



I had been in the Fellowship of Motorcycling Rotarians for some 4 years now and although I had been to a few meetings when members had come to the Midlands for the Motorcycle Show, I had never been on a ride, especially with members of the Fellowship from overseas.

Neville had always told me about the exciting times encountered when visiting other countries and how well they were treated in Europe and on the recent tour of Southern Oz and Tasmania. So, I was getting very excited about going on my first outing, a trip to Cambridge to meet and escort Motorcycling Rotarians to Warwick for a fellowship meeting. Neville and I have been friends for a long time and worked on projects together for Rotary and I had met Rob on various occasion's, so he was no stranger and I was looking forward to meeting him again.

The day finally arrived, Monday the 9th July. A bright morning with a very good forecast, fine weather all the way said Charlie Neill on the television. Well just in case, out came the Frank Thomas wet weather gear, tightly strapped to the rear seat of my Ducati ST2. I must say that I am not the most accomplished of Motorcyclists and Neville had already made the point that this trip would probably double the mileage of my recently purchased ST2. The bike had done 2,450 miles in 3 years, although I had managed 453 of those since I purchased the bike in February.

At the duly appointed time I rode over to Nev's house to be greeted on the drive by Rob, Neville and Jean, Neville's wife. All were very cheerful which helped take away the little of the tension I felt, as I was about to ride a long way with 2 very experienced motorcyclists.

First stop had to be the garage to fill the tanks, Neville left Rob and I to sort out a few bits whilst he went to the garage. Fortunately, these BMW's (Rob's) has big panniers, so off came my Frank Thomas weather gear from my saddle and into the BM pannier it went. Very sensible, at the time, I might add. Well, all we need to wait for is this other chap. "Which chap's

that" asks Rob. "Charlie" I replied, "that TEC chap (Tail End Charlie) who rides at the back". Bad mark number one, a clout across the helmet told me it was time to start the Duc and off we went to find Neville, who by this time was duly gassed up.

Gassed up, well that's an understatement. For the first few miles we took a tortuous route with junction after junction and following a Norton at close quarters is no joke. I had already replaced my visor on the FM with a brand new one but the smoke from the Rotary engine soon fogged that up. I shut the lid as tight as possible, then it fogged up inside. By the time I had fluffed a few gear shifts, swearing, profusely inside my lid, there was a choice foggy inside or exhaust fumes outside. Fortunately, just at that point we hit the open road towards Southam.

Neville had agreed with Rob that he would lead for the first part of the journey to Northampton and apart from the traffic until we reached the junction with the M1, the ride was quite uneventful. I found the riding position of Nev on the Norton interesting as he seemed to be sat very up-right, oh and those tyres, I had already checked mine before leaving home but that rear on the Norton appeared to be half the width of the front on the Ducati.

There is a lot of islands on the by-pass at Northampton and on one of the straights between them, there was a flash of red as a BMW hurtled past me then Neville and I realised that it was Rob's turn to lead the way. The A45, what a super duel carriageway.

Now Rob was leading, and I was still behind Neville which meant that I was now TEC, well I think I was if you can have a TEC with 3. An interesting observation position as I could now observe how the advanced motorcycling contingent of this trio of riders performed. My first observation was of Rob extending his leg in a forward motion and wagging his foot. I did not take too much notice of this apparently unusual activity and just presumed that a man of his affluence would have more than one motorcycle and the other must be a Harley, where one would naturally extend one's leg forward.

Ah! I know where we are now, joining the A14 at the Peterborough island, I remember this from when we had the stand at the BMF rally for the Megaride. Another event when I met many of the Fellowship members. A few miles along the A14 the road turns to the right and we encountered a huge amount of traffic entering the slip road. A large white arctic with a German number plate had slid in between Neville and myself to join the carriageway, so I decided to filter in behind him. I could see Rob and Neville adhering to the speed limit of 40mph in front of this arctic, unfortunately, it appeared that he wanted to go faster, following the intrepid duo in very close proximity. The lorry sported air horns and I could hear him hooting as he forced Neville across the road in a frightening lunge.

I could see this German, who was, of course, sitting on the left-hand side, leaning out of the window, giving a clenched fist salute and shouting expletives at Neville. It took me a few moments to realise I may have mis-judged our German friend and that he was not being abusive nor driving aggressively but had merely recognised that Neville's bike was a Norton with the Rotary engine and he must have been shouting "WANKEL!! WANKEL!!". Just at that moment he braked, skidded and nearly jack-knifed into the back of Rob. Oh dear! A Wankel engine, a German lorry driver and a BMW. what a combination. I was delighted when the road cleared after nearly been required to scrape these two off the tarmac.

