



Quarterly Quest

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East London & Essex Section

News Letter

The 2010 Clent Hills Jampot Rally at Hagley, West Midlands

Even President Roy had not been able to negotiate the price of “on site” caravan hire to what I considered an acceptable level for the three rally nights this year, so it was “off site” accommodation at the nearby Premier Inn for Pam and I this time. We were not exactly alone there though because apart from Dave and Val Kewell, Dave Slater and Alan Jennings, there were also Jampot editor Chris Read and former president Malcolm Arnold as well as a group of members from Australia, Cornwall and various other places in residence there. In fact the majority of people staying at the Premier Inn seemed to be from the Jampot Rally site. The Club might have preferred everyone to have been staying on site but increasingly it is something that the Club will have to factor into its arrangements, as staying in tents (especially ones small enough to be carried on a bike) becomes unsuitable for increasing numbers of members as they get older. Not everyone owns, or wants to own, a motorhome or caravan just for one or two events a year and some prefer to ride a bike to the rally.

It was about 9am on the Friday morning when Pam and I “set sail” on our “bungalow on wheels” sidecar outfit and headed off round the M25 towards the A41 and Aylesbury. The weather forecast wasn’t good so I was wearing the only fully waterproof jacket that I own, my 1960s Belstaff Black Prince vinyl. As it turned out we only hit one small shower and the sun was shining when we arrived on site, to find that our section marquee was already up (quite a few had arrived on the Thursday) and very near to the entrance. The fact that it was bigger than the actual “booking in” marquee caused a little confusion during the weekend when visitors sometimes mistook us for the control tent. Alan and Margaret Earl were staying in one of the motor homes booked by Roy and Margaret produced her usual delicious feast of cakes and pies, which she continued to seemingly produce out of thin air throughout the weekend – and for which we are all truly grateful. As we arrived, as usual, a small group surrounded our outfit to criticise its size and ugliness, while Alan Jennings preferred to criticise the sartorial elegance of my Black Prince jacket by saying that it looked like it might once have fitted me. I think that he has forgotten just how short and “close fitting” those jackets were in the 60’s. For some reason, which might have been very obvious then but now seems curious and somewhat uncomfortable, the belts were always mounted just under the rib cage (my old Trialsmaster was the same) and it is quite true that against today’s styles they do, in fact, look somewhat overly short – even so it is still more waterproof than anything else I have yet to buy though.

Dave Evans had also come to the rally as a passenger with Dave Slater and Alan Jennings, but he was camping in a tent, as was Dave Nichols, Richard Smith, Graham Eaton and Rob, Jan and Kerry Harknett, while Pat Gill and Dudley Woods were sleeping in Pat's truck.

The Friday run got under way – at least it did for most, as Dudley had clutch problems and never made it out of the car park. Roy didn't do much better when, riding his ex Chris Read G15/45, he broke down within a couple of miles of the start and had to catch a lift from someone travelling to the site in order to get his bike rescued. Meanwhile everyone else from our section managed to complete the run OK, although Pat had to remove his fractured rear stand during the run. Roy's problem turned out to be dirty sludge in the fuel supply (not unknown on Roy's bikes I am told) which Chris Read insisted was due to the dirty Essex petrol.

Unfortunately, on Saturday, it seemed that we got the wet weather that had been forecast for the Friday and we had winds and showers of varying intensity throughout the day. There was actually a lull in the rain for the start of the Saturday run, with Dave Slater just managing to get to the start on time after having initial carburettor problems. Dave's woes were not yet over though as not long after the start his engine died. After realising that he needed to switch to reserve he told the recovery truck that he didn't need recovering. Unfortunately though, from then on he never saw another marshall or anyone indicating which route to take. So he ended up doing a considerable run all by himself and on his own route, arriving back at the site quite a while after everyone else and having ridden further than those on the actual run had done. This was not to be Dudley's day either, because his clutch had packed up in a major way this time and despite an extended "fettling" session he was unable to fix it in time for Sunday. Roy had a clear run this time, with only the headlight falling out at one stage. No rest for him though as he and Dudley had to get their autojumble stall set up along with all the other stands in the autojumble area. After that the AGM was held (I have to admit to giving that a miss – again), during which Roy was re-elected as President for another 2 years.

