

# North Birmingham News

## NEWSLETTER

### **Events around the time of Jim Boultons' Spring Trial from the Fighting Cocks**

The North Birmingham Section of the Vintage Motorcycle Club was started in September 1959, with Jim as Secretary. In May he ran his first Spring Trial and this took place around the middle of May as was the practice for many years; more often than not blessed with a warm sunny day. Jim was assisted by his father, mother, Marie Hinks (who gave years of help to the Vintage Motorcycle Club), Jim's lady friend and his sister Mary. I entered with a 1921 new Imperial, with a Mills Fulford (Coventry firm, later to become 'Milford') sidecar. The bike engine was a 680cc Vee Twin J.A.P. (J.A. Prestwich, London). This was its' second outing as John Morris and I had spent six months restoring it from a very rusty state, as it had not been used since 1926 by its' owner Mr. A. G. Fairley of Great Hampton Street, Birmingham. He had used it each year to take his two Alsatian dogs to Crufts Dog Show. (The story of finding and restoring this outfit will appear in a later article!).

Brian Richards a North Birmingham member (who found the 'outfit') went in the sidecar and John Morris was a route reader and sat on the pillion seat. The engine gave no trouble but was slow up the hills, and the brakes were very poor. (The front brake was similar to a cycle brake with a horseshoe to which were fastened rubber brake blocks but working on a distorted rim which was not running true, the rear brake was shaped like a crescent moon sitting upright lined with a Ferodo lining which wedged into a dummy belt rim by means of a foot operated pedal, which hardly slowed the bike down. I suppose the length of the route was about 40 miles and we came through Bridgnorth and Quatt and were climbing the steep hill and the primary chain broke. When we took the cover off the side plates of the chain had snapped and the chain was badly worn, so Charlie got a tow rope out of his sidecar, (he was on his 1926 Henderson with Grace and Grace Edna, his daughter, and towed us back to the Fighting Cocks. Then Grace, who had a Morris 1000, towed Brian and me home with her car and I put a new chain on and had no more trouble. The gearbox was a heavy duty four stud Burman box (made in Lee Bank Road, corner of Ryland Road, very near to Bristol Street, Birmingham). They also made a light-weight two stud version for smaller motorcycles, not to mention steering re-circulating ball model. The gearbox had a large clutch drum and a belt pulley for the belt that drove the rear wheel. The system was known as 'chain-cum-belt'. I think I got a 'Finishers Award', and it was a glorious Summers' day.

Over the next few years Jim's Spring Trial was enjoyed by many motorcycle enthusiasts, and several VMCC members came and rode in the events which went on until the pub was demolished. It was then run from Ray Jones house at 23 Jeremy Road which was about two miles up Goldthorne Hill, and one event took place at Goldthorne Park where we started and finished. The first trial was in May 1960 and many stalwarts turned up each year, well known names and faces, which have long since disappeared! Walter Edge on his sunbeam, Pete Farmer (little Matchless), Don Bell, Walter Green from Barnsley on a Councours Scott or Concours ABC, Don Lafford, Walter Warner from Worcester on his B.S.A., Dan Bagnall from West Bromwich on his 1927 Levis (that my son Duncan now owns and uses), John Greenwood on his Scott, Roger Haddock and Dorothy on his 350cc B.S.A., Albert Mattox (who tragically got killed), however his mother and father contacted my wife

through Jim Boulton and gave money so that the Albert Mattox Rose bowl (still awarded each year), could be made which my wife did through the kindness of Phil Smith of Warwickshire. This was made by his long time (45 years) fellow motorcyclist and Jeweller Bert Quibell . He also made the Alice Round Challenge Cup for the Tour of Birmingham, which is now used as the Levis Cup Award; (Alice Round being my mother). Bert also made all the trophies, bowls, plaques, tankards, Finishers awards, teaspoons and various other VMCC awards like ashtrays etc., for the Tour of Birmingham, held each year from 1960 to 1976 until the Birmingham City Council or the police decided that Newhall Street could not be closed for the day as it had been previously. The Tour of Birmingham was so interesting that it warrants an article later after Spring Trial matters.

