

FISHTAIL WEST

**The Magazine of
the Velocette
Owners Club of
North America
no. 193
October/
November 2012**



Chairman: John Ray	1681 Partrick Rd. Napa, CA 94558 clubman@velocette.org
President: Kim Young	45 Collingwood, San Francisco, CA 94114 (415) 864-2194 kim@614engineering.com
Treasurer: Isobel Belvoir	13492 Grand Oaks Pl. Grass Valley, CA 95949 (530) 273-0662 isobelvoir@softcom.net
Membership Secretary: Dick Casey	13029 S.W. Bachelor Rd. Vashon, WA 98070 (206) 463-5242 r.casey@comcast.net
Rally Purser: Gil Loe	21933 Vintage St. Chatsworth, CA 91311 (818) 709-6367 glragpicker@earthlink.net
East. Canada VP: Andrew Harris	48 Calais St. Whitby, Ontario, L1m5M2 (905) 666-4041 andrew.harris@opg.com
Editor Lanora Cox	1731 Alabama St. Vallejo, CA 94590 (707) 553-2909 velocette@earthlink.net
Webmaster:	webmaster@velocette.org

Club dues \$20 a year, U.S. funds only. Please make checks to VOCNA. Memberships run from January to December. Send dues, address changes, membership applications, enquiries, etc. to Secretary Dick Casey.

**Submissions for the
next issue of FISHTAIL WEST
due:
November 30, 2012**

Front Cover: Dee Cameron's workshop/show room by Lanora Cox

Back Cover: With bikes safely parked, the welcoming crew greet photographer Pete Young in Flagstaff, Arizona

editor's note: This was a tough issue to put together. First because there was so few submissions - it seemed that the most likely contributors were either headed to Australia for the "Back to Bundanoon" rally or to southern California for the Melo Velo Fellow Rally. Meanwhile I explored dusty archives and spider filled garages to quench my curiosity. Then a lot of news came in, some of it not so good. Hopefully we'll have better stories next time. LC

Madame Prez Kim Young Sez:

Next summer's Velo rally will be held Sunday, July 14 - Saturday, July 20, beginning and ending in Volcano, CA. (assuming the hotel remodeling goes as planned). It's to be a loop route, riding through the foothills of the Sierras to Downieville, then on to Lassen Volcanic Park, two nights near Chester, a day to explore Lassen, then south to Nevada City, and returning to Volcano. There will be a welcoming dinner Sunday, July 14th. As soon as the final details are confirmed, I will send out the specifics of how to make reservations via FTW and the Yahoo group.

We recently welcomed Velo people Paul d'Orleans and Deb Macdonald to the finish of the 2nd Motorcycle Cannonball in San Francisco. Many of the pre-1930 bikes did the whole 4000 mile route, which should motivate us all to get our early bikes on the road where they belong.

Last month, Pete and I attended the Irish Rally in southwest Ireland. What a fantastic time it was. While it was quite challenging learning how to ride a borrowed hand-shift motorcycle, on the left side of the road, in a foreign country, it was also very inspiring. Of the 159 pre-1961 motorbikes on the ride, 35 of them were older than the 1932 BSA that I rode, and the riders were no spring chickens either. 10 of the bikes were Velocettes, the oldest a 1930 KSS similar to mine. The roads were lovely and adventuresome, best described as a fusion of Wards Ferry Road, Highway 1 and the Lost Coast Road. I rode with three veteran bikes from 1913-1915, it was very impressive to see such old cantankerous bikes doing 130-175 miles a day on these roads. It was a really great experience!

Although the Irish rally is a very different ride than the Velocette rally, some of the ideas I took away from it are: group meals lend more social time, really old bikes can ride hard roads and long miles, and the fun is on the road, so there is no hurry to return to the hotel early.

*President
Kim Young
on the road
in Ireland.
photo by
Pete Young*





Mick Felder, Dennis Quinlan and Gil Loe at the 2011 Spring Opener by Gil Loe

Neville Smith & Jim Day at the beginning of the 2011 New Zealand Rally by Jim Abbott.



Sad news...

Jim

Day crashed heavily during the just completed National Australian Velo OC Rally at Bundanoon, NSW. He collided with another rally rider, Bob Campbell while Bob was making a RH turn (the equivalent of your LH turn) around 3pm



Jim Day is out of intensive care! Here he is with Peter Underwood who was riding in the trio when the crash happened by Dennis Quinlan

Thursday. Jim was airlifted by helicopter to a hospital on the outskirts of Sydney. Quite a scene with 4 police cars, ambulance, the road blocked, the helicopter landing in a nearby field. He has been in intensive care since then. He had concussion, several broken ribs and a punctured lung which continues to cause concern. He appears to be recovering from the concussion and is now speaking cogently. He is certainly not out of the woods yet and his previous lung problems following the NA Velo Rally/Ride in July could impact on his current condition.

Val suffered a fractured wrist and was taken to hospital by road ambulance but released that evening.

Both Velocettes were severely damaged..."insurance write-offs". But of course with time not an issue they will likely both be repaired.

Mick Felder and Gil Loe also attended the Rally and Mick flies home to LA tomorrow, Gil set off this morning for the 1100km ride back to Brisbane on the Honda FT500 that Ron Thomas rode around Australia in 2009 to the National Rally in Perth, West Aust. He flies out later in the week to LA.

Neville Smith who some of you will also know also crashed earlier in the week and sustained shoulder injuries. He travelled home to Melbourne and has a shoulder reconstruction scheduled.

We wish him well also for a successful operation and speedy recovery. Seems like a "doom and gloom" report....

On a brighter note, Mick was awarded the Bertie Goodman Award by Bertie's daughter, Anne Frampton, who is the patron of the Australian Velocette OC and a great supporter of the Club. I'm sure he'll be proud to show it to you when you see him next.

Kindest regards,
Dennis Quinlan.

(Being a variation of the old English nursery rhyme
“A hunting we will go
We’ll catch a fox
And put him in a box.....”)

Great to check out Lanora’s Rally special FTW. Good work all you snappers and caption writers. Not the same as being there of course but the next best thing, what. Nice group shot – these things are not easy to setup – familiar faces, redoubtable folk, unique characters and so many lassies-oh. But what’s this? mNew Pres Kim Young – we’ll go along with that. A Real Rider who’ll make a Proper President. Sweet.