It was very nice to meet Chris and Anna Rotta, from Poland who were including the rally in the middle of a two week touring holiday on their Kawasaki ZZR1200. What a charming couple they are and having met them I can understand just why the International Jampot in Poland was such a success. Chris persuaded me to try a measure of Polish vodka which he had brought with them. Not being a spirit drinker I was rather apprehensive after having heard about that stuff, but I must say that the taste wasn't half as bad as I expected and it was quite warming. I had seen Bill Redford's James Captain go out on the run and that evening I tried to have a chat to him about such important matters as Villiers engines and gearboxes,

but it was not really possible above the level of sound from the band and I had to wait until the following day, when it was a bit quieter. Actually, the live band on the Saturday night was quite good and the group of us around our “section table” grew quite large at times, until it thinned out as we all made our way back to our various places of residence. From the window of our hotel room we could hear the band playing quite clearly.

Sunday dawned much brighter, it looked promising for the run and it got under way in excellent weather. It being a nice sunny day Pam and I took a run out to the National Trust Clent Hills site. The car park attendant was quite intrigued by our sidecar outfit and was not sure what to charge us for parking at first, eventually settling on the solo bike rate. After having quite a chat with him about the outfit he then took a few photos of it. We had a good couple hours walking around the area in the sunshine before stopping in at the little cafe for an enormous roast pork sandwich each (having gravy with it was not such a good idea though) and where we met Rob, Jan and Kerry, who had had the same idea for a walk around the area as us.

Back at the rally site and I found that Dudley’s AJS and Pat’s Matchless Silver Hawk had got rosettes for the best pre-war examples of their respective makes. This caused a few comments from visitors to our tent who assumed that awards were only for bikes that had taken part in the Sunday run, but apparently this doesn’t apply to pre-war models. I can sort of understand those who showed surprise at this because Pat was out on the run on his pre-war Silver Arrow model and despite it not having an abundance of power it had coped very well with the hills in the hot weather and to my mind it would have been a more worthy winner of the award than the Hawk, even though it might be considered a less exotic model. In fact, after the run had returned Pat offered those who felt brave enough the chance to have a run around the site on the Silver Arrow. It must have got even hotter during this low gear work and it was still running well at the end. In fact we were all getting hotter and the appearance of an ice cream van, as the run was returning, was a welcome sight.

That evening the usual speeches were made and awards presented. Dudley and Pat got their awards for the best pre-war AJS and Matchless respectively and Dave Slater nearly fell off his chair when, quite unexpectedly (by him) he was awarded the award for the Best Modified bike.

Chris Rotta then gave a short speech about the Polish International event and got a huge round of applause afterwards, for both what he said and his efforts in making that event such a success.

The evening's disc jockey then got going with the evening's entertainment. I have to admit that it was far too loud for my liking – and judging by the amount of people who drifted out of the marquee to sit in the middle of the field, I was not the only one who thought so. Eventually, my ears had taken enough of a “bashing” so we made our way back to our hotel, having said goodbye to all those who we would not be seeing in the morning (we were heading off for home from the hotel in the morning). It had been a good rally and in the morning, after saying farewell to the others who were staying in the hotel as well, we set off in fine weather (no need for the Black Prince jacket this time) and had a good run home, with only a stop for fuel (for the bike and ourselves) along the way.

Colin Atkinson



Long Distance Motorcycle Trials.

During the 1950s and 60s I rode in a number of these types of trial. They varied slightly in their concepts but were similar in that the start of the trial was always at night. There were often a number of starting points, but all with an equal distance to the first control, where we all joined up. The object was to get the entry to the west country where the famous old trials hill climbs, of various types, were to be found.

Some of the events kept to the tarmac roads, using A roads to get you near to the hill climbs and thence by B roads and farm tracks. Some, however, almost immediately took you straight onto farm tracks, of the type we would nowadays call green lanes.

These were much harder to ride in the dark, remember on 6volt lights and being thrown about in ruts and holes. You were given a route card to direct you and depending on your entry number and start time were given a strict time table to keep to between control points along the route, being late or early cost you marks lost!

For the story I will relate I will keep to one of the first type using mostly tarmac roads. All of these trials I rode on an Army Matchless representing my TA Signals Regt where I was serving as a Dispatch Rider. The only concession we were allowed from standard specification was to remove our pannier fittings and we were competing against “civvy” riders on competition bikes! We had great service from these bikes, seldom failed to finish and won a number of awards.

