

# North Birmingham News

NEWSLETTER

## The "White Russian" Sunbeam A Unique Survivor

*You* will no doubt recognise in this short commentary an interest in all things Sunbeam. Blame it on my father, in 1919 he flew as a wireless operator in a short seaplane: made by Sunbeam of Wolverhampton against the Bolshevik armed forces in Russia. In later life he joined Sunbeam's chief designer, John Greenwood as a production engineer and had the job of transforming the beautiful hand-made bicycles into more affordable production machines. He did achieve this but, they weighed twice as much. I try and atone for his misdemeanours by restoring some of the earlier Sunbeam products to useable condition for future generations.

It is not widely recognised these days what a huge contribution the Wolverhampton company made to the War effort between 1914-18. They made motorcycles for the British and French army, the French machines being specified with belt drive, the British machines with the trade mark 'little oil bath'. Both single cylinder and 'v' twin machines were produced. The 'v' twins used in both J.A.P. And Swiss Motosacocke (MAG) proprietary engines. The other major contribution to the War effort was the production of air components. This phase of activities deserves a book on it's own but a brief summary indicates Sunbeam's extensive range of expertise. They manufactured complete aircraft, notably the Short Bros. huge sea planes, and also 700 or so of the air force standard trainer the Avro 504S.

On a very much larger scale they manufactured aircraft engines of the larger capacities designed within the company; famous type names well-known to aircraft enthusiasts, like 12 cylinder Maori, 18 cylinder Viking, Arab and Amazon engines. Sunbeam engines powered the R33 and R34 airships, and also Vickers Vimy converted bomber in which Messrs. Alcock and Brown made the first transatlantic crossing.

In the late 1960s and 1970s; before the days of motorcycle auctions and voluminous glossy magazines; it was normal to haggle your way up from £5.00 for almost any old motorcycle if it was a runner, or if it wasn't, then as often or not you collected the rusty bits free, to help clear the garage space to accommodate the newly acquired mini.

A somewhat similar situation led to my acquisition featured here. Jim Bowen, a founder member of what was to become the North Birmingham Section VMCC, had seen my labours to restore 2 sunbeam motorcars and thought

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## From the Archives The Victory Trail

During the years between the two Wars there was a great number of motorcycle trials, such as the Levis, the Colmore Cup and the London to Lands End.

One very important event was the Victory Trial, which was organised by the Birmingham M.C.C. and run in our area.

The 1929 event was very well supported with 181 entries.

The quality of the field was very high, with famous riders such as Vic Anstice, Jack Williams, Vic Brittain, George Dance, Len Vale Onslow, Margery Cottle, Bert Perrigo to name just a few.

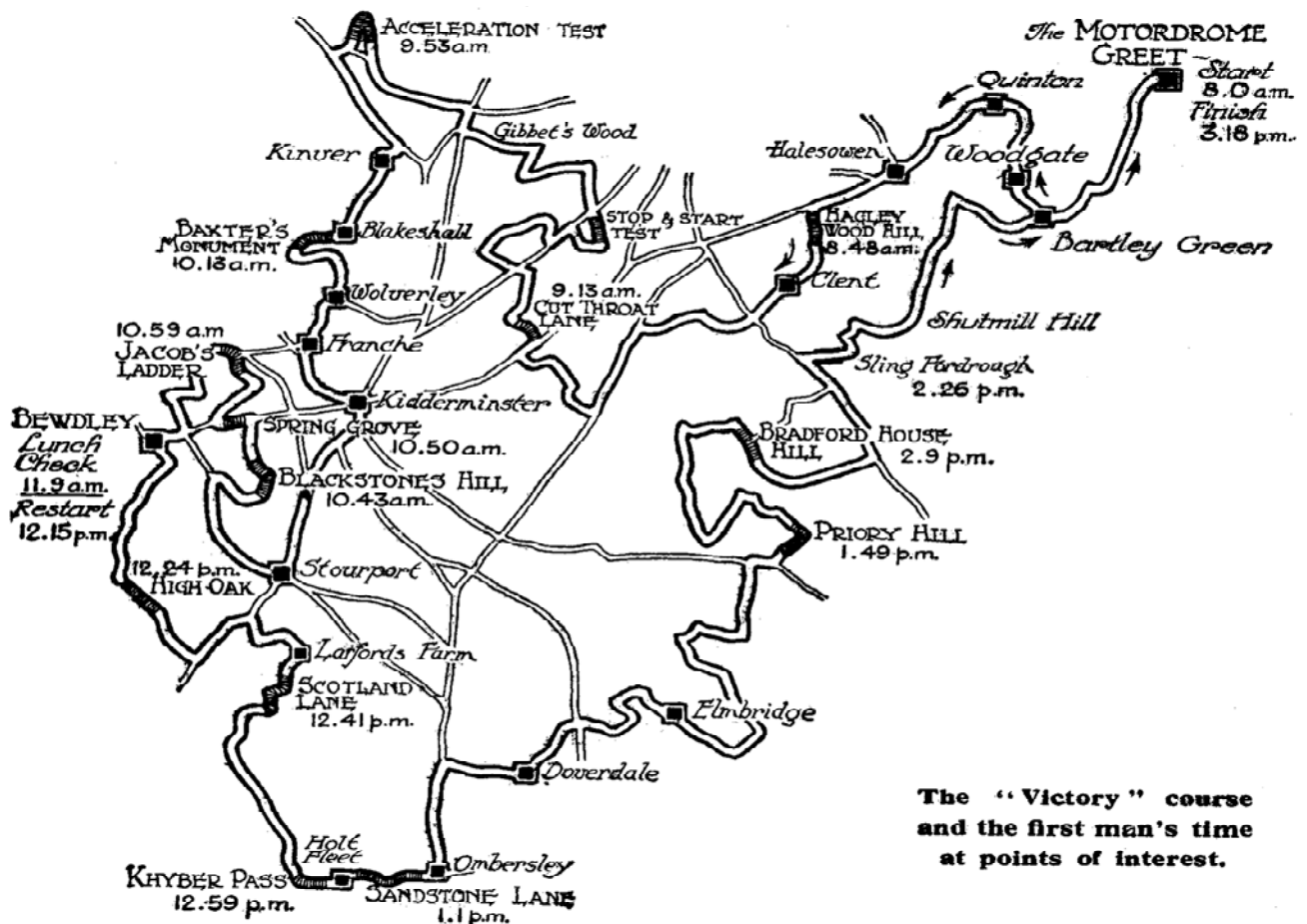
There were several Levis Cup winners such as Geof Davison and A. R. Edwards.

