

SOUTH WESTERN ROAD CLUB

NEWSLETTER

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DECEMBER 1979

A Merry Christmas to you all with this the last issue of 1979.

Some dates for active cyclists:-

Reliability Trials: 13th January, 1980 9.30 a.m. Oxshott
1st check - Jolly Farmer, Bagshot
2nd check - top Horse Block Hollow, Cranleigh
Finish - Oxshott (55 miles in $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours)
27th January, 1980 9.30 a.m. Oxshott
1st check - Crawley
2nd check - Abinger Hammer
Finish - Oxshott (60 miles in $4\frac{3}{4}$ hours)

Full Club event calander next issue.

GEOFF PARSONS

In the August issue of the Club Newsletter the article headed "That was the day we did the Galibier" called to mind the day I and three others did the same pass in, I believe, 1928. We started up the Col-du-Lauteret on a July day, very hot, wearing plus fours (shorts were unknown) and very large straw hats (Mexican style) costing at the present rate 1p or, in old money, 2½d.

The roads in those days were abominable, one could only ride on the grass verge. We rode and walked upwards all day long and about 6 o'clock reached the P.L.M. chalet at the top of the Lauteret near the start of the Galibier (is this chalet still in existence). We booked in, had a meal and then went for a walk over the snow fields. This brought everyone out of the chalet to watch us and then, with much waving and jumping about, they began shouting and calling us back French style. It seemed we were walking on an enormous snow bridge over the river on the right hand side of the road; this bridge is caused by the snow melting from underneath. Who cares, "where there's no sense there's no feeling".

I recall that at the foot of the beds in our bedroom two or three extra blankets were folded; this we could not understand on a hot summers day - but at 10 o'clock at night all were needed when the temperature dropped below zero and the rivers and streams froze up.

Next day we continued up the Col-du-Galibier, walking all the way to the tunnel, the road worse than ever. Yet the Tour-de-France of that year came up the same track and some of the riders rode all of it. (I still have in my possession a sprig of eidelwiess picked among the rocks over the tunnel. Also on the way up the two cols I picked sprays of all the wild flowers that grew in profusion over the

my mother). On this tour we also did the Grande St. Bernard pass, getting arrested at the top and put into little cells (that's another story). We also did Col-de-Forclaz where, at the top, there use to be a small wooden shack or hotel-de-Fougerie. This was owned by a very small Swiss man who we afterwards called "Mickie Mouse". This old man spent his summers in this shack and his winters as a doorman in Frascatis Restaurant, Oxford Street, London. For many years afterwards we always stayed here with Mickie Mouse. In those days the Forclaz was not fit to be called a road, just a track that zig-zagged up from Martigny.

As I sit here writing this letter, my bones creaking and me groaning, I wonder how on earth, but for our old bikes, we would ever have seen such wonderful scenery. "Packaged Tours" unknown then.

BERT RICHARDS

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A MOMENT IN HISTORY

It was all conjured up by a picture in a recent "Cycling", a picture of that ever remembered happy character, Arthur Overton, of the Kingston R.C.

The 39/45 war had just ended, it was still 1945 and thanks to Ted's and a few others hard work during the war, our Open 12 hour was serving the racing man as hardly any other event in the country was.

The picture showed the ever laughing Arthur taking a drink at
speed through Reading. The article by Bernard Thompson which

accompanied this picture was also about our event and drew a comparison with this years Championship 12 won by that fantastic veteran, John Woodburn who had been the latest rider to go from the gun. So fast and confident was he that the first 100 took only 3 hours 53 mins. and in his own words "rode the next 100 at a more sedate pace of round about 4 hours and maintaining his great effort over the next 85 miles to finish with a competition record ride of 285 miles.

The rest of the Bernard's article recalled what was possibly the first instance of a carefree effort of a rider in a distance event that earned an over 10 mile beating of the competition record and, thereby hangs my tale.

I too had donned the ludicrous black tights and was also an entrant, but having only just come out of the army and, therefore, totally unfit for such an effort I retired and sat at the side of the road. It was there that I learned the exciting and rather alarming news that Overton had passed through Theale at approx. half way leading the field which meant, that as he was No. 60, he had caught and dropped that number behind his flying wheels, and that it was obvious that if he maintained his great effort he was going to run out of measured course. The day wore by as I sat in the Maidenhead/Slough area when up came my brother-in-law, Alec Stewart, driving his tiny blue Austin 7, with Robbie, our chief time-keeper aboard. Those of you who remember pre-finishing circuit days will remember that each rider was run out separately, usually by a fellow clubman with a watch matched to the chief time-keeper, but always the leading rider was followed by the chief time-keeper and accurately run out when his 12 hours was up.

This being the great Fred Robbie whose dedicating to pure amateur sport and timing accuracy was legendary and the agitation

which showed in the face was a sure sign of the threat that was developing to the successful running of the event posed by the still thundering wheels of the clown prince, Arthur Overton.

