

FULL CHAT

Lockdown Special Issue #2

Newsletter of Somerset Advanced Motorcyclists

Group No. 1241



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Front Cover: SAM's new Gazebo, all ready for use at local shows and exhibitions. Next event—Bransons Yeovil 19th July



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FAVOURITE BIKING MEMORIES

LOCKDOWN SPECIAL ISSUE – BIKING MEMORIES

Welcome to this 2nd Lockdown Special Issue of Full Chat. It is aimed at sharing with other SAM members some of your favourite biking memories, hopefully raising a smile or rekindling a distant memory. The main purpose of these “special issues” was to try and maintain some form of communication with our members whilst our usual get-togethers at Group Rides was not possible. As we start to see existing lockdown restrictions easing, we will hopefully see at least some of SAM’s social activities return to some form of “new” normality: associate training has recommenced, as have IAM RoadSmart-managed advanced tests, so hopefully Group Rides might soon be a possibility. If so, this will be the last “Lockdown Special Issue”, and we can return to our usual quarterly Full Chats.

But please, don’t let that stop you sending in articles to share with other members! The next regular issue of Full Chat (Summer 2020) will be going to print around the end of July, so please make the effort to pen an article (with a photo!) on anything biking-related for inclusion.

Send your contributions to me at Tullochg@aol.com, preferably in text or Word format, with pictures in jpeg format (to allow editing of size).

Graham Tulloch, Newsletter Editor



After over 3 months of forced inactivity, Chief Observer Gina Herridge was delighted to be back on the road offering advanced training as part of SAM’s Observer Team. Gina is seen here with her Associate Jonathan Denovan-Smith. All training is under the strict ‘Covid-safe’ guidelines issued by IAM RoadSmart.

Kawasaki Demo Day—19th July



Kawasaki

After several months of lock-down, SAM will be christening their new Gazebo at Bransons Motorcycles in Yeovil on 19th July. The event is a Kawasaki Demo Day, but with dealerships for Honda and Yamaha also on site (not to mention a wide range of used bikes) there should be something to interest everyone. Somerset Road Safety Partnership and Yeovil Freewheelers will also be there, with the blood bikes looking to raise funds for their valuable services.

If you know of anyone looking to find out more about SAM, or maybe someone looking for a Taster ride, then be sure to direct them to Bransons Yeovil on the Pen Mill Trading Estate on Sunday 19th July.

Dan Wright



MY FIRST BIKE

Back in 1987 I had been in the RAF for about a year in Buckinghamshire and as I was 17 I wanted a motor-bike like all my friends. I had first ridden when I was about 13 when my next door neighbour got a 50cc Suzuki, well when I said ridden I had managed to not stall it and moved it about 5 feet and on one occasion rode it on a huge recreation field with my feet down to go round corners so I probably wasn't a natural.

I had earned some money and borrowed a small amount and entered the only bike shop I knew in Aylesbury,



I wandered up and down looking knowledgeable and when the man appeared (who remembers Mr Ben?) I was bursting to buy a bike. My friends and I had all the brochures and could talk for ages on the benefits of YPVS and two stroke oil; I had decided on the model, the extras and everything. He looked at this 17 year old (I wasn't spotty!) and said "Can I help you....sir". He seemed tired, so I said in my best 'knowledgeable' way, I would like to buy a TZR 125 in red and white please and it must have a fairing, and I also need a helmet and some gloves. He looked at

me and said "How will sir be paying?" The wad of money came out of my inside pocket, two thousand pounds in crisp, bank fresh twenty pound notes. His manner changed and the "sir" became "Sir" and he started fussing around the skinny 17-year-old: "What about this helmet Sir...these gloves are just right for someone with a bike like yours", and so it went on. I ended up with a black and red FM helmet and a set of black and red gloves with metal rivets in the palm, looking back that would have been painful if I had fallen off as they would have got very hot. Anyway the deal was struck and I agreed to pick the bike up the following Friday. My mate was due to take his driving test and the plan was when (not if) he passed I would walk from the test centre to the bike shop and collect my brand-new bike. Luckily he passed his test and I arrived at the shop, in a pair of jeans, army issue boots and a very fashionable leather jacket from Burtons, there was no CE Armour or indeed not a lot of padding but it was quite thick and I looked good in it (this was a matter of opinion but in the 80's we all looked good).

