

Northumbria Branch Newsletter



Feb 2009 (being the “Tappity John newsletter”, by Tappity John, Northumbria)



Dreams of Spring: Nortons above Loch Awe, 2008.

An ANNUAL GENERAL meeting!!!!!!!!!!!!

Announcing an Amazing, Exciting, Thrilling, Magnificent and absolutely GENERAL, Annual General Meeting!!!

Cabaret yet to be announced (*has anyone anything to contribute to the cabaret?*). Come in and support your committee, because it is about to change! (and you get sandwiches too!)

Where? - Melton Constable at Seaton Sluice, as is traditional.

When? - 23rd March (Monday). Time: Meeting starts 8 p.m. prompt (that's what we always say).

There is change in the air:

Dave Wardle fancies getting involved with the events side, so if anybody wants to do the secretary job let him know!! He's having an adrenalin rush about ACTIVITY! ACTIVITY! ACTIVITY! (though Jim is happy still be contact-man for the Wooler

camp – see later- so he’s not QUITE resigning, and judging by the welcome extended at Wooler last year, a good thing too.)

Clive Taylor Mark 1 is resigning as treasurer after many years cooking the books. Simon Murray has volunteered to stand as treasurer (unless he changes his mind). (He’d better not!!) – anyone else, let Dave know.

We have not quite arm-locked anyone into the secretary job, but some are being targeted.

Unless someone else is standing for the job, it looks like your Tappity scribe will offer to keep churning out the bullshit as before (and publishing any bullshit other members would like to contribute).

Bob Tym as chairman has not said anything about wanting to give up his throne, from which he presides in majesty over the AGM. Well, there is a limit to how much change we can take - - -

Any other volunteers?

Now!!!! - Before you read further, pay attention to - - - -

BRANCH FEES. THIS REALLY MATTERS! - TO YOU!!

All Branch subscriptions are due by 31st March. Price £5.00. (You may remember we decided on one annual renewal date for all members – **this is it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**).

The branch subscription is **NOT** included in your subscription to the main NOC club, whether you pay by standing order, or what.

Also since the main club did its computer thing there seem to be a number of conflicting lists of who actually IS a branch member. Dave (still secretary) keeps getting lists from the main club, of people who the main club think are members. But that includes quite a lot of people who never paid branch subs. So: If you do not pay Dave £5.00, we assume you do not want to be a branch member – and, among other things, you will no longer will get this amazing publication. And you will not get notice of branch events either - You can’t let a thing like that happen to you, can you? Anyhow, we’d miss you.

So please do pay up – so we know we are still appreciated (note ever-increasing paranoia). You know you can afford it - - - Cheques made to “Norton owners Club”. Send to:

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Branch Events:

The final programme will be set at the AGM, but we had a sort of pre-AGM at the last Club Night, and the following came out:

Wooler Camp. We have had to jump the gun and set a date, because “Roadholder” needs to know in time. So its 5-7 June, campsite, North side of the town.

Ugthorpe Hall camp, near Whitby: 26-28 June provisional: Dave will be doing this.

Consiton: the intent is that the old Torver site is changed to Coniston itself. Dates will be Thurs. 23rd to 26th July to correspond with the Great Cumbria Steam Rally

August: Talking to Robin Watson, it appears the Tyne Valley Classic Bike club’s show is moving to the field behind the Robin Hood on the Military Road. They will provide more info later, but branches like ours are invited.

Late Aug at the IOM, and by popular request, Northumbria NOC will be official “greeters” at the Manx Reunion, at the Shore Hotel, Laxey. Roadholder gives the date as Tuesday 25th August, from 4 P.M. A group from Northumbria will be riding over. Talk to Dave Wardle. (Dave says racing days are Aug 31, and 2nd and 4th of Sept).

The Middleton-in-Teesdale camp looks like being, most probably, 18th-20th Sept, Dave thinks, but this must be confirmed.

Kamtrek Treasure Hunt – to be announced later.

And now, hot off the press, tales of a racing man, from Richard Johnston:

The Team Morpeth Mafia, in person:



Birthday Celebrations at Chimay 2008. (Gert reaches Fifty!)

