

MEGAPHONES AT THE ISLE

Words: **Chris Swallow** | Photos **wpfotos iomtt.com** and **Fent**

BRM's classic scribe, Chris Swallow, shares the trials, tribulations and unsheduled beer breaks that are all part of the ultimate classic race...

You're in the middle of a hot practice lap, scratching away as best you can around, say, Hampton Downs and you miss your apex into turn 1 by a foot, you've got to roll off with the right hand and momentarily wait. Just over a minute later, on the next lap, subconsciously aware of your previous error, you get it dead right, the bend unfolds sweetly before you and you open the throttle in the knowledge you're on line, the exit is yours and that bend's in the memory bank for the next lap, and the next. Picture the circuit where you can't see your apex as you approach it, travelling at a speed that is faster than your race bike has ever been before, you miss your apex by a foot and then have to wait 37.73 miles to have another go at it. When

you arrive there again around 22 minutes later... Bollocks! You make the same error, have to roll off the throttle, and then it's back to the pits as that practice session is over for the night. The allure of trying to ride the Isle of Man TT circuit well entices hundreds of racers each year to a small rock in the Irish sea.

FRIDAY 15TH AUGUST

Compulsory formalities of sign on and riders briefing are attended. Huge slow moving queue for sign on; when I get in there I'm asked to confirm all the details on my entry form one by one before signing in the relevant box. Can't help but think things would move quicker if we were asked simply, 'Any details changed since you entered?' Riders briefing

was conducted by clerk of the course Phil Taubman, who I consider to be a top boy, very proficient in his role. No bullshit, Phil's emphasis is on riders being thoughtful, approaching matters with common sense. "There are only two walls to worry about in the Isle of Man," he says. "The one on the left and the one on the right."

I'm sat next to Belgian Paton racer Bart Crauwels, who lends me a twin-pull Menani lever for the extension clip-ons I have brought to assist me in wrapping my lanky frame around the tiny 350cc Aermacchi I'm to ride in the Junior Classic TT. Good mate Bob Millinship lends a clutch lever and that afternoon, for the first time ever, I can get my knees inside my elbows on an Aermacchi. Cheers fellas!



SATURDAY

First night of practice and a plan to do two laps on Dave Kenah's beautiful 500cc Manx Norton, my mount for the Senior Classic TT, all the way from Whitianga. A rumour that there are not enough marshals unfortunately proves true and the session is canned. Mutters and grumbles prevail, wonderment at why is there not enough? The question I feel we should ask instead is, which suit has decreed there needs to be such a huge quota of marshals at each post? Spread them out around the track, trust their professionalism, maybe it's time to pay them for their efforts, too?

SUNDAY

Nothing much doing. Met my old school mate Fent off the ferry, he's over to help us on the

spanners. Top boy, now working for Yamaha UK.

MONDAY 18TH AUGUST

Run-in the new piston on the short-stroke Aermacchi up on the old Clypse circuit. As I whistle round a blind bend I spot two horses in the distance so instantly kill the motor so not to spook them. Thinking I was about to be admonished I lift the visor and the rather attractive jockey thanks me as, 'It's the first time out on the public road for this one, so good to get used to traffic noises!' Nothing like an Aermacchi's open megga to acclimatise a horse to traffic I guess. Fent drops the hot oil and it's crystal clear, jolly good. Stick in 3 ½ new pints of Morris R40. Also discover a sticking throttle that is traced

to a burred needle tube on the Gardner carb, so emery it smooth and then grease: lovely. Bike feels strong.

The plan for practice is as per Saturday, two laps on the Norton. Five miles in on the run down to Crosby and I feel that dreaded slowing so whip the clutch in quick and the motor dies instantly with a piston seizure. (Incidentally three others suffered the same tonight.) When I told a good mate of mine what happened, and that the internals weren't too decimated, he said 'Good man Chris, our boy banged it down a gear and gave it another handful'. The lovely couple whose garden I coasted into proffered tea and chocolate biscuits, then I saw Dad go through on the 250cc Eldee Velocette, its first lap of the Island, both of which cheered matters somewhat. ➤

TUESDAY 19TH AUGUST

Surveying the piston shows expansion on the skirt where the internal ribs meet.

"You know where it's growing now Dave", says my Dad. "Dress it in those areas and put it back in." Dave acknowledges such advice with a slight eyebrow raise, before dressing a few thou' off the skirt of his new piston then proceeding to rebuild the motor.

