

SIX DAYS IN WALES

PART
THE
FIRST

70 years ago, the ISDT roamed over the Welsh mountains and Marches. Last summer, Oily Boot Bob and a team of intrepid Enfield riders set out to re-trace the route on old British bikes...

Photos by Oily Boot Bob and Mortons Archive





In keeping with the international theme of the Six Days Trial, two of the 2019 team came from the Netherlands

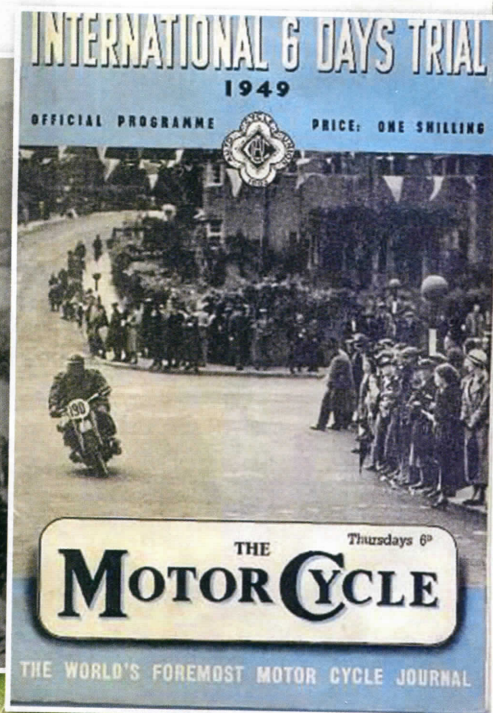
A handful of photos of motorcycles crossing the picturesque hills of long-ago rural Wales intrigued me. How many of these scenes from the 1949 International Six Day Trial would be recognisable today? These thoughts became a plan to retrace the route of the 1949 ISDT when a very helpful lady at the VMCC replied to my long-shot request for a copy of the original

event programme. Jacqueline in the library at Allen House said that most of the place names on the old maps in the programme could be read when enlarged on a computer. My wild idea was actually viable.

The International Six Day Reliability Trial, as it was originally known, was conceived more than a hundred years ago by the Auto Cycle Union to test the reliability of motorcycles and light

motorcars over a gruelling course of many hundreds of miles. Motorcycle manufacturing nations submitted a Trophy Team of riders on machines made in their home country, while national Vase Teams could ride any make of motorbike. Private and sponsored riders made up the rest of the entries.

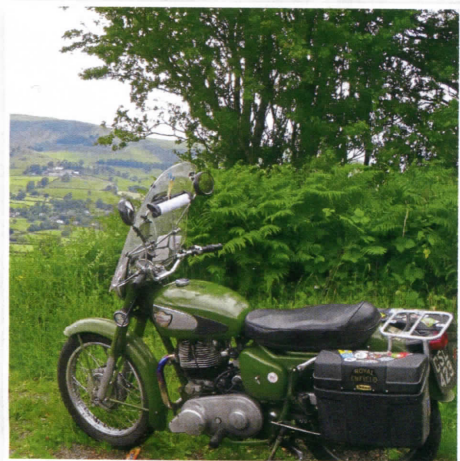
In September 1949 Great Britain hosted the event in Wales around ➤



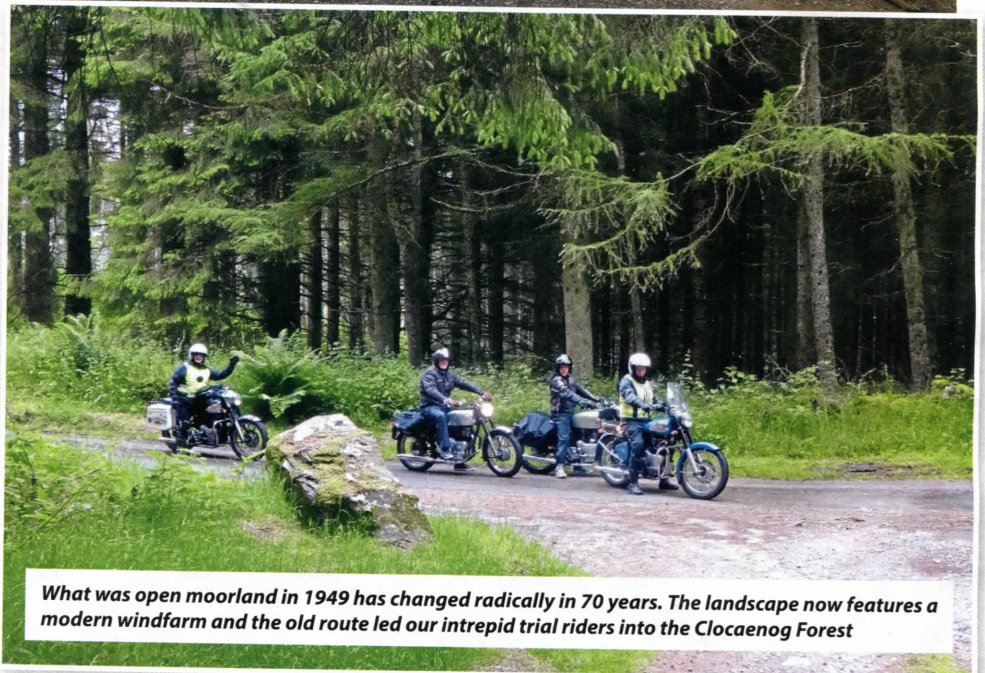


The 1949 ISDT started in Llandrindod Wells. There weren't so many spectators around for the 209 re-enactment