A few more comments, for what they’re worth, re the photos. I see that Sirisvati has graduated from the sidecar seat to the pillion of the family KTT. Next stop – the front seat. How about the shot of Dee’s workshop/garage – I thought at first that it was the Barber Museum....Pete and Paul with boater and blazer, tres elegant and big names on the SoCa vintage scene. Near the end, nice to see Tom and “Chuck’s bike”, and in the center montage is that a bottle of Dewars that he’s taking good care of? An immaculate LE for “Most Outstanding Velocette”? The late Eddie Arnold would surely approve. And the Bundies flew in, complete with jazzy shirts. Dai and the Packard, a long way from Blighty. Shot of Sedona brought back happy memories of visits with Brenda.

Good that no reports of painful get-offs, overloaded chase truck, extreme temperatures and other negative stuff that happens. Now here’s a thing. Just for the heck of it I pulled out my ratty California map and looked up Volcano – HQ for next year and found that I had marked it at some time. I assume that it must have featured in a past ride, perhaps as a lunch stop when we rode nearby #88 over Carson Pass on a Sierra Rally.

Back to the Future – sort of. After I parted with the Velo some years ago I missed the big single, so it was (surprise!) that I recently found myself at our local Indian Royal Enfield emporium. Just looking, you understand, ha, ha. Turned out they just had three in stock all 500cc Classic models, after selling a dozen of them this year, and no more due in until June next year. I wasn’t the only character skulking around so all of a sudden it was decision time, whoa. One bike was in a desert sand color and another in a rather strange black and chrome. But the third was a lovely maroon with cream tank panels and before you could say “Built Like a Gun” I had handed over a check and was the somewhat surprise owner of this particular motorcycle. Oh my. A sure-fire way to perk up your day is to acquire (another) pair of wheels, don’t you know. It also beats having a bunch of Monopoly money sitting in the bank earning one per cent...

A bit about the bike. Three years ago the company in India redesigned the motor with unit construction, fuel injection, hydraulic tappets and automatic valve lifter (don’t ask me how that works), five speeds and electric start – yeah! Also new is the frame – I had a 1953 R.E. way back and recall that it had a

haphazard mix of tubes and plates masquerading as a frame. Paint and alloy are lovely, telescopic superb, front disc nice, warranty at 2 years is twice that of Honda's new 700, tires are Avon, starter motor Japanese, nuts and bolts metric, motor under-square at 84 by 90. Comes with side and center stands and gear ratios are spot on.

Writing in Motorcyclist musician Adam Ant calls his Enfield "a work of art" – the shape of the fuel tank alone would justify that. And Cycle World editor and Veloist Mark Hoyer has positive things to say about their test RE Classic in an article about bikes with character. Fuel injection is not perfect and finding neutral can be a challenge (remind you of another marque!), but that's about it for negatives of any significance. Up to speed it's just like a good Velo – smooth, quiet, comfortable with neutral handling and that big single feel. I am not able to venture far on it but, like a MAC or MSS, it's a nice bike for pottering. It's also a big-time contrast to the rev-happy wee Ninja.....

Friend of mine died recently back in the UK. Chappie by the name of Frank Farrington whom I had known for all of his 76 years as I was born just around the corner from him in a small Lancashire town. I mention this as Frank wrote tech articles in Classic Bike and was the author of the Haynes hardcover "The Vintage Motorcyclist's Workshop", under the nom de plume of Radco (an early radio station). So a certain number of you will have read his words at one time or another.

He and I enjoyed many happy times together. Gliding and such in the Air Cadets, flying model planes, cycling to race meetings then graduating, at sixteen, to powered two wheelers albeit prewar ones as this was the early 'fifties as new-ish machines were rare and expensive. Old bikes were just that and Frank acquired a flat-tank Norton, a Scott, a Brough and others which we attempted to bring to life with mixed results. Later in life through his writings and position as Chief Judge at the Stafford Show he knew such folk as the late Jeff Clew, "Titch" Allen and a certain Stanley Woods, and the Rhodes family. He never owned a Velocette but had a lot of stuff over the years including an early Goldie and Morgan Three-wheeler. In his last years a faithful M-20 would transport him to nearby peaceful moorland heights. He loved to share pub fare with his soul-mate Dorothy and friends, and at his well-attended Memorial Service the closing music was a number by "The Blue Magnolia Jazz Band". A modest and cheerful gent.

Hoy Hold-em Batman. Fancy adding a tasty Vincent to your stable? Then maybe put on your poker face and grab a deck as you contemplate the fact that Californian Ned Meislin won a nice Rapide in a poker game in 1996.

Not much of a motorcycle connection here but the fall fashion issue of Vogue checks in at almost four and a half pounds and no less than 916 pages which is, of course, the model number of Ducati's legendary super-sporty piece.

Finally – is your Thruxton not speedy enough for you? If you'd been at Monaco on May 11 you could have bid on a couple of Ducati Desmosedici GP's. The ex-Stoner one went for 201,690 UK pounds and the other for 196,990 which had been ridden by some guy by the name of Rossi. Ciao!

Andrew Harris Eastern News

Greetings from the East. We are coming to the end of the best riding time of the year – not too hot, not too cold although by the time you read this the sweaters and scarves will no doubt be needed for that morning ride. I have been putting vacation days to good use by taking time off work to go riding. Well it's a simple choice – go to work or go riding? Let me see.....

I was pleased to hear from Sam Jowett a couple of weeks ago, seems that Sam has once again surrendered to the siren call of the single cylinder engine and has purchased a brand new fire engine red machine. (not a Velo but fairly traditional). The hills (in Vancouver) are once again alive to the sound of plonking.

Good for you Sam, glad you are still able to keep the wheels turning.

Remember: the important thing is to have a motorcycle, the next important thing is to ride it. Once we have the first two covered then it is time for a debate about whether your bike is better/worse/more or less vintage than mine.

I have not read the Peter Egan article myself but I was surprised to see that he felt Velo's were unreliable.