Mike Fawcett's lovely Aermacchis have both got new internals for the meeting so the plan tonight is a lap on the short-stroke followed by a lap on the long-stroke to run them both in and get some miles under my tyres. An eventful night! About seven miles in and the short-stroke splutters and cuts out while hard on in top gear on the approach to Appledene, a very fast double right. I spot a gateway on the left and pull quickly off the track into the safety of it. I notice that the needle flat on the Gardner carburettor has rotated in the carb body and I am pretty sure this would have been starving fuel flow. The problem I have is I'm on the outside of a full-bore double right where riders run right out to the wall I am behind – if the needle isn't the problem and I



push off down the road and it doesn't bloody fire, I'm in no man's land. Luckily there's a two metre strip of tarseal descending into a field, so I tell the marshal to go for a walk round to see if it's muddy.

'Seems firm enough. Hope you're good at motocross...'

The bike fires up just before I hit the grass then it's clutch in, feet down and wobble round the bumpy field in a big loop and back up to the track and away to complete a 'rusty riding' running in lap. Quick change to the warmed up long-stroke and out we go again, riding a little better now, then exiting the second part of Waterworks and beginning to climb the mountain the motor dies and I coast to a stop on the inside of the track with a huge

bank next to me and nowhere to go. I lean the bike up and the marshals fifty metres away communicate between engines that I should leg it across the track and behind the wall – we're first session tonight so it's going to be a long wait, but what a vantage point! Eyes at spindle level, bikes a foot away under hard acceleration. Michael Dunlop on the big Suzuki is the only rider to make me take a step back, certainly using every inch.

A long delay after the last riders and no 'roads open' car appears – the mountain has been shut after an incident. I quit my grumbling about beginning to turn blue when I learn from the boys who've come to get me that one team in the paddock won't have a rider returning to them tonight. ➤



The Kiwis at IOM TT



Bruce Anstey heading through town



Swallow senior and Swallow junior's rides

WEDNESDAY

Dave has the Norton rebuilt so we go crack it up on the old Clypse road. It feels strong and sounds good. Plan tonight is one lap on the Norton followed by one on the long-stroke.

We have jetted up and I keep the new piston busy under light load, spinning at 7,500rpm in 5th gear until about five miles in then I start to let it pull. It feels lovely, strong, torque, handling is brill and I'm really settling down to enjoying matters. Tucked in down Sulby straight, 300m board, 200m, right that'll do, anchor on, and.... not a great deal happens. With the tight right of Sulby Bridge rapidly approaching I squeeze the fading front brake for all it's worth, stamp hard on the rear and come all the way back to first gear before drifting gracefully sideways into the air-fence at low speed, eyes bulging on stalks through my visor. Phew. Pull it out, bump it off down the side road, adjust the front brake up and get going again, late braking points now being treated more cautiously. (We put the fade down to the new linings and Dave then went right through the brake; it never happened again. Strange.)

An enjoyable lap on the long stroke; very busy out there, a lot of traffic getting in the way. To the newcomer rider on the mountain riding a modern machine – if someone has just whistled round the outside of you at the 33rd Milestone, full-bore in top, head behind the bubble while you make three slow corners out of this one fast sweep, would you consider for a moment they perhaps know where they are going a smidge more than you and you could perhaps learn something tonight? Next time, don't go squirting past them aggressively on the run to Keppel Gate, balk them completely on the entry and make a complete balls-up of that bend too. Pretty pleased with a lap of 95.7mph all things considered. On the Norton, sector times without air fence reconnaissance are positive.



Chris

Dad gets a lap in on the Eldee. Mechanically it's sound, a great achievement for a new engine made by Nick Thomson in Wellington. But it ain't as quick as it should be, so heads are being scratched.

THURSDAY

Go see Steve Smith at Avon tyres who helps us out with some new rubber, thanks. Fit various tyre combinations to various bikes and decide to commit to dropping the forks through the yokes on the short stroke Aermacchi, the rationale being that the AM26 Avons are a bit tall and the front end has at times pattered a bit, so it would make sense to try load the front up. The cable tie I positioned yesterday indicates a 15mm drop through should be safe, so I drop it 10mm and tighten it all back up.

