

RIDERS

... magazine of the KAMG



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THIS EDITION INCLUDES . . .

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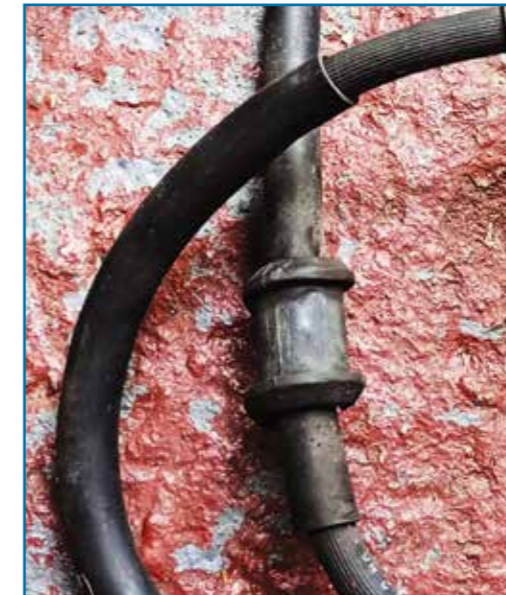
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FUTURE EVENTS

September

- Sun 1st Ride to Arundel
- Sat 7th Machine Control Day
- Thurs 12th Fish & Chip run to Crispins at Teynham, nr Faversham
- Sat 21st IDCAM
- Thurs 26th Group night – BikeTrac, vehicle security
- Sun 29th Ride to Pevensey

October

- Sat 12th Ride To The East
- Sat 19th IDCAM
- Thurs 31st Group Natter Night

November

- Sun 3rd Ride-out
- Sun 10th Remembrance Sunday ride to Capel le Ferne memorial
- Sat 16th IDCAM
- Mon 26th Annual observer conference
- Thurs 28th CHRISTMAS DINNER.
Details to follow.

This list is correct at time of going to press. Check all KAMG dates on Tracker to ensure that there are no changes. Details of contacts for IDCAM, Machine Control Days and Ride-outs are on pages 30 and 31.



Nick Farley, Editor

EDITORIAL

Levelling Up

I got terribly excited when the last government started banging on about 'Levelling Up'. Hurrah! Hallelujah! Yee Ha! And similar expressions of delight and ecstasy: they are finally going to do something to make the roads flat, I thought. And not before time. Level roads. Jolly good show. Well done chaps (and all others, of course), I thought. But no, it was not to be. 'Levelling up' was something to do with building railways north of Watford, I think. Whatever it was, it definitely wasn't about flat roads. Some of our older members will remember flat roads. No, really, they existed in my lifetime. The horses used to make a merry clip clop on them, I remember that as a young boy.

I don't know what the new lot are going to do; they haven't said much so far. In fact, they've said sweet Philip Archer about 'transport' as far as I can see. I bet you don't even know who the new Secretary of State for Transport is, do you? No, I thought not. Well, it's Louise Haigh. She was, apparently, a special constable in the Met for two years, but the danger signs are that she studied politics at Nottingham and London universities. Imagine studying *politics*. Actually going to two universities to learn how to be something that no one in their right mind would ever want to be – a politician. She follows a list of recent Transport Secretary non-descriptors including the un-smart champion of the SMART motorways, Grant Shapps, and his predecessor, Chris Grayling, who was so utterly useless at every government job that he had, that even his colleagues called him Failing Grayling.

Well, I guess we have to give young Louise the benefit of the doubt, maybe she will turn up trumps, but she needs to get a move on, and I'm not hopeful.



Enough said!

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Despite poor weather conditions over the summer period, plenty of riding activity has been taking place. A good number of 'Fish n Chip' runs have been organised by individuals and good use of the WhatsApp group has seen 'ad-hoc' rides slotted in to the breaks in the weather.

The trainee observer group have almost all passed and are added to our National Observer team, and we are now looking for new recruits for the 2025 programme. The Peterborough training weekends are as popular as ever and we now enjoy three of these each year.

Now that prices have become more realistic, KAMG have invested in a Heart Defibrillator to be carried on our official group training rides. This will travel with the run organiser and brought forward if required in an emergency. We will try to organise transferring this unit to any riding events including machine control days in future.

KAMG have a storage issue for some of our items, including the speaker system used at group night. Historically, we have relied on various volunteers to store and fetch these items as and when required, which does cause logistical problems. A few years ago, it was decided to rent storage space in Swanley to alleviate some of these problems. However, the storage company have now hiked their prices and we are looking for a cheaper alternative. If any member knows of a small storage facility which will not break the bank, please contact anyone from the committee.

CIO update

IAM Roadsmart have acknowledged KAMG's request to form a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation) and remain affiliated to them. The proposed KAMG constitution is being considered by IAM Roadsmart lawyers and we will be considering the changes that need to be made to get a round peg to fit into a square hole. We are still pushing to get this completed by the end of the year, but are in the hands of IAM Roadsmart at present. In principle, IAM Roadsmart agree that this is a sensible move and that they want to work with us to get this model right. Once we have this in place, then it is envisaged that our model will roll out to most if not all of the other IAM groups across the UK. The intensive work of Nigel Clibbens and Matt Pounds has been vital in shaping this idea, which Martin Ford first proposed a few years ago. It is very important to get this right and accepted, in order to protect the future of the group and its trustees. We will keep you all posted on progress.

Dave Murphy, Chairman

TEST PASSES

Since the last edition



Simon Radford on receiving his Advanced Rider F1RST qualification from his observer Ian Walker



Angela Spencer on receiving her Advanced Rider qualification from her observer Tina Underwood



Andrew Page receiving his Advanced Rider qualification from his observer Martin Ford



Tim Martin receiving his Advanced Rider qualification from his observer Nigel Clibbens



Khushhal Yadav receiving his Masters qualification from his mentor Colin Underwood



David Howard, Thomas Kempster and Nicola Walker all receiving National Observer Hi-Viz vests on completion of their training

The views and opinions expressed in this magazine are solely the views and opinions of the people who write the articles, and those views and opinions should never be taken as, nor be presumed to be, the official view of, nor views supported by, either IAM RoadSmart or the KAMG.

Every article that appears in this magazine has been written expressly for this magazine and has not appeared in any other print or electronic medium before, and none of the material in this magazine may be reprinted elsewhere without the express permission of the KAMG.

Everything is done to ensure the correctness and accuracy of the editorial content of the magazine, but neither the editor nor the KAMG accepts liability for information errors, omissions or typesetting errors.

Riders is the place for every single member, or associate member, of KAMG to say what he/she thinks about anything and everything connected with riding and driving and the KAMG. Every article submitted will be published (provided it is legal) and no opinions or views will be changed or cut out. The magazine is apolitical, but criticism or praise of politicians of any political colour is welcome if the criticism, or praise, is about the politician's actions or views on road safety, roads or some other aspect of transport.

Please submit articles for publication, or letters to the editor, to the email address of the editor (see page 30). Please send pictures for publication as separate file attachments to an email if possible, rather than embedding them in the email content, and ensure that the pictures are of the highest resolution possible. Please do not send information or pictures via Facebook.

MAGAZINE DESIGN AND LAYOUT BY JOHN GARDINER

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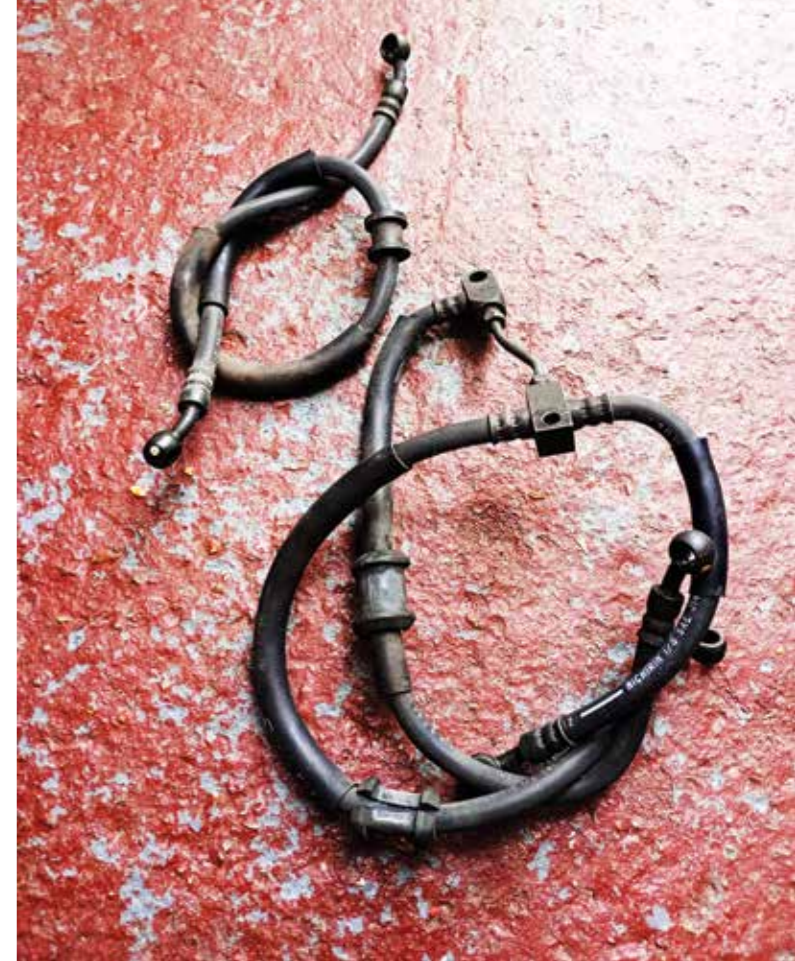


R&N Engineering

THEM'S THE BRAKES

Dave Willson breaks out the brake hoses

Here's a little experiment for those of you who have got far too much time on your hands: grab hold of one of your brake hoses and squeeze it as hard as you can. Now, while squeezing it, pump your brake lever and see if you can feel the hose pulsing. If you can, that's the hydraulic pressure expanding the hose, but the bad thing about it is that pressure is supposed to be applying your brake pads to the disc, not pulsing in your hand. I've always had a bit of a spongy front brake on ye olde Fireblade, not dangerous you understand, and it did pass its MOT about a month ago; but having said that, my MOT tester is a bit old school – you know, you sit on the bike holding the brake on, while he attaches your bike to a pulley via the front wheel and then winds it up to a certain pressure, and your brake has to be able to hold the bike. I did feel that I was



Vulgar, dirty, common old non-braided hoses

squeezing the brake very hard and we chatted about it, and he showed me the squeezing-the-hose experiment. I can't say I'm surprised as my hoses are 25 years old, but he reckoned that if your bike is older than five or six years it's worth checking.