Reverting to Jim's 1960 Spring Trial, John Bone entered his 1921 250cc new Imperial , (made in Principis Street just off Corporation Street, Birmingham). This won the 1922 T.T. lightweight race in the hands of Doug Prentiss at an average speed of 44.46mph. John Priests' (1926 AJS), with Roger Jordan as a sidecar passenger. Freddie Bird from Wolverhampton came on a 1922 496cc. Martinside sidecar outfit with Rose (Fred's wife) in the sidecar. This outfit had Q.D. (quickly detachable) wheels with a spare on the back of the sidecar which came off on the Clent Trial a fortnight before and was never found! Jack Baines rode his 1921 225cc Baby Triumph, Roger Webley from Bromsgrove rode a Concours 1923 31/2 H.P. (500cc) Rudge Multi (which Jim Boulton had fetched out of a cellar in Southampton in 1951 as a result of a letter from Graham Walker, the father of Murray Walker. Graham told him to take a lorry as there were 17 motorcycles in the cellar which had lain there since the motorcycle shop was bombed in 1940. Jim got the bikes which included two 'Neracars' (designed by a Mr. Nearacher from Holland (I think). One model had a two stroke engine and was friction drive, the other had a 350cc Blackburne engine with conventional gearbox and clutch; (Phil Smith rode this one in the 1956 Banbury Run but it packed up on Saintbury Hill). Phil never rode in a Banbury run again! Jim got his rare 750 cc single cylinder 1914 Rudge Multi; multi means multi gears 16 speed with 16 notches on the bracket on the side of the petrol tank where the gear change lever sits in. He also got the 500cc Rudge Multi for Roger Webley. I think Len

Wills Bradbury, (the engine was brazed into the frame – came from Jim but I am not sure, I can't remember what other machines he had because he never mentioned them, but it may be on record in the early issue of the "Bulletin" published and printed by Geoff Davidson (1921 TT winner on his Levis in the Light Weight Race), at his office at 106 Bristol Road almost opposite the Bristol Cinema, (long since gone). ). He also published and printed the T.T. News and other Motor Cycling papers on sporting events. The "Bulletin" ceased publication in 1955 (September) when it became the Vintage Motorcycle magazine, distributed from 106 but was printed by Phil Smiths' longstanding friend of some 30 years, riding old motorcycles at the age of 10. His name was Jack Keating who printed the magazine at his works called the Redditch Indicator. I never saw Jack on a motorcycle but I believe he had one that hadn't been used for many years and he said he was going to 'do it' one day and ride with us. I remember seeing another 'mate' of Phil Smith's, Maurice Marshall, who lived in Shirley riding a 1914 Wall Autowheel which was a heavy duty cycle wheel carrying 118cc petrol engine with a chain drive from the wheel to the engine, and was attached to an ordinary peddle cycle at the offside of the rear wheel. It had Bowden cable controls for the throttle and clutch and the petrol tank had to be put on the bike frame. I only saw it once but there was another one that a VMCC member Harry Shute (who lived in Bottetort Road, Weoley Castle by the ruins of the castle, which was on display in the Museum of Science and Industry in Newhall Street for many years which was as new. Harry always attended the monthly meetings of the North Birmingham Section, when they were held at my house, and very often his wife came too, but their main interest was Old Time Dancing, it isn't all that long ago that he came to my house to see if I was still alive and he was suffering from Arthritis and when I asked if he went dancing any more he replied "Oh yes both of us are suffering but we still manage to get round the floor". I said "what happened to your Wall Autowheel? He said that it is on display at the museum. Harry told me that it was still painted in an early form of Olive Drab (Camouflage Green) ... and that he thought that it was probably made before 1900 with the forces in mind; they were made at Farnham in Surrey but eventually they were bought

