



# Quarterly Quest

July 2011 Vol.21



East London & Essex Section

News Letter

## ***That Strange Beast, the Sidecar Outfit***

In Dennis' article about his sidecar outfit "race transporter" in the last "Quest" he said that he would like to know my thoughts on the subject of sidecar combinations and driving (never riding) them. Well, here is the story of how and why I got to know them. I had a bit experience of travelling in my uncle's sidecar outfit as a child and enjoyed it greatly, however, once on a bike of my own all thoughts of sidecars disappeared. What on earth would I want something like that fixed to the side of my bike for, not only would it take all the fun out of riding but it was engineeringly all wrong. They were my views as a young rider and I quite often made them known. Later on though I was to change my mind completely and regret those words spoken in ignorance.

I married in 1972 and we moved to a bungalow with the luxury of a garage. Pam (my wife) accompanied me on the bike to various runs out, rallies and visits to friends etc. After four years or so of this and getting to enjoy it, it was a shock to realise that the birth of our son would bring it all to an end and that joint visits out in the future would have to be by car. I had reached that common motorcycling crossroads and I didn't fancy the option of the usual route taken by many motorcyclists, that of giving up the bike completely. The obvious answer, although not without a certain amount of misgivings on my part, was to fit a sidecar to my 1954 500cc BSA Star Twin plunger sprung A7 (and thereby following in my uncle's Footsteps as his sidecar was also fitted to a BSA Star Twin). The misgivings now though were not really because I didn't fancy driving a sidecar but because of the amount of space it would take up in my garage, as the garage had filled up in the five years since we had moved in and things were getting a little "tight" in there.

Anyway, eventually a suitable sidecar became available from a motorcycling work colleague and with it bolted to the BSA (a task which sounds a lot easier than it actually was as the sidecar had previously been fitted to a Panther and none of the fittings were the same and strange as it might seem these fittings weren't as easily available then as they are today) I launched myself into the world of sidecar driving, only frightening myself a couple of times in the process, including one incident on a road near to where I live when coming up behind a car. The driver suddenly decided to change direction. In taking avoiding action my text book knowledge of sidecar driving disappeared as I frantically tried to wrestle the outfit out of the way of the car. Coming to rest, eventually, with the sidecar wheel bumping up on to the edge of the pavement, I then indulged in much "engine peerings" when a head popped up over the garden wall, eighteen inches from where I came to rest, to see what all the noise was about. After all, I had to give the impression that I had just casually pulled up there deliberately, as you do, just for an inspection. I wouldn't, of course, want to panic anyone with the realisation that I had been out of control in any way and in possible danger of demolishing his wall.

I straight away enjoyed sidecar driving, despite one or two more "panic moments", fortunately when nothing was coming in the opposite direction. Its peculiarities and driving techniques demand more concentration than just about any other vehicle and the satisfaction of "doing it right" is great. It is no substitute for a solo but is totally complimentary in my opinion and it changed my previous views completely. Mark (our son) took to it right away and it never failed to send him pleasantly off to sleep on a longer journey. However, with our climate being what it is, I felt that a saloon child/adult sidecar so that Pam could travel in the sidecar with Mark so that they could both keep dry was a better bet than our current single seat open type. So I purchased a brand new Briggs child/adult saloon and together with it, another bike, an MZ TS250/1.

Both Pam and Mark declared satisfaction with the new sidecar (the other outfit was still kept, just for the time being you understand!), but on our first few journeys I realised that I had made a mistake with the MZ. I had bought it because the only other Briggs saloon I had seen previously was also attached to one and the owner had declared himself satisfied with it. However, he only carried a small dog in his, whereas I had one and a half humans in mine and the MZ brakes were just not good enough. While toying with disc brake conversions etc, the chance arose to purchase a Suzuki GT380 two-stroke triple at a bargain price, complete with disc brakes. So very soon it became mine and was fitted to the sidecar (I still kept the MZ as a solo, of course. You can see how my garage fills up!).

While the 380cc two-stroke Suzuki might not seem the ideal choice for pulling a sidecar it in fact served us very well for three years, giving no trouble at all during that time. It was eventually changed for another Suzuki, a GT500 two-stroke twin this time, for no other reason than an expectation of more performance, which was not entirely realised. The Briggs outfit took us on two holidays to the Isle of Man and it was while on the second of these, when the weather was not so good, that Pam and Mark both realised the fact that as he had now outgrown the child portion of the sidecar it meant that one of them was going to have to get wet on the back of the bike. This didn't go down too well with either of them.

