

Northumbria Branch Newsletter July 2020

Mid-season Newsletter - This follows 8 “Viruscasts”

Before anything else, an important point:

At the last count, 21 members are listed for newsletters by post and 25 for newsletters by email.

Your scribe would much prefer taking the trouble to print and post **IF, OTHERWISE**, an emailed newsletter may, for example, disappear below the bottom of the computer screen and not be read. **BUT AT THE SAME TIME**, if you are on the “by post” list and email is OK with you, please let me know by email (jnoandlizpowell@yahoo.co.uk), copying Alan (a_m_millar@hotmail.com). Email saves cash and time.

Viruscasts 1-8 went out by email only during the lock-down. If you did not have email, I am afraid you did not get them. The budget does not stretch to printing and posting so many multi-page documents. .If you did not get the emailed viruscasts and would like to see them (many articles from members), give me an email address of someone who can receive them for you and I'll e-mail the lot.

However, as we now have returned to club nights at the pub, things are now normal enough to go back to the old newsletter frequency. So here's the usual mid-season newsletter.

First club night!!

It takes something as small as a virus to get us together in such numbers! A huge gathering of Northumbria Nortoneers, safely out of doors, at the pub for the July met – the first since Covid started. There were a couple more inside, too.



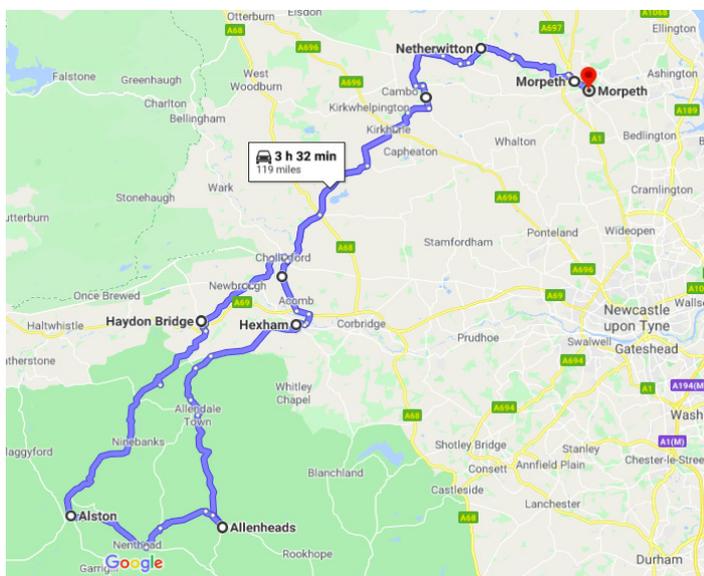
Derek Turnbull leads 2 rides! – and, by pirating an email sent out by Derek to the riders, here’s a report on the first!

You're never too old to learn. 3 x classic bikes. 1 x future classic bike. 4 x classic riders - Richard Johnston, Clive Taylor, Bob Tym and Derek Turnbull. Proceeding at a pace befitting gentlemen of our age, brisk but rarely illegal. Thigs I've learned:

1. *The road from Morpeth to Hexham via Kirkharle is known as the Corn Road;*
2. *One of the group (who shall remain nameless) has a more active bladder than me;*
3. *The Italian for unplanned maintenance is manutenzione non pianificata;*
4. *There is no charging indicator (ammeter or red light) on a Laverda;*
5. *Laverdas stop when the battery is flat;*
6. *Laverda dynamos need to be polarised after a long period of inactivity or a battery change. Doh!!;*
7. *Bob Tym is a wonderful man, who is prepared to swap his good battery for a mate's flat battery to get him home.*

All in all, an excellent afternoon out. Thanks guys! – Derek

Guess whose Laverda it was! - and here’s the map including the Corn road -



The second ride became a festival of deviations, each deviation getting longer than the last. Which led to 5 bikes wandering even further and further into the Scottish Borders, the miles increasing, and the hour getting later. But a lovely afternoon. Having participated in this ride I can report that Derek leads without exceeding the 60 mph speed limit (except possibly for the odd minute by accident), but nor does he ever drop below the 60 mph speed limit no matter how steep the road or winding the bends!

- AND, since contributions have kept coming in for the viruscasts (keep them coming!), I have no less than 3 more contributions from members.

The first is this delightful little tale from Bob -

The Good Samaritan of the A59.

In January 1970 I was sent by BP to South Shields College for an OND course.

I'd paid off my first ship in November 1969 and with £90 in my pocket, one of the first things I did when I got home was to buy another motorbike. On the recommendation of a friend I traded my knackered Honda C50 in for a 1955 Norton ES2 which was on offer for £30! At the time a 15 year old bike seems ancient but now with a 45 year old Commando and a 60 year old Triton, my perspective is different!