and made by B.S.A. Harry told me that it was some weeks (in 1936) before he got in touch with the office, but it happened to be Iliffe the publishers and Harry knew that Bob Currie worked there. Harry and Bob had known each other for years and ridden in motorcycle trials for about 7 years. Bob was surprised when Harry asked about the Autowheel and looked to see who had got it. It transpired that it was a chap of military disposition who was older than them but they both knew him because he had ridden in trials with them and lived not far from Harry. When Harry contacted the chap he said he had it off someone who had it new in the late 1990's together with a load of spares all in camouflage green. Harry still had everything together with the layout of the engine and its operation and the spares sheet with each item numbered and all stamped by the War Office. In the licence holder was the original licence issued by the War Office with the registration 02--!! When Harry wrote to the Birmingham Licence Authority to apply for a tax disc (in 1936) they sent it through the post with 02—registration and no questions. When Harry applied for a V5 in Oozells Street again no questions were asked and it is now on the computer at the DVLA Swansea with 02—registration.

Harry dismantled it completely in 1936; the engine had never been used and he got all the camouflage green off and repainted it with black tekaloid and had the bright work re-nickleplated, then used to go to work on it for 14 years and it never loosed him down. The son-in-law now has it and wants to re-paint it camouflage green.

Frank Marchington came on a 1921 Bradbury Vee Twin with a 680cc J.A.P. engine with his wife Milly on the back, and rode it from Stockport in Cheshire. The bike was made by the Oldham Bradbury Company who also made sewing machines, bicycles and machine tools. Frank's mate Ken Robinson also from Stockport, rode a 1921 A.B.C., T.T. replica which was lightened by removing the steel sheeting from under and in front of the engine, the leg shields, the mudguards, cutting the rear carrier off which formed part of the frame and fitting flat handlebars. Ken pulled my leg about A.B.C.'s and said that they had no 'torque' and you had to keep changing down to keep the revs up etc., he was used to slow revving big bangers I suppose. John Rotherman from Shirley came on a 1928 Scott (Flying Squirrel) which was entered as a 596 cc. But many years later I bought it from him and found it was a 496 cc – my son Martyn has it now. It had modern telescopic forks fitted which John replaced with the original web forks when I had it from him.

That machine had covered many vintage runs with all my family on the pillion seat at one time or another (Christine and the four children). A very reliable and good road holding bike. Mr. F.G. Fricker from Bathford was a regular competitor at Vintage events; he always came on his own and was a nice chap but with very little to say. He had a very desirable machine which was always immaculate.

This was a 1929 Henderson with a very large sidecar, the body was in polished aluminium which he made in 1936. I don't know whether the sidecar chassis was Henderson or American but it was a very hefty looking thing and the wheels were like car wheels possibly cast aluminium about 15 inches in diameter with huge balloon tyres on. It had the biggest crash bar or fender that I have ever seen and literally surrounded the whole outfit, whether it was something you could buy in America or whether he made it or had it made I don't know, but it was chrome plated as were the rest of the fittings with two tremendous spotlights beside the twin headlamps and the instrument panel was like on an aeroplane. The petrol tank was cast aluminium and it was so quiet as it purred along there was no exhaust sound. The engine was four cylinder O.H.I.V. (overhead inlet valve) five bearing crank, thirteen babbitt metal bearings, high pressure oil pump, steel plate flywheel clutch and it was used daily. I wonder what happened to it? John Huband from Cheltenham came on a 1927 A.J.S. 348cc, but told me he was restoring an A.B.C. which he came on in subsequent years. He was a very active member of the Western Region (later to become known as the Cotswold section) and was one of the instigators for the construction of a building to be used for the monthly meetings and became their headquarters, (known as Hubands Hut) as he did a lot of the construction work and put the services in etc.