In consequence he looked somewhat askance when Alec stopped, picked me up and installed me in the back of that tiny car. This was, therefore, the reason why I became a witness of the following saga and what was then a fantastic ride. Competition record by Cyril Hepplestone was then approx. 240 miles and we had measured a course which coped with that distance but which brought any rider doing such a ride dangerously near the end of the Bath Road. Arthur, however, laughing as always seemed to have no idea of the problems his speed was setting Robbie who was, I assure you, well aware of his responsibilities. So the Bath Road began to run out and Arthur still pounded on with almost an hour still to go when we arrived at the Travellers Friend at the junction with the Great West Road.

There was nothing for it but for Robbie to direct the flying Arthur down the Great West Road with all its traffic lights and, therefore, never before used as part of a course. It was a minor miracle that all the traffic lights on that momentous run were a beautiful green colour and as we approached the London end of the G.W.F. Robbie went ahead and turned Arthur opposite the then, Smiths Crisp Factory. Back we went once more offering a prayer at each traffic light which to our delight persisted in displaying a beautiful green colour and once more Robbie went ahead and directed our hero down the Staines extension. Finally as the time ebbed away, Robbie motored up beside the still flying Arthur and told him to stop, his courage and complete abandon had paid off and while he sat on the kerb with no sign of distress and quaffed tea, we proudly congratulated that fine sportsman who we were to find later, had taken distance

won for himself a competition record and a place among the immortals of our game.

BILL REED

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Dear Fellow Members,

Heres to wish you all a Happy Christmas and prosperous New Year. A routine statement but I do hope it will be so.

Now, an appeal. No not for charity, but for you to do your bit. Please, please come to our annual dinner and re-union on February 9th, pick up your pen or phone and let Bill Squirrell know now. Further, if you know a past member who is out of touch, again, pick up your pen, get them to book too. A word of warning, we can only seat 150 and we would like to see as many club members and ex-club members as possible on this our 50th. The balls in your corner - Look forward to seeing you.

An appreciation of long distance time trialling. Imagine, if you will, a Frank Patterson sketch showing a rider standing at the side with his back to you, looking down an empty road undulating into the distance. The riders bike is propt against the kerb, two tubulars are draped round his neck and two feeding bottles stand at the kerb side. This picture was presented to Frank Robertson of the Bell Vue as Frank had written the following around it. I thought it warranted space in our N.L.

"AWAITING THE APPEARANCE OF THE LITTLE BLACK SPEC"

this is what time trialling is all about. There are, of course, the intangible memories which are a peculiar part of the 24hr. scene. The lovely blue velvet of darkness and the cool air which comes with the onset of night in high summer on southern roads. The utter silence of the small hours with only the swish of tyres and the muted cry of some nocturnal animal for company.

The waving light of a friendly helper, the welcome hot drink and subdued word of encouragement as the rider goes through.

The incredible brilliance of the harvest moon in the fenland, when the scenery takes on an entirely new dimension. The mist dispersing with the rising sun, the enduring friendships borne of shared experience. These are memories I would not trade with any man.

Frank Robertson"

Alexander Stevens borne May 18th 1896 - Passed away October 28th 1979

With the passing of Alex, there is the passing of an era and one of the much loved characters of the cycling world, a strong character.

I first met Alex in June 1929 when I was asked to join that memorable continental tour. Alex was the mainspring and driving force of that tour, and it quickly became apparent what a strong rider he was and then too, that other facet came through; "piano playing".

Alex told me he volunteered under age in the first world war and went "over the top" wearing his kilt. Club runs with Alex were a trial of strength. He has immense knowledge of the lanes, tremendous energy and riding ability with above all, the desire and will to lead. Then the social seasons evolved and again Alex

excelled as an excellent dancer and an excellent master of ceremonies. He was a natural in this without dispute. In the early and formative years of our club, Alex's influence in the cycling scene, riding and social, was of tremendous importance and one of our great assets. On one occasion I visited Alex at his work bench at Hangers, the artificial limb manufacturers, and this visit confirmed another aspect of which we had heard. He was the expert on the making of knee joints and I am sure those fingers of his brought relief to many afflicted people. And, those fingers worked their magic through the piano and gave us many unforgettable evenings. Casual acquaintances have often, in wanting to know how he was, opened with "that chap who played the piano?".

We will always remember Alex for his many accomplishments of which he gave so fully and above all the piano playing. He enjoyed that with us, and reached high peaks as we did with him.

TED SHEAD

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"BRAKE CABLES"

Most of you will know about the impending happy event, the marriage of our dear Vera to George Mcree. It was with great pleasure that Vera said that I could announce it in our Mag. We had of course, heard rumours some time ago, but that George had taken 72 years to take unto himself a wife was to say the least a surprise. But what a sensible and companionable thing to do, all of us who have known and loved them over nearly 50 years have the sincerest of wishes that their coming life together will be full of pleasure and contentment. Incidentally, they intend to live close to Bert and Edna Richards in the little south coast village of Felpham, Bognor, where they were born the light of day some 67 years ago and where

as a boy we went on a hard won holiday year after year.