My bike was against the kerb on its side stand and the man came out to see me off, he showed me the indicators, horn and choke lever and then asked the question he shouldn't have..."Any questions, Sir?" Only one I could think off: "How do I ride it?" He looked a little perplexed but explained about clutch, brake and throttle, so I set off wobbling down the road for my first ride with his voice echoing in my mind about it needs to be run in so don't take it above 7000rpm.

My first ride got me back to camp, it was about 7 miles I think but passed in a blur. My friend had driven back as well, his first drive with no one else in the car, we were rebels and very lucky that the roads were quieter then than they are today. With lessons finished at the camp it was now 5pm and I was ready for my second journey, 120 miles up the A1 to my parents' house for the weekend. Running in a 125cc bike on a fast dual-carriageway meant I was flashing the trucks in as they overtook me as I was only doing 50mph running the bike in and they were going faster than me, but I made it in one piece with no scares. Sunday night was the return journey and I repeated this for about 6 months.

When I sold my 'first' bike it had over 8000 miles on it, I only had it 6 months but had to sell it to buy a much more sensible car. It was an Austin Allegro Estate in bright orange, so you would have to question why!!! But I was posted to Northern Scotland and needed to move all my stuff so the

car was needed. That first bike was brilliant, on the tank it would do seriously silly speeds, it never broke down apart from a fouled plug after a service, the garage put the old one back in again and it was fine but still billed me for the new one. I had my freedom and on my move to Scotland I had lots of other bikes but that is another story.

Steve Dixon



CADWELL PARK

Not entirely sure, but I think Maggie bought this for my 40th birthday. Track days were getting popular and Yamaha were running a race school at Cadwell, so it seemed like a good idea to safely take to the track. I had friends who raced, but they were often broke or broken so it didn't appeal to me.

We decided to make a weekend of it and travelled to a B&B nearby for a



Rick riding #5, being closely observed by his Instructor

look around Lincolnshire. We had a look at Mablethorpe and probably had fish and chips.

The day at the track was far more exciting, I had a set of one-piece leathers that were black with pink and green bits on, as usual, cheap but did the job. We had a briefing and were taught the flag rules used and what we should do if they were waved. After being led around for a few laps we could carry on at our own pace and the instructors would mingle and give advice between sessions, much like the IAM track events. After a while I wondered if something was wrong with my bike, but apparently they were Japanese spec FZR400s which were restricted to 114mph, so at that speed it would feel like it was misfiring. Anyway, I had a great time and

went home ready to do some track days.

In the years that followed I bought a Yamaha FZR400, at that time many dealers were bringing in Japanese imports, and this one came from Riders of Yeovil, the restriction could be overcome with a "black box" which just plugged in to the wiring loom and gave a top speed around 140mph. My most memorable day was at Thruxton, a day arranged by Steve Parrish, but was also a free practice day for the British Superbike lads. I had the pleasure of being overtaken by Steve Hislop and Chris Walker, one either side of me, as I approached the final chicane, I was slowing down, they didn't seem to, and just laid their bikes over and were gone.

Rick Chubb



BORN AGAIN

{continuing on from last issue's "Teenage Thrills"}

Throughout the rest of my Uni days, and the entry into the job market in Somerset in 1979, cars remained my go-to means of transport until 1997 when I spotted a 1980 Suzuki GS1000G (shaft drive) in the Western Gazette. This had been one of my poster bikes of the late 70s, and this Ital-



ian import was in excellent condition, so not one I was going to lose. By this time I had been an Observer with the Yeovil IAM Car Group for several years, and as 2-wheelers still scared me (!?), I immediately joined SAM to develop and improve my riding standards (and to protect my health!) SAM rides then were significantly fewer than today, but always entailed a roll of Duck-tape and lots of cable ties to secure things when they were hanging off at our coffee stops! The Paddy Hopkirk 'AGORDO' full face helmet I bought in 1977 for my GT250 was still usable (visibly, if not operationally!), but was replaced with a Frank Thomas Novak very soon into ownership—a great helmet, and of course white, like my next 2 helmets. A trip to the Bath & West Classic Bike Show saw me trying on, and buying, a set of plain black leathers in the back of a van in the car park from an



East London clothing supplier (I still have the jacket, but haven't worn it for many years).