The event was the MCCs Exeter Trial, always run on the first weekend in January,

whatever the weather! For the 1956 event we started at Feltham and I left at 23.45 Friday night after a days work. We were expected to arrive at the first control at Sparkford at 3.45 which we did and took some “refreshment” in the cafe there as instructed in the route card. After 25 minutes away again to arrive at the next control at Exeter Here we had a 90 minute breakfast break before setting off for the first of the trial hills at 7.45 and arriving at Tillerton at 8.25. This set the tone for the rest of the event being scheduled for the next seven hills, such as Fingle Bridge, Simms, Stretes, Waterloo, Meerhay, Batcombe, Lutton Gwyle and final time control near Poole. The events so called “grand finish” being at the Grand Hotel in Bournemouth

my finish time was 15.45. We, not surprisingly, did not stay at the Grand and rode on for some distance to our overnight stop. Our mileage on this trial was 319 miles in total.

We had to contend with numerous snow flurries and of course bitter cold. The trial hills varied greatly, Fingle Bridge for example was fourteen hairpin bends climbing up the side of a seemingly vertical moorside. All were very steep, muddy or rocky, often with shingle/shale to get you sliding off route. Some commenced in or through a water course. It was very annoying if you were an early number and had successfully ridden the hill to find that later the course had been “washed out” and all marks “scrubbed out”. All that hard work and effort for no reward!

However, it was all great fun riding in good company (we rode in two teams of three) riding on the leading riders time schedule and only “clocking in “ at the correct individuals time as appropriate. This way we each carried different spare parts which could be used for whoever had a problem, but without duplication. I hope I have managed to convey something of the style, effort, commitment and enjoyment of this type of event.

Dennis





"FINGLE BRIDGE", FOURTEEN HAIRPIN BENDS UP THE SIDE OF A MOOR! 64 YA 10 CLIMBED IT CLEAN SEVERAL TIMES OVER THE YEARS.

Matchless Radial (that's like the Rudge and not the Megola)

“It’ll never start without putting some fresh petrol in”, I said to Roy after looking at the few drops of turpentine smelling liquid at the bottom of the fuel tank after pulling the bike out from behind a mower and an old car. “Yes it will”, said Roy. “Just run the front wheel up the bank so that the petrol runs to the back”. It took a few kicks but to my complete disbelief it then started and I was left wondering why when what petrol was left had been reduced to a good approximation of paint thinners. “What are you going to do with it?”, I asked. Roy paused a bit and then replied that he might convert it into an off road bike. I studied it for a bit and although it looked a bit sorry for itself after about ten years lack of use and with the road muck of its last period of use still on it, it was obvious that someone had put quite a bit of thought and not a little work into the bike at sometime in the past. “It would be a shame to change it so much after all the work that’s been done to it”, I said. “If you want an off road bike then my AJS Stormer is road legal and taxed, its not really my sort of bike so if you want to then I will swap bikes with you”. – And that is how I came to be the owner of the Matchless Radial.

RFVC are the letters proudly emblazoned on the overhead cam box – that’s Radial Four Valve Combustion, apparently. This 500cc single cylinder engine never started life within the Matchless/AJS 350cc lightweight frame of this bike though, its previous home at sometime in the past had been in a Honda XBR model and someone unknown (at least to me) had expended a lot of effort in fitting it into the frame of the AMC lightweight. They had also improved the braking power by fitting an 8 inch twin leading shoe BSA/Triumph front brake into the Teledraulic forks. Some people dislike “specials” but I have always found them fascinating and I like to see the ingenious ways people have got around the inevitable problems which arise when putting engines and frames together which were never intended to be that way.

In the case of this bike the front down tube of the frame had needed to be pulled slightly forward at its base in order to fit the front of the Honda engine which had a crankshaft balance shaft at its front, but the tube had not been kinked or stressed and after all the same thing had also been done by many manufacturers over the years when fitting different engines to their existing frames. The builder had also fixed up an ingenious right foot gearchange conversion for the engine which was both simple in design and positive in feel. Being that an AMC lightweight engine carries its oil in a tank attached to the crankcase the lightweight models need no oil tank on the frame but because the Honda engine needs one the builder had welded a back plate to the lightweight toolbox cover and then fitted a filler cap, breather pipe and inlet/outlet pipes to turn the tool box into an oil tank. On the AMC lightweight models the rear wheel sprocket is part of the rear brake drum and the builder had welded a new sprocket onto the drum which had the wider teeth needed to match the Honda gearbox sprocket. It was while looking at this sprocket when I first saw the bike that I could foresee a possible problem – which I chose to ignore, as is usually the case when I want something. The AMC lightweight engine has a transmission shock absorber in its clutch centre, while the Honda XBR model has its transmission shock absorber in the rear wheel hub. Now if the builder had fitted the AMC engine into the Honda frame then he would have had an abundance of shock absorbers, but with the Honda engine in the AMC frame there was none and with a 500cc four stroke single and no shock absorber I feared for the well being of the spokes, but we will just ignore that for the time being I thought to myself. The electric starter was knackered (technical term) but this engine, unlike the Rotax, started quite readily on the kickstart I wasn't too worried about this either. I will sort that out in time – eventually – perhaps.