Reliability is of course the Holy Grail of any equipment operation and could be defined as the ability of the (motorcycle) to reach the end of the journey without unexpectedly failing en route.

A pre-requisite for this happy state is that the appropriate planned and preventive maintenance has been carried out. I wonder if Peter thinks that maintenance falls into the tinkering and fettling category and is thus optional?

Any equipment needs maintenance and it is wise to obtain the manufacturers recommendations if possible. In our case the red book is available which makes it clear that frequent attention is the norm. Any machine designed in the 40's/50's/60's will not tolerate the throwing against the fence each night school of maintenance without pushing back.

When I used the Viper daily it was fair to say that frequent attention was required but it generally paid off on the road. It is certainly not reasonable or sensible to apply modern maintenance desires to older bikes.

Ride safely

Andrew

Dai Gibbison found this great photo in a 1914 Motor Cycle Magazine. He said he was afraid to send it in case it gave Jeff ideas... I wonder what he meant by that? LC





Velocette Wins! – Queensland Annual Teams Trial

1st July 2012

by Dave Royston

The border between Queensland and New South Wales is around 2 hours drive south of Brisbane. In this area the border is marked by the 'Border Ranges' a picturesque densely-wooded part of the 'Mount Warning' (named by Captain Cook in 1770) and related eroded caldera structures first created when volcanism was active 23 million years ago. The cool wet peaks still have 'Antarctic Beech' trees – said have originated when Australia was still connected to Antarctica as Gondwanaland. The valleys are now rich farming land. To the west is the escarpment that forms part of the Great Dividing Range. The whole area is called 'The Scenic Rim' and it provides many great motorcycle roads, very popular for rallies out of Brisbane.

The Queensland 'Teams Trial', essentially a 'regularity' trial, has been organised by the Brisbane Area of HMCCQ for the past 17 years in this Scenic Rim Region. This year the base was the show-grounds at Boonah, a country town servicing agriculture and tourism in the region. While the meeting was held over two days, with a short run on Saturday afternoon as well as a big dinner in the evening, the main event as always was on the Sunday.

This year the trial was run over 100 miles on a beautiful sunny Queensland winter's day. A roller-coaster route with spectacular views – this year over all-sealed roads – passed through familiar and popular venues from previous motorcycle events. At the core of the 'trial' was the 'set time' for the whole route with teams losing points for each minute ahead or behind the 'set time'. The route had the usual 'surprise' check points, and the quiz questions - each correct answer gained a point. In addition, for this year, teams gained additional points for girder fork bikes, rigid rear bikes and pre-1930 bikes. Some teams were cunningly assembled to maximise these 'free' points.

15 teams of three bikes entered; together with route marshals and other support, there was a strong turn-out. Four Velocettes entered: one team comprised two rigid MSS and a rigid MOV/MAC aimed to maximise the 'free

points', there was also swinger MSS, and (at last!) my road-rigged 1960 Velocette Scrambler (imported from Canada via the USA some years ago) was a member of the 3-bike winning team along with a boxer BMW and a bevel-gear desmo Ducati V-twin.

Dave Royston

Brisbane

1 July 2012



Dear Editor

Am I alone in being astounded and horrified by the AGM motion, passed unanimously, empowering the Committee to award itself any salaries it wishes out of Club funds (ie our money) without any further discussion with, or approval by, Club members?

I hope there will be a final decision made and publicised before the end of the year, when renewals are due.

Geoffrey Blanthorn

Geoffrey

Yes, a final decision will be publicized in this newsletter. As this issue goes to print, the officers have not been able to get it together to discuss this issue either in person or electronically. As far as I know, no one has received a salary or a stipend from the Club funds to date.

editor, Lanora Cox

BSA Mid State ride, 2012..

aka "Broken trails."

by Tim Kenney

It was to be a glorious day, but the thick Morro Bay fog bank would not relinquish till well past Hearst Castle. The ride started early, two T160s and a T100R riding north, Bob Rymer, Gregg Gorris, and myself hoping to get most of the way up the the beginning of Frank Forster's always epic Central Coast ride.

We encountered some sun in Cambria, gassed up, and dived back into the mist, wiping shields and fogged up eyewear with one hand, navigating the easy rolling curves and straights of Highway 1 with the other. At times the mist was so heavy the water on my shield could be moved simply by turning my



Dee Cameron tells Frank Forster where he can pick up some knee socks in Flagstaff, Arizona

helmet, letting the wind blast clear the plot.

Riding through heavy fog on a motorcycle is somewhat oppressive, like being in a very small room with no windows, as I would imagine a basement prison cell. Your focus, of course, is on the road and what may be an immediate hazard, like the CHP hidden up a farm road along a straight near Hearst Castle. We, being good citizens, had nothing to worry about. But it was still ominous, as features of the landscape and objects loom out of the mist, to be absorbed as you motor past.

Just as I was resigning myself to this mode of travel for the rest of the ride up the coast, we entered the Ragged point section of 1 and the fog lifted up and away, revealing the rugged coast and the sparkling jewel like ocean. With vision restored, the verdant green of the hillsides and the winding ribbon of asphalt beckoned. At this time of the day there was almost no traffic going in our direction, so it was easy to enjoy the wonderful section of road at an interesting pace. My little Daytona awoke and dived into the road easing into the serpentine path with a relaxing snarl, chasing the vanished Bob, trailing a Gregg limpet.. a t160 sandwich.. how often does that happen on today's roads? I was riding in a style that I think that Frank later described as 'Bicycling' to describe his current approach, gliding into corners, powering smoothly out, no drama. I think this is what he meant, although I didn't really try to follow him on this ride.



Author Tim Kenney with Jane at the 2011 Melo Velo Fellow Rally. photo by Gil Loe

When Gregg and I found Bob waiting

at Gorda Springs (home of the expensive Gas and coffee), I for one was ready to turn around and re-trace our ride up, but we pressed on to Big Sur, with light traffic and more good roads, at least until we were almost in the Big Sur area.. where we stopped, feasting on fresh baked goods from the 'Big Sur Bakery,' and waiting to see the lead group from the Northern Crowd.

Ray Pallett and Ann were off the front, giving us fair warning to suit up and start up. We fell in behind a small Moto Guzzi packing double which was determined to keep my Daytona at bay, or at least that is how it seemed.