Clothing wise, I had now decided that I needed some textiles, so a visit to GT Motorcycles in Mudford saw a Spada jacket and trousers join the wardrobe, and a pair of Sidi Black Rain boots (which I still use today in warmer weather, and are more like slippers than motorcycle boots, remaining totally waterproof). Like most lower-priced textiles at that time, waterproofing was suitable for light showers only, and a SAM ride to the British Motor Museum on the August Bank Holiday weekend in 1998 resulted in more water inside the suit than outside.

A major illness in 1999 saw me try to re-evaluate what was important in life, and whilst recovering from surgery and chemo I immersed myself in car and motorcycling magazines. Based on my type of riding (ie a sit-up-and-

beg riding position and touring/fun/sensible riding) the journalists were unanimous that the Yamaha Fazer FZS600 was the best machine on the

market, so a trip to Taylors (then at Priorswood in Taunton) and a test ride quickly showed me that 20 years of development in tyres, brakes and suspension were huge, so a deal was quickly done. This was a great bike, so smooth,



but I couldn't ride it properly. Helpful observers in SAM suggested that rather than slipping it into 6th at 50 mph, and keeping the revs down to around 3–4,000, wasn't ideal for cornering (peak torque came at 9,500 rpm!). So followed my typical cornering procedure – approach nice and

leisurely in 6th, change down 4 gears before the corner, get the revs up to around 7,000 or 8,000, and then power it round. Amazing, it worked – I had finally put the ‘G’ into IPS_A! But this became a bit frenetic for my liking (torque beats horsepower every time in my book), and with my now annual trips to France each year with luggage (I don’t do packing light!), a trip to see Simon Stone at Taylors at Chip Lane (now a Triumph dealer) saw us try to do a deal on a used lime green Triumph Tiger 955i. As those in the motor trade may understand better than I, he couldn’t get the figures to work on this machine, but surprisingly he could on a new orange one with panniers, heated grips and centre stand, so 2004 saw me for the first time buy into a British Marque (despite my attraction to 70’s Japanese chrome and bright metallic paint).



Tiger 955i on day of disposal, at 8 years old and 38,000 miles.

Clothing choices remained unchanged, but a chance visit to Taylors around 2006 saw them selling off Triumph fabric bomber-style jackets at £60. It had to be worth it, and today this remains my favourite jacket, used for 50% of my riding. A brief spell with an Arai RV full face helmet (not my best purchase, remaining too tight on my ears) saw me invest in a Schu-

berth C2 flip – a comfortable and quiet helmet that unfortunately would never stay in the raised position, and whose tinted drop-down visor prevented any clear view through it. The search for more visually stronger boots (hopefully with a thicker sole, to allow me to touch the ground more easily on the Tiger 955i!) saw me take a trip up to Richmond in Yorkshire to visit Altberg, and buy a pair of their fantastic Clubman boots, which remain comfortable, intact and totally waterproof after 10 years continuous use.

Around this time I spotted a sorry-looking, hand painted matt black Honda SLR650 sitting outside Frank's Autos (then in Aller), and it joined the fleet.

With only 34 bhp from its single cylinder engine, this bike stayed with me longer than any other, and provided an un-burstable engine and incredible grip - this became my go-to machine for any SAM rides in wet or icy conditions, and only let me down once. This occurred whilst I



was leading a SAM ride on the dual carriageway leaving Podimore, where the chain snapped. But



true to this bike's docile form, it fell neatly onto the road like a rigid snake, allowing me to coast into the adjacent layby (along with circa 20 other bikes religiously following me!) This bike will be familiar to anyone attending SAM Slow Riding Days, as it ("The Goth") now belongs to Peter Herridge.