Dissension in the ranks could not be endured and the obvious answer (to me) was an even bigger sidecar. As the BSA outfit had been sold when I went to work in London and no longer needed to use it for going to work in the winter I thought I would have room if I got rid of the Briggs outfit plus a couple of solos. However, before I had got rid of anything I was attracted by an advert in the sidecar club's magazine and before I knew it I became the owner of a most enormous treble adult saloon sidecar attached to a Suzuki GS850G shaft drive four cylinder "tug". No problem with carrying anyone or anything in this - but I still kept the other one as well, just for the time being, you understand!. Meanwhile the garden was also filling up with bikes as well as the garage.

Quite a few years has passed since then and Mark no longer travels with us as passenger. He has his own transport and friends and when he goes to events with us he uses his own bikes. I finally parted with the Briggs (to Kevin O'Brien) when I admitted to myself that my collecting extravagance was getting out of hand. However, Pam likes our big "bungalow on wheels" sidecar and will not let me swap it for a sports single seater. So we still have it, although with hindsight it would have been better to have kept the smaller Briggs instead as we no longer need the two seats and it would have been both smaller and easier (weight wise) to manage now that I am older. The thing about sidecars though is that I never seem to settle on what bike I wish to be permanently fitted to them as I always get tempted by bikes which I think might be better. The Briggs had The MZ, then the two Suzukis and finally a BSA M21 600cc side valve pulling it and the large one came with the Suzuki GS850, which I later changed for a Harley Davidson Sportster and then the Moto Shifty which I have written about previously (any changes always for seemingly logical, if misguided reasons at the time, as was the case with both the Harley and the Shifty). One thing I have found through these experiences though is that I think plunger sprung motorcycles make the best sidecar "tugs" as not only can the rear mountings be fitted right at the back, by the bike rear axle, but the limited rear suspension movement means that there is much less risk of the sidecar wheel lifting on left hand bends. This all makes for a more "taught" feeling outfit which can be "hustled" around the bends in a more "spirited" manner and without the wallowing which can be experienced when bikes with greater rear suspension movement are used. The downside is, of course, that you do feel more bumps with the plungers, but I am willing to live with that and to my mind my original plunger BSA Star Twin gave me the best handling outfit that I have yet owned and the most enjoyable to drive.

After the Harley did not prove to be the success that I hoped it would be the sidecar was then attached to the Moto Shifty 900. This also was not a successful partnership as the bike transmission was not up to the task and the whole exercise proved a very expensive and disastrous failure, so the bike was removed and the sidecar sat sadly in the garage (in disgrace?) for 5 years while I sulked over the Shifty experience. Then I suddenly felt the need to be driving a sidecar once again and so along came the currently fitted BMW 1100GS (and yet more expense, as fitting a “chair” to a bike always costs a deal of money) which many of you have now seen. It doesn’t get a great deal of use these days but as Pam can no longer travel on a pillion it is now that the only way that we can share motorcycles together and therefore it now has a new relevance to our lives. So I say, “Long live the sidecar outfit”, that strange beast that can become quite a compulsion.



**Our "Bungalow on Wheels" in its current form at the 2007 Jampot Rally**

2011 INTERNATIONAL RALLY - MELCHTAL, SWITZERLAND

Exit Channel tunnel terminal on to **A 16** Junction 42

**A16** east to junction 46 and **turn R on D 943**

**D943 to ARDRES / ST>OMER)**

Round **ST.OMER** bypass, **exit at 4<sup>th</sup> junction on D 943**

**D 943 ( AIRE-S-LA-LYS / LILLIERS / BETHUNE)**

**At BETHUNE**, turn **R** for 1 mile, then **L on D 941** for 1.25 miles, then **R on D 937** (**ARRAS**)

**D 9 37** for 13.5 miles, turn **R on N 25** for 6 miles, turn **L on D 265**, then **R on D 60** for 6.25 miles, **turn R on D 939** towards (**CAMBRAI**)

**Turn R on D 1643** for 1.25 miles, **L on D 630** for 1.9 miles.

**Turn R on D 644 / D 1044 (N 44)** for 24.4 miles to **ST.QUENTIN**

Follow signs around **ST.QUENTIN** and at 3.1 miles approx, **exit on to D 1044 ( N 44 )** Toward **LAON**, go approx 27 miles and bear **R onto bypass ( N 2 )** for 5.6 miles and exit on **D 1044 /**

**N 44** to **REIMS** , Follow the **D 944/ N 44** through **REIMS** to **VITRY- en – FRANCOIS** ( First overnight stop ) Distance 300 Miles