Another nice run south of Big Sur led us to the turn off for Nacimiento Fergusson road, which leads up away from the coast into the back side of Fort Hunter Liggett, the old hunt lodge for the Hearst Family, now an unspoiled (well, except for the tank tracks) section of the California coastal range and inland valley. Every time I ride this road I get to the end with a huge smile, and this day was no exception. I left before the rather sizable crowd, not wanted to be tempted out of my pace, and enjoyed an exhilarating ascent and roller coaster descent. Try it.. Good news for tourists, they have shrunk the patrolled perimeter, so unless you want to buy cheap gas on the base, you don't need to pass through the guards.

I wanted Gas, so I had to endure the droll humor and scrutiny of the gate guard, who informed me that he had just issued a \$495.00 speeding ticket to one of my buddies. I assured him that it was not one of us good citizens.. but it was a good reminder not to speed on the base.. Federal judges don't issue traffic school, and don't ask me how I know.

It was at this point in the ride that I lost track of the plot. Frank eventually pulled up with his Norton supertanker to refuel, and we promptly got lost trying to exit the shrunk perimeter. When we finally got out and navigated our way toward the Nacimiento Lake (threading our way past Lake San Antonio in the process), I waved all the big bikes past, falling into my bike saving cruising speed somewhere around 60mph. It turned out to be insufficient, as somewhere on the way to the lakes, my coil bracket broke, the coil disconnected from the wiring loom, and the bike coasted to a sudden stop (under a tree).

Careful swearing and on my knees debugging revealed my problem, and soon I had my meager (hey, it is a Triumph, who needs tools?) tool kit out to discover a stock of wire (who would have thought...maybe other things have fallen off.. I kind of forget.. oh, ok, there was a muffler..). It was fine wire, and my plan was to weave it around the frame and coil and suspend the whole hot mess above the rocker box so I could cripple it back in.

Now things get interesting. Down the road comes John Simms on a very nice sounding Velocette, accompanied by Dave Warnes (sp?) on a modern Triumph. Unlike all the traffic that had passed, they pulled in and soon were lending a more than helpful hand. John produced some heavier wire, and between them they instructed me on how to better suspend the coil. There was a lot of humor involved, as they tried to help me without insulting my rather weak repair plans, and I was very happy that they had come along. It almost made me happy that the bike had stopped, as I had this unique opportunity to work with two helpful and funny gentlemen. We were soon back on the road, They to intercept the ride, I to work my way back to Morro Bay.

That is pretty much what these rides are to me.. a general plan with a huge shot of Chaos thrown in to make life memorable. What fun would it be to simply ride out and ride back without any adventure? At least that is what I tell myself.

We tried to follow the route sheet, but missed a turn and ended up in Paso Robles. They headed north to find the route, I headed east then south on River Road, heading roughly toward Morro. Two land deserted farm roads, threading through wineries and horse property, seductive curves and calming vistas.. just what I was looking for. I landed in Templeton and found another short road, Templeton Road, which rose and dropped, turned and twisted, and dumped me on 41, which took me through Atascadero and out to Morro Bay.

What a great way to lead the horse to the barn!

Burt and Barbara were ensconced at the Motel, and with Jane I sat down for a nice drink of wine and some cheese. Bob had returned early as well, and Gregg's headlight had developed an oil leak, so he was back (really? An Oil Leak??).

Barbara got a call from Sachie (of George and Sachie Shoblo) to see if someone could help them out, as a deer had stepped out in front of their little Guzzi (AH HA.. that explains who was on that Guzzi) and it was not rideable.

Jane and Bob Rymer and myself jumped in Bob's giant diesel truck and headed out 41 to see if we could help. We found them with a VERY NICE CHP officer who helped load the bike in the truck and made sure no one got hit by a car, then (on Jane's advice) we took them to the Hospital in SLO to get checked out. They were banged up, but are home and safe as you read this, although I am thinking George will be looking for Guzzi parts for a while (I have a LeMans, parts don't exactly grow on trees). Another unexpected twist on the ride plan, but I was glad Jane and I and Bob were available, and George and Sachie had full leathers and good helmets.

We kind of missed dinner with the crowd, but were able to grab a parting drink. Quite a jolly crowd, and another eventful ride, thanks to Frank and his followers. The next day we loaded up the truck and headed for Ojai to ponder the power of random events, and to look for a coil bracket.

As we were all milling around getting ready to go our separate ways, a member of the Austin Martin club that was mostly meeting in the next door hotel climbed into his new V12 and started it up. What a sound! Nothing like a proper British motorcycle, of course.. but still...



George and Sachie made it to the 2012 VOCNA Rally in Flagstaff Arizona. At the AGM, George shows off his island duds with Jeff Scott.

See you next year! Tim Kenney



OverHeard Kami's

Dear Kami

I'm having trouble starting a relationship with my Mac. There is no energy transfer. Is the Mac the wrong bike for me? What should I do?

Batter E. Phobe

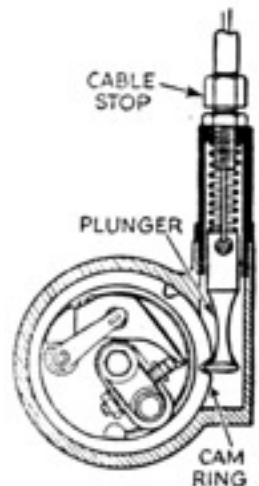
Dear Batter E. Phobe.

You haven't provided me enough details to diagnose your relationship, but I can tell you a few steps to jump start it. First, are there any sparks?

Spark is crucial. Your Mac may need a tax sticker (the Velo equivalent of a dozen roses). Look at the spark plug to see if it's fouled or not. Changing a spark plug can transform a non-starting relationship into a torrid affair. If that doesn't work, look at the spark cap. Hint: this is not a sex toy. The HT lead is next.

Finally if all that is in good working order, and assuming you are eating correctly and getting enough sleep yourself, you may have to change the self-generating energy transfer unit. In other words your relationship not only won't start, it has no magnetism. There is no other solution than to dig deep into your pockets and replace the magneto. Once this operation has been completed, you'll start a new affair and be able to connect rubber to the road.

