otherwise the weather was glorious!

Dudley



Knebworth Show 6th June 2010.

Yet another run threatened with rain, thundery this time! However, the entries on the run list mostly arrived in good time and prepared to take a chance on staying dry. We waited a little longer than start time for Graham Bister but he did not show. At the next clubnight we learnt he was in a drunken sleep after a surprise Anniversary party!!

The run set off at a smooth cruising pace, led as usual by Dave Nicholls, followed by myself, Mike Handy, Keith Smith and Roy Bellett. Picked up en route was our newest member, Bob Gell. The run went smoothly until roadworks on the A602

completely blocked the last leg before the series of roundabouts on the outskirts of Stevenage. Dave got some advice from a road repairer and off we set on a country run down narrow farm roads until we finally found civilisation and completed the run into the show.

Although we were a little early the public and riders attendance seemed a bit down, but as the day progressed and no rain appearing numbers rose quite substantially. Although there were some traders and jumblers present, not as many as in previous years. However, after some food and drink we did "cruise" the retailers picking up various items we could not do without.? Suddenly the tannoy began pleading for ring entries to begin the show theme of marque displays. They wanted to progress this quickly to enable an earlier finish than usual.

Unfortunately as riders were still "shopping" this led to an even lower number of ring entries with our marque being even smaller than last year! So three of us went in and came away with Best Matchless , Roy Bellett and Best and Second A.J.S for myself and Dave Nicholls. Tough on the other two entries!

By this time the sky was darkening and as both Mike and Keith had already left we thought we were pushing our luck with the weather. As Dave had lost some keys and was going to retrace slowly our earlier route to look for them, Roy led Bob and myself to try and get past the roadworks on the A602. After reaching the Stevenage side of the blockage it was clear that there was no way through(not even with Mr Presidents silky tongue). We therefore had to return to our original morning route to pick up the A602 again!

However there was no rain, dry roads for a change and we made good time progressing homewards without further trouble. Altogether an enjoyable day in good company, an interesting and amusing run and no rain.

Dennis .



<u>January—June 2010</u>		Venue	Time
10th January	Sunday Jumble Witham		10.00 AM
14th January	Thursday Club Night.	Squadron	7.30 PM
24th January	Section Run	TBA	10.00AM
28th January	Thursday Club Night.	Squadron	7.30 PM
11th February	Thursday Club Night.	Squadron	7.30 PM
21st February	Section Run TBA	TBA	10.00AM
25th February	Thursday Club Night Talk Pat Gill	Squadron	7.30 PM
11th March	Thursday Club Night.	Squadron	7.30 PM
21st March	Sunday Run To Ardingly West Sussex	J28M25	9.00 AM
25th March	Thursday Club Night Bill Hawkins	Squadron	7.30 PM
7th April	Wednesday Mid week run	TBA	11.00AM
8th April	Thursday Club Night.	Squadron	7.30 PM
18th April	Sunday Eastern Counties Meet	Sible Hedingham	10.00AM
22nd April	Thursday Club Night Fish & Chips	Squadron	7.30 PM
25th April	Sunday section Run Drive it Day	TBA	10.00AM
9th May	Sunday Jericho Cottage Bike Meet	TBA	10.00AM
13th May	Thursday Club Night.	Squadron	7.30 PM
21st-24th May	Fri- Mon 2010 International Jampot	Ireland	
27th May	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM
29th May	Saturday Open Day Kettering	TBA	8.30 AM
2nd June	Wednesday Mid week run	TBA	11.00A
6th June	Sunday Classic Bike show Knebworth	TBA	9.00 AM
10th June	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM
20th June	Section Run TBA	TBA	10.00AM
24th June	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM

July-August 2010		Venue	Time
4th July	Sunday Section Run To Battlesbridge	TBA	10.00AM
4th July	Sunday 100 years of AJS Woolwich	TBA	TBA
8th July	Thursday Club Night Kent Section visit	Squadron	7.30 PM
14th July	Wednesday Mid week run	TBA	11.00AM
22nd July	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM
25th July	Section Run ACE Cafe AJS Day	TBA	9.30 AM
6th-9th August	Fri - Mon Jampot Rally West Midlands		
12th August	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM
15th August	Sunday Section Stand North Weald	North Weald	8.30AM
16th August	Monday Evening Run To Kent Section	TBA	6.30 PM
26th August	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM
29th August	Section Run TBA	TBA	10.00 AM
9th September	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM
12th September	Sunday Classic Bike show Knebworth	TBA	9.00 AM
15th September	Wednesday Mid week run	TBA	11.00AM
23rd September	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM
26th September	Section run to Battlesbridge	TBA	
1st-3rd October	Alternative Rally	Hampshire	
14th October	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM
22nd October	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM
24th October	Sunday Change of Clocks Run	TBA	10.00 AM
7th November	Sunday Remembrance Sunday	Squadron	10.00 AM
11th November	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM
25th November	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM
27th November	Saturday End of Season Dinner	TBA	7.00 PM
9th December	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM
23rd December	Thursday Club Night	Squadron	7.30 PM

The Next Quarter

July 2010

4th Sunday Section Run To Battlesbridge
4th Sunday 100 years of AJS Woolwich
7th Wednesday Mid week run
8th Thursday Club Night **Kent Section visit**
22nd Thursday Club Night
25th Sunday **Section Run ACE Cafe AJS Day**

August 2010

6th-9th t **Fri - Mon Jampot Rally West Midlands**
12th Thursday Club Night
15th **Sunday Section Stand North Weald**
16th **Monday Evening Run To Kent Section**
25th Wednesday Mid week run
26th Thursday Club Night
29th Sunday Section Run TBA

September 2010

9th Thursday Club Night
12th **Sunday Classic Bike show Knebworth**
15th September Wednesday Mid week run
23rd September Thursday Club Night
26th September Section run to Battlesbridge

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