It pisses down in the afternoon and practice is declared untimed. Clerk of the course Phil Taubman announces to the paddock this would be a good opportunity for riders to get some laps in during the untimed evening, but the pit lane is noticeably quiet. I put in two laps on the Norton, it is wet, damp, patchy and inconsistent the whole way around, but I enjoy the steady ride round, the Norton feeling good. Dave tells me he's timed me at 98mph which is surprising as I felt like I was tiptoeing in places.

FRIDAY 22ND AUGUST

Dave is race-prepping the Norton so I take both Aermacchis out, the long-stroke first. 21 times TT winner John McGuinness on the 500 Paton sets off ten seconds behind me and comes wailing past just before Braddan Bridge. I consider he has braked very early so I hold the Aermacchi open for a split second more then outbrake him down the outside. He has the inside line and he's clearly gonna disappear up the hill after Braddan so I hold back and let him tip in to the left first. John proceeds to then head off for a 112mph lap. (My perceptions of competence are diminished somewhat when I hear him interviewed on the radio that evening citing, 'new brake pads as the reason I nearly didn't stop for Quarter Bridge, so I was very tentative into Braddan and for the next few miles after that, sorry to Chris Swallow if I got in his way...')

An enjoyable lap, the front-end better with a change of fork oil, before coming in to the pits and heading out on the warmed up short-stroke. The front-end has also benefited from a change of fork oil, and in addition to the 10mm lowering feels real planted. We have taken a tooth off the rear and it is overgeared however, labouring along when it should be spinning, the short-stroke being a more peaky buzz-box that benefits from being kept above 8,000rpm; it really sings at 8,500rpm.





Ansky on the Macintosh Manx

Because of this, I don't feel like I'm particularly 'on it' so am surprised to see I've made a half decent lap.

I get wind that Dad has broken down on the Eldee at Ballaugh. Knowing he'll be picked up by Nick and Phil, I jump in his van and shoot over to Team Velocette's digs in Peel to save them having to drop Dad back at our digs in Colby. I arrive the same time as they do and discover the problem is magneto related which proved to be easily fixed; but despite jetting improvements and a positive step in an

ignition timing alteration for tonight's practice, it is still not, we feel, going as it should. A long discussion into the evening culminates in postulations as to whether it's high comparative performance in New Zealand may be due to running on methanol which is masking a fundamental Achilles heal for the more fickle petrol one has to run on in the Island. Valve timings, cam profiles, durations and lift are all considered before two Swallows depart and head off to get out of leathers and into a shower each.

PRACTICE LEADERBOARDS FOR THE NIGHT:

Formula 1 – 1st Bruce Anstey, Yamaha, 122mph, 2nd Ryan Farquhar, Yamaha, 118mph, 3rd Jamie Hamilton, Kawasaki, 114mph.

Formula 2 – 1st David Hewson, Yamaha, 103mph, 2nd Adrian Morris, Yamaha, 101mph, 3rd Derek Glass, Kawasaki, 100mph.

500 Classic TT – 1st John McGuinness, Paton, 112mph, 2nd Bruce Anstey, Norton, 106mph, 3rd William Dunlop, Honda, 105mph.

350 Classic TT – 1st Lee Johnston, MV, 99mph, 2nd Chris Swallow, Aermacchi, 98mph, 3rd Chris McGahan, Honda, 95mph.

SATURDAY 23RD AUGUST 500CC CLASSIC TT RACE DAY

There's a 350 practice in the morning which I decide to have a run out in aboard the long-stroke Aermacchi. Apprehensive about getting back for the race in the event of a breakdown, my worries are assuaged somewhat when I realise there's a Rudge parade lap with friends Mike Farrall (of Farrall's transport, who was a huge help getting the bikes transported) and Paul DeLacy in it. I have a wry smile as I envisage thumbing a lift back over the mountain on a rigid and girder pre-war Rudge.

A steady event free lap, it is intermittently damp around the circuit with wet patches in places. I go chat to Dad upon return to tell him. Silently, I begin thinking these are tricky conditions to race in, not quite knowing how hard to push.

Clerk of the course Phil Taubman delays the start by an hour and then reports 'dry roads, perfect but windy conditions', so a wise move on his part.