Kami





Once the tents are set up, everyone is excited to tell stories and go riding. photo by Joe Powers III.

Photos from the 2012 Melo Velo Rally started to arrive before this issue went to press. There was food and a live band. More next issue....

Tim Kenney makes sure everyone gets fed. photo by Dana Shatts





Above: Snow bunnies Luke and Amy discover the joy of going fast on a Velocette. photo by Mirek Sharp.

Below: Dana Shatts celebrates Father's Day at Century Cycles with his daughter Jenny.



Jim Johnson- 1954 Catalina Grand Prix Winner by Rick Furguson May 2012

editor's note: Olav Hassel forwarded some photos from Jim Johnson and this raised my curiosity. The man is still alive and available to talk! Meanwhile, I looked for more information and found the following article and interview. What a full life Johnson's led! The article that follows was published May 2012 on this site at: <http://budanddaveekins.com/stories-photos/jim-johnson.cfm>. Yes this is a website dedicated to Bud and Dave Ekins website run by very helpful and friendly people.



Jim Johnson and his Velocette 1954. photo courtesy of Jim Johnson

When Jim Johnson turned sixteen, he wanted to join the military and fight for his country, but he was too young. His LA/ Hollywood friends, who were one year older, were already serving in the Army, Navy, or Marines. He began to worry that WWII might be over before he could serve, but his luck soon changed when he found out that the United States Merchant Marine, due to heavy losses, dropped the age limit to sixteen years of age.

During World War II, the US Merchant Marine was providing everything to our men in battle around the globe, and in many instances, they followed invasion forces across the Pacific providing fuel, ammunition, water, and food to the US Navy and ground forces. They also transported lend lease military

equipment to US Allies.

Some of the greatest losses the US Merchant Marine suffered in WWII took place in the "Run to Murmansk", a voyage from the United States across the North Atlantic to the Northwest Port of Murmansk in Russia. The losses from enemy subs, sur-

face ships, and aircraft were so great that few survived a second trip. According to Jim, this was the reason the age for service in the US Merchant Marine was lowered to sixteen.

Jim Johnson completed a three month course on Catalina Island, and shipped out on the SS Charles Kurtz on 1 January 1945. Jim said, "She was a 'drug store' tanker built in 1917. She carried fuel, oil, and gas up and down the Pacific Coast from Seattle to LA, LA to Chile, and I got off on the return trip to LA." When I asked him about enemy subs, Jim just shrugged his shoulders and said, "We were too close to shore, and we were too small a target." Jim, a shy and humble man, never mentioned the fact that coastal tankers were stalked and sunk by enemy subs during this time.

After his "shakedown cruise", Jim's next ship joined a convoy that went thru the Marshall Islands delivering fuel to Eniwetok, Saipan, and Tinian Islands. His ship had P-38 Lightning Fighters strapped to the deck that were also delivered to Tinian Island. (Note: America's top ace and Medal of Honor winner Richard Bong flew the P-38 during WWII). During the interview Jim did not say much about the danger of Japanese aircraft or submarines, but he did mention that his ship was armed. He said the normal crew manned the (4) .50 caliber machineguns and the (6) 20 MM cannons. A special armed crew manned the ship's bow 3 inch cannon and the stern 5 inch large cannon.

Jim's second trip in the Pacific was onboard a new Victory Ship, the SS Vanderbilt Victory. There was a lot of interest in serving aboard this new ship until the ship's cargo was revealed: all bombs. This didn't seem to bother Jim. He looked forward to the first stop in Hawaii and then on to Eniwetok and Guam.

While on Guam, Jim and a buddy hitched a ride in a Lockheed transport/reconnaissance aircraft to Tinian Island, home of the B-29's. Jim said, "We watched all the B-29's take off for Tokyo and probably saw the Enola Gay,



*Jim Pioneering the Motorcycle Ramp Jump.
photo courtesy of Jim Johnson*

but it did not register in our minds until later when they dropped the first atomic bomb". Jim also mentioned he and his friend (both current on .50 cal machine guns) were offered jobs as door gunners for a one night mission to Tokyo, but declined when told they would have to drop their Merchant Marine Insurance. The next day Jim and his friend hitched a ride on a B-24 Liberator back to Guam to rejoin his ship.

Jim causally mentioned that his ship had navigated through the same waters that the USS Indianapolis had passed through on her way to deliver the first operational atomic bomb to Tinian Island. Tragically, the USS Indianapolis was sunk by a Japanese submarine while en route to her next destination with tremendous loss of life.

After Jim finished the remainder of WWII on ships up and down the US, South American, Alaskan, and Canadian coasts, he continued to sail. He described getting drunk with an Army lieutenant cousin of his in Brussels, and he mentioned enlisting in the US Army in 1946 (now that he was old enough). He served one hitch with the US Occupational Forces of Germany and got out. Having survived WWII, Jim's continuing life of adventure never stopped. His first love was the sea, but he was acquiring a taste for motorcycle racing, and he was dividing his time between the two when the Korean War broke out. According to Jim, "the desert was too hot for motorcycle racing so I signed on for a trip to Japan in support of the Korean War."

After Korea, Jim made multiple trips through the Panama Canal. He remembers being called up to the bridge by the Captain to steer the ship through the canal because he was the only sober man on the ship. Apparently, the whole crew loaded up on cheap booze in Chile before the voyage, but they knew they could depend on Jim. This was one of many lighter moments in Jim's life; not to forget the time he climbed up to kiss the Blarney Stone in Ireland. At the last moment, Jim changed his mind when he thought it looked too "slimy" to kiss.

From 1952 to 1973 Jim's love for motorcycles kept him in the Hollywood area, but he also had time to join an automobile/motorcycle thrill show where he traveled the US east coast and entertained crowds in South America. Sponsored by GM Chevrolet, Jim performed in Argentina, Columbia, Uruguay, and Venezuela where he rolled cars, crashed cars, and made motorcycle jumps through flaming hoops.

