

## LIGHTWEIGHT NEWS - 13

(January/February 2008)

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I just had occasion to read through L News 11 and realised it went out without being checked and there were several 'typos' including three mis-spellings plus 351 instead of 531 – apologies.

To a certain extent the social scene of the late 40s and early 50s has a bearing on what cyclists rode and why. Following WWII there were shortages of everything as the country was hamstrung by having to repay massive debts incurred to the Americans during the war. There was however full employment, much of which was in trades with apprenticeship schemes where one was paid about 20% of a normal wage in return for 'training'. This meant that quite a percentage of the younger cyclists were on low wages and living in a very austere manner with food, clothing, furniture etc. rationed.

There were very few cars for sale as virtually all UK production was earmarked for export – there were long waiting lists for the few new cars available, and this of course kept the price of used cars at an inflated level. For the lucky few who had a car used for leisure they were mainly road-taxed for six-months of the year, March – September. At the end of August cars were ceremoniously jacked up and put on blocks to keep the precious tyres off the road. The battery was disconnected and taken indoors to be put on a trickle charger from time to time, the water drained from the cooling system and every couple of weeks the starting handle was used to turn the engine over to move the oil around the crank, cylinders, etc. There were of course some owners who used their cars all-year round such as doctors (nearly always in Rover cars) and businessmen.

Youngsters who became interested in cycling had to use a lot of resourcefulness to achieve the cycle they wanted and I have mentioned this subject in earlier editions of L News. It nearly always became possible at some stage to acquire a new, or nearly new machine, which was a real item of luxury in these cash-strapped times. Some were kept in bedrooms (nothing changes) and they would be cleaned and polished as soon as they got dirty or even dusty. At the start of an open time-trial there would be up to 120 machines (the maximum at this time), each was the apple of its owner's eye and would probably be the main focus of life for the owner.

Nowadays some specialist time-triallists train for very short distances at a high-intensity level on the roads with the real training done on turbo-trainers. Come the day of the event the bike goes on the roof of the car, or in the boot, to be driven to the event where the warm-up may be done on a turbo yet again. This became so prevalent that for some events warming-up on turbos had to be banned as neighbours were complaining of the disruptive noise caused by this happening in the early hours of the morning. After the 10-mile time-trial, the bike is back in, or on, the car and off home.

Previously I have mentioned the mileages done in the 40s and 50s, getting up at 4am, riding say 20 miles to an event of 25 or 50 miles and being finished in time to do a club run of 100-150 miles – probably with sprint wheels on carriers attached to the front wheels.

**John Cooper** (ex. Coventry CC.) tells us:

"I remember riding the Notts.Wheelers. 25 in 1951/52, a fast course where you started at the top of the hill down to Lowdham Island and finished at the bottom. Dave Keeler started in front of me and did a 56. I didn't see him again except at the cross overs and at the finish! I did 1-1-56 and thought I was "flying" on 82" fixed."

"Alex Coward (IOM) and I rode the Belle Vue 50 in 1952/53 (Pangbourne, Berks). It was a horrible day, blew a gale. We rode home, after the event, back to Coventry 80 miles. Ray Booty rode back with us, we ate two dinners at Kidlington (Oxford), when we parted Ray still had another 50 miles to ride home to Nottingham!" (Ed: - *this is not the first mention of eating two dinners I have come across, of course portions were much smaller in those days!*)

## *Cycling Biographies* by Steve Griffith

I was recently given a pile of Cycling biographies and as some of these cover the LN era I thought some not so random thoughts might be of interest. These included books by/on Barry Hoban, Ron Kitching, Beryl Burton, Eileen Sheridan, Reg Harris, Russell Monkridge and Hugh Porter.

From a purely literary point of view the majority have very little merit, of course our interest is in the insights they might shed on our heroes and the background of cycling in that era. The modern reader of biography is often looking for something salacious (sex always sells). It's an interesting reflection on how times have changed that until fairly recently people did not write a warts and all book. Reg Harris who had a fairly colourful life (e.g. serious car crash with mistress just before the '48 Olympics) in his 1976 *Two Wheels to the Top* very much glosses over these episodes. They are mentioned but get a few lines whereas now days they would get whole chapters.

The danger with any sporting biography is it becomes merely a list of races victories and or excuses why they did win. The most extreme example is Burton's *Personnel Best* which is really just a list of victories (and there were an awful lot of them). You search in vain for any insight as to what motivated Burton to carry on and be at the top so long. Barry Hoban's is similar and very skimpy on his relationship with Simpson. I won't mention the Dick Swann books on Taffy Davies, more about Dick Swann than the subject !!!!

The other problem is that we often know the end to the story and thus our interest wanes as we know how it will end. Eileen Sheridan's book, *Wonder Wheels*, suffers from this. Having said that, this apart it is a pretty good read.