three huge circuits, two of which would be ridden in both clockwise and anticlockwise directions on different days, arriving at checkpoints within a specified time to avoid gaining penalty points. A clean score card at the end of six days of hard riding over 1250 miles merited a prestigious gold medal, and the trophy was awarded to a national team with clean cards. Silver and bronze medals were awarded according to the number of penalty points collected. No provision was made for puncture repairs or minor maintenance during the event, which had to be carried out en route, necessitating fast



Inspired by Jack Stocker, who wrestled an Enfield 700 around the Alps and won a gold medal in 1952, Bob opted to take his 400lb Super Meteor on the Re-Trial



What was open moorland in 1949 has changed radically in 70 years. The landscape now features a modern windfarm and the old route led our intrepid trial riders into the Clocaenog Forest



The Cornish Constellations both hail from 1959. Kelvin's in the foreground was modelled on Vince's very original and reliable example which was garaged from 1972 until 2007 when Vince brought it back to life. Both bikes have the scissor clutch which was abandoned by the factory for the traditional pushrod operation after three years

riding in order to keep ahead of schedule. All machines were locked away in the *parc fermé* at the end of each day to prevent illegal tampering or replacement of broken parts.

There were observed sections over rough terrain, typically river beds or rocky tracks were included in the route to test the rider's control and the machine's robustness, and gave birth to the more gymnastic trials we have today. Riders were penalised on these sections for using their feet and, not so many years beforehand, for standing on the footrests which would receive an NNS penalty – not normally seated – giving an insight into the humble origins of motorcycle trialling.

In this respect, our choice of road bikes would be in character. Heavy luggage carrying capability was a higher priority than cross-country agility, so I tried to be inspired by Jack Stocker, who wrestled a Royal Enfield Meteor 700 through the Austrian Alps to a gold medal in the 1952 ISDT, the biggest bike to ever do so.

Our agenda was simple; we would ride sections of the route which took our fancy, as well as other interesting-looking roads agreed around the map each morning, with further changes often made during refreshment stops throughout the day. For a bit of fun, we'd try to find the locations of the

old black and white photographs.

Tracing the roads with a highlighter pen through place names on 1:250000 Ordnance Survey maps was surprisingly straightforward with the back-up of Google Maps, Satellite View and even Street View where time permitted. I soon realised just how fast those competitors had raced through the many hundreds of miles of rough, narrow lanes. We would be hard pushed to average 25mph even with modern tyres on hard surfaced roads.

So, this adventure would take my Super Meteor (previously featured in RC179) and I across the Severn Bridge and northwards to the Dee Valley, where our team of seven would be hosted by the friendly MZ Riders Club at their North Wales rally for the weekend. The furthest travelled award went to our man Vince from Cornwall on his very un-German RE Constellation, such was the hospitality of the MZ folk.

On the hottest day of the year, three of us from the south-west and two from Birmingham met and awaited the arrival of our two friends from the Netherlands to complete our truly international team. Unlike the 1949 ISDT which started and finished each day in the spa town of Llandrindod Wells, we made two base camps; one at Carrog in the north for the first three days, then moved on to our second campsite near the Brecon Beacons to explore the more southerly routes.

Denbigh, the northernmost point of the ➤



Refreshments at Caffi Treferwyn, where a full cooked breakfast could still be purchased at something close to 1949 prices!



The first victim of the tribulations of the Re-Trial. Frank and his 1958 Enfield 500 Twin developed a misfire and then vanished from the rear-view mirror

trial, provided the lunch stop for the 1949 riders on days four and five and for us on our first day, as well as a welcome retreat from the rain before traversing the Clocaenog Forest. This may have been open moorland in 1949 and probably presents the most altered landscape with its towering wind turbines. Passing the imposing wind farm and descending through the track-hugging plantation, Frank's 500 twin developed one of those annoying intermittent misfires. It was frustrating, but nothing quite like the

problems encountered on this same stretch of road seventy years ago by CM Ray. His Ariel 500 lost the rear brake rod, followed by the front brake lever shortly after, when the bike was dropped on the loose surface of a corner. *The Motor Cycle* tells us that Mr Ray completed the final 56 miles in heroic style and within the allocated time, apparently without brakes. His performance was heralded as the most meritorious of the whole event.

