

LIGHTWEIGHT NEWS - 5

(September/October 2006)

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***Lightweight News* is a newsletter produced for the Lightweight group which is a specialist group within the Veteran-Cycle Club. The club also publishes a bi-monthly magazine, *News and Views* plus four copies of *The Boneshaker* each year. Membership Secretary is Sue Thorne, 44 Springfield Road, Moseley, Birmingham B13 9NW. % 0121 7783615 email: suethn@dircon.co.uk**

This issue of Lightweight News coincides with the launch of a new Web site called Classic Lightweights UK with the URL www.classiclightweights.co.uk. It has been set up by Patricia Killiard (Technical and editing) and the editor of L News with the idea of providing an informative site rather akin to Lightweight News but obviously with a much wider catchment. As readers of L N some of the material may seem familiar but it was felt that much of the editorial in L N was worthy of a global readership and we did have more material that we wanted to share. The site is in an embryonic form and we are adding to it continually so we hope that Marque Enthusiasts and others with useful information will be inspired to send in material for inclusion. We need some items on Italian machines. There are similar sites on the web but we hope with this one to create a balance between images and text which can be lacking in other places. In the section 'Classic Components' I am just putting images and text up to get some feedback. If you know more about the makes, other interesting components they produce, or are able to date for example the Chater cranks, please let me know as soon as you can. This site will be constantly added to and updated. We have other items to hand but there is a limit to how much we know and can do ourselves. Of course we still have to produce L News so any items for this gratefully received.

In an earlier L News I mentioned the Alex Singer shop in Paris and had some enquiries as to where to find it. I think it is 53 Rue Victor Hugo - Levallois-Perret according to a transfer I saw on one of their machines.

The item in L News 3 on '*gen/un-gen*' in the cycling world still attracts comments, the following from **Derek Taylor** of Shoreham on Sea:

"I much enjoyed Paul Curtis's remarks regarding what was, and was not, 'gen' in the 50s. Many of us 'Leaguers' carried our front light in the handlebar mounted double bottle carrier as it was not 'gen' to lumber our bikes with lamp brackets. Needless to say the wretched lamp, even with the aid of a toestraps, would never remain steady and the beam would end up pointing in every direction but the right one!! As he (Paul) was in the Crawley C.C. I wonder if he ever used the Filo (First in Last out) Cafe on London Road, Brighton. This was a well known mecca for Sussex Leaguers, run by the Turner family. I don't remember us eating Lyons fruit pies but we used to imbibe large amounts of hot Ribena together with a dreadful concoction known as an EMbar (I think that's how it was spelt) which had the shape and texture, of something I dare not mention in these pages, ugh! These bars certainly made you go but not, unfortunately, in the cycling sense!!!"

"p.s. I still have not had contact with any other Dilecta owners, am I the only one!!!"

Ed: Paul's remarks about the Lyons fruit pies brought back memories for me, especially of training runs to Hunstanton on the Norfolk coast where we had a regular tea stop at Stockdales, a cafe at the top of the green overlooking the sea. Like most riders in those days we were so proud of our 'track stands' that we spent ages in the most unlikely places trying to emulate Reg Harris in his duels with Arie van Vliet. Unbelievably, I can actually remember doing it one winter (cyclists were the only ones foolhardy enough to be out in the snow) on the top of a table in the cafe itself. Being a relative pauper I would do anything (well nearly anything!) for the price of a cup of tea or even better hot chocolate, only our elders could demand a bag of chips. I'm sure that most of our readers will be familiar with the cyclists, 'on the hoof' or should it be 'on the pedal' food, created by boiling rice pudding, mixed with currants, until it was solid and then cutting into chunks which were put in a paper bag to be handed up during the longer races. Some masochists even used to take Bovril drinks during races whereas I can only remember taking orange squash

especially as I was, and am, a vegetarian. Tales still abound of the unfortunate feeder who, wearing a spotless clean white shirt, handed me a bidon of Bovril by mistake. Let's just say he had to go home for a clean shirt before the next feeding stint came up!