I feel relaxed enough at the start, give Dad a hug then go into 'thousand yard stare' mode once I'm aboard the Norton. Dad is setting off number 17 to my number 20 but I have no recollection of him starting, and in no time I am heading off down Bray Hill myself. Bike feels good and I'm riding fairly well, I feel. Catch and pass a couple of riders, then Maria Costello on a very quick Paton twin passes me down Cronk-y-Voddy straight. Her bike is too quick for the Norton to hold in a tow, but I catch her up quickly through the 11th and get frustrated all the way to Kirk Michael through the fast stuff. Knowing that it's much the same after Kirk Michael to Ballaugh I scratch up the inside into Douglas Road corner and head off into Kirk Michael village. A huge wheelie ➤

Chris heading through Kirk Michael



exiting Rhencullen suggests I got through this technical section well. Don't see Maria again until she passes on the straight after Ballacrye then enforces a return to 5th gear through Quarry Bends when I'd really prefer to be rattling through hard on in top. She disappears off down Sulby straight and as we approach Sulby Bridge at the end I spot a familiar figure and witness Maria thinking hard about outbraking Dad. Instead she makes a bit of a hash of matters and I squeeze past on the exit before having the unique experience of passing my Dad in the Isle of Man on the run out of Ginger Hall. Get on with things and feel good all the way up and over the mountain, the Norton sure does feel strong. Then braking hard for the Creg, 5th, 4th, 3rd and... the clutch breaks. If it had been the last lap, perhaps even the third, I'd have carried on, but there's a pub and we've still got an intact gearbox, so I pull in utterly despondent as I hear Maria's Paton take the bend.

I'm the only person in the pub, everyone's outside in the sun watching the race, but I don't really give a shit at this stage. A lovely lady called Jude comes in and buys me a beer and we chat a while, I gradually begin to perk up. Dave Kenah arrives with Mike and he too, like me, is inconsolable. I hear Dad is out of the race too with a magneto problem, having done over a hundred miles per hour on his standing start lap. Given I'd caught thirty seconds on him, then pulled out another twenty or so more, I was looking at an opening lap of around 105, which would have been competitive enough I guess. The 'what ifs' and 'could have beens' of the Isle of Man. Small consolation for Dave, his bike was the fastest single cylinder machine through the speed trap at over 136mph, and that's with a full tank and a 5th gear Quarry Bends exit; a real tuner.

Breaky 122mph average speed
- Bruce 'Almighty' Ansky



Ian Lougher goes on to win the race on the Paton, overcoming a 30second time penalty for speeding in the pit lane. Dan Cooper puts in an impressive performance for second place aboard the 4-valve 500cc Molnar Marx (when was that ever made in the period we are trying to re-create?) his exhaust pipe coming loose on the first lap and having to hold it on with his boot for the race. Third place goes to the Kiwi team of Bruce Anstey aboard the McIntosh Marx – well done. Bruce laps at 108.110, beating my Dad's 15 year-old lap record for a single cylinder by just one second, but Michael Rutter goes even better taking his mono-cylinder round on

the second lap at an impressive 109.102 on the Ripley Land Seeley G50, but he failed to finish.

"About time wi't course and bikes as they are now," said Dad, when informed of the progress.

500CC CLASSIC TT RESULTS:

- 1st Ian Lougher, Paton, 108.481
- 2nd Dan Cooper, Norton, 107.740
- 3rd Bruce Anstey, Norton, 106.803



Coaxing the 'Macchi into life

SUNDAY 24TH AUGUST

Late start thanks to a late finish the night before. Go spanner-check the Aermacchi and change the gearing. Fent goes for a lap on an original Yamaha FS1E 'Fizzy' that he has fettled into life for our top hosts for the week, Brian and Alexia Hewitt. He runs out of fuel on the mountain and phones in for recovery. He is thrilled when I take up race fuel and oil and he can thus complete his fizzy TT lap. Forecast for tomorrow not good.

MONDAY 25TH AUGUST

350cc CLASSIC TT RACE DAY

Grey, wet and windy. Race postponed until tomorrow. Go watch British Superbikes live from Cadwell Park where weather is much the same. Got a flight back to NZ on Wednesday so pleased to see a positive forecast for tomorrow.