So new hoses then. Obviously you can buy genuine hoses or even OEM, but the word on the street is that braided steel hoses are the way to go. The reason these are better is because, unlike the aforementioned rubber hoses, they can't expand under pressure. Also, they have a protective Teflon sleeve over them, which you can have in an array of colours, so they look cool... always a bonus.

There are a number of manufacturers making braided steel hoses and general opinion seems to be that HEL are the best make; but who knows? In just the same way, people bang on about this tyre being better than that tyre, when they're all made out of the same materials, in the same way, by the same Chinese, in the same factory. Probably.

Being a rebel – ("What are you rebelling against Johnny?" "What have you got?")* – I bought a set of OHA Motorsport hoses. These were recommended to me and are slightly cheaper than HEL, although they all seem to cost roughly the same. The hoses duly arrived and having consulted the Honda Fireblade owners' Facebook page, and *Practical Sportsbikes'* Facebook page, and the Vintage Japanese Motorcycle Club's

**If you haven't seen 'The Wild One' with Marlon Brandon and Lee Marvin then you really should, because that, and 'On Any Sunday', are the two best motorcycling films ever made.*



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Facebook page, and spoken to my brother, who's a bit handy with a spanner, the consensus was that a half blind, one armed, baboon could fit them. So, off I went to get my tool box.

You don't need many tools for this job: a 14mm spanner to swap the hoses, an 8mm spanner for the bleed nipple, a couple of Allen keys for any brackets, and that's your lot. You'll need a container (old milk carton) and a bit of tubing to bleed the brakes and obviously a bottle of DOT 4 brake fluid. The last things you'll need to get are some rags, and having got them go and get some more because brake fluid is very corrosive and you do not want it on your bike especially on the paint. Incidentally, I now have a large patch of unpainted garage floor.

I thought I'd start with the back brake first. Obviously this doesn't have the lifesaving qualities of the front brake so my thinking was that if I did cock it up then getting the bike down to A2 motorcycles wouldn't be too much of a drama for me and I could give them some humble pie, show them what a half blind one armed baboon had done to my bike, and ask them to sort it out.

I was given a bit of advice years ago, and that was don't eat yellow snow, but I was also told that before replacing anything on a bike take lots of photos because you'll get to a point where you're scratching your head and asking yourself "how did that connect?" or "which way did that go?" and having a photo to refer to is



A useful milk 'bottle'.

invaluable. The first job is to empty the master cylinder of all the old brake fluid. You can either buy a big syringe for a fiver on eBay and just suck it out, or you can open the bleed nipple and pump the lever to push it

out that way. Having completely emptied the reservoir I was surprised by how much gunge was sitting in the bottom, so I took the opportunity to clean it out with some tissue. Taking the old hose off is just a matter of undoing a couple of bolts remembering that there will still be a bit of fluid in the hose so have those rags at the ready. Fitting the new hose is simple enough. I'm not going to explain how banjo bolts work other than to say you have to use copper crush washers on the bolts so it's essential that you get them in the right place otherwise you'll have more leaks than Wales. The instructions that came with the hoses have torque settings for the bolts. I do have a torque wrench, but it's the mother of all torque wrenches and trying to apply a small amount of torque with any finesse is quite difficult. I just used a bit of commonsense and did them up tight without leaning on the spanner like an orangutan. You can always tighten things a bit more, if necessary, but if you stretch or, worse, strip the thread, you're buggered.

All that's left to do is bleed the brakes. I'm sure most of you know how to do this, but I will say it takes a bit longer than usual because obviously the hose is full of air, and remember to keep topping up the reservoir. Another little hack I was told was to dab a bit of Tippex on the bolt, hose, and calliper. That way if anything moves, you'll be able to see with a quick visual check. I'm guessing that

brake fluid pissing out all over the floor would also be a clue. Lastly, give everything a good slooshing down with hot soapy water and the job's a goodun.

You won't be surprised to hear that doing the front brake is the same process as the rear, only you've got two to do, unless your bike only has one front disc, then it's the same process as the rear. The most important thing to think about here is how you route the hoses. On the front you've got more suspension travel and steering to think about. Inevitably the hoses will touch the bike at some point, so try to ensure that they don't rub or snag on anything. Talking of snags: the only thing I forgot to photograph before I started were the brackets that attach the hoses to the mudguard and it took me an age to figure out which way round they went. Lesson learned.

Proof of the pudding etc, and I would say that braking has greatly improved, although they do feel a bit all-or-nothing, but I guess I'm just used to a spongy brake.

So, there you have it, a relatively easy job that takes a couple of hours and a few tools. What's two hours labour in a bike shop? £160! It's a bit more complicated if you've got ABS, which I'm guessing a lot of you do have, but it's still within the capabilities of most home mechanics. Perhaps you need a half blind baboon with two arms.



Smart new braided hose with "cool" (?) blue Teflon sleeve.

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HOW KEMS(?) TOOK 200 VULCANS(??) ON A LITTLE TRAIN

... and Roger Pinnock was there

It's more than half way through 2024, and the Kent Event Marshals' (KEMs') calendar has become as full again as it was before Covid. New types of events have arrived too – a couple of mass runs or mass walks in support of hospices, and helping British Masters Cycle Racing as safety marshals on cycle races in Kent, Surrey, Essex and even in Derbyshire – but this July there was a completely new event: marshalling a mass ride-out of Kawasaki Vulcans for the Vulcan Riders Association (VRA) on their annual international rally. It was the UK's turn to host this event and Kawasaki Vulcan riders had gathered from all over Europe, and from further afield, at the University of Kent at Canterbury for three days from the 24th to the 28th of July.

On the day of the ride, the 13 KEM members met near the actual starting point at 7am just for a 'photo opportunity' ride together, fully kitted, into the official start

Shortly after testing our communications (radios that Bluetooth to Sena/Cardo) the rest of the Vulcans started to arrive and we helped marshal them into their four ride groups – all colour coded and wrist banded – and were amazed at the variety of nationalities. Between us we could manage French, German and Italian, but after that it was Google translate! Finnish, Croatian, Polish, Spanish and Swedish were beyond us, but fortunately many of the Vulcans spoke English.

Final briefing for KEM from our team leader, Mark Sutton, followed by a joint briefing with the VRA marshals who would act as tail-end-Charlies. It's obviously essential for us to know who the last riders are, and they were the only other riders in hi-vis. Each of our four teams then distributed cards among the riders with the postcode of their destination, and essential timings.

The assembled bikes at Canterbury made an awesome sight.



A Kawasaki Vulcan

So, where do the European elite heavy bike riders (that's heavy bikes not the riders) go for their fun? Well, apart from either riding 800km to get here, or flying in from Australia and America and having a party every night at their base in the university halls of residence, they wanted a ride on the Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch



Marshalled marshals make a photo opportunity.

at the sports centre of the university. Many of the VRA members were staying in the university accommodation or in motorhomes in the car park and already, by 7.15am, the first of the 200 Vulcans and their riders had started to arrive, and we were invited to breakfast with them, and were treated to sausages, bacon, scrambled egg, beans, tomatoes, hash browns and mushrooms in the main tennis hall.



Romney's Rural Fair, which would involve widespread road closures that we were able to avoid. This shows how important good planning can be.

The journeys were pretty uneventful, maybe because *Top Gear* rules applied – 'if you drop out, you get left behind' – apart from a crash or injury, of course; in that case a KEM member would stay with the incident to manage it.

Marshalling differed from our usual cycle events in that the convoy speed was higher, but the big bikes seemed to prefer to cruise at 40-45 mph, so even that wasn't a problem. Marshalling was by warning and guiding, and the radios were essential for advising ahead that traffic was clear at junctions and roundabouts. When the peloton split, we reverted to dropping off to mark junctions.

The Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway welcomed the visitors at New Romney station, and two chartered trains took them to Hythe for fish and chips, and paddling, before returning them to New Romney at 3pm to pick

Railway, and at 9am the first group set off for New Romney, followed five minutes later by the next, and 25 minutes later the third, and then the fourth. Successive groups used a different one of two routes so as not to cause too much disturbance to traffic and residents. Return journeys used the opposite route for each group. Two of our committee members had put a lot of work into designing these routes and then riding them before the event, and part of that planning process paid off because we identified that it was the day of New



The Winston Churchill, a 4-6-2 Pacific locomotive built for the RH&DR in 1931!

up their bikes. KEM looked after the bikes, which filled the otherwise closed car park. Fortunately, there was a café handy and the sun shone.