The open moorland roads were extremely

enjoyable, giving clear views of the road ahead towards vast horizons, only spoiled by the locals. Locals who have terrible road sense and don't even speak the same language, but since they outnumbered us humans by five to one, we had to ride carefully and even respect their sit-down protests in the road. At least we didn't have to contend with young lambs which can abandon a position of safety and run across the road to be with their mums at the appearance of a vehicle.

Later in the afternoon, climbing the B-road



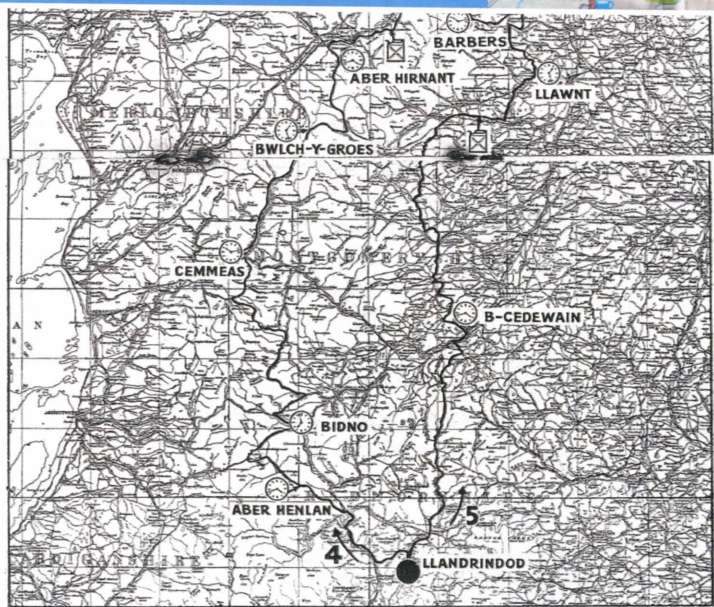
Kelvin the apprentice was given the task of rounding up straying sparks

onto the high moor towards Penybont Fawr against the distant silhouette of Mount Snowdon, we lost a rider. The unmistakable platinum-white LED lights of Frank's bike disappeared from my mirror and I knew he was in trouble. The misfire had become worse, so bad that he couldn't climb gradients and had headed back to camp where Kelvin, our young understudy, set about the task of troubleshooting the engine.

Frank's 500 Twin is from 1958, the final year of the long-stroke motor which was replaced by the short-stroke Meteor Minor. During the 25 years of ownership he's made many of his own improvements, such as home-fabricated toolboxes, LED running lights and a disc brake. The original magneto ignition remained, which is where the misfire was traced to after a lot of searching. In ISDT ▶



Tracing the original route of the 1949 occasionally meant taking a plunge into the unknown...



4th & 5th DAYS



The very resourceful Peter doesn't restrict the use of duct tape to seat repairs

Mike's Constellation, mostly from 1959, goes and stops better than most. The Indian disc front stopper requires an Indian fork leg to withstand the increased forces. Some owners have attached the calliper to a Redditch fork leg and survived!





Authentic 1949 roadways survive!



terms, Frank's card would be marked DNF – did not finish – which today meant a breakdown recovery to his home. He later reported that the expected faulty capacitor was not to blame. Instead, the brass armature, the rotating centre of the magneto, had broken in two. Judging by the recent number of magneto failures in the classic community, it seems that they've exceeded the critical age of reliability.

Neglected but not mistreated, Peter's 500 Bullet could be described as a rescue bike. The Rustfield, as he calls it, had lived a previous life in a garden a bit too close to the North Sea, which accounts for its feral appearance. The 1995 bike was laid to rest by the previous owner when the notoriously inconsistent main bearings, piston and valvetrain started failing in rapid succession. Picked up for a few Euros, Peter fitted an Alpha roller big end and what he calls a 'skeleton' wiring loom, and put sintered bronze bushes in the distributor which cured its erratic starting behaviour.

Next up, new valve guides and a 43mm exhaust valve from Hitchcocks were fitted and, while the head was off, potential breakdowns were reduced by removing some stress raisers introduced during the Chennai manufacturing. Sharp edges and corners were given radii on the rockers and on the expansion slots of the piston, and some ugly stalactites were removed from the inlet tract to improve the breathing.

Pulling a 19T gearbox sprocket, it has a reliable top speed of 65-70mph, governed by the enormous and effective original silencer. Peter has traded some performance for noise reduction, which makes long days in the saddle a bit more bearable.

Peter is a very capable mechanic who thrives on the challenges arising during his frequent travels. He once spent several enjoyable weeks touring India on an old BSA M20 which he brought back to life by carving a new contact breaker heel from a piece of wood with his penknife, so you'll understand that roadside recovery is a rare option, particularly when you see the enormous toolkit which lives in his tank bag. **Rc**

NEXT TIME: More mechanical mayhem, tackling the water splash, and the challenge of the No Through Road sign...

MANY THANKS to Jane Skayman of Mortons Archive, who should've been taking it easy over Christmas but instead spent much of her time sorting out images for this article!

'Where are we?' Kelvin appears unconcerned...