I bought a Honda XR250R in 2007 so that I could partici-

pate in SAM's occasional off-road training days on Exmoor, but used it relatively little due to the lack of off-road facilities in Somerset. With less than 2000kms on the clock when I bought it, it was an amazing machine with incredible power and ability off-road, but – fitted with trail tyres – not something you used on road above 55mph. I eventually sold this to help fund an Aprilia Pegaso Trail, clocking up less than 100 kms a year during the 7 years I had it, but sold it for quite a bit more than I paid for it.



The Aprilia was my answer to a bike as similar to the SLR650 but with a bit more power and luggage, and I found a lovely example at Motorcycling Bournemouth, complete with Hepco and Becker aluminium panniers. It featured a Yamaha Tenere 660cc engine, with Italian electrics..... To be fair, apart from requiring a replacement n/s switch unit (simply sourced used off eBay), a stone flicking up (again on a SAM ride) from the front wheel severing the side-stand switch and a holed radiator, this bike provided sterling service. A great winter hack, the Tenere engine pulled like a train, cruising easily at 70mph and cornering on rails, whilst the panniers

provided the perfect platform for the tent during our annual Cornish Camping weekends. Now seeing service with another SAM member, these are greatly underrated bikes, even if the chrome may not be to Honda standard.

Come 2012, I felt that the Tiger 955i was getting a bit tall for me (or was I shrinking?) Trying to do a U-Turn on a 1 in 5 single track road in mid-Wales (Devil's Leap) on one of Rob Bartlett's infamous weekends found me floundering for the ground with my down-slope foot, resulting in a sideways tumble—and a bike, with rider, sliding down the slope! Loaded panniers and a top box filled with bread, cheese and Lea & Perrins (the Welsh weekend wouldn't be the same without the mandatory Welsh Rarebit in the Cottage!) meant that a top-heavy bike, with a short-a**ed rider, wasn't the ideal recipe for a controlled ride, so I started looking around for something lower. A Tiger 800 was the obvious choice, but a trip to Total Triumph to test ride one brought a flat refusal, citing the cost of providing loan bikes for test-jockey riders, and how they thrashed them etc etc. For the record, by that time, the only bikes I had ever test-ridden in my life were the Yamaha Fazer (from Taylor's Triumph) and the Tiger 955i (again from Taylor's Triumph, and both of which I bought). But obviously I wasn't wanted, so I scratched the Tiger 800 from my list. On the rebound from that refusal, I bought a Moto Guzzi Norge 8V (affectionately known as Nellie by Rob Bartlett, something to do with a White Elephant I believe!)



This was a beautiful bike, but the sum of the parts definitely didn't build to a good whole. Originally thinking it a

similar (but cheaper) alternative to a Pan European, it lacked torque, the power band was tiny, it drank fuel, it slid on corners with minimal provocation, the handlebars were exposed to the elements, and the heat from the engine appalling. Worst though was when one of the head gaskets expired at 7,000 miles, following which the bike wouldn't run smoothly, despite Moto Corsa checking it and saying it was AOK. I put up with it for 2 years, still thinking it one of the most visually impressive bikes I'd ever had, but I wasn't prepared to put up with the reliability. By this time I'd replaced the SLR650 with the Aprilia Pegaso 660 trail, so when I went to try a Tiger 800 again, I realised it was too similar to the Pegaso in style, so decided I didn't need it. That's when I saw a used Triumph Explorer in Branson's – not a bike I particularly liked the look of, but it was well specc'd, and worth a try. 200 metres out of Bransons my decision was made! This was what I had hoped the Norge would have been, but the Explorer and I gelled immediately. And 6 years later it remains the perfect bike for my needs. Approaching 40,000 miles, yes, it's heavy at standstill, or when manoeuvring out of the shed, but once rolling it is one of the best-



-balanced machines I've ever owned. It tours, it trains, it scratches, it trickles – I'm sure there are far better bikes out there, but none that suit my needs so well. And yes, loads of torque!