The start and finish locations were at the Motordrome, Colebrook Road and Greet and there were observed hills including Hagley Wood, Cut Throat Lane, Baxter's Monument, Blackstone's Hill, Spring Grove, Jacob's Ladder, High Oak, Scotland Lane, Corporation Street, Khyber Pass, Sandstone Lane,

Priory Hill and Shut Mill Hill.

The main award was the Victory Cup and there were 15 other awards.

There was a stop and restart test and an acceleration test, for which there was a 150 yard stretch of level road.



Continued from page 1

I may be interested in rescuing the rusty remains of a 'V' twin sunbeam motorcycle from a boys club in the Black Country. I was, and so it sat for many years roughly assembled or rather disassembled, on a bench in my garage.

My good friend and writer of books on sunbeams, Bob Cordon-Champ, happened along one day and expressed an interest in taking the rusty bits back to his somewhat larger garage to do a bit of re-building and research. Of which more anon.

In brief, it turned out to be a 1916 machine, one of a large batch built for the Tsar of Russia's army, to fight the then enemy, the Germans. The Russian Revolution of 1917 put an end to that conflict and as a result this batch of machines was never delivered. They would almost certainly have joined the 1914-18 conflict in Europe, as machine gun outfits or stretcher carriers on the Western Front. Although the 41/2 inch ground clearance must have been a major disadvantage in deploying them. My machine is the only known survivor of this batch identified by its engine, front fork layout and the three filler caps in the tank. The middle cap giving access to the largest compartment in which a paraffin like fuel was used, after the engine had been started on petrol.


To be continued .....

The Return of the rusty bits and the process of restoration

Peter Ashen

May 10th, 1921. ADVERTISEMENTS The Motor.

## LABOUR DAY IS PAST.



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## Small Ads Section

New Good quality Fabric Jacket with full armour size small £75, New size 8 forma street boots £40, R-sport gloves large vgc £15, Good Quality Flip front helmet with retractable sun visor(57-58cm) unmarked used twice £60, Belstaff fabric over-trousers XL (41") used twice with knee armour £60, Size 8 Belstaff boots VGC £50, Tel 01384-270268 eves  
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The "Big Breakfast" Mid Way Truck Stop A41 by Whitchurch is hosting the annual day again on the 1<sup>st</sup> April

#### Newsletter Postage

There will be an increase in the postal charge by 1p from the 1st April.

For those who have paid in advance their credit will be adjusted accordingly.

Please let me know if you no longer wish to continue as a subscriber or receive the newsletter by email at no cost.

Julian

**F O R T H C O M I N G   A T T R A C T I O N S   F O R   2 0 0 7**

<b>CLUB NIGHTS</b>	
MARCH 28th	Noggin and Natter Night
APRIL 25th	A talk by Frank Dolman on Douglas Motorcycles
MAY 30th	Slide show by Richard Thomas on the "President" Steam Narrowboat
JUNE 27th	Ride a Bike Night
JULY 25th	Fish and Chip Supper
AUGUST 29th	Arrive on Your Bike Night
SEPTEMBER 26th	A talk and slide show on "International trials riding" by Scott Ellis
OCTOBER 31st	Slide show by Stephen Mills on the History and development of Morgan, AJS, Austin 7, and the pocket watch.
NOVEMBER 28th	Bring and Buy evening
DECEMBER 26th	No Meeting

**CLUB RUNS**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>RUN</b>	<b>ORGANISER</b>	<b>Tel No</b>
April 22nd	Spring Run	Paul Harris	01902-842732
May 6th	Trent Valley Run	Brian Empsall	01543-264968
May 20th	Girder Fork Run	Martyn Round	0121-550-1547
June 1/2/3rd	The Welsh Weekend	Josie Stanley	01902-607293
June 10th	Josie's Jaunt	Josie Stanley	01902-607293
June 17th	Banbury Run		
June 27th	Ride A Bike Night	Frank Ashton	01902-372719
July 8th	Roger's Run	Roger Greening	01562-730464
July 29th	Long Mynd Run	Ian Harris	01952-299118
August 5th	Breakfast Run	Rob Pell	0121-624-7674
August 19th	Picnic / Concours Run	Peter Ashen	01562-882854
September 9th	Flight of Fantasy Run	Trevor Bull	01905-778917
September 16th	Levis Cup Road Trial		
September 30th	Clun Run	Paul Harris	01952-299118
October 14th	Autumn Run	Andy Briggs	0121-544-5938