Back home while winning a car roll-over contest in the LA Coliseum, Jim could hear his biggest fan in the audience yelling encouragement. His mom, Clemence Gifford, could be heard above the crowd. After all, she sang for the New York Metropolitan Opera Company. While not performing Wagner, she performed small parts for "I love Lucy" and other television shows.

In 1954, Jim won the Catalina Grand Prix Motorcycle Race. In 1955, he placed 2nd overall of 850 contestants, winning 1st in his class in the 160 mile California Big Bear Race. Jim was well on his way to winning over 100 trophies, having his picture on the front of every motorcycle magazine and getting to know Hollywood stuntmen and stars who shared his interest in motorcycles. His circle of friends grew to include actors Lee Marvin, Steve McQueen, Keenan Wynn, and Hollywood stuntman Bud Ekins.

When Steve McQueen was on the movie set for "Bullet" , he thought so much of Jim, he wanted him in the movie with a couple of motorcycles. He asked his stuntman, Bud Ekins, to call their friend and make the arrangements. Ekins had ridden a motorcycle for McQueen in "The Great Escape", and he was doing the automobile chase scenes for him in "Bullet". Jim's claim to fame was a small scene where he drove his pickup, with two motorcycles in the back, on a busy San Francisco street.

With his expertise in motorcycles, Jim found himself on the business end. He started out as a salesman, co-owner, and eventually owner of his own motorcycle shop up in Berkeley. He said, "The hippies would come into my shop and wash the tear gas out of their eyes." He also helped out a couple of members of "Hells Angels Motorcycle Gang" when they had mechanical trouble, but he made them turn their vests inside out because they were on "neutral territory".

With all these adventures, Jim still found time to teach himself how to sail, and he learned his new skill on San Francisco Bay with its high winds, fast currents, fog, and twice-daily tides. Jim admitted that this was not the right water to teach yourself how to sail on, but he never doubted his ability. He soon found himself sailing from California to Hawaii, and up to 1977 he lived on a 48 foot (sailing) ketch in Hawaii. When people wanted to sail, they called him.

For years, Jim was "carded" in the Merchant Marine as an Able Bodied Seaman and a First Mate on anything from tug boats, tankers, passenger liners, cable ships and research ships (University of Hawaii). By 1983, Jim had advanced to the rank of Merchant Marine Officer. He was now licensed to serve as Master of Ocean Steam or Motor Vessels of not more than 1600 gross tons; Radar Observer (unlimited); Chief Mate Ocean Steam or Motor of any gross tons; and Master of Sail Vessels of not more than 100 gross tones.

Starting in 1992, Jim moved to Swan Valley, Montana. He would arrive in April and leave in November. While he was away, he was at sea going back and forth to Hawaii and Japan; still in the Merchant Marine. In 1994, he retired and has stayed right here in the valley.

When you interview a great person like Jim Johnson and think about all his accomplishments and the dangers he faced beginning at age 16, you are looking at a great American who was prepared to give it all in the service of his country. You are also looking at a professional on the water and a professional on the land who, at certain times, liked living on the edge. You cannot help but admire this man, and when I asked him if he could go back in time, would he change anything in his life? He quickly responded, "why would I want to change anything? I lived my life the way I wanted to."



Following VOCA Membership Secretary Peter Underwood from Vincent to Velo

(continued from FTW 190 March/April issue)

At the time I was having fun riding the MSS all my old school mates were riding Triumphs, Ajs ,Matchless ,BSA Goldstars ,Royal Enfield, Norton's, and Ariels. As stated previously a great deal of fun was had riding with that lot. So now no bike to ride, my good working mate had a black Shadow in pieces being rebuilt so we looked around and came up with a 1951 series C Comet in a rather sad state which was shunted around the Kitchen side of our house, to be stripped and restored, you how it goes.

My dear old mum made it quite clear that not one item was coming into the house, so there it was with a cover over it slowly being dismantled. The engine I took to work, well, Terry took his Shadow engine in. So there they were being worked on during lunch and tea break times and many hours when the Forman was out of the workshop!!! All the painted items were taken to Stevenage for stove enameling and many parts were rechromed.



This is my old MSS. The two boys belong to my friend's neighbor and the house on the right was where I lived. The room on the upper right is where the Vincent Comet grew up. Peter Underwood.

When the engine was complete there was no way it was going outside under the sheet, but what to do. When you entered the front door the stairs on the right went up through the small bedroom which was mine and a large shelf covered the stairs, so when mother was not around I carried it through the front up the stairs and somehow hoisted it onto the shelf. It looked brilliant all polished and spotlessly clean.

A day or so later my Mother asked what that shiny thing was in the bedroom and when advised it was the engine of my bike she made the fatal mistake of saying "well I don't mind it like that."

Because now it was open slather.

Wheels sporting new alloy rims went under the bed and being a Vincent without a frame as such the oil tank and gearbox went under as well, all was good until mum needed to vacuum. Then there were some small problems but it's amazing just how much you can slide onto that stair well shelf.

The engine was assembled with 9.1 Piston Lightning cams., TT Carb and a Goldstar silencer and it all went rather well. Rode this for about 18 months and decided to emigrate to Australia. I had a girl friend at the time and she came six months after, but my friend Michael and I came together. So the Vincent was sold (wish I still had it) and they were the only funds I had, went for half what it cost, that's life, and that was the end of motorcycling for some time.

After getting married, having four children then separated and divorced there was no time or money. However after many visits to the local race circuit at Amaroo park I decided time was ripe and wrote to my brother in England to look for a Velo for me.



Fixing Yet Another Oil Leak – Velo Tele Forks

By Tom Ross

After only 42,000 miles and many years of Summer Rides, it was time to fix the leaky forks on the old Venom. Oil would run out as quickly as I put it in, and I got tired of cleaning it off of the front wheel rim and tire. It was obvious that the sliders would need resealing.

I had heard about a method of repair that did not require paint stripping and resoldering the slider. Ed G. has used it, and Pete Causer of the VOC posted a story about his successful repair on the Yahoo group. So I gathered the materials needed, found my old Mityvac brake bleeder, and set to it. All the stuff shown, except the pump and slider, cost less than \$25. I had to order the Loctite, and only NAPA knew what a metal tire valve was. And the top washer on the test lug had to be filed down to fit into the top of the slider. Tighten it well, and point it away from valuable items when you first pressurize the assembly... Pete's "two plates and an o-ring" put a hole in his workshop ceiling. The plumb-



ing test plug remained in place for me.