To keep in touch with Smithy, Art of that name, is a very great pleasure. Always a character of humour straight out of "Pickwick Papers" and his beloved Dickens of whom he is something of an authority, his letters are pure pleasure. He loves his bowling and evidently travels to an indoor green in Dartford together with some choice companions, passing en route a village which figured largely in the pre war years - Sutton at Home; how many times we use to add "breakfast in bed" to that name. His keenness for riding his bike is unabated, in fact, he has just mapped out a run to take, as he says, "Young Sheady" on a run which will include Penshurst which he intends to flash through after lunch. He revealed a corner of early history, "Smithy version", about the introduction of ladies into what was then a real hairy he man Club, a move that did not hold the approval of all. Evidently Jack, Tiddler and Erb Page were on one side while Bert and he held the opposite view. All this happened before I became a dedicated South Westerner and by then the "for" women lobby had won the day and I well remember my utter admiration of those long suffering heroines on the backs of those charging and fiercely competing tandems.

The death of that great character and superb cyclist Alex Stevens disproved what many of us thought, that he was indestructable. Those of us who bore with a somewhat stoic outlook the prospect of following the flashing no clips on straps, low gear great pedalling of that fine stylist, will never forget him. I never will for when I first faced a ride as a completely inexperienced rider, he rode up alongside me as we left Tibbets with that friendly advice that enabled me to reach lunch at Storrington and have the confidence to come out the next week, with his assurance that it got easier the more you banged your head against a brick wall. He will ever be remembered for - the pranks which we played on him (to be honest we were a lot of

holigans) and for the magic of his piano playing which gave us many a happy time.

Another recent death fills me with sadness, was that of a fine cyclist and great friend, Sandy Heffernan, the father of that redoubtable Olympic and World rider, Steve Heffernan. For years we worked together running the Vets and Combine 100, a task that was pure pleasure with such a companion. His courage when, a few years ago, he had to have an arm amputated after an accident mirrored the fortitude he always exhibited in his 24 hour rides.

Beware Ruskin Drive, you are going to have an Australia inflicted on your fair area. Lucie and Fred's scheme of breeding rabbits is rolling. The first batch came off the line recently to accompany the ducks that are in residence, one species of which are reputed to grow so large as to rival the creatures of the Black Lagoon. Lucie and Maureen are busily engaged as muckers out and no doubt, egg collectors. You have got to applaud their enterprise and energy. There is no doubt that our Lucie is a redoubtable women.

This coming Thursday sees my dear Vera singing once more at the Albert Hall, "Messiah" this time, with the ever reliable help of George Oliver who went in person and got tickets when all else had failed. I shall hope to be there to wallow in the slightly confusing situation of an atheist's love of religious music.

A visit from another non-believer, Bill Morgan, brought up the same theme for having bought a music centre. He brought us his records of Elgar's "Dream of Gerontius", a mystical work which fills his consciousness with pure pleasure.

Hard upon the Smithy letter of his proposed dastardly plan of giving a sharp dose of the "sags" to "Young Sheady", came the report from Ted on the encounter. Our crafty President not often at a loss or an ear to the ground, devined that something was afoot and got in a bit of training beforehand, guessing that our Pickwickian friend would have at least 3 runs over the course and despite Ted's heavy cold and Smithy's well-known dislike of expenditure of excessive energy, they had an equal and happy time riding the lanes so often enjoyed 30 years ago around Penshurst, Cniddingfold, Sevenoaks Weald and Hever. On their return Anne regaled them with an excellent dinner and Ted gave what use to form so much of our pleasure, a slide show, evidently a great success all round.

Eric Morris was in town recently and made a few visits, nice to know he is so well.

Fred Fielding was surprisingly on the other end of the line early this week, evidently Ted and Winnie's summer party aroused a deal of enthusuasm and we shall be seeing him and Flo, and Bert and Mirriam, at the Dinner.

Happy Christmas to you all.

BILL REED

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Would you note that Sammy Austin's new address is:-

6 Lovat House,
Main Road,
Golspie, Sutherland, Scotland.

He visited Vera North (was Parrish) recently and he has asked her to come to the 50th Dinner. I believe Ella Keen is also in touch with her, so what about a bit of pressue on Vera from Ella?

Does anyone know any other old members who could come?

FRED PARSONS

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First Committee Meeting - Monday January 21st at 8 p.m. Ted Sheads

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Special Meeting at Clubroom 8th January at 8.30 to discuss ways and means of improving attendance at Clubroom and of position of clubroom and any other connected items.

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Club subscriptions for 1980 are now due.

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News has been received by Ted Shead of the sudden death of Ray Simper. An obituary will appear in the next edition of the Newsletter.

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