When I first put my A.B.C. car on the road in 1965, I took John Priest to Prescott, and John Huband said to me "I live near to Prescott, call in and see my A.B.C. car in the garden; it is sheeted over but I probably shan't be there but have a look at it because the previous owner has lowered it for racing and I want to put it back to original so I have a lot of

work to do and I want some measurements off your body one day to do it. When John and I looked it was nothing like an A.B.C. car, whoever had it before had started to make a G.N. (chain gang) type of car which has a solid back axle (no differential) and the rear wheels are set close together and two large chains drive the back axle. There was no front or back axle, no wheels or hubs, the steering box was missing, I can't remember whether there was an A.B.C. gearbox, and the flywheel and clutch were missing. The engine consisted of a crankcase that had been modified with some cast iron water cooled cylinder heads that someone had made and started to put on, and two enormous S.U. carburettors lying on top of the 'mess'. There were some rusty channel sections lying on the garden possibly to make a chassis! Also there was part of the bulkhead which had been cut about, otherwise no body! I never saw John Huband again because he went to America for a holiday and sadly died. About three years ago a man contacted me and he had bought an A.B.C. car and it was John Hubands'. This other guy is still trying to restore it.

Keith Cockbill came onto the vintage scene in 1960, he worked with Les Wooding as a lad in the motor trade on Stratford Road almost opposite Smiths Imperial Coaches not far from Walford Road or from Len Onslow in the other direction. I can't remember him on a motorbike but he had a 1925 Excelsior 147 cc Villiers engine two stroke (made in Kings Road Tyseley, Birmingham). He was an expert photographer specialising in 16mm silent cine film and was always present at any VMCC event and we had many film shows at our house on the first Tuesday of the month when the members turned up for the meetings (which were a riot), more so when Pinky joined us on Shrove Tuesday - 1962. Keith was made official photographer for the VMCC by the management committee.

Les Wooding rode in Jim's 1960 Spring Trial and bought a Greenwood designed 490 cc single cylinder Rover which was very heavy and had a foot operated clutch, so you needed three legs to ride it. He brought it in one of Charlie Headland's vans and had put a hand clutch lever with a Boden cable, but it was hard to free the clutch if you operated the foot clutch and put it in gear you could lose the clutch out with the hand lever. He rode it once in the Levis after that and sold it to Mr. Scott of the Coventry Museum and it was still there six years ago.

*Many thanks to John Round for his recollections at the start of the North Birmingham Section*



## The "Simplex Automatic"

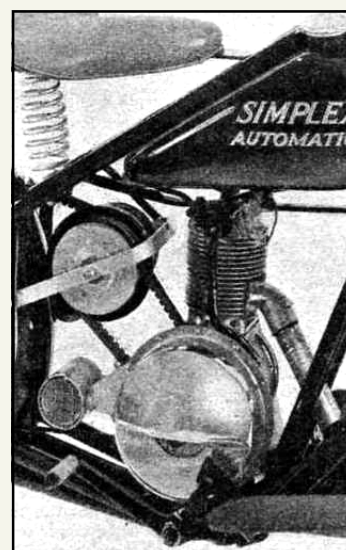
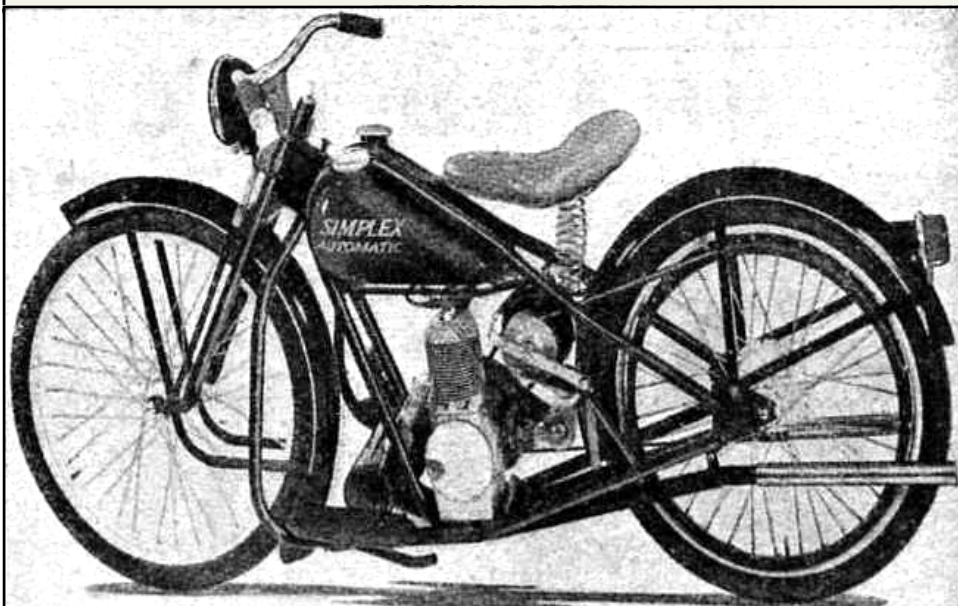
Announced in early 1954 the Simplex Manufacturing Corporation of New Orleans, Louisiana, who have been producing these little runabouts since 1935.