We eventually returned to the University at 5pm. Picking up a few lost Vulcans at petrol stations on the way. All in all, it was a fun and satisfying day, and from the many remarks we received, our work was much appreciated. And as a postscript, I was interested in the comment of one German biker who, after sampling Kent's beautiful

roads, said that he'd never complain about German roads again!

The KEM is always looking for new members. If you would like to join our team or find out a bit more about what we do (we have members both from EKAM & KAMG), please visit our website www.kenteventmarshals.org.uk or call Mark on 07801 226117

[A version of this article will also appear in EKAM's magazine. Ed.]



New Romney station car park.



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MY DAD'S BIGGER THAN YOUR DAD

Says Dave Willson

I've just part exchanged my Honda Fireblade for a Yamaha MT07 and I was going to write a review about it; however, since owning it I've noticed a strange phenomenon regarding motorcyclists' attitudes. But before I get into that, let me briefly describe the MT07. The MT range of bikes are naked street bikes built by Yamaha. The largest is the MT10, which is basically an R1 shoehorned into a naked bike. Then there are various sizes all the way down to the MT01, a learner-friendly 125. The MT07 sits squarely in the middle of the range. It's a 700cc parallel twin with 75bhp, 50 ft/lbs of torque and a top speed of 125-ish. The MT moniker stands for Master of Torque, and the bikes try to appeal to younger riders with slogans like 'The Dark Side of Japan'. If I were to sum it up, I'd say that if you were going to ride a bike in shorts and flip-flops then the MT07 is the bike you'd ride. It exudes fun.

Now back to that phenomenon I mentioned earlier: lots of people, who know more about this sort of thing than I do, have said lots of things about the Yamaha MT07 since it appeared on the scene in 2014, but usually when someone's summing up the MT07, you'll hear phrases like "It's a good beginners bike," or "It's a good bike before you move up to a big bike," or, as a friend of mine said, "That's a funny little thing you're riding." Worst of all, and I apologise ladies, they say "That's a girls bike."

I wonder when attitudes to bike size changed? How can a 700cc bike with 75 bhp be described as a beginner's bike? The late great Barry Sheene famously said 50bhp is all you need on the road. Let me give you an example to illustrate my point. Back in the day, when all around was green fields as far as the eye could see, my elder brother was in a bike club or gang. They weren't Hells



Angels but think *Sons of Anarchy*, or *Easy Rider* etc. and you get the picture. They attended rallies where much drunken debauchery and other nefarious activities took place, and his mount of choice was an original Kawasaki Z650, which was deemed to be a proper bike and one perfectly respectable enough for someone in that kind of club/gang to be riding.

Fast forward four decades and if you tell someone you ride the latest version of Kawasaki's Z650 (which is far more powerful than the original) you'll be told "That's a good beginner's bike" or, yep, you've guessed it, "That's a girls bike." It seems to me that current thinking dictates that unless you ride a litre plus bike, it's not a proper bike and you're not a proper biker. Has it got something to do with the fragile male ego I wonder?

Now before I alienate 4/5ths of the KAMG I do appreciate that there are bona fide reasons for riding a large

capacity bike – high mileages, carrying a pillion, or carrying luggage would be three examples, or, like a lot of KAMG members, riding high mileages while carrying a pillion and luggage. Although I do believe that a stalwart member of the Group recently toured Wales on a 400cc Triumph twin.

If you look back in time you find that anything over 500cc was deemed to be a big bike. Take film and TV for example: any of you that grew up in the 1970s will remember an American sitcom called *Happy Days*. For those of you that don't know about it, it revolved around a group of college kids in America and their drop-out friend Arthur Fonzarelli or The Fonz as he was known, and he was the coolest dude in town. All the guys wanted to be him and all the girls wanted to be with him. And what bike did this hyper cool chap ride? A triumph T5, which if memory serves, was a 498cc twin. The same bike incidentally that the hyper cool

king of cool, Steve McQueen, used to attempt to jump over the border between Germany and Switzerland in *The Great Escape*. I say Steve McQueen, but it was actually the stunt rider Bud Ekins; and why the Germans were riding Triumphs is anyone's guess. But perhaps if Steve, or Bud, had had a 1000cc between their legs they may have made it to freedom. As it was, he/they attempted the jump on a beginner's bike – apparently.

Have you seen the movie *The Wild One** starring Marlon Brando and Lee Marvin as rival bike gang leaders? The plot is loosely based on a 1947 incident in which the town of Hollister, in California, was inundated by biker gangs. They spent the weekend drinking, fighting and racing their bikes and they destroyed the town. Many of these motorcycle gangs were made up of ex-servicemen demobbed after World War II. If you're 20 years old and have spent the previous few years dogfighting Germans in a P51 Mustang, and you are now addicted to adrenaline and you suffer from PTSD, it must be very hard to fit back into normal life. And so, for many, motorcycle racing and fighting was a way of fulfilling a need for excitement – but I digress. In

the film Brando rides a Triumph 6T Thunderbird which is a 650cc twin, and in *Kill Bill* as late as 2003, Uma Thurman rode a mere 250 Kawasaki.

However, since then things have changed in movies. For example, in *John Wick*, Keanu Reeves rides a Yamaha MT09. In *The Matrix* the character of Trinity rides a 998cc Ducati Panigale, and in *Mission Impossible 6*, Tom Cruise rode a BMW S1000RR, and I wonder if this move to bigger bikes in films has influenced the larger motorcycling community, or is it the other way around

So, what about this male ego thing I mentioned at the beginning? The term 'male ego' connotes a judgmental type of superiority (it says on the internet) with a need to show off, constantly striving to impress (women) and outdo others (especially other men). The male ego has been a good thing since homo sapiens first roamed the Earth. It's helped us to survive and evolve as a species. In another way our brains help us survive by focussing on the negative, and that's why it's natural to be afraid of the dark. Our brains are always looking for what may do us harm. The male ego can in some cases be linked to how and where a man sees his place in the world and

whether he's living up to expectations — his and those of society. Am I strong enough? Am I wealthy enough? Do I meet the traditional definition of masculinity? Do I attract women? Do I control things or people? Do people recognize me for these things and am I respected and revered for them? But it's hard in the modern world for a man to satisfy his ego. Let's face it, there hasn't been a war in this country for eighty odd years, and there's no manly jobs left like coal miner, or dock worker, or even lion tamer, so perhaps the male ego needs other ways to satisfy itself, and perhaps riding a large capacity bike helps do that. Try asking someone who rides a Yamaha R1 why they didn't buy an R6? An R6 is cheaper to buy and run, it's easier to ride and, unless your name starts with Valentino and ends in Rossi, there's nothing you can do on an R1 that you couldn't do on an R6. What possible answer could they give other than it makes them feel good?

Anyway, just the ramblings of a middle-aged biker. See you all on the next ride-out, I only hope I can keep up on my little bike.

* *The Wild One*, which was banned in this country for many years, is available in full on YouTube. Ed.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Quite a lot, it seems

Much has been written in the past about the failure of the British motorcycle industry in the 1950s and 60s, and I'm sure that it is all good, worthy, well researched stuff. People have been banging on for years about the old-fashioned designs, the crap workmanship, the bad management, bolshie trade unions and stuff like that, but I think there's something far more important that has been overlooked – company names. It was the dopey names of the poorly managed, union-crippled companies, who built the badly designed, old fashioned bikes that brought the British bike industry to its knees, long before the Japs turned up with their poncey electric starters, oiltight engines and bucket loads of reliability.

Just think about it; how on Earth could you ever hope to make money trying to sell a motorbike – I

repeat, A *MOTORBIKE*, not a pram or a sewing machine, but a motorbike – made by a company proudly calling itself Francis Barnett? Worse still, could you ever imagine buying a motorbike called a Plover? A what? Yes, a *Plover!* You read it right, a *Plover*. Where did that come from? A bloody plover is a bird that spends its time walking about in water. Jeez, it doesn't even swim, it walks in water. It just paddles, like a cissy. Yet some managerial wombat in Francis Barnett HQ said to his fellow Francis Barnettians one morning "I say chaps, I think we should call the new bike the Plover." And all his mates said "Yes, jolly good show, Beverly, old man. Perfect name. That'll show those Italian Guiseppes what we Brits are made of, eh? I say, what?"

And so it was that Messrs Francis and Barnett sank quietly and gently,

unloved and unmissed, beneath the shallow waves where the bloody plovers were paddling. And get this: in addition to having a soppy name, the Francis Barnett Plover didn't have a proper engine either. No, instead of a proper engine it had a Villiers engine. It's true. At the very moment that the British bike industry was writhing in its hideous death throes and desperately needed something that looked and sounded as if it actually would pull the skin off a rice pudding, it fitted weedy Villiers two-strokes into everything. Two-strokes! Ugh! And once again, it's the wrong name. The very name *Villiers* sounds weak, feeble and tinny. There is absolutely no way that anything approaching a single solitary horsepower has ever escaped from a Villiers. If you had an Atco lawnmower in the 1950s it would have had a Villiers engine,

and that engine would have been an awkward, difficult-to-start, plug-whiskering rattlesome thing. And its utter weediness was all manifest in its thin, weak-sounding, scrawny name.