One of the best for my money is Russell Monkridge posthumous biography. There are interesting insights into the Australian race scene in the 50's and quite explicit of the use of drugs on the Tour. *A Wheel in Two Worlds*, the Ron Kitching biography, ranks I think as the most interesting. There is an excellent account of his racing career, his battle with cycling authority, especially H H England, who seemed to have a vendetta against our Yorkshire hero. The second part of the book details the rise of his 'Everything Cycling Empire'. Great stuff on the early days building up the business, info on TA, Cinelli, Zeus, Gian Roberts etc. This is not technical stuff but about the people behind the names. The final part of the book can be read with a wry smile as he justifies every bad business decision he made, e.g. turning down the agency for Shimano, not foreseeing mountain bikes etc. What makes this book so refreshing is that it must be one of the few to be written without any concern about being sued. See the sections on Daniel Rebour and Vin Denson or even Reg Harris, for example.

Finally, an excellent cycletourist's autobiography is Cliff Pratt's *Sixty Six Years a Cycletourist*. Cliff was a Hull cycle dealer and also funded the York Rally. In 1929 he was one of the first cyclists in the UK to use a Cyclo (mentioned in *The Dancing Chain* under the initials CAP). This book works because he doesn't try to cover everything and there is a great variety, e.g. not just accounts of tours but also about building up the business and his interest in Cycle Polo

So what are the recommended reads for the LN subscriber? (I sound like Richard and Judy)

1. *Major Taylor* by Andrew Richie. OK it's about the early 20th century but what a great book
2. *A Wheel in Two Worlds* by Ron Kitching, see above
3. *My World on Wheels* by Russell Mockridge

**Dunlop rims** – I need a pair of 27" Dunlop alloy HP rims 40/32 hole in good condition to purchase or for exchange I have a pair of 26" Conloy rims in good condition, or for an exceptional, say NOS, pair of rims I have a pair of Blumfield small-flange hubs gear/fixed. I'm also looking for a nice pair of Brampton B8 pedals to go with the Brampton cranks on my Hobbs which were so admired on Ricky's Theale Ride last year.....*Peter Underwood, Ed.*

**Bill Ives** - I have been reading on the Classic Lightweights web site your bit about the difficulty of getting an SA four speed to go into bottom gear. Sometimes even if you can get it in it will jump straight out again. I have heard people say they have to hold the trigger to make sure the gear stays in.

The problem here is that the very high cable tension required means that the pawl which holds the quadrant in place is very likely to jump out and once it has done that a few times it becomes rounded off and so is more likely to jump out and become more worn. It's a vicious circle.

Here is a bodge to fix it:

Remove the cable. Now take a sharp screwdriver and lever the side of the casing out, that's the side that the cable ferule screws/ fits into. Lever it out just enough to remove the spring which will allow the pawl to pivot out. Using a bench grinder square up the end of the pawl. Don't let it get too hot or the tempering will be damaged. The spring sometimes becomes a somewhat tired so give a little squeeze in the vice to tighten up the bend. Reassemble and tap the side back into place with a small hammer and with a bit of luck it will now stay in bottom gear. Also from-

**Bill Ives** - I wonder if I can request the help of your readers?

In N&V 321/35 there is a photo of a circa 1961 Walt Ormesby frame which I bought. Since the photo appeared I have gathered a little info. It seems WO had a cycle shop in Leeds, just off Burley Road. He built a few frames, mainly for members of the Westfield cycle club. He was a bit of a character who seems to have liked "funny" frames. Apparently he had a penchant for struts. In what I suspect might be characterised as a blunt Yorkshire fashion he had no time for over elaborate fancy lugs. My frame is stitched together with light, strong but "naive" welds. WO retired/finished in about 1969. Perhaps some of your readers especially in Leeds or members of the Westfield club might remember him or his shop. If so, I would be very pleased to hear from them.

**Roger Stevens** – I am trying to find anything on Southern Cycles. All I know is that they existed probably still in 1964. Location probably South or South-West London.? [steverog8@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:steverog8@blueyonder.co.uk)

**Alvin Smith** - I have some nice models of a Paris Galibier - 4.5 inches long, say about 1/15 scale. Made in Spain and sold at £15 plus P&P of £3. I can send a photo if necessary. Trevor Jarvis has some of the Flying Gate.



**Peter Kohler** - [koh157@starpower.net](mailto:koh157@starpower.net) asks

Are there any Harry Quinn owners out there who can help with my restoration of frame no. Q2689? This has been estimated to be c.1965. Does this sound correct? Here are the details of the frame if that helps:

Material: Reynolds 531 butted tubing and forks. Fastback stays and seat cluster

Finish: presently in black (repaint, not original), chromed rear triangle (10" chromed chainstay and 9" chromed seat stays), 10-inch chromed front fork and chromed fork crown.