Known as the Simplex Automatic, the new model features the traditional primary and secondary Vee-belt drives associated with this marquee, but incorporates a most ingenious fully automatic, infinitely variable gear in place of the pedal-operated system hitherto in use whereby the inner flanges of the two pulleys were moved transversely, thereby contracting one pulley and expanding the other, thus raising or lowering the gear.

The accompanying sketches illustrate the working principle of the new countershaft device. It will be seen that the primary pulley is now a one-piece, fixed flange job revolving on a double-row SKF ball bearing. To the inner face of the pulley is bolted a back-plate carrying a pair of spring-loaded brake shoes. Mounted on a separate sleeve a ball bearing, is a brake drum. To this are bolted two arcuate-slotted members in which are free to slide dumb-bell shaped governor weights. These weights are in constant contact with the inner-sliding flange of the secondary drive pulley, the belt of which is kept at a constant tension by a spring-loaded jockey pulley. (Incidentally, the countershaft itself is mounted on a spring-loaded bracket this accommodating any primary belt stretch.)

When the engine is just ticking over, the brake shoes are free of the drum which with the secondary pulley in the fully-expanded position, remains stationary. As the throttle is opened, however, the shoes move outwards under the effects of centrifugal force and contact the drum, whose bob-weights move up their grooves as engine speed increases thereby forcing the floating flange outwards from its





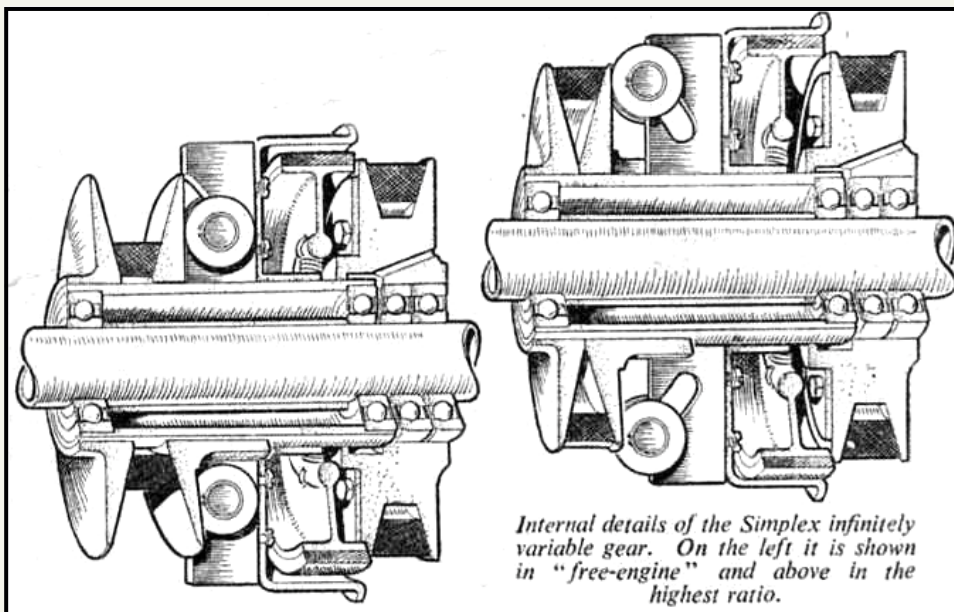
"free-engine" position and, afterwards, automatically raising or lowering the gear according to throttle opening and gradient. Thus, driving consists solely of operating the twistgrip and the brake pedal—the acme of simplicity.

