

MY MOTOR CYCLING DAYS PART 5 By Charlie Brown (Mar 1979)

(In the last episode Charlie had woken up in an ambulance on the way to hospital- without the slightest idea of what happened.....)

Only now do I realise why I was treated the way I was. With concussion, one is placed under observation in case of shock and accompanying complications. When wheeled to my bed the nurse pulled the-curtain's around us and supplied a pair of pyjamas but did not leave me alone to -change. I asked no questions but got down to it when she ordered "Change.." My truckies leather waistcoat came off first, then a leather jacket, two woolly jumpers, two warm shirts and a long sleeved 'Long John' type singlet. The nurses eyes were raised and her eyes agog so I had to explain as I also had a similar amount of clothing on-the bottom half of me. We obviously kept the cold out by not washing-or changing. I can't remember if we even brushed our teeth. (I find it hard to believe all this now). It had a beneficial side effect in the way of crash protection.

From my mates I learnt that we had just negotiated a roundabout and were all accelerating away, (I was in the middle of the group), when the left side sidecar chassis member broke, ahead of the sidecar wheel. The frame dug into the road, catapulting me off and I landed like a high diver- but on my head. My helmet was cracked right through but not split apart. The combination cartwheeled about three times and you can imagine Eddie's dilemma. The following riders had a grandstand view and said that Eddie was popping in and out of the side-car as it over-ended. Fortunately he was not seriously hurt, just bruised and severely shaken till he was whiter than white and completely speechless for several minutes.

Getting back to the hospital, I was X-rayed from head to toe which showed the reason for the ache at the base of my neck. I had a sprained collarbone and was very lucky not to have a broken neck. All this time the nurse kept her beady eye on me and there was just no way I could make a speedy dash to the toilet so I just had to let her know what I wanted. She asked if it was to be a penny one. I didn't care what it cost so I said yes. She pulled the curtains round and stayed but when I attempted to make water into the pan she said ,"Oh! You only want a bottle. You've never been in hospital before, have you?" I said no, but also learnt about pans and bottles.

I never asked for a pan or bottle again, instead I observed and noted the length of time various nurses left the ward then made a speedy dash for the toilet and returned before they did. I asked to take a bath and was quite bemused by the wheelchair procedure and total help and observation throughout. Little did they know about my toilet dashes. I guess each thought I went in the other nurses shift, thanks to the other patients who did not give me away. They probably thought I liked running about.

At the doctors' round on the fifth day the Ward M.O. decided I should be supplied with a hospital dressing gown and be allowed ward privileges, including use of the TV room, little did he know!! I knew I would be discharged soon so I kept pumping questions at the sociable nurses as to where my wrecked bike was located and the extent of the damage. Needless to say they soon realised that I would work on the machine and ride it back-to London on my discharge. I was to be discharged on the seventh day...but the rotten spoilsports kept me there till visiting hours. They asked a burly visitor if he could be so kind as to show me where my bike was then put me on the train to London.

My mates had pushed and carried the outfit to an old disused barn only a little way from the main road. The machine wasn't badly damaged apart from a smashed fairing and useless sidecar and chassis. I had no tools, so disconnecting the plot and riding solo. was out of the question. I was duly escorted onto the train, my mind figuring out ways and means of retrieving the bike.

I had to rely on Shanks' Mare once again. My first visit was to Eddie's mum. Was she mad at me, really abusive. Eddie had arrived home on the pillion of one of the other bikes and his shakes and whiteness may have been accentuated. He could not go to work for a couple of days and I guess his colour took as long to return. Seems he was suffering both his shock and mine that I should have had. Unfortunately it also spelt the end of his motor cycling days.

I next teed up a friend who had nearly run in his brand new 50cc Norton Atlas (remember them?) and was itching for a nice long run. We set out the following weekend armed with tools and a trusty persuader (.hammer to you). We fairly flew down the M1 motorway-doing nearly the ton and soon reached Brownhills where the Gold Flash was. The attached sidecar and chassis was soon removed and discarded. I had not been riding a mile when the rear wheel locked solid as we slowed down for yet another roundabout. Inspection revealed a shed rear chain and mangled brake plate locking-arm. Evidently my inexperience and inattention was the reason I forgot to tighten the brake locking plate and as I slowed down using the rear brake the bolt sheared allowing the arm to spin and become mangled, also breaking the chain in two places. Amidst curses and sweat (yes, in midwinter) we improvised by removing the brake operating mechanism altogether (for safety if you like to call it that) and somehow riveted the chain together. (Good job we took along the persuader). Now there was no more play available for what was left of the chain and no rear braking. We set off for home, silently thankful that there was only limited movement of the rear wheel-from the old-plunger suspension and ever mindful that I only had a front brake.

I reached home without any further incident and when I had a few bob to spare I put the Gold Flash right and sold it. George didn't take the money back from me so I bought-an old Excelsior 98cc to mobilise myself in the fashion I had become accustomed to. It had no rear suspension, undampened spring forks (a-la-Bantam)

and a two stroke Villiers motor with two speeds on a wrist change. I discovered it would only go for about four miles before it ran out of sparks. All I had to do was allow it to cool and we could set off again. I also achieved 42 mph. downhill and flat out! All this time I was silently working on my Tiger 100 Superbike..... To be continued.....