Once Roy had got the special running well enough for him to ride he fetched it round to my place. “It seems to run OK but when I opened the throttle a bit more it seemed as if the chain was slipping on the sprockets a bit”, he said. “It was probably just the spokes being tortured by the lack of any transmission shock absorber”, I mentioned, hoping that none had already “twanged”, and added that it would need to be ridden very gently and smoothly if they were to survive very long.

The wheels and rims looked to be fairly new Hagon products and I hoped that they had used strong spokes for the job. I stood back to admire my new “toy” and noticed that it seemed to be dripping oil from quite a lot of places, nothing unusual for many of my bikes I must add, but it did seem a bit excessive. I then found that the reason that oil was dripping from the battery box was because a cam box breather just finished there and deposited everything behind the battery, so I rectified that and run a new breather to exhaust onto the rear chain run. Oil was also dripping from the crankcase breather and from the base of the welded up oil tank. Thinking to check the oil level I started and ran the engine for a couple of minutes, as advised in the manual, before stopping it and opening the oil tank filler cap. The level was not only well up in the tank, it was up to the cap itself. As I was intending to change the oil anyway I drained it all out – all seven and a half pints of it, more than twice what it should have, the poor thing was almost drowning in the stuff. This engine wet sumps the oil when standing (causes no problem) and needs to have its engine run before checking the oil level, there had obviously been a few extra top ups, “just in case” in the past. With the right level of oil then the leaks mainly went away, although it still breathes rather heavily from the cam box breather – at least the rear chain keeps lubricated.

Over what decent weather we had during the winter months I managed to gradually clean most of the road muck away from the frame and engine. I also lubricated the various cables and controls so that they all worked smoothly and sorted out the electrics so that the lights worked as they should do. Although the paintwork is not in good shape, with the muck cleaned off and the chrome polished as much as possible then it was not looking bad at all, at least by my standards. I was a bit concerned that the centre stand would not support the bike because it went too far forward to its stops but I managed to improve this by enlarging the stops. It still needs a piece of half inch thick wood underneath it for a firm standing on anything other than a perfectly flat level surface but I can live with that for the time being

Everything seemed to be in order and with an MOT certificate gained the bike was taxed and it was ready for me to take out on the road. An initial 25 mile “shakedown” run on mainly straight roads showed that although the lack of a transmission shock absorber made itself felt when pulling away, if that task was done smoothly and without fierce throttle movements then the bike ran less harshly than I expected. In any case going gently did not mean a pedestrian pace because the acceleration was far greater than my Matchless G5 anyway so even with easing the clutch home it was still quite brisk in getting away and with a little care snicking through each of its five gears could easily be done without snatching the transmission. When I got home from this first run I was pleased to notice that most of the oil leaks had gone away. I checked every spoke in the back wheel and was overjoyed to note that all the spokes were still intact. I had been quite impressed with the performance of the BSA/Triumph front brake because my more recent experiences with drum brakes (once they have been re-lined with modern materials) are not very good. The engine ran quite quietly for an air cooled unit with more of a whirring sound rather than the pushrod rattles that I am more used to with my G5 and it ran easily at a steady 60mph. I then took it up to 70mph but I was not quite happy with the feel of the front end at that speed. The bike is fitted with modern style Avon tyres and while most people now, and especially journalists who have been riding on these style of tyres for all of their riding lives, prefer the feel of them to the old Speedmaster types, I have never liked the feel of them with the steering setup on older bikes and to me they feel “nervous” and overtired when compared to my preferred ribbed front type. It is true though that the longer I rode on them the better they felt as I became more familiar with their characteristics – I still prefer ribbed front tyres though. One thing I did notice though was that impressive front brake was not quite so impressive from 70 as it had seemed from 60 and needed a lot harder pull from that speed. The exhaust note from the standard looking Matchless silencer was fairly strident, but most of what could be heard from the saddle seemed to be induction roar from the rudimentary air cleaner fitted