The rest of the ride was fairly uneventful although we were followed from the outskirts of Cambridge to our destination by those very nice gentlemen in blue driving a rather fast looking car with rows of lights on top. Arriving at the Granta Inn, we were able to park in the small car park. We were just taking off our gear when, Pearce arrived with the rest of the Fellowship, a very timely arrival.

Punting down the river, enjoying the views and the splendid University buildings. A full commentary given by our professional punter, soon to be replaced by Colin, who thought he should try this leisurely art. The nearest comparison one could make would be of the straight-line skier to that of the slalom. I am sure that Colin's zig-zag course extended our trip by at least 15 minutes. Giving much better value. After lunch at the pub it was time to head off home.

I had never experienced the system used by the I.F.M.R. but Brian Jones had explained it to me in simple terms that even I could understand. You have a leader in an I.F.M.R. bib, in this case called Rob and TEC in a bib at the rear which was Neville. Each time a turning was made the number 2 bike stopped to mark the direction. Got it? Yep! Think so!

So off we set and within the space of 100 yards I could see the system working. A good pace was set by Rob and once in the countryside we met the usual speed limits and cameras. An interesting observation, many of these cameras are now forward facing, especially in Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire, so you can blast through with a big, big smile whilst they take your photo. No number plate up front Pal. So, we did.

We got to our stop at Northampton and it was Neville's turn to take over the lead. Now shouldn't they have changed bibs?? Just then the heavens opened. A few riders stopped to put on waterproofs and of course, TEC (now Rob) got a little further behind. I've had enough of this, my leathers were getting very wet, so I stopped under a tree and waited for TEC who had my Frank Thomas Waterproofs in his panniers. After a few moments Rob arrived to see why I was stopped, "I need my waterproofs mate, they're in your pannier, I only need the trousers". Being a fair-weather rider, I had never worn them before. Ah! it's an all in one, so with a huge yank, Rob pulled them over my shoulder and we were on our way. Or so we thought.

Oh Dear!! Rob's BM wouldn't start, now if it had been my Ducati I could have understood. We tried nearly everything, I even tried to push-start it but it was hopeless. "I'll have to ride on with you John and leave the bike here" Rob said. "OK" I said, "But I have never taken a pillion before" Within a split-second Rob produced his mobile phone and announced he had got a better idea, "I'll ring the BMW breakdown". Now I'm not too sure if my previous comment had anything to do with this new idea. We agreed that I would ride to the next junction to tell the next marker to ride on, then go back to wait with Rob.

Just at that moment Rob pulled up, "Why's your face the same colour as your bike Rob, did you try to bump it again". No answer just a funny look, so we rode on at a very quick rate to play catch-up, great fun although I don't think our new Treasurer, John, was so happy as he was now leading on a very wet slippery road. Eventually, of course, we should find all the bikes stopped at various junctions until we came across our leader. So why was Neville riding in the opposite direction. Good job he's on a Norton, he'd never turn my Ducati round in this narrow lane.

So, the party was all together again, and it stopped raining. I had thought of stopping to ask Rob if he would put my waterproofs back in his pannier but then I also thought that I might be pushing the punt out a bit too far and could be wearing them up-side-down.

We arrived at the very last junction in Warwick and everything had gone swimmingly, when Nick overshot the junction and a chase followed to stop him ending up in Birmingham. Having caught up with him, he turned the bike round and twisted his knee. I only learned this after riding home and then driving back to Warwick in the car. At the Hotel bar a large bag of ice was produced by the landlord to reduce Nick's swelling.

It was at this moment that Rob whispered to me, "I found out why the BM wouldn't start, I had forgotten to raise the side-stand. If you don't tell anyone I'll buy you a drink". No way! Pal! I'll die of thirst first. Sorry.

What a splendid end to a splendid day, I was really looked after by my 2 experienced motorcycling friends from start to finish. I experienced true International Rotary Fellowship, some really super company, a lovely ride and to end it all, I was given a lapel badge by from the Northern Chapter of the Fellowship of Motorcycling Rotarians which I was proud to wear on my jacket for my Rotary meeting at Royal leamington Spa the following day.

Thank you all and if I may, and Rob and Neville forgive me for writing this article, I will join you on many more occasions in the future.