All through the winter we would be out on training rides in the evenings and weekends and to this day I can still feel the sensation of rolling along in a group with the Ever Ready front light and the uncanny silence of riding over the snow using, as usual, a fixed wheel which gave us enough control in the slippery conditions.

Riding amongst the time-trialling fraternity we used to have the front lamp on a bracket brazed-on the front forks or under the front track nut. As front lights were very prone to jumping off we used to put a toestrapped over the bracket and inside the clamp on the light. I have tried this with restorations and there is no way I can get it to fit now. Maybe straps were thinner in those days or perhaps a really worn strap will do the trick.

Steve Griffith from Finchley writes:

Can I speak up in favour of a component which in my experience is much maligned. Indeed when I recently grabbed one out of a £1 bargain box at a jumble a member of the lightweight group asked "what do you want that c**p for?" (*Not me – Ed.*) I refer to the Huret Allvit which I regard as one of the best engineered and durable gears of its time. First introduced in 1958 its use solves the problem I have often encountered : how can I fit a period gear to a 50's machine that works well over a wide ratio (*Sign of encroaching old age – Ed.*) . By wide ratio I mean 14-28 on the rear and something like 46-32 on the front . The old standby, a Grand Sport, can't cope with anything like this. Cyclo never made the standard in this country in 3/32. Simplex long arm plunger types works but are just not durable enough.

The original Allvit (the one without the cover plate) is an extremely high quality item. The geometry and design are totally different to the versions developed with the protective cover. The 'standard Allvit' which came out a couple of years later went through various design changes. Like many other components over time the quality worsened and many useful features were deleted. The type to look out for has the black ball bearing rollers and 3 or 4 positions on the jockey cage for chain tension. After 1969 the rollers became red plastic and chain tension positions were reduced to 2. Contrary to popular belief, Allvit's were fitted to top lines bikes such as Rene Herse.

They work best with the Huret steel shift levers as the mech does need to pull more cable than others. Avoid the later long arm version: it simply does not work as well as a Suntour over sprockets over 28t.

The majority of the mech. is heavily chromed steel. The main problem is without regular use the parallelogram tends to seize up so a good soaking should free the one you rescued from being thrown away. Also, as the top jockey is attached to rear cage plate you may need a vice to remove. After full dismantling and re-greasing you will have a working mech. - one that shifts very positively over a range of 28t.

Ed: I recently gave my 1956 Macleans Super Eclipse a rebuild as I felt it was looking too sedentary as it was. It is now built as a classic 50s time-trial/clubman machine with fixed wheel, Chater cranks, Airlites, Brooks Swallow, etc. This machine is in its original finish and I have all the paperwork relating to its purchase. Frame No. KD 213 - purchased 29.9.1956. Nervex Professional lugs.

As usual I had to change the bottom bracket axle (a job readers will know I hate) and when I removed all the components I saw a piece of paper sticking out of the bottom of the seat tube. I managed to wriggle it out and found that it was piece of greaseproof paper, the old foolscap size (roughly A4), with the initial owner's name and address written on it in ink. The paper was rolled into a tube and had rubber bands around it at the top and bottom. I didn't think too much about this until I was riding the Macleans on the first day of the Lightweight Weekend in Hampshire and was talking with a fellow Macleans owner. I happened to mention the paper and he told me that he had found exactly the same in his frame but also having frame number, etc. So if you have an early Macleans there may be a bit of history lurking in the seat tube. It was mentioned that several makers would have the frame details, etc written on a piece of paper which was loosely rolled, tucked in the top of the seat tube and allowed to spring out so that they

didn't slide down. The ones found in the Macleans were held by the rubber bands to a diameter smaller than the seat tube so they would slip down presumably to allow the owner to prove ownership should the machine be stolen at some future date. 13 lines about a piece of paper – not bad.