I messed around with the ES2 over December and I rewired it (with old household flex) on Boxing day after I realised the horn sounded every time I rode over a bump with a passenger, but otherwise I didn't do much to it.

When the time came to go to South Shields, fearing bad weather, I took the bike up on the train which you could do in those days.

We had a half term in February and I decided to ride home to Northwich, having become more familiar with the bike. I planned to go down the A1 then take the A59 across the Pennines and then continue south on the M6.

The first part of the journey went well. I was cruising on the A1 at 55 to 60. In those days there were plenty of roundabouts on the A1 to break up the monotony! It was still light when I passed Harrogate. I rode on but then disaster struck. My chain broke and was lying on the road. I recovered the chain but as a callow youth of 18 I didn't have a spring link.

I found a phone box and rang my parents to say I'd broken down. They asked where I was. The phone number was Blubberhouses xxx. Naturally I've never forgotten the place!

I started to push the bike, but it's pretty hilly round there.

Eventually a bloke stopped in a Morris Minor. He had a few things in his car but no spring links. With some wire cutters he attacked a barbed wire fence and produced some wire from which we fashioned a temporary link for the chain. He said he would follow me but to take it very gently. The temporary link lasted about 5 miles until it broke going up a hill. Unfortunately the chain was now all bunched up around the gearbox sprocket and we couldn't get it out. We then tried towing the bike with his car. This was ok but very slow. Also it was by now dark and the lights on the bike were not great without the dynamo contributing.

Eventually we concluded this wasn't the best way and the Morris Minor owner proposed that we load the ES2 onto the back of his car!

He was clearly quite resourceful. He searched around at the side of the road and found two sturdy fence posts. At the bottom of a Morris Minor boot is a sturdy shelf under which the spare wheel is stowed horizontally. We pushed the fence post in, on at each side of the spare wheel and then proceeded to lift the bike on to them across the back of the car and lashed it in place with the rope we'd used for towing. We then set off along the A59 stopping occasionally to check the lashings and listening to grinding and rubbing noises from below the car.

At something like 0400 we arrived at his house. We wheeled the ES2 into his garage and he gave me a spring link, some screwdrivers and pliers and left me to extract my chain from the gearbox sprocket. There were a couple of bikes in his garage. One might have been a Vincent, but I don't really remember.

After fitting the new spring link (with the spring the right way round, as instructed) I went in to wash my hands, at which point I found that he'd got his wife up to cook me a wonderful breakfast!

He advised me that I should always carry a spare spring link.

I thanked them for all their help and, following the directions I was given, found my way to the M6 and arrived home about 0700. It had been a long night.

To my regret I never knew the name of my Good Samaritan or his wife and I'm not even sure where his house was. However I'll never forget the kindness I was shown or the need to always carry a spare spring link.

And also a nice little story from the other Simon (he with the side car)

Memorable Motorcycles, Memorable Places

The area where I live is dotted by special places, most of which are unforgettable. They make me shudder as I pass. They're all places where an old bike of mine has misbehaved. At least these old clunkers are sensible and tend to sulk close to home.

There's a steep hill beside Swarland, which I crawled up on a single-cylinder machine that had just suffered a piston rub. It left an impressive smokescreen in its wake, just like a battleship might do. With fully open throttle, the machine climbed the severe gradient at about 10mph, with me urging it on and got me home. Once parked up in the garage, the bike's oil tank let out a subdued bang, as the metal cooled and contracted, as if to say, "Over-and-out".

Near Powburn, there's a long hill, where I bump started a side-valve single, after its magneto began to play up. After leaving it for an hour to cool down, the wretched thing still refused to be kick started. In desperation, I pushed it to the edge of a downhill stretch and jumped on board. The 600cc powerplant repeatedly refused to start, despite several attempts, as we rapidly lost height. It felt like being a pilot before an air crash. On the final attempt, the engine fired up – Hallelujah! A swift journey home ensued.

I must admit that none of these episodes has featured a Norton product, but one spot is seared into my little head because I was towed home from there (the shame of it) by a Norton 19S. This noble 600cc single managed to haul its own sidecar,

together with my BSA B31, for about two miles, all uphill. The final few hundred yards involved passing many of my neighbours. I tried to look quite nonchalant, which is surprisingly easy within a full-face helmet. I think I pulled it off. Most of them don't quite understand motorcycles, particularly old 'uns. The small number of observers probably thought it was all quite normal...

It turned out that a new valve had stuck in its guide. As you can see, the repairs were carried out organically.



