

## MY MOTORCYCLING DAYS. EPISODE 3 By Charlie Brown (Oct 1978)

By now my 350 'Boy Racer' was getting a little bit stale. In the search for more excitement, I lit on the idea of utilizing the sidecar of the VB outfit I still owned. I set about chopping down a perfectly good Watsonian or was it Canterbury single seater body (makes me cry to think of it now), to end up with a flat platform headed with a plywood/alloy nose complete with a little perspex screen. I fitted this new creation to the hot looking 350 and presto, I had a pseudo-kneeler outfit. Now to get somebody to ride in it! Eddie didn't mind so we set about swinging (not that type) about the roads of Barking and Dagenham, Eddie learnt much later that it was a mistake to ever ride with me.

One Bank Holiday weekend Eddie's aunt said we could use her caravan at a beach resort some 80 miles away, I can't remember the name now. We bolted a seat to the platform, collected my young brother, strapped all our luggage to the area behind the sidecar seat and set off. The old Ariel was singing once it managed to get us moving and that meant at about 55 to 60 mph. About 10 miles from our destination we just managed to strain our way to the top of this hill when the motor went unusually quiet and we lacked urge. I took advantage of the hilltop to cruise down before attempting a restart. There were plenty of sparks and fuel but for reasons then unknown the motor would not go. We decided to push and went about 2 miles before we got to a garage, closed of course. We parked the bike and decided to walk and bus it to the caravan park. We made it around midnight and were glad to tumble into bed.

The next day, Sunday, George and Eddie spent the day at the beach while I decided to foot and bus it back to the bike. My compulsory lessons in mechanics and diagnosis were just beginning. I removed the head and barrel (already, one step more than the YB) and saw the neatly melted hole in one corner of the piston. All I could do was loosely reassemble the motor and wait till Tuesday when I might be able to buy a piston.

I returned to the caravan and decided to make the best of my weekend using 'shanks' mare. George and Eddie caught the train for London on the Monday while I took a 'sickie' on the Tuesday, fixing the bike and riding back.

As luck would have it the man from the garage where I had parked the bike directed me to another garage where they used to sell motor bikes and what's more the proprietor dug into his old stock and came up with a 350 Ariel NH standard piston complete with rings; price, 30 bob. I also bought a top end gasket set for 5 shillings and received plenty of advice on fitting and running in.

I made a trouble-free return home which said much for my spanner work. My lessons were learnt from much listening and discussion with older, more experienced motorcyclists. The-melted piston was the result of solo gearing, overloading and a straight-through muffler without the compensation of a richer mixture. With new-found knowledge I swiftly unhitched the sidecar.

About this time the super-fast 1964 Honda of Brians (mentioned in the last episode) had given up the ghost (said much for Japanese engineering then), and he was after another fast bike. He offered me £25 which I accepted as I had just purchased a 1951 Mark 1 Square Four with sidecar for £15 as it had the head gasket blown on one cylinder. With my experience of blown head gaskets I thought it would be a piece of cake.

The furthest I rode that Squariel was three miles to the lock-up garage .I was renting, I did not realise what a headache I had bought. The head did .not come off like the VB. I had to modify a socket and open ended spanner in order to undo the 24 head bolts and rocker cover nuts which were between the fins. Do you think I could buy a Mark 1 head gasket anywhere? I would have had more .luck if I had sent to Australia for one. Mark2 gaskets were plentiful but not the Mark 1 so I tried to use a Mark 2 without success. In frustration I dismantled the whole lot and stored the pieces in my mate's cellar. (If you are going to England and are in the market for Mark 1 bits, the address is No. 30, George St., Forest Gate, London, E7, ask to look in the cellar.)

So ended my mostly enjoyable, often frustrating days with the great Arie I marque. I had a brief flutter with a £2-10, 1948 BSA C11 250 cc with girder forks and coil ignition. I was unlucky with parts and electrical problems so I sent the dismantled machine to join its great-cousin in the cellar in George St.

I heard of a 1960 500cc Triton going for £25 in Barking. I looked the bike over. The engine was an all-alloy, single carburettor, square barrelled 500 cc Triumph twin of around 1955 vintage housed in a 1960 wide-line featherbed frame with long Road holder forks. The special appeared 'homebuilt' but ran well and looked O.K. I test rode the machine and was thrilled with 'Triumph Power' and with the luxury of swinging arm suspension, however it behaved peculiarly on right hand bends, not wanting to lean over. Left handers were O.K. I deferred my decision to buy because of this but by nightfall my lack of a motorcycle got the better of me and I returned with my £25.

The bike had no Rego so I decided to collect at night. My route took me past the Westbury Pub on the way to Forest Gate where I now lived. There was a sharp right hand bend at the pub and I was approaching at 50 mph I had made this bend at 45 on the NH several times so I felt that 50 with a featherbed frame would be no problem. When I tried to crank the Triton over it would not go and it was too late to brake. My quick thinking decided me to swerve left, jump the kerb and cut into the little lane on the left.

Alas, it was not to be as the kerb deflected me straight into a lamp-post. I was, catapulted off, landing on all fours like a monkey. A couple across the road ran to my aid but I was by the bike before they got to me. I quickly assessed the situation (no coppers in sight) and enlisted the couple's aid in dragging the bike into the lane. The tank was leaking from the seams and the forks were bent right back, almost touching

the frame. The front wheel was battered of course. I had skinned knuckles and was more shaken from the fact that I could have been had by the coppers than the fact that I could have hurt myself.

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