Yet, while Villiers powered Plovers were rattling tinnily up little British hillocks, over in Italy there were companies with muscular names like Gilera, Moto Guzzi, Ducati and MV Agusta, companies who were not only way ahead in the marketing game because of their names, but also because they weren't using fricking Villiers engines. No, they each made their own engines, and more often than not they were four-stroke engines. In other words, they were proper engines with proper names. What's more, the Italian bikes looked seriously fast too. (Looking fast is terribly important. See male ego on page 15) There was obviously no way that something called *Gilera* was going to be slow, was there? Say the word 'Gilera' and immediately you are doing at least 10mph while you are stationary. Say the words 'Francis Barnett' and you just start to go gently backwards. It's an irresistible and undeniable force of nature.



It is a two stroke, but if you can make it look like this Motobi 200cc twin everything is forgiven. This beautiful bike, designed by one of the six Benelli brothers, is 70 years old. This is what the Italian yooof were able to buy in 1954 while we had BSA Bantams and Fanny B Plovers.

Have you ever wondered why the only British bikes to survive up to today are bikes with proper names? I know you probably haven't wondered, but you should. Think about it: we still have Triumph, Norton, BSA and Royal Enfield. Proper stuff. Did Triumph ever call one of its bikes Dandelion or Petal? Of course not. They went for Bonneville, Tiger 110 and Thunderbird. No paddling in the shallows there. And Norton, not to be under-named, chipped in with Dominator, Commando and Atlas, while BSA gave us Gold Stars, Rocket Gold Stars and Super Rockets.

This name thing applies to people too, and it's another field in which the Italians have the edge. I ask you: was there ever any chance that a bloke called Nuvolari was going to be slow? No. Absolutely not. And if you were named Giacomo Agostini, your future was decided right there at the christening font – you were going to be a World Champion. Obviously. No question about it. Likewise, Rossi, Valentino of that family. And a Brit name that must have been worth at least 2secs a lap, was 'Surtees'. Say it out loud: *Surtees* – it simply screams speed. How fast do you think he would have been if he'd been called Julian Prendergast or Herbert Trubshaw?

With a name like Surtees, you simply win without ever having to get out of second gear.

So why did the Brit bike industry drown itself in a sea of weak and puny names? Names that weren't merely neutral and meaningless, but names that actively conveyed quite the wrong image, an image of everything a motorbike shouldn't be. Think not only of Francis Barnett, but also of insipid names like Norman, Cotton, James and Ambassador. All were Villiers (under)powered, of course. Why would anyone with balls buy an Ambassador? To be fair, Norman and Cotton built some decent trials bikes and scramblers, but lugging those limp-wristed names around with them was never going to put them on the high road to lasting success. There was competition from every quarter back then, with the British Motor Corporation selling cars for only five hundred quid (albeit at a loss of £3 per car); Hondas and the rest of Japan being very visible on the horizon; and Italians with the names, the looks and the engines, while we were trying to flog Fanny Bs and Ambassadors. Is it any wonder we sank?

NF

1 and 2: A 250 cc Ducati and 125 MV. Just two examples of early 1960 four stroke Italian light weights. Plovers they are not.



AN AFRICA TWIN IN AN AFRICAN DESERT

Vernon Witney meets the sands of the Sahara



As you may have read in the May edition of *Riders*, I rebuilt my Africa Twin for a trip to Morocco. It was in the lull between Christmas 2022 and New Year 2023 that I was thinking to myself 'I really should get that trip planned'. It's always the biggest step to take – the step from 'I'll do that some time' to actually doing it, and so after some casual Googling I found Overland Motorcycle Tours, a company that did small group tours to Morocco. The reviews of the company were excellent and the prices reasonable, but places were

would ride to Plymouth and catch a ferry to Santander in northern Spain. From there we would ride the length of Spain and would meet up with Jay and the rest of the party in Tarifa, near Malaga.

The morning of October the 8th was bright and sunny when Tim and I met at Clacket Lane services for the start of our adventure. The ride to Plymouth, at about 4½ hours, was a lot further in reality than I had visualised in my head. We decided it was just a case of taking the fastest and most direct route down with one quick stop for coffee, and we arrived in good time for our ferry. Only a few bikers were there, but up at the head of the queue was Del, our companion-to-be, who was the other rider from the UK. And to prove that you could do this trip on any bike, Del was on a Triumph Bonneville, complete with some old but sound panniers adorned with stickers from his travels, and with a custom paint job inspired by the Vikings TV series.

It was an overnight crossing, so we wanted space for us and our gear and we had booked a four-berth cabin for the two of us. I know that I should have packed my top bag with essentials for overnight, but due to my somewhat chaotic packing, I had to bring everything up to the cabin. This was a real pain and a lesson I learnt for subsequent overnight ferry trips. Get a bit more organised so you can simply take one bag off your bike and leave everything else on the bike. Obvious, I know, but I clearly didn't get with the programme on this.

Once we were installed in our cabin, Tim made reservations for himself, Del and me in the restaurant. A rather civilised start to the trip we thought, with excellent food on offer. It was clear that the three of us would be teaming up for this trip. Over the meal, much discussion took place about what the trip would be like, about our various biking histories and generally getting to know each other. Our tour guide was also leaving from the UK. We only knew him as 'Raz' from the west country, and we found him on one of the decks near a bar. Raz, it turned out, had something missing: one leg to be precise. We later found out this was due to a rather nasty motorcycle accident in his youth when he turned

limited. I emailed Jay, who runs the company. He said that they had just had a cancellation, so I paid the deposit and I was in. Suddenly I had a deadline to work to, which does focus the mind. One of the main attractions was that while this was a guided tour, the participants would be provided with all the GPX files and hotel details and were under no obligation to keep with the group, so it would 'feel' like an adventure. The other benefit was that Jay would be driving a back-up van, which meant that should anyone get into trouble, there was the possibility that they would be able to get their bike back to Europe, from where their own European breakdown cover provider could repair or repatriate the bike. I thought this was a useful benefit and it gave me some peace of mind.

Tim Bolton said that he might be interested in such a trip too, but since I had taken the last place, I wasn't sure what could be done about that. I emailed Jay, saying that I'd be willing to share a room with Tim if he could be accommodated, and after a little chasing Tim was in. Suddenly I had a partner in crime, but I did warn Tim that I was on a 30 year old bike with 60hp versus his nearly new Ducati Multistrada V4, which had not far off three times that power.

As this was going to be mainly a road trip, I decided to use Mitas E07+ tyres, which are well-regarded 60:40 tyres. These were bought on line and I asked Boot's Tyres to fit them for me. Fitting the 21inch front tyre was a struggle and I was just hoping that I didn't get a puncture on the trip. I have tubed wheels and although, by all accounts the E07+ tyres are as tough as old boots, this toughness is a double-edged sword when it comes to getting them on and off the rims.

Jay had set up a WhatsApp group for those going on the trip, and some communication started. It turned out that three of us were riding from the UK on our own bikes, with everyone else flying to Malaga and picking up rental bikes from there. The plan was that Tim and I



Stopped at the side of the road checking to see if anything was loose. Luckily not much traffic.



A brief stop for water and a distant view of the walled city of Avila.



Waiting for the ferry to Tangier.

a straight four engine into a straight two. This calmed him down somewhat, but didn't deter him from riding. In the morning, we had a relaxed breakfast and enjoyed the weather, and Del even reported seeing whales in the Bay of Biscay.

We disembarked at Santander and headed south to our first hotel in Valladolid, and it was on the way there that the Africa Twin started to have some real problems. Misfiring. It started on the motorway and I was dreading having problems with the ignition that I thought I had solved. I had brought quite a number of spares with me, but fitting some would take a fair amount of stripping down. It would be crash bars and, bash plate off. The crash bars are very strong, but they definitely don't just bolt into place easily, there's a real knack to getting them on and I really didn't want to go through that. I stopped on the hard shoulder of the motorway, as it felt like I was running on 50% of my not so great 60hp and the bike was really struggling to maintain speed.

As it was not a particularly safe place to carry out further investigation I decided to pack up and carry on. Surprisingly, the bike fired up okay and sounded fine again. But on the way to the hotel, it was clear that all was still not well. Should I have replaced the ignition coils? Africa twins of this period run four coils, with four spark plugs for two cylinders, which is quite unusual and should give these bikes a measure of redundancy: if one spark plug or coil fails per cylinder, you should still be able to carry on.

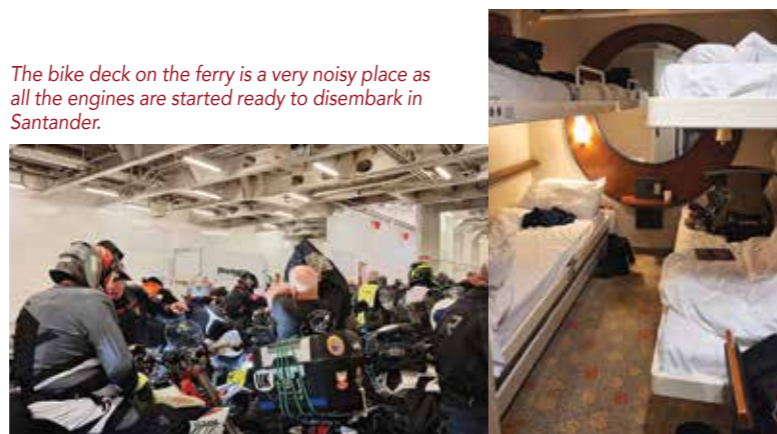
Eventually, arriving at the hotel, there was still some daylight, so while the other guys got the beers, I was stripping down the bike to see what the issue was. Not all the spark plugs are easily accessible, but checking these would be a good move. On checking one, I found a cracked insulator. Hmm, not sure how that happened, but it was badly broken. While I thought I had replaced all the spark plugs on the rebuild, this one didn't look new at all. To this day I'm not sure what happened, although I was reasonably happy that I had found at least one issue. And with no daylight left, I decided to grab a beer and have something to eat. Next day we found a Honda dealer nearby and after breakfast Tim took a ride out to pick up some spark plugs for me. I put a new plug in and we were off. Raz and Del had left earlier as there was little they could do and they wanted to get some distance under their belts before the heat of the day. A wise move. After the plug change the bike was better, but there was still a hesitation at around 5000rpm. I could ride around this relatively easily, but it still worried me that I was having problems so early in the trip.