It had been a good first run, I enjoyed riding the bike and now hoped that I had been wrong about possible spoke damage. Roy also had a run on it and was most impressed at how much better it felt now that it had been “fettled” a little bit. At the start of June I took it out for a longer run, this time over much more varied roads. Dual carriageways, main roads and back lanes as well as town traffic. One annoyance was exhaust backfires. There is a small air leak in the welded up siamesed exhaust system and this causes very loud backfires on too many regular occasions. I have the same problem with my G5 and while yes I know that Gun Gum paste etc in all the joints and ports can effect a cure I am not too keen on the stuff, so I am learning to keep the problem to a minimum by learning the throttle positions that can be held which do not cause backfires at inconvenient times. I have been doing the same on the G5 for years now and will learn this one the same way. This second run was about 55 miles long and I returned home quite elated because the bike seemed to be running extremely well. There were no suspicious noises and the oil level showed that oil consumption was not going to be a problem. The elation was short lived though because examination of the rear wheel found a broken spoke even though I had been treating it gently, so my initial fears were realised. I had some spares of the right size so I fitted a replacement and checked tension on all the others. My next trip out was 35 miles to the High Beach tea hut and back. The bike caused quite a lot of interest while parked there, and a bit of embarrassment for me. When I left to come home after a couple of hours or so, I had a group around me chatting and asking questions while I was putting my helmet and jacket on. Then some six or so kicks later, with the choke lever in various positions, I never even had a misfire out of the engine. It was a humid day and I was just starting to overheat when someone said, “It might be stating the obvious, but is the ignition turned on?”. It will take me a couple of weeks to live that one down I guess. The ignition switch is down underneath the oil tank and I just hadn’t noticed. At least I never broke a spoke on that journey though.

So, apart from the spoke worries, I am pleased with my new “toy”. Some might ask why anyone would bother to go to all the trouble of combining a frame and engine that were not meant to be together. After all, the resulting bike does not handle or stop as well as the original Honda did, or have the historic charisma of the original Matchless, so what is the point. Well, the point is that if you have a crashed Honda XBR with a good engine and a sound Matchless G5 with a wrecked engine, then if it can be done then why not? For myself I think that it is in the best traditions of the British home mechanic to build something like this and I hope to sometime find out who it was who did it and why. Both Roy and Will Powell feel sure that it was built in Essex. However, all the early tax discs I have were for Welling in Kent and as they cover several years I can only assume that the bike was used during that time (and the road dirt I cleaned off it seems to confirm this) so perhaps spoke breakage will not be as bad as I fear at the moment.

The original registration was 741 XKR (this was removed by a later owner who wanted it for a car), so if anyone knows anything about its construction or subsequent use then I would like to hear about it. I wonder why the builder got rid of the bike after putting in so much work on it and might it have been only after he started riding it that he realized the significance of that missing transmission shock absorber. If it had been a twin or a two stroke then he might well have got away with it, but not a 500 single. Someone has put some miles on it though.

Colin A



Mid week run to Leigh-on-sea



The Next Quarter

October 2010

1st-3rd Alternative Rally

14th October Club Night.

20th Wednesday mid week run

24th Sunday Change of clocks run to Ardingly.

28th Club night AGM

November 2010

11th Thursday Club Night

14th Sunday Remembrance Sunday

17h Wednesday Mid week run

25th Thursday Club Night

27th Saturday End of Season Dinner Toot hill

28th Sunday Section Run TBA

December 2010

9th Thursday Club Night

15th Wednesday Mid week run

23rd Thursday Club Night

Section Committee

Chairman: Dennis Fox 0208 554 7608 denjune@btinternet.com

Secretary Roy Bellett 01245 423982 g15.mk2@btinternet.com

Treasure John Puttock 01245 421259 jayandjayputt@talktalk.net

Scribe Alan Jennings 01277 653943 jackiealan@aol.com

Technical Help Ron west 017085 764331 ron.amc24@tiscali.co.uk

Dating Officer Pat Gill 01992 813253 matchlesspat@aol.com

Dave Nichols Run Captain 01277 656054 nicholls235@btinternet.com

Reg Green 01277 362836 reggiegreen@btinternet.com

Will Powell 01245 223589

Web Site address: www.ajs-matchless.com/eastlondon