Last July, I, along with my wife Jen, pal Ron, my two Nortons (“Team-Morpeth Mafia”) and a strong North-Eastern contingent of like minded souls, travelled to Chimay in Belgium to participate in the annual “Internationale Trophee de Motos Classiques” road-races.

This year the 4-day event was to be held over the original and longer 9.5 kilometre road circuit, which weaves it’s way through the undulating Belgian countryside around the picturesque little town of Chimay, just south of Mons, which is world famous for it’s beer. Not being somebody who has done much “real road” racing, I experienced mixed emotions, of excitement and trepidation in anticipation of the challenge of the longer circuit.

Each year the Programme for the event, in addition to listing the current years events and riders and in keeping with the festival atmosphere of the event, also gives a review of events from 50 years ago, with reprints of current affairs, sport and even adverts from the era. This year reviewed 1958. Very interesting!

Now, apart from the fact that I can remember 1958 quite vividly from the perspective of a nine year old boy, i.e. Elvis, Skiffle, teddy-boys and the Manchester United air-crash, but not really anything related to motorcycle racing at that time, except for watching the hundreds of riders making their way to Liverpool on their way to the TT, on the main road past our house on the outskirts of Liverpool, each June.

So, it was not until I was actually riding one of my bikes flat-out in a race at about 115mph, down the two mile flat-out section of the circuit, that the penny of realisation dropped and I realised that a milestone in history had occurred! The 350cc Manx Norton (family name “Gert”) I was riding, was now 50 Years old!

Who would have thought that when the original owner, H.R.F.(Bob) Anderson, accompanied by his sponsor and mentor Geoff Monty, loaded the brand new, shiny Manx Norton into his van at Norton’s Bracebridge Street factory, Birmingham, that it would still be getting used in anger 50 years later!

Manx Nortons were fast, tough, uncompromising bits of kit, made for longevity and long “classic” races on road circuits, with superb handling and roadholding. Think eight-lap TT races, over three hundred racing miles! They were also not cheap, Bob Anderson had paid £496.10.shillings (an average man’s wages for a year in 1958!) for “Gert” in late June of 1958, about £15,000 in today’s money! Also, “Joe Public” could not just go and get one, you had to have experience, form and a good dealer to sponsor you!

These, Bob Anderson certainly had, having won the 500cc Manx Grand Prix in 1956 and finished second in the 500cc TT, to the works MV Agusta of John Surtees, just that June of 1958. He was a definite star in the ascendance and the co-rider of Geoff Monty himself in the respected Geoff Monty race team!

Another penny dropped during the Lansdowne Cup race at Chimay, as I was slip-streaming an AJS 7R along the same, never ending, 2-mile long flat-out section of circuit, toward the village of Salles, that this was what these bikes were made for and were extremely good at! I began to imagine Bob Anderson doing his stuff at the highest level, at similar tracks all over Europe and the TT, back in the fifties! I then also realised that it was almost exactly 50 years to the weekend that Bob Anderson had achieved his first notable success on Gert, a close and hard fought second place to “The Maestro”Geoff Duke, on the “works” Reynold Norton special, at the Swedish G.P., held at the ultra-fast Hedamora road circuit in the third week in July 1958. Duke eventually getting the result after being caught and passed by Bob Anderson, only for Bob to be baulked by a back-marker on the run to the flag! If only! However, some consolation went to Bob with the fastest lap of **98.5mph!** Some chap called Hailwood finished way back, in third place!

Next outing for the new combination, was the Italian G.P. at Monza in September. The result of the race was something of a foregone conclusion, with two works MV's being ridden by Surtees and Hartle, so the real race for most of the entry was for third place. Once again, Bob Anderson battled it out with Geoff Duke on the "works" Reynold Norton, swapping places with Duke for the whole race, before Duke snatched 3rd place on the last bend, the famous Parabolica!

In 1958, Bob Anderson, riding Gert, finished an impressive 5th in the 350cc World Championship. What followed next, over the seasons of 1959 and 1960, can only be described as incredible for a privateer!