By now, the benefits of retirement meant that I was doing more observing with SAM, and whilst my annual mileage on 2 wheels remained around 10,000 a year, it was now dictated more by pre-arranged observed rides than optional ride outs. I was also fed up with stopping in heavy weather to

put on a “boil-in-the-bag” waterproof oversuit, so another trip to Bransons saw me invest in a Halvarssons jacket and trousers. This was the biggest outlay on motorcycle clothing I’d ever made, but has successfully offered an all season, all weather outfit offering reasonable protection. The Schuberth C2 has been replaced by another Schuberth, this time an E1 (flip with a peak), which offers just about everything I could wish for in a helmet.

Since then, I’ve acquired another poster-bike of the 70s, a 1975 Suzuki GT550M 2-stroke triple, which is a lovely machine even if it does indicate just how much technology has moved in 45 years! And the Pegaso has been replaced with – finally – a Tiger 800, the bike I’ve often said is the ideal solu-



tion for anyone who needs 1 machine to do everything. I still believe this is true, albeit it is more of a “hot hatch” than the “executive tourer” that is the Explorer. Best of all, being one of the earlier 800s, it is not blighted with the dreaded electronics that drive me crazy in both

cars and bikes – one of the reasons why I’ll be reluctant to change any of my bikes to a newer version in the future. Eventually the Explorer may become too heavy for me, but until then (and whilst it remains cost effective) I will continue to enjoy it, using the 800 when I feel like a bit of a hooligan (told you I wasn’t a ‘real’ biker!)

Graham Tulloch

HONDA VFRs

Where do I start? Honda had played around with a few V engines not all successfully, but being Honda, they keep improving even when everybody else gives up on their failures. So in the eighties they brought out the first VFR750 with gear driven overhead camshafts, over engineered perhaps, but after a few problems with the early V fours they had a reputation to mend.

Ron Haslem raced a new standard VFR, I think at Donnington, and did well against pukka race bikes. The press loved them. Dealers sold loads. I waited, were the cams going to melt?

History gives us the answer, the VFR has turned out to be virtually indestructible. It was fast, handled very well and was comfortable. I found that in heavy rain, if you could keep to a high speed, you stayed pretty dry. I got about 50mpg riding normally, but some models only had about 150 mile range, not so good touring, and a few times abroad I had to get help finding fuel on the red one in the photo, an FM from 1990. This is the bike we



seemed to use a lot for holidays, despite its limitations fuel wise. It took us to the Isle of Man several times, also to France, Spain and Ireland. A few times it struggled to stay with a friend on his

CBR1000 climbing mountain passes, but otherwise it was great.

Now if Honda's do have an Achilles' heel, it's the regulator/rectifier, mine failed and killed the battery on the dockside as we waited to board the ferry back from the TT, at least it didn't spoil our holiday, but after pushing on and off the boat, we were collected by the breakdown truck and had a long trip home as he had other bikers to deliver along the way.

Why three? a very good question, as they say, the correct number of bikes to have is one more than you have. I only had three for a while, but over



the years have owned two FM's, an FV, an FR, the black one, not sure which model, plus an NC400 and a VF1000R. You could say I like the v-four motors.

I have done track days on many of my bikes, one of the most memorable was at Donnington, I went to the GP and on the following Monday MAG had the track for the day. The weekend had been warm and sunny, the racing lines of Rossi and co were clearly marked in rubber and easy to follow. The FM went home a little lighter, leaving some metal on the track in the perfect conditions.

These days I only have one VFR750FR in the garage. In the late 90s Triumph introduced the 955 Sprint and it was called the new VFR by some in the press. Indeed on trying it, it seemed an ideal replacement, the RS model looked even better, and after riding one I bought a yellow one. The start of a new era for me but I still enjoy the old VFRs. **Rick Chubb**

The SUMMER 2020 issue of FULL CHAT will be published next month, so send in any articles and photos you would like included to me (Tullochg@aol.com) by 31st July latest. And as well as the electronic copy, we will be back with a PRINTED COPY this time!