



Northumbria Branch Newsletter

December 2008 (being the "Tappity John newsletter")

YOUR OWN PERSONAL BUMPER CHRISTMAS EDITION

Well, Christmas is bearing down on us like a run-away steam locomotive. SOOO - your scribe must WRITE! WRITE! WRITE! before the news gets stale.

Some of us may already be absorbed in the happy winter pursuit of dismantling their machines to see what is inside. One or two may still be riding – but your scribe has, with great sorrow, garaged the machine, having learned the hard way that it is impossible to fight off the effects of road salt. – pity! She seems to be running well just now.

What happened since the last blast of bullshit from this source reached your august portals?

Well, while the economy has been going to hell, Northumbria Nortonians have been active.

Richard Johnston tells me that he was off in Belgium at some racing event in a place I never heard of, except it is not too far from where the Germans made their break-through at the Battle of the Bulge, in WW2.

Organisation does not seem to have been so good. In fact they even let him absent-mindedly drift into the wrong race, in which he claims he performed with credit (maybe the race was for push-bikes). Also his cylinder block appears to have come in half, with the top half deciding it would prefer to go up and down with the pistons. It saves all those painful compressions, you know - - - Anyhow he has promised a vast report which I am not allowed to trim back – so prepare yourselves - - -

And, of course, Brian Hutchinson's amazing Café racer keeps winning prizes.

Of our own, club, events we had:

MIDDLETON_IN TEESDALE.

With typical organisational skill, we chose the wrong weekend and went a week early. The Eggleston show, with which we try to coincide, was the following weekend. This may explain only 3 of us on the camp site on the Friday evening. It RAINED that night and the ground around the tents went even squishier.

But loads of bikes turned up the next day – in fact as good a turn-out we have had for years. People split up and did different things, with different groups riding different routes. Yours truly went for a hike with Dave's brother, Derek. He had invited me to join him on a hike the previous year, which I declined, and, given what happened that time, I decided not make the same mistake twice. (Derek told me about old lead mines, about trees, leaves,

giant funghi, and that he has a “Danger-matic” visor in his helmet: it goes opaque when he goes over a hump-backed bridge.).

A good gathering in the evening, and the Wardling went on late into the night.

KAMTREK TREASURE HUNT

This was run on the last weekend in October – maybe a bit risky with the weather, but with the summer we have had this year, well, who would know the difference? In fact it turned out to be a beautiful day.

Your scribe had won the previous year so was stuck with organising this one. Some of the clues involved a short hike – leading to loud complaints. Other clues, it was claimed, were too confusing. All of which led to the organiser being threatened with violent consequences. Do they not know that one of the skills in working out Kamtrek clues is to try to understand how the organiser’s mind works?

We went round much of what had been the land of coal in Northern County Durham (amazing how nature re-asserts itself and the countryside recovers), then off into the hills, dropping over moors, riding towards vast vistas, and into Hunstanworth, near Blanchland, where there was a clue – and where friends had laid out tea and biscuits in their garden.

We had a good turn-out - especially welcome since it seems we have sadly lost the Seaton Sluice Hell’s Angels (Geriatric) Society, who actually started Kamtreks . And The Clives Taylor (Mark One and Mark two)’s amazingly advanced motorcyclists group could not be inveigled into joining us, though both Clives tried. Admittedly Alan went by car (His Commando is very poorly at the moment), and so did Clive mark one – but that enabled him to bring Patti.

Winner was Clive Taylor mark 2, who therefore has the honour of organising next year’s event. Clive Taylor mark one got the tie-breaker clue. A great day for Clives!!

Many thanks for the support. It is a lot of work organising these things. And, as the one who did the work this year, your scribe is really grateful. And I think all had a good day.

Here’s the tea-party at Hunstanworth:



Isle of Man

The only news that reached your scribe is that the usual suspects went, and that anything more is not safe to print.

And now, at last, to the long held back Don Richards' Report on his amazing restoration, the winner of prizes -

THE WORM

Tale of a Norton 77 600cc twin

I thought I might share a few words on the recent completion of my project.

In summer 2001 I saw a Norton 77 rolling chassis advertised in OBM, travelled to Nuneaton to view and after due consideration, bought it as a *project* – what a lovely word that is!

Subsequent investigation showed that only the frame, toolbox, oil tank, fork sliders and rear wheel belonged to this model, the rest being a motley collection of autojumble tat.

When I (bravely?) decided to pursue originality I hadn't realised that Norton only made about 430 of these bikes, so many of the bits I needed would prove to be extremely rare, not to mention expensive. I optimistically thought I might complete the build in one year (hah!).