Tim and I headed for Cordoba, riding some fantastic roads with great surfaces, but there were also some very straight roads with dry fields stretching off into the distance on either side, and when we stopped, there was an eery silence, with just the faint sound of tractors off in the distance and the sight of the huge spidery arms of the crop irrigators in the fields.

We pulled up at one point where, with a slight mis-step, I dropped the bike! Tim asked if I was dehydrated, and I think I was, so we stopped for 10-15 mins and I took on some much needed fluids. It was warm out there. But dropping the bike turned out to be a minor miracle, because after this there was no more misfire! The old girl was running really well, no hesitation at any revs, and pulling cleanly through the rev range. How long this would last, who knew, but I was happy.

We had our fair share of twisting, sweeping bends, taking us through rocky outcrops and undulating scenery ever closer to Cordoba, from where it would be a relatively short ride down to Tarifa. However, it wasn't long after the miracle that I had my first and only brush with the law. Happily buzzing along, we saw a rather nice Alfa Romeo police car pass us going in the opposite direction, but within a few minutes, he was back, this time heading in the same direction as us and overtaking us while clearly indicating for us to pull over. Oh dear, I didn't think we were speeding.

Pulling in just off the forecourt of a petrol station, the issue became clear very quickly: most modern bikes have their lights on dipped beam at all times, but my 1991 Honda, as standard, simply had a sidelight on and one of its twin headlights on when the lights were dipped. I had changed the wiring and added another relay to give me twin dipped and twin main beams, but I was simply riding with the single side light on, which to be fair is pretty dim. The police officer came up to my bike, had a fiddle with the light switches and saw I could have had the lights on dipped beam, so even though I had a light on, that wasn't good enough. He informed me that this was an infraction and there was a fine to come. All I could do was accept my fate. He was instructing a younger officer on how to do this, so while I'm sure I passed the attitude test, he had to show his young colleague how it was done. He did say that as I was polite and accepted what he said with no argument, he would reduce the fine to €100 rather than the 200 that he said was mandated. Thankful for small mercies, I received the longest ticket I have ever seen, it measured 63cm, and we were left to be on our way with a 'have a safe trip' and with my lights on. Luckily, I had cash, but this depleted my beer fund somewhat.



Our four-berth cabin.

The bike deck on the ferry is a very noisy place as all the engines are started ready to disembark in Santander.



We reached Cordoba, where we parked in an underground car park, but next morning, the steep ramp out of the car park caused some havoc with my heavily loaded bike that resulted in its becoming wedged against a wall coming up the ramp. Not a great start to the day, but with the help of Del and Tim, the bike was unwedged and we were on our way to Tarifa, where we felt the adventure was really about to begin.

At Tarifa we met Jay and his blue recovery van, and the rest of our travel companions, for the first time. Here too we had the first technical problem when a hired KTM decided to break down only 100 miles from Malaga where it was hired. Luckily, Jay had his own personal bike, a much modified Honda CRF250, that he loaned to the rider, and we were all set to head to Africa.

The ferry trip to Tangier isn't long, but there is enough time for a drink, and also time to fill in the customs paperwork and show passports for emigration. Once we had docked, our paperwork was checked and then it was off to exchange money and to buy third party insurance for the duration of the trip. The insurance wasn't expensive, but I question how useful it would have been in the event of an incident. Never mind, we had it and could show documents should we get stopped at one of the many police checkpoints that we encountered, although we found that in all cases we were simply waved through at these checks.

Being let loose in the Tangier traffic was a real experience and one definitely not for the timid. Getting out of Tangier was hectic and nerve-wracking to say the least. We encountered our first major roundabout and it was simply every man for himself. If we had waited calmly for a good sized gap, we would have been stuck there for ever. It was a case of push, swerve and be aware of everything around you. The traffic will swerve around you. See how other riders and traffic get through and you follow their lead. Just by being resolute about where we wanted to go, we eventually got through and were soon riding the winding roads into the Rif Mountains and over towards the east and to Tetouan for the night. Our first experience of riding in Africa, the sights, the sounds and the chaotic traffic, was quite an introduction.

In the morning, after a simple breakfast consisting of doughy pancakes, eggs, honey and coffee, it was off to the bikes, and then heading towards Fès. This really was our first proper day in Morocco, climbing once again through the low Atlas Mountains. The landscape was remarkably lush and not as I expected. We rode at a relatively relaxed pace, and while overtaking did happen, we mostly stuck together without much in the way of problems or people getting lost. We did get strung out over our route, but there were not that many roads, so getting lost wasn't really much of an issue. It was just a case of soaking up the atmosphere and the views, taking in the lush hills, villages and village life, with the locals returning a wave and the children running out to see us. There was so much to see, and a GoPro camera would have been a nice thing to have had to record some of the sights. We stopped for breaks mid-morning, and for lunch and in mid-afternoon, with planned fuel breaks along the way. While having a bigger than average tank, the old AT isn't especially fuel efficient, so I was often down to my amber fuel light before refuelling, although I never made it to red.

Riding into Fès meant riding on our wits again. We stuck together and rode on the dual carriageway entering the



Off-road parking in Tetouan



Some stops were oasis-like



Some stops provided fuel for bikes and riders.



A dimly lit place. Squeeze in where you can



Ready to unload outside The Blue Sky Hotel in Fès

city, past ornate walls and through ornate gates, into the heaving throng of the heavily congested centre, heading for the Blue Sky Hotel. It had been a fairly long and hot day, so getting organised around the hotel was challenging. The hotel was very close to the centre of the city, and while it was convenient for seeing the sights, parking was at a premium. It was a case of riding past the hotel, down to a turning area near some impressive gates, then riding back, pulling up and taking all the luggage off the bikes and dumping it in the hotel lobby before getting back on the bikes, riding maybe 200 metres up to a roundabout, going straight across and down into a parking garage. This was a dimly lit place with cars and bikes parked everywhere. Some looked like they had literally been abandoned and I did wonder how we would actually get out of there the next day.

Once we were installed in the hotel and changed, we headed into the city. Everyone in the group seemed to do their own thing, with the significant Irish contingent



We rode through gates like this on our way into Fès and would ride out through similar ones the next day.



... but camel burger washed down with beer, which is available even though Morocco is a dry country, was most welcome.



Cats were everywhere and don't expect the hygiene standards of home.

Photo opportunity before leaving Fès.

definitely doing their own thing and having a great time. We had a restaurant recommendation for the Café Clock, where the camel burgers were a treat not to be missed, apparently. However, finding the place was another matter. But first we were in the medina (the old part of the town), where we were assaulted by the sights, sounds and smells of a north African city.

We ended the evening in an upstairs bar, where several of our party had also settled. Beer was available and a general mulling over of the day's events took place. Then it was back to the hotel where hopefully we could get a good night's sleep, although the minaret just down the street did call people to prayer a little too early for my liking.

After breakfast in the morning, it was time to rescue the bikes. Thankfully, a lot of the vehicles in the garage had already gone and our bikes were as we had left them. So, while we had been a little concerned at leaving the bikes there, the small payment and the security of the car park was well worth it. Then we had to reverse the process of our arrival – go and get the bikes, park outside the hotel and load the luggage, and this is where we lost our American friend Glen. He was travelling with his sister as pillion. She was looking quite dejected because her brother, who had gone to get the bike, had not returned after 30 mins. This was a little perplexing as you could pretty much see the entrance to the parking garage from the hotel. There was, however, a roundabout to be negotiated and this was Glen's undoing: he took the wrong exit and quickly got lost in the rush hour traffic of Fès. He eventually just parked his bike and walked back to the hotel to get help. Jay went with him and rode the bike back and we were all set, but it probably delayed our departure by a good 45 minutes.

Riding out through Fès was another great experience, with us beginning to get used to the way to make progress through the traffic. The only rule appeared to be 'there are no rules', but it all seemed to work well enough. As the traffic thinned, we left the walled



A quiet narrow medina street



Mint tea at a morning break



As we headed south towards the Sahara the landscape became ever more arid.

city through the arches by which we had entered and we were on our way to Midelt and the Kasbah Hotel Jurassique.

As we headed south towards the Sahara, the landscape became ever more arid, but where there was water, there would be an oasis of palm trees and civilisation,

and as we all had the GPX route files and the hotel details, we could pretty much go at our own pace with no one chasing us to keep up or to slow down. We had the reassurance of the blue back-up van if we hit trouble, which meant that could do our own thing. We could take a detour, stop where we wanted and have the feeling that we were on a bit of an adventure. For me, this was great – an organised tour, yet with the chance to do your own thing at any time.

At the Kasbah Jurassique we settled into our rooms and as night closed in, we hired a taxi to go and buy beer in the local town. Our rooms were very basic, but there was a reception area where we could sit and drink beer in the relative coolness of the evening. Most places had Wi-Fi, so we were able to catch up with messages and send loved ones updates of the trip. We were rarely out of communication for long.