My first attempt was on what looked like a NOS slider that came with a MSS Scrambler basket. It turned out to have a big leak, made a stream of bubbles when I immersion tested it. On my first attempt I used a bit too much vacuum for too long, and it sucked the Loctite right on through. Two more tries got it sealed up, so far. So the vacuum numbers in the following procedure are not absolute – you have to play it a bit by ear.

The other problem I had was that the pump itself would not hold a vacuum for a long enough time for a proper test. Before you start, I suggest you put a cap over the pump's inlet and check it for leakage. Mine got better after I

blew the dust out of the exit and relief valves (next to the gauge, above and below).

If anyone has more experience with this, I'd be happy to hear from you.

Tom Ross



Velocette Telescopic Fork “No-Solder” Repair:

Symptom:

Slider leaks oil, especially from the brake side. Obvious remedies are fruitless.

Cause:

The soldered joint between the bottom casting and center tube has cracked.

Materials/Tools:

1. Loctite 603 - a press fit, oil tolerant bearing retaining compound. This can be found at bearing or machine tool supply companies. Threadlocking grades of “wicking” (green) Loctite are not suitable.
2. A “Mityvac” vacuum hand pump (typically used to bleed brakes) or similar, with a gauge.
3. A 1-1/2” plumbing test plug, which is a rubber plug with a through bolt for tightening by expansion.
4. A metal Schrader valve as used in a tubeless wheel rim, sized for a 0.435” valve hole. These are designated Type 435 or 416(S). You may need to add an adapter to fit the vacuum pump; this can be found at the end of an old bicycle tire pump hose.
5. A tire pump, from a bicycle if the one on your Velo has gone missing.
6. A heat gun or other “approved” heat source. Solar heat could be enough.
7. A can of brake cleaner or acetone, remember these are highly flammable.

Procedure:

1. Disassemble forks; strip and clean the fork leg. Replace the drain plug.

Wheel Tips by Kelly Moss

Regarding: evenly torqued spokes vs. overstressed wheels.

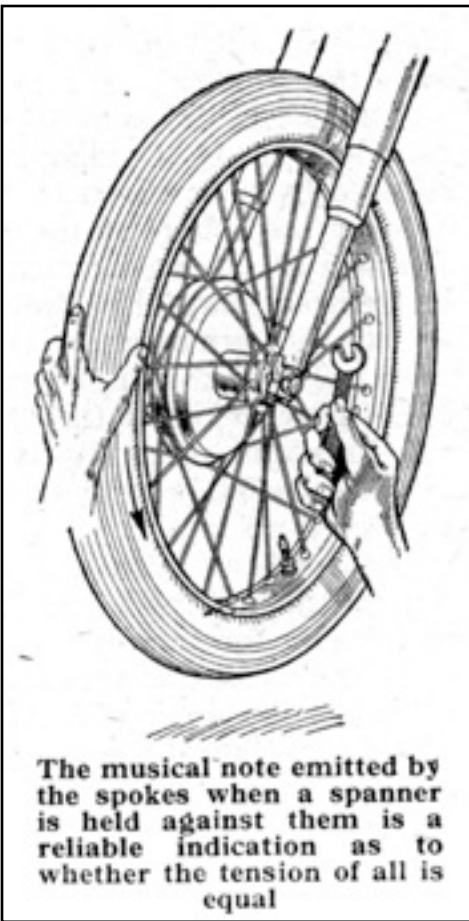
To put a spoke wheel together, all you have to do is get it straight with even spoke pressure (torque). Some people think spokes can be used to “pull out” a dent, warp or hump at the weld; almost all rims are butt-welded together. A rim can sometimes be made rounder by using uneven spoke pressure (torque). If the wheel is stronger than needed (under-stressed), then one is more likely to get away with uneven spoke torque. So one must know the alignment needs and the even torque needs of the wheel. If a wheel is built properly, the rim should probably bend upon severe impact before the spokes, nipples or hub would break. ---- Something has to give.

A few rims, although new, have a huge hump at the weld. My last one was over one hundred thousandths (.100”); under fifteen thousandths (.015”);

or so is usually desired. I was told the rim could be trued ok by a wheel builder – I thought at the expense of not having uniform even spoke torque. The trade off: uniform torque vs. alignment can be interesting.

The wheel builder must weigh the demands of the wheel against the strengths and in this case the weaknesses of the wheel. I opted for uniform torque over alignment on this rear wheel. The owner of this stainless steel rimmed wheel said the tyre ran true, so the correct option was chosen. To beat (form) out the huge hump at the weld could’ve broken the rim at the weld. So I was kind of stuck but got lucky; well, the customer got lucky.

Stainless steel rims: soft maybe but at least if you dent it you can probably form (beat) it back straight without losing chrome --- if the dent is not on the weld.



The musical note emitted by the spokes when a spanner is held against them is a reliable indication as to whether the tension of all is equal

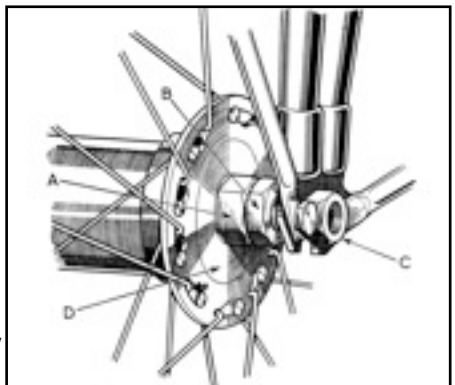


FIG. 26.—FRONT-WHEEL BEARING ADJUSTMENT. A. Adjusting nut. B. Lock-out. C. Spindle nut. D. Dust cover.



Who Was Harold Willis? by Lanora Cox

Harold Willis is a name often connected with the Velocette marque. His name is mentioned so often and with so many different models, it's difficult to remember, just how does he fit into Velocette history? The following overview mentions many of the man's accomplishments. Each and every race, model, and invention has a longer story. For more information see, the blogs of Dennis Quinlan and Paul d'Orleans. The October, 1982 issue of ClassicBike includes a six page tribute to Willis written by his friend and co-worker, Phil Irving.