I recently came across an item in the Guardian written by Gavyn Davies which I think could be of use to Marque Enthusiasts who are often trying to work out production dates from limited information. In 1941-42 the allies had very little idea how many of the newer Mk IV and V tanks the Germans were producing so they asked the intelligence services to try to work this out by secretly observing the output of the factories. The numbers produced were contradictory and unreliable (think 'weapons of mass destruction' and you will know what they mean!). In view of this they asked the statisticians to test the accuracy of the figures. They had one piece of information which was the serial numbers taken from captured Mark V tanks. The basic idea was that the highest serial number could be used to calculate the total. The German tanks were numbered as follows: **1, 2, 3,.....N** where **N** was the desired total of tanks produced. If they captured five tanks with the serial numbers **20, 31, 43, 78** and **92** giving a sample of five with maximum serial number **92**. Call the sample size **S** and the maximum number **M**. The statisticians reckoned that a good estimate of the number of tanks produced could be provided by the simple equation $(M-1)(S+1)/S$. Taking the example above this translates to $(92-1)(5+1)/5$ which equals **109.2** to give an estimate of tanks produced at **109**. Using this formula statisticians estimated that the Germans produced **246** tanks per month between June 1940 and September 1942. The intelligence! sources estimated the figure to be nearer **1400** per month. At the end of the war papers captured from the Germans showed that the production figures were in fact **245** per month almost exactly what the statisticians' figures had produced but less than one fifth of what intelligence calculated. Relying on the statistics the allies decided that they could attack the Western Front in 1944 and overcame the Panzers. When I read this I was sure that this was the answer to a Marque Enthusiasts prayers and that they should easily be able to settle the question of machine dating for once and all without asking the intelligence services (oxymoron I think)!

Dave Keeler, Mercian cycles and the Paris Roubaix gear

Peter Underwood

Anyone who cycled in the 40s and 50s will surely be familiar with the name of Dave Keeler riding for the Vegetarian C & AC. When I was an admirer of Dave in those early years I always assumed that he was destined to become a short-distance specialist as he seemed regularly to win the 25 and 50 mile events and also did some pursuit events on the track. He used to enter my own club's event, the King's Lynn CC Easter 25, each year from the late 40s on into the 50s: in those days the Easter time trials were some of the first of the season. I used to ride these events but was an also-ran way down in the field. I was an absolute fan of Dave's and even became a vegetarian, which I am to this day, but the bad news is that I still never won anything in spite of being fanatical about cycle sport. Recently I was lucky enough to meet Dave, who provided much of the detail for this story.

He started his racing amongst a group of friends at school in Letchworth in 1946. The school had no cycling club as such but one of the pupils had a racing cyclist in his family and knew enough to organise some unofficial time-trials amongst themselves. D K had a run-of-the-mill Raleigh Sport at this time which cost £4 19s 6d with Sturmey Archer 3-speed gear. He then moved on and started to enter some time-trials organised by his home town club, Letchworth C. C., and soon purchased a second-hand Hetchins which was fitted with fixed-wheel, as were virtually all lightweights of the period.

Soon after this Dave went to college in Nottingham to study for a science degree: in 1949 he represented England in the World Student Games in Budapest both on the track and the road events. He had joined the Yorkshire Section of the V C & AC. In those days the Club had sections in various parts of the country (as did the Clarion CC – but the Clarion story deserves an article on its own as it not only tells us about cycling in that era but gives a feel for the social and political conditions of the time – any volunteers?). Dave's parents were both vegetarians and consequentially he had been brought up in this lifestyle so his choice of club came naturally to him. The arrival of D K on the racing scene was to give the V C & AC a much needed boost in the austere post-war period. He was already winning races on a regular basis and one day

he cycled from the college at Nottingham to Derby to visit Mercian Cycles, as a result of which he was to ride on their machines for the rest of his competitive years. Dave is well over 6" tall and all of his frames were built with a 25" seat tube and a 24" top tube. He also used the longest cranks he could find, starting with 7" Chater Lea but later on using some mighty 180mm TA cranks with 56/53 rings.