The next day, Tim, Del and I decided that we were going to be all adventurous and not stick with the group; we would make our own way to the next hotel. This was going to be the big day, the day we reached *The Sahara*! We would leave on our own, stop where we liked and really take in the country as travellers, but safe in the knowledge that help wasn't too far away. We loved being able to stop when and where we wanted. If we spotted somewhere for a coffee we could stop. As long as your schoolboy French is up to scratch, you can get by in Morocco with a smattering of Spanish thrown in as a back-up. We could just chill and let the world go by with no real plan, other than knowing by the end of the day, we needed to be in the hotel in the Sahara. We had stopped in one small town after spying a coffee place from where we could see the bikes, when three bikers rode passed with much beeping and waving. They turned around and came back and we had a good chat. One was on an old GS and another was on an Africa Twin of similar vintage to mine, so we couldn't resist a photo opportunity.

All the normal pleasantries were excitedly exchanged: where are you from? Where are you going? How long have you been travelling, and so on? These guys were from Germany and Belgium and had been on the road for a few weeks and were simply going to keep riding and see where they ended up. No time scale or plan. It made our 'adventure' seem insignificant, but I'd like to think that one day I will do a longer trip. Feeling very jealous, we bade them farewell and safe travels.

At one point we spotted a market, and thought we would have a look. Tim was a little apprehensive thinking that we would get hassled by the locals, but very quickly we realised that any fears we had were unfounded and we simply mixed in with them.

After the market, we pressed on to Merzouga. The sat-nav files were excellent and guided us through towns and villages. It was all so alien to me, and just riding along straight roads, watching the scenery go by was an experience. Passing through a reasonably big town, we took a left at the centre, and headed out again. An old lady waves as we go by, and we see skinned and gutted carcasses of sheep or goat hanging up.

The town was quickly left behind and we headed towards the desert, but my amber fuel light came on and with virtually nothing on the horizon indicating fuel, or indeed indicating anything at all, we decided to head back to town to fill up at a petrol station we had seen. Pulling in, we were met at the pumps by a young couple, the guy on a slightly newer Africa Twin than mine – his was only 27 years old – while his girlfriend was riding what looked like a Yamaha XT. They were from Birmingham and I'd guess that they were in their mid to late twenties. They were a few weeks into what they thought would be a several month trip to see how far they could get. I really admired these two and I wish I'd done more when I was younger. I did do a fair amount of travelling before my daughters came along, but nothing as adventurous as these two.



Yamazuki?



The last fuel stop before the Sahara



The Jordi and Naima restaurant. A nice spot for lunch in sight of the dunes.



Washboard



Yep, we are going to do this



The hotel finally came into view.

We headed back on to the route to the night's stop and again the scenery began to change, the rocky outcrops and rock-strewn landscape slowly giving way to sand. As we approached Merzouga, we started to get glimpses of the dunes of the Sahara. Jay had mentioned that there was a restaurant we could go to in Merzouga before we took the final leg to the hotel. He said that then we should take the track nearly opposite the Shell petrol station and we would find the hotel. Probably. First things first: we decided to fuel up. Tim found the restaurant on his sat nav and we were off, riding through just a little sand to get there.

After lunch and coke, it was time to hit the road, such as it was. We were pretty sure this was the right place to come off tarmac and head towards the desert. The sat-nav seemed to be indicating that out there somewhere there was a hotel, so we took the plunge. Tim engaged Enduro mode and I just put my bike in gear, which was as much preparation as I could manage.

I've heard people mention washboard surfaces before, but had never encountered one until today. You definitely know when you hit what feels like a highly destructive surface. I honestly thought something, or perhaps many things, would be shaken loose on this stuff. I really can't describe just how bad it was. The vibrations through the whole bike were unbelievable, in fact it was better to come off the track and try to ride a parallel course beside it. Riding faster helped ease things a bit, but it was quite an experience.

I was the only one with tyres suited to this terrain, so I was off, standing up and loving the speed and the surface. It was loose, but nothing to be worried about. Getting way ahead of Del and Tim, I stopped just short of the hotel when it finally came into view.

Once they had caught up I was off again, not realising what was in store for me, and riding through the entrance of the hotel, perhaps a little faster than was wise, I hit the Sahara, literally, and made it only a little way towards back of the hotel before sliding down in the soft sand.

That evening at dinner, Jay asked if we wanted to ride quads in the dunes and most of us said we would, so Jay

arranged with a local quad bike company for a desert tour next day. We were doubtful that they could deliver 20 quads to our location, but on getting up for breakfast in the morning, there were two lines of blue quads ready to go.

After a little familiarisation, we blasted off into the desert. The Irish contingent were a force of nature and no matter how much the guides tried to keep them sensible, they were fighting a lost cause. It was like trying to herd cats. I'm very glad that we had a guide, as once you are out into the desert, it's very easy to become disorientated. It is just dunes in all directions.



No harm done to me or the bike. It's a tricky surface that sand. BUT we had made it, we were in the Sahara.



The Hotel Kasbah Erg Chebbi



Just dunes in all directions.



The way out: just keep going and you'll hit a road eventually.



At the Kasbah Jurassique Hotel there must have been at least four inches of water when we arrived, but by morning it was dry.



Outside the Jurassique at night.



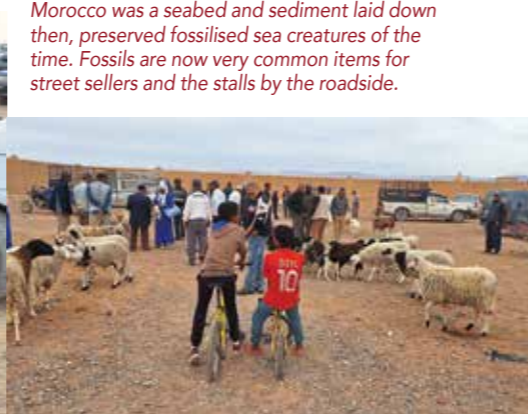
Outside our hotel quite a section of minerals and fossils were for sale. Back in the Paleozoic period – around 500 to 200 million years ago – Morocco was a seabed and sediment laid down then, preserved fossilised sea creatures of the time. Fossils are now very common items for street sellers and the stalls by the roadside.



Twin Twins



Chicks for sale in the market. No idea why they are coloured.



Del checks the livestock



Glen heading for the fort. Here we were quite some way from the road probably 20 mins or so into the scrubland.



Entrance to the fort.



Looking back to where we had come from, and well worth the view.



No matter how remote you think you are, when you stop there is a good chance someone will appear on a bicycle selling gems and fossils.



The Dadès Gorge



In some places the scenery just looked other-worldly. These ridges were like the great claws of a fossilised dragon.

As we were out fairly early on the quads, Tim and I decided that after that, a day off the bikes was well deserved, so we chilled out at the hotel. Tim took a dip in the pool and we generally took it easy. Meals and beer could be ordered as we wanted and it was all reasonably priced.

The hotel at Erg Chebbi was pretty much as far south as we would go or at least stay, before heading back north. Jay had taken riders further south to Marrakesh before, but he said it's getting too busy and very touristy there, so prefers to avoid it these days. Leaving by the track that had taken us to the hotel, we hit the main road again and regrouped at the Shell petrol station before heading to our next destination, Boumalne Dades.

We seemed to be skirting the desert with scrubland on our right and the desert on our left. Then, after a few miles, we veered away from the desert, and headed across barren land, sometimes passing through small towns, but with very little of any note. Jay had told us of a natural castle or fort that we could visit, which had been used as a location for Land Rover ads and for James Bond movies, so we thought it was worth a visit. It did, however, mean another off-road excursion. Those of us who wanted to go could and the rest of the group would wait at the next town at a coffee break. The Irish guys had gone to the fort yesterday, so that left just three of us to go.

One amusing aspect of the trip was that no matter where you are in Morocco, however remote you think you are, if you stop, there is a good chance someone will appear selling gems and fossils. Right at the edge of this cliff fort it was no different.

The tracks that were so clear when we were heading towards the fort were not so clear on the return when there was nothing obvious to aim for. There were several faint paths heading in similar directions and I wasn't sure which one to take. Luckily, after around 100m, I realised I was on the wrong one and cut across the rough, rock-strewn ground to the right track. That was probably not the wisest thing to have done, as those

stones could easily have caused a puncture. I headed towards the moving dust clouds and sure enough, I was back on the road and I caught up with the other guys.

At the lunch stop, we refuelled, had a bite to eat and explored nearby. Del, Tim and I checked out a fossil shop, where Del was adamant that he was going to negotiate a bargain. He didn't, and left empty-handed. Here, we encountered a German couple who had converted a fire engine, still resplendent in its red paint scheme, into their transcontinental, go anywhere camper. They were retired and living the dream. How cool is that?

The Dadès Gorge road is one of those roads you may not recognise by name, but when you see the picture, you may well recognise it. Unluckily, I was stuck behind a very slow lorry and a few cars, but I was able to overtake some vehicles, and it was still quite a ride, but I think a clear run would have been far more fun.

After a very pleasant lunch and back on the bikes, we started to climb, with the roads snaking their way through dramatic landscape, heading up to Agoudal, one of the highest villages in the Atlas Mountains at about 7500ft. As we climbed, my bike started to struggle with the altitude. I could definitely feel the loss of power. I know it was running rich, but with the air thinning, this did not help matters. The roads, however, really were superb, yet after every sweeping turn, I was hoping that we were as high as we were going to get and I would not lose any more power. Unfortunately, my hopes were in vain and we just kept going up and up, rolling through villages that were truly third world. Here you bought fuel out of plastic containers and the main roads through the villages were just dirt tracks. Yet still the children would come out and wave. I wonder what they thought of us, but with mostly smiling faces, they seemed happy to see us. We arrived in Agoudal and rode into the hotel courtyard. Things looked very sparse, but it was okay. There are not many hotels in Agoudal, so Tim and I, and a few others, were in another hotel a few minutes ride away. This was an even more stripped back affair. We could park the bikes right outside the room,

but the accommodation was basic to say the least. It was also freezing and we had no hot water; well, very little water of any temperature, actually. There was a reception building where we could warm up, and which also had Wi-Fi.