Size: seat tube 23 ½ inches (c to t), wheelbase 40 inches, bottom bracket height 11 inches,

Angles: 73 parallel (?); Fork offset: 1½"; Rear spacing: 120 mm

Lugs: Haden "birds mouth" with cut outs; Fork Crown: Milremo (?) chromed

Dropouts: Campagnolo forged; Braze-ons: single pump peg on seat post, bottle bosses down tube, bare wire brake cable stops and cable eyes under top tube, gear lever bosses and gear control wire guides on down tube, gear control wire guide and stop under right chain stay.

Of the myriad braze-ons, the water bottle bosses are something puzzling as '65 seems quite early for these and I am not sure they are not latter additions.

Finally, does anyone have Quinn catalogues/adverts from this era from which I get an idea of the paint schemes and transfers used by Quinn then. For example when they switched from "Harry Quinn Cycles" to just "Harry Quinn".

Many thanks for any assistance with this project.

**Book review:** by Peter Underwood

*12 Champions* by Peter Whitfield of Wychwood Publishing – sold by the Club Sales Officer of the V-CC. Another volume written and published by Peter Whitfield who also produced *The Condor Years* and *Eileen Sheridan: A Cycling Life*, both of great interest to the lightweight enthusiast.

My formative years in cycling were in the late '40s and early '50s and like many I drifted away from the sport for some time until returning in the '90s. However, once a cyclist always a cyclist, so even in my absent years I had some idea of what was going on in the cycling world and certain names would crop up from time to time.

*12 Champions* is just what it says, the story of 12 Champions namely: *Eileen Sheridan; John Arnold and Albert Crimes; Ray Booty; Frank Colden; Les West; Martyn Roach; Phil Griffiths; Sid Barras; Alf Engers; Ian Cammish and Beryl Burton*. I was familiar with some of the earlier subjects listed anyway but it was fascinating to catch up on the stories of the riders from the '60s onwards who were really not much more than names to me. Peter Whitfield manages to get into the psyche of many of his subjects and I now understand a lot more of what went on in this less chronicled era.

The riders featured here all achieved their fame in the period when, in the main, riders looked after themselves and set up their own training schedules and life styles to achieve the ultimate that sport in the UK could offer them. This was before the days of heavy commercialisation which produced large teams with trainers, doctors (!), and physiotherapists, not to mention rider's agents. Peter tries to probe deep to find out how and what it was which gave these men and women the discipline and ability to endure so much pain for so little financial reward.

To quote the author: "This book is the story of their races, their victories and their lives".

**Also hot from the press** is *Lightweight Cycle Catalogues – Volume II* published by the John Pinkerton Memorial Publishing Fund and available through the Veteran-Cycle Club Sales Officer. This second volume contains catalogues from 12 builders:

W & R Baines	1937	Mercian Cycles Ltd	1963
Carpenter Cycles	1932	Paragon Cycles	1937
Granby Cycles	1938/9	Mal Rees Cycles	1960?
R O Harrison	1950	Saxon Cycle Eng.	1938
Higgins Cycles	1952	E Stephens	1938
Macleans Featherweight	1938	Viking Cycles Ltd	1951

From a personal point of view I was sorry that so many of the catalogues were pre-war – seven out of twelve, maybe the Marque Enthusiasts felt there was some advantage in providing the older information. I suppose it could be argued that the older printed material is then the more valuable it is. You can probably tell that my main interest is in machines from WWII onwards. Maybe because of this I meet so many others with similar interests and just a handful who own pre-war models so the date based selection seems rather slanted. It is so easy to criticise after others have put in a lot of hard work but in retrospect maybe the volumes could have been, one for pre-war and another of post-war.

**Corrosion:** up until last year anti-icing measures on UK roads entailed gritting lorries spreading a mixture of salt and grit granules. This was easy to see and was not too cruel on our bikes as cars soon dispersed it to the sides of the road. Last winter the local authorities started to suspend the salt in water before spraying it on the roads. In the Spring I noticed that the bikes I used for most of my winter miles (app. 200 per week) were in a sorry state indeed, in spite of reasonably regular washing. Several of our midweek group found that the rivets holding the mudguards to the stays had rusted away. I also realised that much of the bottom bracket area was quite corroded. This made me remember that at the finish of one of Cambridge Section winter rides I put away two bikes unwashed and returning to them a couple of days later found that a lot of the alloy was covered in a white corrosion. Luckily I caught it early enough and it all washed off so was OK when I polished it up. The conditions to look out for are where there is high pressure weather system about so no rain and clear skies giving very cold nights.

When you go out the next morning the roads are, to your surprise, wet. This is the salt laden solution waiting to eat up your prized possession – you have been warned!

