



# Newsletter

November 2015

## **Its not the years, it's the mileage. (or is it?)**

At the excellent Tullybanocher meeting in October, Jake and I were having a chat about the mileages our bikes had covered. To be honest I have no real idea how many miles the Commando has covered. I have plenty of history from previous owners, old MOTs and what have you, but I also know that it will have been run without a working speedometer for who knows how long, will have had instruments rebuilt or replaced and maybe even tampered with. For more than half the time I've had it, the Smiths clock has been disconnected and I've used one of three different digital clocks or just pure guesswork.

If that sounds somewhat casual, it's because I don't think it really matters. Use only really wears out the consumable bits – tyres, chains, bearings, seals – and as they wear out they get replaced. You could argue that that this will take its toll on the structural parts too, and in extreme cases I would have to concede that. A very high mileage engine is likely to have had its main bearings replaced many times and each time may enlarge or damage the housing, valve guides would be the same story, the regrinding of worn crank journals may eventually require metal spraying or replacement. But I would suggest that these are less likely to be an issue for most of our old bikes than a history of neglect, poor storage and ham-fisted “maintenance”.

I really think that the more you ride your old bike the better it gets. That's not the same as trying to go fast on it – that *is* a sure way to break it. And I'm not talking about neglecting your bike either, just about using it and suffering - even welcoming - the tell-tales that are its story and personality.



Used bikes are so much more interesting than perfectly restored or preserved showroom pieces, and judging by the attention this Triton was getting at the SVMC meeting at St Fillans, plenty of others agree.

It did get me thinking though, and during a particularly miserable weekend, I went through my diaries to total the mileage recorded. Keeping a diary of when things broke, wore out or were replaced was a habit I got into when I bought my first ever brand new bike, and I have just stuck with it. What can I tell you, I'm a pedant!

The mileage travelled each year on the Commando depends on which other bike I have had on the road and which one went on holiday with me. There were a few years when the total was over 10000 miles – years when the Commando was the only bike on the road. But there were also years when the mileage dipped right down to around 3000 miles – the year of a bottom end explosion and buying a new Ducati.

Overall the average annual mileage between 2008 and 2015 was 7800 miles. So really just barely run in!

One of the things that happens when you ride any bike for a longer period of time, in my case the Ducati for twenty years and the Commando for ten, is that you start to tune into them but at the same time become so comfortable with that you don't notice them wearing. Its like the favourite pair of boots that become so familiar that even at the end of the day, you are not even aware of them. You don't give them any thought other than to polish them to keep them waterproof or new laces when old ones break. But you stamp them on each day and each day they do just what you expect of them. Your old bike gets like that too. They seem to reach a kind of steady state where they just persevere, but that's the time when things creep up on you. The Commando has been wearing the same set of Hagon rear shocks since I bought it and possibly even since 1992. I don't think they wore out all of a sudden, but the damping must have been gradually disappearing without me noting. This condition was quite dramatically brought to my attention when I had a huge moment riding up the Great Glen. Laden with my weekend gear packed into the Krausers, I was enjoying the road (perhaps a little too much!) and when I threw it into a bend it suddenly turned into a pogo-stick. It was luck rather than skill that allowed me to avoid the hedge and I certainly proceeded with more caution after that. A new set of Ikon dial-a-ride shocks has restored its rear end decorum, but I find it amazing that I could have let them become so bad.

Maybe familiarity really does breed contempt?

## Press Gang

Readers of the Real Classic magazine may have spotted a familiar face in this months edition. Stuart Urquhart has penned an

extensive feature on Sandy Bloys recent build of an exRAC Norton ES2. If you are not familiar with the magazine you can get the feel of it at <http://www.realclassic.co.uk>



## Tullybannocher Autumn Lunch

Good to see such an excellent turnout at the Tullybannocher Café despite the slightly damp conditions. I really enjoy the variety of bikes we get at these meetings, so thanks to all who came along.

## Xmas Dinner

A date for your diary - Xmas Dinner Saturday 12th December at the Killin Hotel. By coincidence it's the same night as Norrie Miltons sidecar do, so we are going to join forces. The cost for Dinner, Bed and Breakfast is £60 a head. Contact the hotel direct to book (01567 820296) and tell them I sent you as the rooms are held under my name. There are twin rooms but if you want a double, make sure you tell them when booking so they can release the twin room.

## For Sale

'Motorcycle Sport' magazines, annually professionally bound into books, from Vol. 4 to 42

Contact John Hyman for more details