The next morning after a very simple breakfast we were off into the chilly air of the high Atlas Mountains. This time we were descending, ever downwards, and as we did so, my bike's power started to return and I was far happier with how the old girl was running. With 'only' 60hp, and a fairly heavy bike, you feel any slight power loss, but when things were running well, I had easily enough power to have fun, especially going downhill. We got closer to sea level, and it was lunch time. We parked in a car park near a restaurant in a bustling street. One of the other guys mentioned not seeing a brake light from me, so a quick check and my front brake light switch had failed. Luckily, with the numerous spares I had, I did have a spare brake light switch in with my fuses. A few minutes later, normal brake light service was resumed.

Our next destination was the city of Meknes and riding there was much like riding in Fès – just keep up and watch everyone around you. Parking our bikes was challenging, but the end of a pedestrian walkway, just down the road from the hotel entrance, served well.

After a quick freshen up, Del, Tim and I went to explore. There was a medina/souk near to us and it didn't disappoint, with sights and smells to fill our senses. There was a labyrinthine network of alleyways and thoroughfares under cover, selling mainly food, while in the surrounding streets, other items were sold, cookware and clothes being the primary wares.

We were now in the last days of our Morocco leg. The familiar ritual of packing and taking luggage down to the bikes to load them, began after breakfast. Then the ride out through the arches of the city of Meknes was once again an interesting experience, negotiating the traffic and 'the-rules-are-there-are-no-rules' style of driving. It all seemed chaotic, but it works, and I suppose it will never change.

Up until now, the weather had been excellent: hot, yet not too hot, low to mid 30s Celsius. However, heading towards Tangier, our final stop in Morocco, the weather took a distinct turn for the worse, with strong winds and storms forecast. The final part of the trip into Tangier was pretty dramatic, with very high winds and heavy traffic. Arriving in the outskirts of the city, we were on a wide stretch of straight road with lots of slow-moving stop-start traffic, and at the wider junctions, where there was no shelter from the winds, just stopping was a scary affair. I could feel the wind against my bike and at times I struggled to keep it upright. I could see everyone else struggling as well. At one point a huge gust



Not all the roads in Morocco are great. Many were, but some had eroded to the point where only part of the metalled road surface remained.



Cold Tim!



Our hotel in Meknes was hidden behind this impressive door.

of wind knocked me and one of the other guys off our bikes. My crash bars certainly earned their keep on this trip. No damage done and with the help of a few kind bystanders, we were both quickly back on our bikes. Tim said that he and the others would have loved to have helped, but they were too busy trying to keep their own bikes upright. I don't blame them. It was wind like I had never encountered before.

We had dinner in the hotel as the weather really closed in, with heavy rain and winds battering the city relentlessly.



Due to the storm, the ferries to Europe were cancelled that evening and we were at risk of being delayed the next day too. This had the guys who were flying from Malaga changing their flights to give themselves some time buffer. The three of us, who were riding back to Santander, had a different issue: we had a ferry to catch and Tim was on a time crunch, as he was away again very soon after we returned.

Fortunately, the next morning dawned fairly clear. A little rain, but nothing to worry about. The main concern was the backlog of ferries crossing to Europe, and it looked like our ferry might not leave until the afternoon, possibly not even until the next day. It wasn't looking good. We headed to the port anyway, to see what the situation was. We couldn't find any news on the status of our ferry, but Jay said there was another smaller ferry service that appeared to have earlier sailings, literally in an hour's time. He pointed us towards the ticket booth and said good luck, and thankfully we were able to buy tickets, get the paperwork sorted out, and head straight over to the boarding queue with minutes to spare.

We were back on track and on time when we landed in Tarifa. The route to Santander was pre-planned and the hotels were prebooked, so it was a case of following the directions. Morocco was a fantastic place and some of the roads were excellent, but they were nothing compared to the roads we encountered in southern Spain. Jay lives in Spain and his routes are well researched. The route he mapped out for us was stunning, with sweeping curves, tight hairpins and grippy surfaces. The roads were superb. If we thought the trip was over after leaving Morocco, we really were in for a surprise. The ride to Santander was as much a part of the trip as the Sahara and with clear weather we all had a lot of fun, although riding through central Spain wasn't as exciting as riding in the south, and the weather was definitely cooling as we travelled further north.

We did find some nice places for lunch though, and we fancied stopping in the walled city of Avila, but unfortunately it was closed to motor traffic as there was a cycle road race in progress.

We eventually reached the Picos Mountains in northern Spain, another place where the scenery and the roads are dramatic. I know people rave about the Picos, and having ridden there, I can now see why. We really had an absolute ball on those roads, and were a little sad finally to reach our hotel, but we had huge smiles on our faces and vowed to return. The hotel had a good bar and food, so we spent the evening there. For the next day Del had an idea for a ride he had heard about. It was, however, up to a village and it was a dead end, so we would have to ride up to it and turn around to come back. After some careful consideration of the timing, we concluded that if we left early enough, we would have time to visit Valdeón, and also be in time for the ferry, and I'm very glad we did that. They were not fast roads, but the scenery was dramatic and as we headed out of the mountains, the weather closed in and we were riding through rain, stopping only for some snacks before heading to the port.

On the ferry once again, I took only one bag to the cabin (see, I do learn), and we booked a table in the restaurant. It was a 'last supper' affair: we had done it! We had ridden from the UK to the Sahara and back. But next day real life resumed as we arrived in Plymouth on a damp English afternoon to face the five hour slog home in the dark and rain.

Would I recommend this trip? Absolutely. There were some great characters on this trip, and some that were perhaps a little annoying too, but we rode 3200 miles together and had a great laugh. It was a trip that we'll definitely remember to the end of our days.



Customs at Tangier



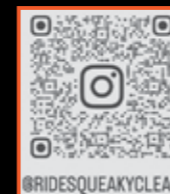
Back in Tarifa, on track and on time.



We did find some nice places for lunch though.



Roads with rock overhangs made for some dramatic riding in The Picos Mountains



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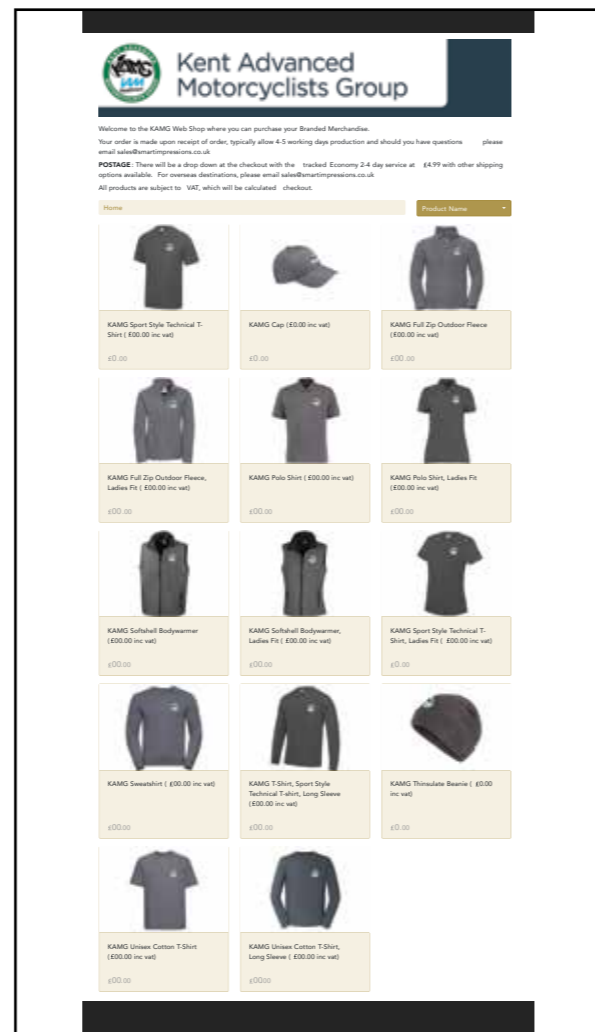
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KAMG MERCHANDISE is here now . . .

... actually, it's *almost* here now. The merchandise exists, but the access details to the website so that you can buy it had not quite been finalised when the magazine had to go to the printer. Everyone will be sent the access info in... well, probably a few minutes after the magazine has been printed. That's the way things work. But, fear not, it's all worth waiting for, and a little wait sharpens the appetite.

There is a big range of excellent stuff including fleeces, bodywarmers, sweatshirts, polo shirts, beanie hats, caps and, of course, T shirts – including 100% cotton, long sleeve T shirts. How about that? Everything comes in a wide range of sizes ranging from XS to 4XL, and in ladies versions too. And everything is branded with a choice of two KAMG logos. How about that, again!



Steve Wright

A dear friend and KAMG member, Steve Wright, lost his battle with cancer at the end of July. Steve was my one and only associate during my brief time as an observer, and we were both delighted when he achieved a F1st back in 2016. Following his subsequent attendance on a Peterborough training weekend and the positive feedback he received, I had hoped to persuade him to

go on to take his Masters but, unfortunately, his ill health put a stop to those plans.