(600 cc powerplant?? Do I detect a good Samaritan called Clive? - J)

And:::----- (There is a wealth of material to follow), Sean has sent me what amounts to a book, but do not read any of it before going to bed because it will give you nightmares! He has the history of many decades of disasters with his Commando, and, amazingly, even has the pics from so far back, to go with it. So I am going to make it into a serial (yes, a serial, not a cerial, like Weetabix). Starting with – the first thrilling episode -

An almost new Commando

For those fans of The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy, this is of course the answer to the ultimate question of Life, The Universe and Everything. After 42 years of ownership my Norton isn't the ultimate answer to anything but it does seem like the whole saga started eon's ago.

It has proven to be a merry dance through various mechanical disasters and perhaps in these dark times some of you may enjoy a little schadenfreude to perhaps raise the spirits.

My 42 years of teething troubles began just before my 18th Birthday when a 750cc Commando was advertised for £450 in nearby Darlington. I'd just passed my test on a Honda CJ250T and after 12 months trouble free ownership I wanted a "real" bike to get me to University in the Autumn. Seemed a "No Brainer" - sell Honda, buy a Commando for not a lot more. Graduating to a British Bike asap was all part of the plan - and I'd decided it would be a Norton long ago - Far better looking than the Honda, cheap spares, you could fix it yourself...I had a myriad of good reasons. Partially reinforced by a friend's older brother who "commuted" on his Interstate from RAF Bruggen in Germany to Teeside whenever he was on leave to see his girlfriend. The fact that there seemed to be a saga of running repairs carried out when he did make it home was glossed over. We kept him in cigarettes and passed the spanners - whilst cylinder heads were removed etc., then got in the way just long enough for the keys to be handed over whilst acquaintances were renewed with said girlfriend and we disappeared over the horizon. The bike was quick, did Germany and back and provided a big boys Meccano experience. -what more could you want?

So I hotfooted it off to Darlington: this was the one - didn't look at any others and frankly let my heart rule my rather naive head, but at 17 years of age who isn't naive? The bike, a 1973 750 with supposedly 8K miles on it, was in Roadster format - Engine/Frame/Gearbox numbers all matched, being one of the last of the 750's had the post Combat (disaster) improvements - stiffer crankcases, metal clutch - and a "Racing Head"and its at this point that the warning signs should have been observed: It started but was difficult...high compression on account of that "racing head" no doubt - it seemed to be running partially on 1 cylinder but the lad selling it claimed he wasn't very technical but his mate reckoned it was "electrical". Irrespective, we had a Haynes manual, we could sort that!. A quick ride on it resulted in fluid on the front disc - so leaking calliper - a seal kit would sort that. Gears are OK, suspension worked, brakes sort of did - so we bought it. There was no MOT - so it came home in the back of a van.

Then the fun really started. The "Electrical" issue - wasn't - because after much playing around, the lack of sparks seemed to be heavily related to the amount of oil drowning one of the plugs. So off with the head - we were certainly getting value for money from our Haynes. Like our young seller said there were all the signs of a racing pedigree - phosphor bronze guides,

nice shiny ports - or at least once you removed the oil - however the large and rather deep scores (channels is more accurate) down one of the bores illustrated one source of the oil supply. Re-assembled after serious mechanical failure and passed off as an electrical fault. Passing the head onto those that knew better also told us that it had been skimmed at an angle for this and other reasons was unserviceable - probably the real reason it wasn't "racing" anymore. The barrels had half a fin missing - just where some idiot would have put the tyre lever instead of unscrewing the underside head nuts. Given the state of the above we thought it prudent to have a look at the bottom half of the engine. Haynes was put to use again, and I learned that apparently the big end bearings were supposed to be white in colour not Copper. Crank re-grind and new Big Ends then.

Moving onto the front forks revealed that the rubber gaiters over the sanctions were secured by jubilee clips whose screw heads were partially destroyed such that removal wasn't possible without an impact driver. Once shifted we were rewarded with large quantities of fork oil dribbling onto discs/floor. The fork stanchions had large sections of chrome missing - real quality finishing for a 6 year old bike. The high compression level had obviously taken its toll on the kick-start splines as the main KS shaft and KS lever had been drilled and pinned in place. A brilliant engineering solution as it didn't take my 9 stone long to break the KS shaft in 2. The gearbox shell had an interesting patch of epoxy resin on the rear section - but it worked - so leave it alone was the verdict for now.

The swinging arm bearing was full of grease - rather than oil - but at that point ignorance was bliss.

The air filter had been junked. The ignition switch moved into the headlamp shell - no doubt by the lads mate, which of course isn't big enough and only resulted in consumption of 15A fuses. Rear tail light by Suzuki - god knows why, and one of the exhausts fell into 2 pieces not long after.

So all in all its a complete dog - The previous owner, whose name (N.A.E) and address I can still recite verbatim, got blamed for more than Trotsky, but to some degree the general standard of engineering and finishing on a 6 year old bike was frankly rubbish.

