

MY MOTORCYCLING DAYS PART 9 - DOWN UNDER. By Charlie Brown (Nov 1979).

That Honda 90 Sport was an incredible bike. I read somewhere that when Hondas first began filtering into Britain and gaining a good reputation, a section of the industry acquired two new 50cc models, run them in, then operated them for 48 hours non-stop at near maximum revs. They were then stripped and examined for wear, which was found to be negligible. I ran that machine of mine at near maximum revs too, without so much as an oil leak.

Warwick and I spent many an enjoyable time riding pioneer bush tracks and improving our times for the dirt track dash to Kangaroo Valley. The light weight of the Suzuki 100 and my Honda made them ideal machines to lug through bogs and do that kind of riding but the 55 mph flat chat became a bit boring. I started looking through the adverts of the Sydney papers.'

My forte is road riding and touring, although I enjoyed the dirt riding on a suitable Bike. So when I came upon an ad' for a 1968 Velocette Thruxton in original condition for \$650, registered, I hurriedly visited my bank. (I was a bit more affluent by now). Unfortunately the owner wasn't home when I called but his wife said he was disappointed at the two previous callers who thought he wanted too much for an old-fashioned bike. After having a good look, I said I'd call again to buy at the weekend. I noted the big G.P. carb and competition magneto and if those previous callers only knew that a bike similar to this old-fashioned one won the 500cc class of the production TT and placed 2nd overall to a 650 Thruxton Bonneville in 1966. Both had been clocked at over 150 mph on Sulby Straight.

That cunning brain of mine went to work again. I put \$600 in my wallet and the other \$50 in my hip pocket before I called again. I learnt that he was a 'swinger' for one of the sidecar racing boys and they needed more money to update their old Triumph outfit. He also said he bought the Velo. new from Burling and Simmonds in order to burn around and thrash his mates. He obviously knew the potential of a Thruxton and said Bonnies and GT Falcons were no match but he couldn't take a 750 Four. I let him know that I couldn't raise more than \$600 which he reluctantly accepted. After he'd shown me the starting technique and how well the bike ran I set off.

The ride home was quite exhilarating. It seemed like an incredible speed at so little revs. My wrists hurt when I reached home and on closer inspection I noticed the clip-ons were fitted in reverse, giving an unnatural upsweep. With the steering stop filed right back they cleared the top of the tank, giving a better turning circle. It was then also noticed the slight bend in both of the fork legs, as if the previous owner had hit a brick wall. I soon got the opportunity to right all the faults I discovered. I kept my promise and allowed Stan Edwards a ride.

I expected his ride to take about ten minutes but when he didn't return after half an hour I went out in the Mini to find him. He wasn't far from home, all puffed out and

pushing the bike. "It just stopped!" and couldn't be restarted. Even the kick-starter wouldn't turn over. I couldn't believe it had seized and started to remove the tank to get at the motor. When I reached under the seat for the 30" by 12" rag I kept there it had gone!. Fearing the impossible, I lifted the carburettor slide and spied a wisp of rag deep down the inlet tract. Removing the head revealed all the rag packed tightly into the combustion space with a leading and trailing end out the exhaust and inlet ports. There was not enough room for the piston to reach top dead centre. The cartoon of a little man being sucked down the carb bell mouth of a Thruxton in 'Fishtail' now had some bearing.

Luckily engine damage was minimal, with only a bent exhaust valve and pushrods . I took this opportunity to have the forks straightened with new seals fitted. Besides replacing the valve and push rods, I checked the rest of the motor for wear and only fitted new piston rings. The clip-on handlebars were refitted the right way with a new steering stop to prevent them hitting the tank. I also discovered it had a non-standard 19 tooth countershaft sprocket fitted. No wonder the previous owner burnt off Bonnevilles. I fitted the standard 21 tooth which made its long legs even longer.