The withdrawal of the Italian teams at the end of 1957, except for M.V. Agusta, had "levelled the playing field" with few "works" rides available. Now, having left the Geoff Monty team, and as a solitary privateer, Bob Anderson mixed it with the best of the era on his Nortons. Geoff Duke, John Surtees, Bob McIntyre, Alistair King, Derek Minter, John Hartle, Bob Brown, Terry Shephard, Mike Hailwood et al.

During 1959, apart from many short-circuit successes at venues from Scarborough to Silverstone, Bob Anderson also contested the TT and selected G.P.'s. Although he had a 2nd place in the new Formula GP350 TT (a race of only three laps and with no four cylinder works bikes allowed), behind Alistair King and ahead of Mike Hailwood, his main achievement of the 1959 TT was a creditable 5th place in the open 350 TT, again narrowly beaten by his nemesis Geoff Duke on the lightweight Reynold Norton. The first three home being Surtees and Hartle on MV's, and Alistair King on a "Pott's" Norton. Not bad for the humble privateer on a "production bike"?

1960 brought more success at the highest level for Bob Anderson, and 5th again in the World championships, but a fall in a pre-season 350cc event in South Africa resulted in a back injury which had a lasting effect on him. With this in mind, and with the departure to car racing by John Surtees, 1960 was to be Bob Anderson's last season in motorcycle racing. In 1961 Gert was sold and a career in car racing beckoned for Bob, initially in Formula Ford and then in F1, where he ran his own team. Tragically, Bob Anderson lost his life at Silverstone in August 1967, whilst practising in his F1 car. What happened to Gert between 1961 and 1971 is a mystery I am still trying to solve!

And what of our results for "Team Morpeth Mafia" at Chimay? Well, after a split cylinder barrel had sidelined the 560cc Dominator in the Unlimited class, "Gert" was elevated from being back-up bike to front runner and an unplanned entry in the prestigious Lansdowne Cup race was arranged to complement the 350cc "Authentiques" races already entered. The results? Two class wins in the "Authentiques" class giving an overall win and 3rd place in the 350cc "Lansdowne Trophy" race against stiff opposition. Also eighth place overall in the 350cc Group one class.

As good as Bob Anderson's efforts all those years ago? No, not really, but let's just consider that at my pace, Gert is now enjoying a gentle retirement, for a Manx Norton!

R Anderson in action, 1958



Some other events that may be of interest (Main Club and other), either classic bikes events or just an outing/ride (Source, Dave Wardle) :
(for branch events – see pages 2 and 3)

Scottish Bike Show Weekend 14th of March. Bus for day trip from Seaton Sluice, on the Saturday. £10. Again talk to Dave Wardle. 01670 820424

Sun April 5th **NOC main club AGM**, at Gaydon heritage motor museum, near Banbury.

Stafford Show. Another bus. 25th April (Sat.). Talk to Dave about this too.

Model Engineering show, Harrogate. 8-10 May County showground. Dave could share petrol.

Barnard Castle Steam Fair 23-24 May – incl Classic bike display and autojumble

Thirstone classic car show – classic bikes also on display. Weekend of Wooler camp. Could use it as a destination for a ride out from the camp. (or go home via the show? – its not too far, is it -- ?)

Jimmie Guthrie Memorial Run 13th June – Denholm

Rothbury Steam Show, 14th June – also has classic bikes. Combine with the Jimmie Guthrie run?

Donnington Park Revival and Norton Day: 19-21Jun. (See Jan-Feb Roadholder, page 11) Clive Taylor Mark 2 is going. If not away boating, so will your tappity scribe, for at least Norton Day on the Sunday. Dave and/or Jim may drop in, combining the event with the Banbury Run the same weekend. Any more? Support your main club??

Rothbury Music Fest – 11th July (Dave, I did not know you were a musician!)

BMF Show, Kelso 12th July

Otterburn Show (Good reports about this one!) – 19th July

Pickering Steam show, 31st July

Glanton Show, Wooler, Aug 9th.

It has been mentioned that “**Bikewise**” (16h Aug) have an interest in stands demonstrating makes of classic bikes. Something to discuss at the AGM? (have I got this date right?)

Brunton Airfield show - 18th Oct?

Richard will also be out racing, if anyone wants to check up on his claims/give him support, I'll try to get the dates for the post-AGM newsletter.

- this will probably get updated - - - - -

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