One of the first things I did was to contact the NOC to verify date of manufacture and establish some authenticity before committing myself further. I was advised by a '*noted NOC expert*' not to proceed as the bike would end up a can of worms! Red rag to a bull or what? The bike is henceforth to be known as: **The Worm**.

Six years later the bike is finally finished and appeared in a recent newsletter to prove it (well, I had to shut the whingers up somehow). I'm entered in the parade laps at the 1000 bikes at Mallory Park on Sat/Sun 12/13 July, if you're there come and say hello.

Special thanks should go to Bob Rodgerson (Humbernut) who rescued the engine for me. No thanks at all to those w--k--s who offer machine shop services but refuse to accept the job. They collectively wasted almost a year of my time by hanging on to my crankcases for ages – then refusing to do the job.

Also to Dave Coates who built an excellent gearbox and rescued the clutch for me, I never thought there could be so many ways to get a Norton clutch wrong.

Special consideration for my next door neighbour who got me issued with an environmental nuisance order for painting the bike in my garage. (Ar--h--e)!

Problems of note:

- Making odd crankcase halves mate up (see April issue of Real Classic, Humbernut)
- Front brake, Tried 3 different specialists before I was happy with it.
- Clutch, much work and money to make it work properly.
- Oil filter, cartridge filter hidden away to preserve originality.
- Front forks, Commando-ised to improve damping.
- Rear shocks, rebuilt by Ohlins experts.
- Rear brake, 3 different back plates before finding one which was straight.

Fastenings, almost all made by me in stainless: bolts, nuts spacers, washers. Etc.

Much of the time was spent in assembling a functional workshop with lathe and polishing equipment etc., and learning to use it – I'm not an engineer so this was a steep learning curve.

Man hours involved: I never learned to count that far.

Cost: Don't ask! Those of a nervous disposition should not even think about it.

Value: Somewhat less than ½ of the actual cost (not counting labour).

The end product is a very attractive – nay – beautiful machine with lots of modern touches hidden away so as not to compromise original appearance.

I'm contemplating adding indicators to aid safety in modern traffic. Problem... how to do that whilst causing least compromise to the original appearance. Hmmm...



There are a small number of jobs to finish off which I need to get on with cos there's a 350 Ariel waiting in the wings. *Tempus fugit*

(Thanks, Don - - -)

And Now to Canada -

No doubt your scribe has bored you rigid with his boasts about having been made a member of the Ontario Norton owners. Well – here's a piece from their "Norton Nomad" newsletter, written by Gary Robinson. A bitter-sweet tale – and in the spirit of "Peace, goodwill to all men" (except, perhaps, Harley riders) here it is:

(Indeed - - - Merry Christmas, peace, and goodwill to all our readers - -)
– see next page

“The best “I used to have a Norton” Story I’ve ever heard.

It was a hot Saturday in late August when Nuala and I got a sitter for Fynn and decided to have an all day ride. We were heading down to Kitchener first to visit Zdeno Cycle. We were stopped at Crappy Tire (*presumably Canadian Tire, which sells EVERYTHING – ed.*) as the bikes were thirsty, when I was approached by a guy who you could tell was older than dirt. Even though he was old he was still pretty chipper for his age and he had some kind of accent but it was pretty faint.

He told me he used to have a Norton waaaaay back. Then he proceeded to tell me how he’d gotten it. He described how he was posted to Africa during the war (WWII) as a courier between headquarters and tanks out on the line.

During one campaign he acquired a Norton by stealing it from the “other side”. The other side being the British. Now I know what his accent is I was hearing. It turns out he’s German.

He apparently stole the bike off the British when they retreated from the Germans during one scuffle.

He went on to tell me that the Germans back then admired the British bikes because of their superiority to the stuff they were riding.

After the war he kept the bike and went on to own two other Nortons after that one. He was so happy to see our two Nortons and to know that people still ride them.

He pulled away from the pumps and parked near the exit. Then he was looking around in the back of his van for something. I wasn’t sure what he was doing but he raced back to us as we were

getting ready to leave the gas pumps and handed me this picture of himself from when he was a young soldier in the war.

So here he is, complete with his helmet and goggles in uniform from WWII” (*Gary Robinson*)



(I wonder how he managed to get his Norton back home, seeing how things developed in Africa. That would be a story in itself.)

DON’T FORGET: PRE-CHRISTMAS NORTON-MOOT, 3 HORSESHOES, Horton Road, Blythe, just off the B1505 exit from A189 : Date: Thursday 18th December

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