I recently studied some photographs of Dave on his Mercian track machine at the World Championships in Milan in 1951. He represented the UK in the 4000 metres pursuit event where he fought his way to the quarter-finals before being defeated by the ultimate gold-medal winner, the Italian De Rossi. What is interesting is that all the other competitors were riding very close clearance track frames built around what we called 27" sprints but were in fact what we now know as 700cc. (When 700 HP wheels first came to this country they were known as 'Continental 27s'). All of his opponents' machines had minimal clearance but Dave's bike was built in the true English tradition in that, although being ridden with sprints and tubs, it looked as if it was built for use with 27 HPs and possibly even had mudguard clearance. This was the way most machines were designed in the UK, where even track bikes were ridden to the event, probably using HP wheels, and in the winter would be used with mudguards for training, riding to work, etc. Shortly after the World Championships he was to beat Glorieux, the Silver medallist, in a 4000 metres revenge pursuit race at an international event held at Herne Hill. Also in 1951 he lowered the 25-mile trial record twice as well as taking the 30 mile record. He was the first rider to beat the hour in Wales and was Scottish 25 mile champion breaking the competition record at the same time. Another Celtic foray resulted in him breaking the Welsh 50 mile competition record. On the track he took the National (NCU) 4000 metres Pursuit Title at the Butts Stadium, Coventry.

In the early 50s Dave, like most of us, had read all he could about Fausto Coppi, a rider he admired greatly. Coppi won the Tour de France using a Paris-Roubaix gear and Dave felt that this set-up would be ideal for a time-triallist because on the fast courses one would probably only use the one gear out and perhaps a different gear back to take account of the wind conditions. He was impressed by the fact that one could set a cam on the gear which would dictate the tension on the chain when the wheel was locked after a change and that this would give him the easy running drive which he favoured along with no drive-sapping pulley wheels. Dave was cycle touring in Italy in 1954 when he managed to buy a Paris/Roubaix gear and what was more amazing managed to get it back into the country – anyone who travelled through customs controls in those days would know that this was quite an achievement in itself. He was to get Mercian to build him a frame with the P-R ends and they also decided to build a second frame to the same specification, as Tommy Crowther, the proprietor, managed to acquire a second Paris-Roubaix gear set to match the first.

Dave also says that even when using fixed-wheel in competitions he always had a slightly slack chain so as to reduce friction. Such is the detail of a champion. When he wanted to use fixed-wheel on the P-R Mercian he merely removed the geared wheel, with its teeth on the axle, and replaced it with a double-fixed wheel with flats filed on the axle and so was able to leave the gear in situ.

As was the fashion in those days Dave trained by doing very high mileages, which included several very long tours around the UK and on the Continent. Having got such distances under his belt, by the mid-50s he moved up to compete at 100 miles and 12 hours culminating in his first of five 24 hour events, the 1956 Wessex 24 when he was in the V C & AC winning team. In 1957 he would win the first of his two consecutive victories in the North Road 24-hour event. This was obviously boy's stuff for Dave as in 1958

He started to think about the Land's End to John o' Groats record, which had stood for some 20 years and was held by Sid Ferris (also a vegetarian). In April of that year Dave had moved to live in Paris where he was working for a French high-tech company: he was to stay there until 1963 working on an international defence project. During this time he was commuting by air from Paris to London to compete in events in the UK. Between April and the start of his attempt on the End-to-End he did two week-end rides of about 200 miles and also attacked the standard time for the 300 mile SRRA London-Southampton-Dover-London, setting a time of 15 hours 38 minutes which stands until this day. During his Christmas break in 1957 Dave decided to reconnoitre some of the End-to-End route so he rode from Land's End to Gloucester where he met a friendly lorry driver who took him with his bike up to Penrith, so giving him some idea of what was in store. He then rode home from Penrith to Letchworth.