So a summer of spending and fixing followed - a brand new £120 head from Graeme Little Sunderland (Bargain - I though - see later), crank regrind, re-bore and pistons, Boyer Branson - and eventually its a runner.

Roadster Tank is swapped for a 2nd Hand LR Fastback and it emerges as below, a functional, but messy steed, no more money left for aesthetics.



Above early 1980's - shim gauge evaluation - more was achieved by varying the torque applied to the main cradle bolts as the previous moron (see what I mean) had over tightened these thus slightly bending the frame lugs. The bike now went OK - dragged me up and down from Berkshire at a steady 80 mph but suffered from frequent fettling woes of slipping clutch, indifferent brakes and waltzing high speed handling - oh and things broke - even if they were cheap. The one thing it wasn't, was particularly fast - it got off the blocks OK - when the clutch wasn't slipping - it even wheeled once (wife on the back was a factor) - but ran out of steam at about 95mph - a long way short of the expected 115 mph. Thus began an obsession....with why?

We soldiered on for a few more years before housing availability in the Southern wastelands prevented me from having anywhere to safely keep it - so it was deposited back in North east partially dismantled and sitting in tea chests.

1987 and I come to my senses and return to the North East - and the bike. A proper rebuild proceeds - frame stripped and stove enamelled. Swinging arm spindle now requires a press to remove it from the cradle owing to years of grease instead of SAE 140 - its knackered of course and so is the cradle.

LR Fastback Tank gets a proper seat and tail fairing. I address the braking weakness by replacing the front calliper with the AP Locked version and disc with a larger fully floating RGM item. It now looks good, runs OK, stops better (but isn't a revelation) - but still is missing on top speed.

(Well now, it looks like Sean may have a functioning Commando?? – but surely he was not trying to exceed the UK speed limits? The scribe can only conclude that he took the Commando to the German autobahn for his speed tests. There is more to follow - do not miss the next thrilling episode).

Events in August and September??

Kamtrek??? Other events?? I am the Kamtrekker still, for an event already delayed from late 2019. **IF** we hold the event this year, it will be end Sept/Early Oct. I'm happy to wait to see how the land lies before a decision is made. But Kamtrek is not just for NOC members, and it does involve gatherings for a meal and, at the end, another coffee/café stop to check the clues and see who won. It may not be possible to hold these out of doors. I see Kamtrek as a social gathering as well as a bike event, and am not sure whether we should be sponsoring what could be a fairly big gathering. Waiting to see.

A debate: motorcycle noise.

Particularly in Germany, but possibly elsewhere, there could be action limiting motorcycling on certain days and at certain times. It seems the public has heard a lot of silence during Covid, and rather likes it. And there are a lot of noisy bikes around. Some illegally so. Because there are also standards re. noise levels from vehicles. It would be of interest to see what members think about this situation. My own experience –

I sold my dommi 88 in 1967 when I went to the USA. I bought a similar one in 1997-8. The original Dommi was very quiet indeed – made a kind of distinguished “FR-R-R-OOPLE” noise. But you could not sell silencers, now, like the ones fitted then. They were full of asbestos!

The 1997-8 replacement bike was deafening. I got some ancient silencers from a NOC member (another design, without asbestos), and gave away those fitted to the bike. The “new” ones were lots quieter, but, inevitably, rusted through quite soon. I then bought a pair from Armours. They were incredibly raucous. Phoning round suppliers produced lots of things like “welds beautifully polished away” and “excellent chrome”, but no info about noise (except Les Emery who said not to buy his as they were noisy and that is what the customers wanted). There was quite a lot about customers wanting an “original sound”. Well, I wanted an original, quiet, sound. Apart from liking that wonderful feeling of quiet flight (can also be achieved with good ear plugs), I did not think noise was considerate to horse riders or inhabitants of towns and villages through which one may ride in the wee small hours.

I sawed up the rusted silencers to study the insides, and found an outfit to make a copy. (I have the drawing). Maybe the metal was thin, or the chrome was bad., so they in turn rusted out in due course. The same outfit sold me with another pair, which looked different even though they claimed they were the same inside. Quiet? – well, less loud than some. But they have not rusted away. That is where I am now, on Dommi silencers. I think the supplier has now disappeared. So, anyhow, I like quiet, as you see.

There are questions here: if the public really cannot take the noise -

- Should bikes be banned at certain times?

- Or, should standards be enforced so as only to ban noisy ones? – Or not to ban at all?

- Even so, is it technically possible to make silencers for classic bikes that may meet the standard?
- And which standard? The only standard around now is the EU standard. UK will be free to change this. Tougher? Less tough? If less tough, will bikes meeting the UK standard then be allowed into the EU?
- Or let sleeping dogs lie?

Your thoughts, please -----

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