With the bike running sweetly again I was the envy of the town's bjkie bods and was often engaged in conversation with reminiscent old-timers. Imagine me restarting the Velo. in the main street after a shopping stint. The distinctive 'single' thump attracting all ears and then all heads turn for the first gear only acceleration for the whole 100 yards of the-street. The gearing was incredibly high. I could only use first and second for legal about-town speeds. In fact I only changed to top above 70:mph. This feature proved quite amusing when riding home from work together with Johnny Guilliam. He was on a Tiger 100SS feeling quite pleased with his machine as he thought we were both in top at 70mph until he heard me change up!

Since acquiring the Velo. I made a few very good friends, notably Bernie Spencer, who owned a rarely used venom. It was in Bernie's Green Horror that I saw the Southern Cross rally advertised. Johnny was also interested so we entered our bikes and started out early one Friday morning to make Melbourne that night. I was very disappointed in John's bike; or was it his riding. He wouldn't cruise higher than 70/75 and insisted on long and frequent stops to rest his aching bum and to torture his lungs with tobacco smoke.

We left Melbourne the next day in pouring rain. It came bucketing down near Ballarat so we stopped under a shop awning to gain a little respite (and for John to have a fag.) Through the waterfall we could see a little figure on a motorbike approaching. At the sight of us, the rider pulled in and dismounted - only just, as her feet only just touched the ground. We soon introduced ourselves and got chatting. Her name was Barbara and we always have referred to her as Ballarat Barbara so I have forgotten her surname. We were joined by another rider on the way to the Southern Cross on a 750 Four K1. Barbara, however, was on her way back to Ballarat after attending lectures in Melbourne on a 350 Honda she called 'Honny'. When we mentioned our

intentions of looking for a hotel in Ballarat to avoid the incessant rain she quickly offered us use of her flat as she was working at the Ballarat Hospital that night. Besides the hotels there didn't take kindly to bikie types.

We set off together for the ten miles to Ballarat and were soon drying off in Barbie's flat. In conversing we learnt that the boys from the Ballarat Rovers were very good to her when she was hospitalised as a result of being knocked off her bike by one of those motorists. They even looked after and paid for her flat. Consequently she had a lot of time for motor cyclists, I hope she has never had occasion to regret it.

The next day was thankfully dry, and after hot showers, a good night's sleep and a hearty breakfast we were more than ready to reach the rally site that day. After our goodbyes and thank yous when Barbara returned from work, we set off at a pretty speedy pace as the Honda rider didn't like hanging about. At our first stop at Horsham we had to wait a fair while for John to catch up. When we set off after lunch it wasn't long before John disappeared from sight rearward and we pressed on regardless, maintaining 85/90 mph.

At the next fuel stop the Melbourne lad suggested we carry on and wait for John at the rally site. This time we wound it up holding 95/100 mph. I was amazed at how well and smoothly the Thruxton ran at that speed. At 95 the rearview mirrors were stock steady and the exhaust sounded like a very fast Triumph tick over. The Honda rider was even more shattered by the Velo performance saying that it was far better than his previous bike, a Bonneville. We reached the rally and about three or four hours later John rolled into camp and I suffered some abuse, he reckoned that he couldn't even have a stop for a smoke trying to catch up.

This was my first Australian rally and I wasn't disappointed. Not as large as the Dragon but the same type of fellers and some interesting machines. That was when I first saw the "Another Triumph for Harley Davidson" special, a Harley in a Triumph frame. Also I saw a Velo in a Norton Frame. The Thruxton came in for its fair share of goggling, especially as it was very standard and the unbelievable truth of the Honda rider's ravings about its performance.

John and I returned to Nowra via the Sturt Highway through Mildura, Wagga Wagga and Goulbourn. We spent one night at the side of the road with a piece of canvas tied from the bushes to our bikes. I stayed at John's place as I felt so guilty at not waiting for him before. The only excitement came when I tired of one semi trying to overtake another. As he was taking so long and had left such a big gap down the middle, I changed down and blasted through. I was only disappointed that John didn't follow.

To be continued.