Willis was born in Kings Norton, Worcestershire in 1900 to Eliza and Sidney C Willis, a master butcher. He had three siblings.

Young Willis joined the Navy. When he was serving as a Midshipman, the boat he was on was torpedoed. Willis spent several hours in the sea before being res-



Whenever Harold Willis had a cold, he would take a trip in his old aeroplane, a de Havilland Moth, kept at Castle Bromwich. Willis called it "Clattering Kate". He would fly to Wales on holiday. He spoke the tongue like a native



H. J. WILLIS, who has now ridden a Velocette into second place two years running.

cued. While still suffering the damage of salt water in his respiratory system, he took a shore job with an engineering firm, Beliss and Morcom.

In 1924 and 1925 Willis competed at Brooklands and elsewhere on Montgomery and Triumph motorcycles. In 1925 he placed 5th at the Isle of Man (IOM) Junior TT on a Montgomery.

Meanwhile, history was being made on Velocettes. In 1926, Alec Bennett won the IOM Junior TT on a 350 overhead camshaft Velocette. This increased orders from the Veloce company so much that they had to move. Veloce moved from a small factory

to the larger factory in Hall Green. At this time the company also placed a block of shares on the market. The senior Willis purchased many of these shares and in so doing obtained a seat on the board for his son Harold.

Harold joined Veloce in 1927. He was the only person on the executive level, who was not one of the Goodman family. He was not even raised in Birmingham. However he filled many roles from works rider to development engineer and general Mr. Fixit.

One of the things Willis was asked to do was to look after and develop the racing machines. The result was the setting of new records at Brooklands in 1927 and 2nd place in the IOM Junior TT, plus a string of long-distance world records including the most prestigious record set at Monthlery in 1928 - one hour at 100.3 mph. In addition, Willis was intimately involved in the development of the KTT and KSS.

Willis often said that Rule Number 1 in racing is, "they only count the winners at the finish." This meant a bike needed both speed and reliability and this attitude meant that Willis was cautious about some changes. As a racer he refused to use a twistgrip throttle, preferring to use the lever. It could be set where the rider wanted it. On the flat-out circuit it could be left alone while the rider concentrated on the steering.

Although conservative about some changes, Willis was very creative and inventive in other areas. Two of his inventions were quickly adopted worldwide and became standards of the industry. One of these is the positive-stop foot gear. This invention eliminated the awkward hand change. Not only were riders able to go faster, but they also were much safer. They no longer had to take their hands off the steering.

In the 1928 TT, this newly developed positive-stop foot gear-change gave Alec Bennett his fifth TT Race win. Team-mate Willis came in second.

Another of Willis' inventions initiated the development of the modern dual seat. Willis designed a combined saddle and pad, patented it and called it the "Lock Ness Monster."

According to research done by Dennis Quinlan, Willis was probably also involved in the development of the swingarm frame. This invention might



“Whiffing Clara” – supercharged Velocette.

have grown out of his love of flying; Willis’ favorite mode of transportation was flying his Tiger Moth, which he named “Clattering Kate.”

Aside from these benchmark inventions, Willis was involved in many other experiments. He developed and tested “Whiffing Clara”, the supercharged single cylinder Velocette. In 1928 a 350 KSS with rear suspension was constructed for Alec Bennett. Willis named this bike “Spring-Heel Jack”, after a mythical miscreant who was also a character in a comic strip. This bike was not raced because it grounded on corners and was overweight.

Willis also helped develop the Roarer, a supercharged twin cylinder model. Unfortunately, it made a poor showing during its practice lap at the IOM in 1939. Stanley Woods clocked in at 39 minutes. Due to the war, racing at the IOM stopped and when racing resumed, supercharged motors were banned.



The Roarer from Dave Masters' Velocette: an Illustrated Profile of Models 1905-1971



Stanley Woods opens the new test house for Veloce Ltd. Willis, wearing white is in the center of the group.

Willis was famous (or infamous) for his colorful language and talent in naming objects and places. His practice of naming bikes is one example. Some of these other sayings are also familiar to Velocette owners. For instance he once responded that G.T.P. stood for “generally tight piston,” and he called cams “knockers.”

As Mr. Fixit, Willis and was responsible for all levels of performance including the shop machinery. His characteristic uniform for this role was a white dust coat. When Veloce moved to Hall Green, all the machine tools were driven by belts and line-shafts turned by three single-cylinder producer-gas engine. Within a year or so, Willis had one engine running direct-coupled to a 240-volt AC generator, and the machine tools were mostly converted to individual motor-drive. His jobs were sometimes more pedestrian and there are stories of him thawing out a frozen toilet cistern with a paraffin blow-lamp!

In 1938 Team Velocette did well at IOM TT once again. Stanley Woods took first in the Junior TT and 2nd in the Senior TT. Other teammates including Ted Mellors and Les Archer also placed well. In 1939, Stanley Woods won again, but Willis was not present to witness this.

Harold Willis died on June 11th, 1939, the eve of the Junior TT. As a tribute, a bench seat was placed in front of the works in York Road. When the factory was demolished the seat was rescued and placed at Ballaugh on the Isle of Man course. Is it still there?. Further research and a trip to the Isle of Man may be needed.

Southern California Velocette Christmas Party

Bruce & Remy Farren

18860 Roberts Road

Riverside CA 92508

Saturday Dec 8th 2012

12:00PM till ???

Please RSVP to farrenb@att.net or 951-780-5874

12th Annual

Antique Motorcycle Club of America, Yerba Buena chapter

www.yerbabuenaamca.org

San Francisco 49 Mile Ride

Sunday 28 October 2012

Start/Finish at BayView Boat Club

Ride leaves at 9:30 am sharp

489 Terry A Francois Blvd, ½ mi south of SF Giants Ballpark

Ride is FREE, T shirts are \$15

Bring cash for BBQ lunch

All brands of old motorbikes welcome BIKES MADE BEFORE 1975 ONLY

Donations accepted for the Shriner's Hospital for Children

49 MILE RIDE San Francisco 2012



Yerba Buena AMCA