TUESDAY 26TH AUGUST ACTUAL RACE DAY

Fine day, conditions once again described as perfect. Set the tyre pressures on the Aermacchi, the front has dropped 3lbs, strange. Re-inflate then take up for scrutineering and the first thing I'm informed is that there is a nail in the front tyre. Instant action mode, it is now 11 o' clock with the race scheduled for mid-day. Jump on the bike and race down to Steve Smith at the Avon wagon: 'Steve, minor emergency!' Ever calm, 'No panic, we've time.'

Tools arrive, lock wire cut, wheel out, Steve gets busy fitting a new tube, re-balancing wheel. Tidy up nuts and bolts free of lockwire, lay spindles, brake anchor bolts, and brake plates out, sequenced and in order on the mat ready, then wait patiently. Newly tubed and balanced wheel arrives, action stations, brake aligned, wheel tight, pinchbolts, lockwiring done, go, go. We arrive back at a closing scrutineering at 11:17 and are allowed through. Phew, hope that's enough drama for the day.

Race is reduced to three laps so I drain four litres of fuel out. Wish the Eldee Velocette team and Dad good luck up on the grid then I'm away at number 11.

The Aermacchi feels good and is pulling the new gearing well. Get passed by Alan Oversby on the Honda twin just exiting Glentramman, then Lee Johnston on the MV Agusta 3 accelerates past soon after. I ignore the ringing in my ears and tuck in behind the five open meggas and follow them through the high speed swervery to Parliament Square then up

the hill to Ramsay hairpin. Exiting the hairpin I am impressed by the speed the multi-cylinders accelerate away from me, that's the last I'll be seeing of you two then.

Lonely ride from here on in, me against the circuit, maintain concentration, what's coming next, where do I need to be on the road, are my toes on the pegs, elbows in, knees gripping the tank. Have a big slide on the right-hander into Kirk Michael on the second lap and look down to see oil all over my right boot. Instinct suggests all is not quite well so temper matters somewhat on the right-handers. Arrive at the chequered flag and am told I've finished in 6th place, seven seconds from 5th, and I have to admit to feeling a bit disappointed. Looking down at the bike and there's an inch wide strip of oil all around the right hand side of the rear tyre, stemming from a mild weep at the base of the barrel gasket. I'm second single cylinder behind Roy Richardson, and in light of the tyre's new lubrication, I soon start to feel a bit more chuffed with our effort, so head to the beer tent for a celebratory pint – maybe two.

Dad on the Eldee Velocette has retired on the second lap with a broken wheel bearing, ironically one of the only items Nick Thomson had not made or replaced as new. An admirable achievement by Phil Price and Nick, plus a close knit team of support, to take a home-built motor to the Isle of Man where, from an engineering perspective, it performed faultlessly. The plan now is to get it running better on petrol in New Zealand, ready for the Classic TT in 2015.

Lee Johnston on the MV won the race with a very quick second lap of 105.239, Alan Oversby second and Roy Richardson third. Would the result have been different if the race had been four laps necessitating a pit stop for the thirsty MV?

350cc CLASSIC TT RESULTS:

1st Lee Johnston, MV Agusta, 104.134mph
2nd Alan Oversby, Honda, 102.942mph
3rd Roy Richardson, Aermacchi, 101.942
Later that afternoon the Formula 1 and 2 races were run concurrently, also 3 laps.

FORMULA 1 CLASSIC TT RESULTS:

1st Bruce Anstey, Yamaha, 121.957
2nd James Hillier, Kawasaki, 119.371
3rd Russ Mountford, Suzuki, 118.949

Many thanks to the following for another year of progress, regress, highs, lows, depression, anxiety, elation and ultimately great fun – enough to make you wanna go back next year, perhaps....

Dave Kenah and Mike Fawcett for beautiful and quick motorcycles. Dad (Bill Swallow) for the many hours of engine development and prep that got those Aermacchis flying. Steve Robinson and Uncle Alec Swallow for precision Aermacchi engineering. Steve Smith at Avon Tyres. Morris Lubricants. Bart Crauwels and Bob Millinship for lever loans. Andy Farrer for race boot support. Adrian Earnshaw for top garaging and signals. Brian and Alexia Hewitt, ever the brill hosts. James the Fent Fenton, top mechanic and breakfast chef. Liz and Jen, both fine women. Mike Farrall, Farrall's Transport for being his usual brilliantly helpful self. Miles Robinson of Norton Works Racing for his transponder and Dark Destroyer. Paul Phillips, Bruce Baker and Sophie Lowney. ■■■



Team MacIntosh