

My Motorcycling Days Part 10 by Charlie Brown 15 January 1980

My rally appetite was whetted by now. With a long-legged machine and a keen mate. We decided to do the coming Alpine Rally. This time Ricky, with his new 250cc B S.A wanted to join John and me. On the morning of our departure the Thruxton just would not fire. I discovered quite a bit of oil on the slip ring of the magneto, after checking all the possibilities. An oil seal had probably gone, putting the sparks department out of action. It would take far too long to correct the fault so I piled all my gear into my four month old M.G Midget, determined to get to the Snowy slopes, even if I didn't qualify for a badge.

Cheating like this had its advantages: I took most of John and Ricky's gear as we11. We set off through Kangaroo Valley, over the mountain and via Goulburn and Tumut to Yarrangobilly. The 1971 Rally weather was particularly kind so we made it without incident. That night, however, we literally froze, the temperature plummeted to 17 degrees F. i.e. 15 below freezing! In the morning everything in sight was covered with a thick frost and needless to say we made tracks for the warmer coast as soon as we got our badges and started our engines. That was, and probably will be, the only Alpine Rally I have attended. It was far colder than the Dragon Rallies of North Wales; or else my blood had thinned considerably.

On my return the Velo was soon running again with a cleaned magneto and new oil seal, I spent ages experimenting with an oil filter on the big Amal G.P. I didn't think, it right that I should have to change piston rings every 10,000 miles After initial 8-stroking and puffing of thick black smoke I finally got it running reasonably well but it meant getting various main jets and needles at exorbitant prices. With the approach of the 1972 Southern Cross Rally I entered again. Warwick had bought a brand new 450 Honda and was keen to give it a long run and run it in too. My bike was thoroughly checked and I fitted new chains.

We set off via the Hume and Sturt Highways to make Hay that night. I soon found that my air cleaner mods were not very successful as a fuel consumption check showed. Besides, the performance was no better than the 450 Honda. We camped under the bridge going into town and even went swimming (nude) in the river after dark. The next day we made good progress in ideal weather. About 100 miles from Adelaide my primary chain started riding over the clutch sprocket while climbing a hill, meaning an enforced stop to rectify the problem. We arrived late afternoon to check into the Rally and discovered that a load of bush cowboys from Adelaide had arrived on their trail-bikes and bought our ordered and prepaid badges. This was very disappointing as it was Warwick's first bike rally and despite assurances that some would be posted to us nothing ever arrived. That was the last rally to be organised by the Southern Cross Club.

In the search for a new Velo clutch sprocket, which I thought I needed, we were guided to Pud Freeman's place. Was he ever enthusiastic about seeing a Thruxton in very original condition. One of the first things he did was offer me his Jawa and a spare engine for it in a straight swap. Was I meeting someone more cunning than I? He showed me his collection of a brace of personally restored Velos and several others littering his yard and sheds and confessed that he would love to add a Thruxton to his collection, especially one of the last with a G.P. carb and competition magneto.

Showing me those two beautifully restored bikes only served to convince me to get mine home, stripped down and work it together again into a valuable masterpiece. The fact that he couldn't have my bike didn't deter Pud from helping me and soon I was ready for the return ride.

This time we intended going via the Princes, Dukes and Western Highways, seeing Ballarat Barbara on the way. We spent the first night sleeping under the showground stands at Ballan and next day skirted Melbourne. While approaching Seymour I noticed that my bike was reluctant to right itself after banking on a bend. I peered at my front wheel and was alarmed by the near flat state of the tyre. We were in Seymour already and the traffic slowed down. No sooner had I touched my front brake than I went vaulting over the handlebars. Would you believe that this was less than fifty yards from the police station and no-one paid the slightest attention,

We soon fixed the puncture at the convenient service station right where I upended and continued our journey with a smashed headlamp, badly dented shell and exhaust pipe. When filling up at 'The Dog on the Tuckerbox', I noticed my bike looking a lot lower than Warwick's. My forks were stuck at full compression and no amount of yanking on the handlebars while holding down the front wheel would free them. I then remembered hitting rail tracks raised well above the road surface at over 70 mph some way back. I carried on with a rigid front end.

We decided to go via Canberra, Queanbeyan and Batemans Bay and soon after Queanbeyan my bike went into a slow wobble. Drawing from previous experience I gingerly brought it to a stop. A rear wheel puncture this time! This time the repair was more tedious as we had no inflation and only horses in paddocks for company. Warwick had to ride to nearby Bungendore to put air in the repaired tyre and we spent the night in a grassy ditch as I had no lights.

The next day we got to Nowra without incident except for a king-size stomach-ache, the result of riding with a rigid front end. No sooner back then my remaining rego, was cashed in and the job of restoring began. The front end was dismantled for repair but work was extremely slow and I could not decompress the fork springs.

Lack of two wheels was getting to me so while looking through Noel Ship's bike shop in Wollongong I fell in love with a little Suzuki 50cc Trail Hopper and bought it. It had a willing motor, automatic clutch with 3 speeds and was registerable. I even used it to ride to work, it was great for wheelies and in not too high bush.

I moved to Sydney and a new job, taking my Suzuki with me. In the first couple of rides I noticed the double-decker bus's wheels were taller than my head so realising I was at extreme risk I soon went looking for a decent 250. I found what I wanted in Frasers, a Metralla with full fairing. I got excellent trade-in for the near-new Suzuki and was soon on a new Metralla.