

MY MOTORCYCLING DAYS PART 8 - DOWN UNDER.

By Charlie Brown (Sep 1979).

My long flight from London ended in Sydney on the morning of May 13th, 1968. The city looked beautiful from the air but the long drive to Nowra and my parent's home revealed a sad lack of motor cycles on the road. I began to wonder whether I'd need the ACU approved 'Pudding Basin' I'd bought only a short time before leaving and carefully stored in one of the two boxes I arranged to be shipped here.

I started work as a maintenance fitter in the local paper mill and motor cycling took a back seat for a while. That is, until the day a new fitter's mate joined the crew. I forget his name but he owned a late model Triumph Bonneville. The only BIKE among the commuter machinery there. I soon made his acquaintance and when he moaned about his bike running rough I swiftly offered my services.

I was amazed at how grossly out of tune it was, so I went through the whole thing, setting tappets, points, retiming, plugs and carburettors. He was so pleased with the result, saying that it had not run so well when new. I declined the money offer of 'stacks' of midnight (a late closer for the benefit of shift workers) but we left with a dozen bottles which lasted until 2:30 am. Then I had a little incident with the local constabulary, thank God that those breathalysers hadn't been invented.

Besides my shock initiation to Australian beer my appetite for another bike had been whetted. From information received I visited a small farm at Shoalhaven Heads where a young-chap was reputed to have a recently reconditioned Velocette; one make I had always yearned for after seeing one MSS Special fly, eating Tiger 100's on the way. The farmyard Velo was a 1954 350 MAC and the fellow only wanted \$100 for it although he showed me receipts for over \$200 worth of work on engine, gearbox and seat reupholstering. The reason it wouldn't go he thought it needed a good tune, adjustment etc., as there was plenty of sparks and no compression. I'd learnt from his mates that he was a merciless rider and noted the air cleanerless carb. and mega muffler so I bet him he'd melted his piston (from memories of my 350 Ariel). 'Impossible' he said and accepted my wager of a \$50 price if I was right and the \$100 if I was wrong.

It took me ten minutes to whip the head off and show him the tiny melted hole in the piston. At least he stood by his word and I returned home with my \$50 Velo.

Unfortunately I was never to hear that Velo run, let alone ride it. My motorcycling days very nearly ended and on a push bike too. A face to right side of body confrontation between a Ford Falcon wagon and myself on a push bike (I used to race them). I was the victim of the 'blind' drunk driver at high speed on the wrong side of the road. Result, a fractured femur, ankle, pelvis and dislocated hip. It was the complications that nearly finished me. My racing fitness pulled me through after eighteen days' in a coma, and a tracheotomy.

Out of sheer boredom I was back at work in six months after convincing my doctor I'd be alright on light duties. Recovery was a slow, painful process and I honestly thought I'd never be able to squat or lift my right leg above hip-height to kick start a bike.

A Sydney ad for an unregistered, electric start 250 Honda attracted me, no need to kick!! I could still ride!! I contacted the owner who was dismayed that it wouldn't start thus turning away potential customers. I swiftly hitched the trailer to my Mini Moke, the only suitable quadricycle for a bikie, and shot up to Sydney. In spite of fitting new plugs and points and a battery to his previously stored bike he could only extract coughs and splutters but overall it looked good so I offered him a greatly reduced price as is and it was quickly on the trailer and heading home. It was a '62 or '64 Dream with enclosed leading (or was it trailing) link forks and square shaped rear shockers.

I removed the air cleaners noting how dirty and clogged they were and pressed the start button. Imagine my surprise when it spluttered to erratic life. Another thing to store in the back of my mind; Japanese motors will not run properly if all things are not reasonably spot on. A little bit of fiddling, cleaning, new air cleaners and some adjustment and I had a fairly good machine with first time starting on the button. That is if you didn't mind 'pogo-stick' suspension. It nearly threw me over the handlebars the first time I took it along Cindy Andy Lane, a rough road to Culburra, to see Warwick who owned a Suzuki 100.

I had many fun times on that Dream and sold the Velo for what I had paid for it to a chap who wanted to restore it. Gammy leg and all I used the 250 for rides totally unsuited for it as Warwick was a bush exploring freak. I must say the electric starter was, very useful. Like the time-when Warwick decided we use the 'Pioneer Road' to Kangaroo Valley. What a road!! It was nothing but a cart track, absolutely no traffic and magnificent scenery in places. I got stuck in a rocky ford and stalled it but with push-button starting no worries. It was rather hairy riding, with big slides, foot slogging and, at times, trampolining.

I guess with all the bush riding and accompanying footwork my leg limitations were lessening and I also had the steel pin removed from my thigh. I realised I had sold the Velo prematurely. If I was to continue my, exploring rides with Warwick, I'd need something more suitable. I was offered a swap with a '67 or '68 Honda 90 Sport, a street scrambler I think it was called, with high level exhaust and it would be ideal for the rides I did. So the deal was made and I was set for more mucky adventures.