Leave **VITRY-en-FRANCOIS** on **N 4** , **ST.DIZIER**

**N 67 JOINVILLE/ VIGNORY/ CHAUMONT**, Left onto **D 619** to **LANGRES**

Leave on **D 674**, go 7.5 miles and bear left onto **D.67** to **CHAMPLITTE/ GRAY**

Leave **GRAY** on **D 67** to **BESANCON** ( Second overnight stop ) Distance 150 Miles

Leave **BESANCON** on **N 57** to **PONTARLIER**

Leave **PONTARLIER** on **N 57 (south)**, then **L on D 67 ( SWISS BORDER)** 10 to **NEUCHATEL**

**NEUCHATEL** to **BERN** on 10

**BERN** to **ENTLEBUCH** on 10

**R to SARNEN / KERNS / MELCHTAL** Distance 180 Miles

08.30 hours, Monday 6th June, saw the intrepid riders and their machines meet up at the A127/M25 junction. The group consisted of Roy Bellett (G12), Dave Ayers (G9), Steve Webb (G9), John Walsh (G12), Steve Brown (G11) and Steve Wilson (G9) an intrepid two-wheeled scribe of note.

Our mission (if we chose to accept) was to arrive safely at Melchtal on Wednesday evening, having had a good ride. The route was all planned out and route cards duly laminated by section member Vic Sayers, who unfortunately had to cancel his trip at the last minute. The route to Folkestone was marred by torrential rain on the M20 and a contretemps with a Polish attendant at the Dartford crossing barrier. Due to a misted up visor (that's my excuse) I found myself crashing through the barrier. A quick glance backwards saw Roy frantically waving me on so, feeling like a getaway driver, we made off and regrouped. We arrived at Folkestone very damp, but caught an earlier crossing.

As the train emerged in Calais, we were met with continuous rain. Steve Webb was leading the group and I was second. On exiting a roundabout, Steve's rear wheel wobbled, then my front wheel wobbled as we hit a patch of diesel. Both bike and I hit the tarmac. Suffice to say the bike came off better than I did, with only superficial damage. Stiff upper lips and all that saw us on our way again quickly. However, further disaster was to befall us as Steve Webb's engine started to knock loudly and large amounts of oil issued from every orifice. It was quickly diagnosed as no roadside repair job and believed to be probable big end failure.

Although this clearly marked an end to Steve's riding, he displayed a truly commendable *c'est la vie* spirit and accepted his fate. Recovery was arranged by CN and we left Steve awaiting his rescuers. Early evening saw us arrive at the Hotel Au Bon Sejour in Vitry le Francois. A pleasant hotel and secure parking for the bikes was available. We found a friendly bar in the very pretty town and were entertained by "Champagne Charlie", a local well-to-do, who treated us to champers and pictures of his Aston Martin. We were rejoined there by Steve, who had managed to hire a car, courtesy of CN, for the duration of the trip. Following a late supper and Dave's lack of sense of direction, it took us an hour to find our way back to the hotel



Tuesday got us off to a good start; dry weather to begin, no further mishaps and a nice lunch stop. On Tuesday night we arrived in Besançon and the Hotel Granvelle, with good parking for the bikes. We had good grub in town and a good night's sleep.

As we crossed the border into Switzerland the rain returned, and some hairy mountain roads eventually brought us to the camp at Melchtal, a beautiful location in the Swiss Alps. The camp consisted of a cafeteria and barbeque, a bar, and several barrack-type dormitories which, although basic, were very comfortable. Evening meals were enjoyable, aided by cheap, supermarket-sourced wine!

The weekend rally was a great success, starting with registration day on the Friday and, for many, meeting up with old friends. The food and bonhomie was commendable. Saturday saw an organised run of 5 miles up and down a very steep and wet mountain track, with very little to see at the mountain top village due to poor weather/visibility. We had a quick cup of tea and returned to camp, as far as I recall without mishap.

Sunday saw a 70 mile organised run in very good weather. The scenery was spectacular. We had an arranged lunch half way round and took in Lake Lucerne. By this stage one of Roy's bikes finally started to complain but was soon cured with a replacement set of points. Steve Webb had by this time also enjoyed the chance to ride and **brake several** of Roy's bikes.

Departure day was Monday, 13th June. Our group divided into those who flew home and the intrepid remainder who rode home: Steve Brown, John Walsh and Alan Jennings. Judy Jennings and Steve Webb accompanied us in the hire car. The three day trip back was great fun, with lovely scenery and good accommodation.