As much as he enjoyed his bikes, Steve's first love was golf and he was good enough to play off a handicap of one, which is why we shared many rides together, but never a round of golf, as I am a long way off such standards.

He was a lovely man and will be missed by all who knew him. Thoughts are with his wife and daughters, who he leaves behind.

Paul Jessop



Rutland Water

May 4th to 6th (Bank Holiday)
Rutland Water is a gentle 3 day tour staying in the same hotel for both nights. It's an easy but still very enjoyable tour for all levels of riders. It's the first one of the year. It's a great first tour, or a relaxed practice.
Rooms £240, 25 rooms only, day 1, 180 miles • day 2, 138 miles • day 3, 180 miles

North Coast 500

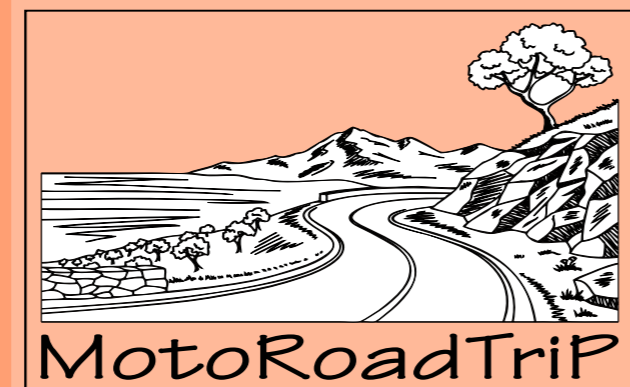
May 25th to June 2nd 9-day tour
Hard tour of some of the best places in Scotland. Every day in a different hotel. It's a great tour Over 2000 miles with only 200 on the motorway. A wonderful route with great stops, cafes and coffee stops. The scenery is exceptional. Cost of rooms only, single £1200, double £1250 9 rooms only. Cost of ferry included

Southern Scotland

June 15th to 22nd 8 day tour
A medium level tour around the Southern Scotland and Northern England If you have never been to Southern Scotland its absolutely great 1700 mile tour of which only 200 are on the motorways. Great sweeping roads, empty most of the time, great cafes wonderful views what's not to like. 9 rooms, single £850 double £870, includes access to Beamish Museum

Wales

July 8th to 12th Mid week 5 day tour
A medium level tour around the Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia. 2 nights in each hotel, total of 1000 miles, from paddock wood and returning via the M25 through Essex less than 40 miles on motorways. The scenery and stops are great. 9 Rooms £600



Fort William and Highlands of Scotland

August 3rd to 11th
This tour includes bed/ breakfast, evening meal - as all the hotels are remote. A medium level tour around the Highlands, the bottom of Glen Coe is a great place to stay. If you have never been to Scotland its an absolutely great 1900 mile tour of which

only 200 miles are motorway. We have a day to Shieldaig and Applecross, cattle pass, Eilean Donan castle (most photographed castle in Scotland). A day over to the Isle of Mull, my favourite Island, a hotel with a view over Loch Leven. 9 rooms, including breakfast and evening meals. Single £1350 Double £1600

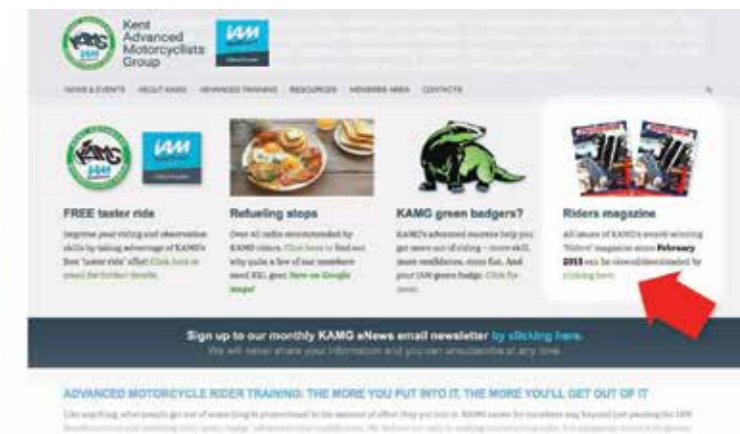
I will be running other trips during the year, please see the web site for further details and availability

www.motoroadtrip.co.uk 07786 592845 steveriches12@gmail.com

Riders back numbers

We often refer in the magazine to articles that appeared in back numbers and which may be relevant to a piece in the current magazine. There are some references in this issue, for example. All back numbers of the magazine from February 2015 are available on the KAMG website.

There are two ways of finding them: either navigate to ABOUT KAMG/PUBLICATIONS/RIDERS MAGAZINE, or scroll approximately half way down the 'Home' page and click on the green link under the Riders Magazine picture.



IDCAM

INTRODUCTORY DAY COURSE IN ADVANCED MOTORCYCLING

- 2024 Dates**
- August 31st
 - September 21st
 - October 19th



Our IDCAM is held at the Kent Fire and Rescue Road Safety facility in Marconi Way, Rochester, ME1 2XQ. If you wish to attend, please register your interest via the calendar on Tracker. Attendees are asked to arrive at 08.45 for a prompt 09:00 start. The morning session consists of a presentation about IAM RoadSmart, about KAMG and the aims of the course, and how to check that both the rider and motorcycle are fit for the road. This is followed by a coffee break.

The second presentation is all about the system of motorcycle control and, if time permits, a *Highway Code* quiz. The morning session will finish at approximately 12:15.

Please note that lunch is not provided. You may bring along your lunch or, if you wish, your allocated Observer can take you to a local café.



The afternoon session consists of an observed ride with a National Observer, and includes a pre-ride briefing and post ride debrief. The finish point is at a mutually agreed location that is usually closer to home than the start. The afternoon session lasts around two and a half hours.

If you would like to attend as an Associate, please contact associates@kamg.org.uk.

MACHINE CONTROL DAY

Our machine control days are organised by Paul Aspinall. If you have not yet signed up then do it now – simply log on to Tracker and register your participation or contact email below:

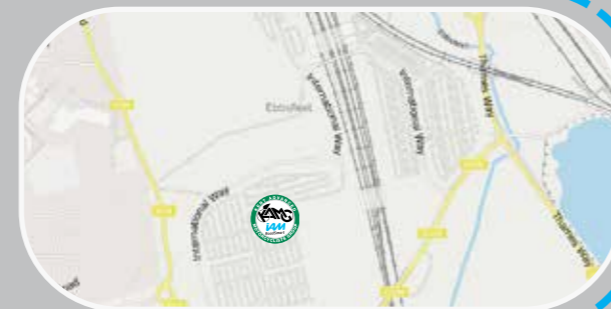
mcd@kamg.org.uk

Held at: Car Park D, Ebbsfleet Station, International Way, Gravesend, Kent DA10 1EB

2024 Dates
Sat 7th September

Non-KAMG members will be asked for a small fee of £10.00 contributing to the running costs.

Arrival time: 08:45 for 09:00 start
Finish Time: approx 13:00 Hrs



Vice President Dave Murphy
Honorary Life Members Kevin Chapman
Christine Botley
John Leigh
John Lemon
Brenda Vickery
Ian Burchell
Sue Mills
Tina Underwood
Tony Young
Roger Lancaster



GROUP SECRETARY
Gerhard Lottering
0844 585 7796
group-secretary@kamg.org.uk



MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY
David Howard
0844 585 7792
membership@kamg.org.uk



GROUP NIGHT EVENT ORGANISER
Sarah Livingstone
07974 235336
groupnights@kamg.org.uk



MERCHANDISE MANAGER
Catherine Hills
0844 585 7795
regalia@kamg.org.uk



DEPUTY CHIEF OBSERVER
John Gardiner
07899 898744
dco@kamg.org.uk

CONTACTS



CHAIRMAN AND VICE PRESIDENT
Dave Murphy
0844 585 7781
chairman@kamg.org.uk



TREASURER
Nigel Clibbens
07766 409660
treasurer@kamg.org.uk



MACHINE CONTROL DAY CO-ORDINATOR
David Austen
07872 008016
mcd@kamg.org.uk



GROUP RUN ORGANISER
Chris Brooker
07739180093
runleader@kamg.org.uk



WEBSITE AND E-NEWS EDITOR
Niels Reynolds
0844 585 7785
publicity@kamg.org.uk



COMMITTEE MEMBER
Paul Jessop
0844 802 7093
paul.jessop@fil.com



COMMITTEE MEMBER
Jeff Cockburn
07970 071427
jbladecbr@aol.com



VICE CHAIR
Tina Underwood
0844 802 7091
vicechairman@kamg.org.uk
07718475004
Tunder2122@aol.com



CHIEF OBSERVER
Colin Billings
07750 301675
chiefobserver@kamg.org.uk



ASSOCIATE CO-ORDINATOR
Joe Mair
0844 585 7789
associates@kamg.org.uk



IDCAM ORGANISER
Ian Broughton
07956500887
ian_bruffton@hotmail.com



MAGAZINE EDITOR
Nick Farley
0844 585 7794
nickfarleygazka@gmail.com



COMMITTEE MEMBER
Matt Pounds
07764 514254
mattpounds@hotmail.com



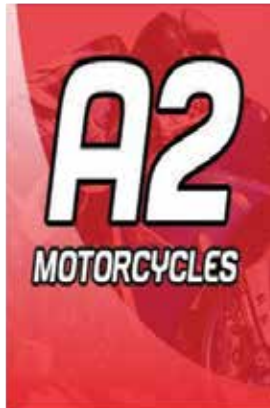
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