The two-stroke power unit, which produces 4 h.p. At 4,000 r.p.m., is unusual in several respects. The overhung crankshaft, for example, supported by no fewer than three ball bearings, is ported for induction purposes and two 14-mm, sparking plugs are fitted, fed by a special Wico twin-ignition flywheel unit equipped with a separate coils for lighting purposes. The die-cast aluminium connecting rod runs on a double-row ball big-end bearing. The light-alloy cylinder has a cast-in iron liner. The alloy piston is of the deflector type.

The overall dry weight of the machine details of which are clearly shown in the accompanying photograph, is only 125 lb maximum speed is quoted as 55 m.p.h. And fuel consumption as in the neighbourhood of 100 m.p.g. The price, ex factory, \$214.00, or approximately £77 in our money.

Ivan J. Stretten, the well-known American motorcycling journalist, to whom we are indebted for these particulars, reported that during a recent test run he was greatly impressed with the efficiency of the automatic clutch-cum-gear unit and the general handling qualities of the new model which apparently, has a very lively performance. Indeed, his only adverse comment concerned the absence of a front brake.

In addition to the single-tracker, the Simplex Automatic is also produced in the form of a three-wheeled 4-cwt, delivery truck. Both types are used in considerable numbers by the huge Chrysler tank-engine plant, the Shell oil refinery and other big business concerns in the New Orleans area. The fact that belt-drive has given complete satisfaction on these and earlier machines for so many years suggests that



*Internal details of the Simplex infinitely variable gear. On the left it is shown in "free-engine" and above in the highest ratio.*

Many of the criticisms levelled against this form of transmission are not well-founded.

## FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS FOR 2009

	CLUB NIGHTS
APRIL 29TH	A talk by Peter Dawson on the History of the RAC
MAY 27TH	A talk by Ray Jones on the Black Country Museum
JUNE 24TH	Ride A Bike Night
JULY 29TH	Fish and Chip Supper
AUGUST 26TH	Arrive on Your Bike Night
SEPTEMBER 30TH	James Hewing VMCC CEO
OCTOBER 28TH	An Evening with Bill
NOVEMBER 25TH	Bring and Buy evening
DECEMBER	No Meeting

DATE	RUN	ORGANISER	Tel No
MAY 3RD	Anchor Garage Run	John Aston	01543-452695
MAY 17TH	Girder Fork Run	Martyn Round	0121-550-1547
MAY 29TH-31ST	Welsh Weekend	Josie Stanley	01902-607293
JUNE 3RD	Wrinkly Run	Roger Greening	01562-730464
JUNE 7TH	Josie's Jaunt	Josie Stanley	01902-607293
JUNE 24TH	Ride A Bike Night	Paul Harris	01902-842732
JUNE 28TH	Roger's Run	Roger Greening	01562-730464
JULY 5TH	Trent Valley Run	Brian Empsall	01543-264968
JULY 19TH	Long Mynd Run	Colin Lloyd	01384-371835
JULY 22ND	Wrinkly Run	Ian Harris	01952-299118
AUGUST 2ND	Breakfast Run	Rob Pell	0121-624-7674
AUGUST 16TH	Anniversary / Concours	Peter Ashen	01562-882854
SEPTEMBER 6TH	Flight of Fantasy Run	Trevor Bull	01905-778917
SEPTEMBER 20TH	Severn Valley Run	Bill Danks	01562-67103
OCTOBER 4TH	Levis Cup Road Trial	Paul Harris	01902-842732
OCTOBER 11TH	Autumn Run	Andy Briggs	0121-544-5938
NOVEMBER 1ST	Winter Wander	Josie Stanley	01902-607293