I would like to thank Vic Sayers for planning the route, Roy Bellett for organising Eurotunnel and hotels, and Steve Webb for the return crossing and accommodation. Also to Steve for his patience and good natured acceptance of the use of four wheels instead of two, and for the carriage of so much extra luggage. Thanks to everyone for their company on the journey and to Hans and his family for organising the event. For me, personally, the journey to and fro in good company, more than matched the rally itself.

JOHN WALSH



Roys 350 G3 That Posh Steve Rode at the 2011 IJR This Happened As I was unloaded from the Van.



J Walsh After his Full



Pat The Night Before Mary Arrived

**Alternative Rally**  
**Friday 30th Sep- Sunday 2nd Oct.**



## ***2011 Events***

<b>Date</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Time</b>
13th January	Thursday	<b>Club Night.</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
27th January	Thursday	<b>Club Night.</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
10th February	Thursday	<b>Club Night.</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
24th February	Thursday	<b>Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
27th February	Sunday	Section Run TBA	Crown C	10.00AM
10th March	Thursday	<b>Club Night.</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
16th March	Wednesday	Mid Week Run	Crown C	11.00AM
20th March	Sunday	Run To Ardingly	J28 M25	9.00AM
24th March	Thursday	<b>Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
6th April	Wednesday	Mid Week Run	TBA	11.00AM
14th April	Thursday	Club Night	Squadron	10.00AM
		Eastern counties meet		
17th April	Sunday	Drive it Day	Suffolk	10.30AM
		<b>Club Night. Fish &amp;</b>		
28th April	Thursday	<b>Chips</b>	Squadron	7.0 PM
		Jericho Cottage Bike		
8th May	Sunday	Meet	Crown C	10.00AM
12th May	Thursday	<b>Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
18th May	Wednesday	Mid Week Run	Crown C	11.00AM
26th May	Thursday	<b>Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
9th June	Thursday	<b>Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
10-13th		2011 International Jam-		
June	Fri- Mon	pot Italy	Switzerland	
		12th Classic bike show		
19th June	Sunday	Knebworth	Crown C	9.00AM
23rd June	Thursday	<b>Club Night BBQ</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
26th June	Sunday	Section Run TBA	Crown C	10.00AM
29th June	Wednesday	Mid Week Run	Crown C	11.00AM

3rd July	Sunday Section Run Battlesbridge Bike Show	Crown C	10.00AM
14th July	<b>Thursday Section</b>		7.00PM
10th July	Sunday leighton buzzard	Crown C	9.00AM
27th July	Wednesday Mid week Run	Crown C	11.00AM
28th July	<b>Thursday Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
	Jampot Rally Section attendance Bishop		
29th July- 1st Aug	Auckland		10.00AM
7th August	Sunday British Owners Club Meeting Takeley	Crown C	10.00AM
11th August	<b>Thursday Club Night</b>	Squadron North	7.00 PM
14th August	Sunday Classic bike Festival North Weald	Weald	9.30AM
15th August	Monday Section Visit to the Kent Section	TBA	6.00PM
21st August	Sunday 13th Classic Bike Show Knebworth	Crown C	9.00AM
25th August	<b>Thursday Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00 PM
8th September	<b>Thursday Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00 PM
11th September	Sunday	Crown C	10.00AM
14th September	Wednesday	TBA	11.00AM
22nd September	<b>Thursday Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
25th September	Section Run To Battlesbridge	Crown C	10.00AM
30th Sep-2nd Oct	Fri-Sun Alternative Rally North Weald	TBA	9.00AM
13th October	<b>Thursday Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.0 PM
23rd October	Sunday section run To Ardingly	J28M25	9.00AM
27th October	<b>Thursday Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
10th November	<b>Thursday Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00 PM
13th November	Remembrance Sunday	Squadron	10.00AM
24th November	<b>Thursday Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
26th November	Saturday End of Season Dinner	TBA	7.00PM
8th December	<b>Thursday Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00PM
22nd December	<b>Thursday Club Night</b>	Squadron	7.00PM

## *The Next Quarter*

### July 2011

14th Thursday Club Night.

20th Mid week Run

28th Thursday Club Night

28th-1st Jampot Rally Bishop Auckland

### August 2011

7th Sun Run To British Owners Takaley

11th Thursday Club Night

14th Sun Section Stand North Weald Bike Show

15th Mon Section Run Kent Section

21st Sun 13th Classic bike show knebworth

25th Thursday Club Night

31st Mid Week Run

### September 2011

8th Thursday Club Night

14th Wednesday Mid week run Alternative Runs Check

22nd Thursday Club Night

25th Sunday Run To Battles bridge Show And Check Alternative Run

29th-1st Oct Alternative Rally North Weald.

### Section Committee

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