Dave Keeler in the 1958 North Road 24 hour event on Mercian with Paris-Roubaix gear

Subsequently the attack on the ultimate record started from Land's End on May 29th and Dave was still using his Mercian equipped with the trusty Paris/Roubaix gear with a 52 tooth Chater ring and 15-17-19-21-23 sprockets giving a range of gears from 61" to 94". He had two machines built to the same specification with one as a spare on the following car. Another unusual feature of this record-breaking ride was that Dave never slept at all throughout the attempt. Most previous holders had opted to have a few short naps during the two days plus of the ride but Dave ploughed on for the whole of the 869 miles to beat the record by 3 hours 24 minutes, a total of 2 days 3 hours and 9 minutes. I am sure that this must be the only time that anyone dared to use the Paris/Roubaix gear for such a ride.

There is a very readable, well-illustrated, report on the ride written by J. B. Wadley in the August 1958 edition of *Cycle Coureur*.

When Dave returned to France he also competed in several massed-start road races with some success but did very little racing after 1962. He feels that his peak performances were done in the 1951/52 seasons. He returned to racing again as a Vet. from 1967-1980 and managed to finish high up in the Vets' BAR most years. Then he had another short break until 1988 when he had offered his services as a marshal for a Vets 12-hour race – just before the event he felt fit enough to ride and so started off another 10 year spell of racing before hanging up his wheels in 1998.



Dave Keeler riding the Icknield Road Club 12-hour event on Mercian with Campag gear in 1992

During his racing career Dave won approximately one hundred open events and was under the hour in 25-mile events about fifty times. He was amongst the first to break the hour in a medium gear 72" event – this entails pedalling at about 118 rpm for nearly an hour. This was in an era when to get under the hour was worthy of headlines in Cycling Weekly. In 1951 he finished 3rd in the National 50-mile Championship using a 'Constrictor' replica gear which he had machined and built for himself.

Dave finally finished working in early June of this year (2006) and has started to ride again after an eight year break, he doesn't plan to train for racing again but is now cycling for the pure pleasure of it. I am restoring one of his 25" 1954 Mercians which had been equipped with the Paris-Roubaix ends for the End-to-End - sadly these were changed to conventional Campag ends some time later. I shall try to restore it to the specification it would have had when the ends were changed, with Campag gears, Chater cranks etc. plus Titan stem and bars.

Peter Underwood

Dave also told me an interesting story as follows. He was in France working when Mercian built him a new machine. He was to ride this in a race in Hampshire en route to Cornwall. The proprietor's wife took the bike from Derby to London, left it in the Left Luggage Office, and posted the ticket to Paris. When Dave flew from Paris to London he collected the machine from the rail station before heading off South.

In a similar vein, when I was conscripted into the RAF I was posted to Netherhaven, a station near Salisbury. My home was at King's Lynn in Norfolk and I had decided to ride home when I got some leave. My father at Lynn took my Claud Butler to the local railway station and sent the bike to Salisbury by rail for me to pick up. I collected the bike from the station, took the wheels out and placed frame wheels, etc. in the space under the stairs of a double-decker which took me back to Netherhaven. Wasn't life simple in those days when public transport worked for the benefit of the public rather than the shareholders.

David Hinds asks me to point out that the Hetchins & Granby weekend will, next year 2007, move from its traditional date (because of Le Tour visiting London) and will be held on 15th, 16th, 17th, JUNE 2007. I always find that the first few weeks in June are usually very crowded so some careful planning needs to take place amongst organisers next year. I think that Herne Hill and the Bates Weekend often clash around this date. I guess we will need a Hetchins Six-day track frame fitted with Bates forks and the use of a helicopter!

We often get asked about our experiences on L'Eroica. There is a photo gallery at: <http://www.blufreccia.com/img/59en/gallery/index.htm> or click on [L'Eroica](#) which gives a fair idea of the territory, etc. Some of the images are of riders on more modern machines who were in fact competing in the 200k Randonne part of the event. We rode the 75k event and saw more than our fair share of 15% signs.

News from New England:

Saturday and Sunday, October 28-29 Clubman's Retreat: the V-CC New England Section Fall Camp at Mansfield, Mass. All riders of veteran British bicycles are invited to participate. Quiet, flat-to-gently-rolling roads are suitable for all machines. For information contact Jack Demarest (jdemarest@hubfoldingbox.com).