**Chris Wood** from Canada asked: Do you know anything about Wedgelock Cotterless cranks, which I think were made in the West Hants/Dorset area in the early 1950's? The cranks were alloy, and a long bolt ran through the bottom bracket, the axle being cut with wedge ends, hence the name. Chris says, I'm from the Portsmouth area originally and saw a Wedgelock Cotterless set many years ago. **John Spooner** replied: Wedgelock cranks were made in Horsham, Sussex in the late 50s, I think in Moons Lane. I have seen a few over the years but no information on how good they were. They did advertise, I think in *Cycling*, but I can find anything yet. Mick Butler has since sent some information which is now on the website under 'Wedgelock cranks' in 'Classic Components'.

**Rod Taylor** [xine.rod@virgin.net](mailto:xine.rod@virgin.net) asks if anyone has a Dave Davey headbadge or transfer as he needs one to complete a restoration. It would even help him if anyone has one fitted to a machine which they could photograph to enable him to get a copy made. We would also like a copy for the website please as the only Dave Davey on the site is without a head transfer.

**V-CC East Midlands Section - East Midlands Classic Lightweight Ride** - 20<sup>th</sup> July 2008 10.30 for 11.00 start at The Windmill Tea Rooms, Wymondham, Leicestershire (Landranger 130 Grid Ref 850193) Free Parking: Distance 35m

Suggested machines Lightweight geared. (fixed possible). Particularly local builders, e.g. Mercian, Paragon, Aende, Sid Mottram, Longstaff, Barry Bond.

Points of interest The Windmill, Burrough on the Hill old Roman Fort. Stilton cheese. Melton Mowbray pork pie. Cottesmore RAF station. Wonderful views over Leicestershire & Rutland from Cold Overton from where great long descent. Dave Fossard 0116 2364131 e-mail [dncfossard@btinternet.com](mailto:dncfossard@btinternet.com)

I was sorry to read in News and Views that not one Rotrax machine appeared for this year's annual Hampshire Section Rotrax Ride, in fact barely a handful of riders turned out and not one on a Rotrax. Some readers may not know that the Rotrax frame was built in Hampshire for many years and is widely regarded as a cycling icon of the county. Patricia and I have ridden in many of the Rotrax rides although we didn't always own one to ride – 2007 was the first one we missed in a long time. The first rides were in the New Forest starting at Brockenhurst and they were always a great success although there was some traffic to cope with, one would assume that there is a secret breeding place for 4 x 4 vehicles somewhere in the vicinity. For the last few years I rode a 1957 La Premiere and earlier this year acquired a 1948 Super Course which I am in the process of building up with period parts. Looking through the Hants list it seems there won't be a Rotrax Ride this coming year to take it to, which is a shame as there must be dozens of Rotrax in Hants alone, very puzzling after Chris Carter went to all the trouble of organising the event which attracted three other riders.

## **BSA DATING** by Steve Griffith

Frame numbers are a notoriously poor guide to BSA dating. They were not sequential and there are no known company records. However, in the VCC BSA file are the ledgers from Astleys of Oldham (1934 to 70) who were a large volume seller (50 to 120 bikes a year). These provide a useful part of the jigsaw but it is important to remember we are a long way from having a complete chronological frame record. The information from Astley ledgers can be summarised as follows:

- Tandems from 1935 to 1940 begin with AD, AE, AT followed by a four or five digit number.
- For 1934 majority of numbers begin with the letter W then a 5-digit letter begins with a 3 or 4.
- For the period 1935 to 39 the letter is WE or WD or H with a 5 or 6-digit number
- For the period 1942 to 1950 there is no letter just a 5 or 6 digit number.
- Beginning in 1951 a letter prefix was re-introduced running A to E.
- Post 1959 the letter becomes a suffix usually 2 letters.

There is no correlation between models and frame number e.g. sequential number may be roadsters or lightweights

## **OTHER KNOWN DATED FRAMES**

Within the VCC information there are the following definite datings:

Number	Model	Date	Comments
C16376	TOUR OF BRITAIN	5/51	WITH 4 SPEED BSA GEAR
WD33567	OPPERMAN	1/37	CORRESPONDS WITH ASTLEYS DATING

### CATALOGUES

In the VCC file there are a good run of catalogues for the inter-war years. Missing is anything pre-WWI and post WWII plus any component catalogues or other information. Copies of these are most welcome by the Marque Enthusiast who would also like any information to add to his files.

Steve Griffith: email - [steve.y.griffith@royalmail.com](mailto:steve.y.griffith@royalmail.com)

Steve has responded to a request for articles for Lightweight News, my ramblings are becoming rather repetitive so why not join him to help to provide some variety. Be doubly warned, Father Christmas brought me a seven-hundred page copy of *Austerity Britain* by David Kynaston so if you don't get round to sending anything in you will be regaled with a minute-by-minute description of life in post-WWII Britain.

*Peter Underwood*