

North Birmingham News

NEWSLETTER

The Trent Valley Run Report

23rd April. St. George's Day and the day I realised that the Trent Valley Run is less than a fortnight away and I don't have a route yet! Then I remembered that for one reason and another few riders completed all the route last year; so with a clear conscience I decided to reuse that route but with lunch at Carsington Reservoir rather than at Osmaston. Later that week Pat and I found a free day in the diary and set off to check the route sheet. As we neared Carsington I realised we were using a moderately old map which purely said "Reservoir Under Construction" and showed no roads nearby!! Luckily there is a good road and well signposted!

Sunday May 6th dawned dry with the promise of sun and when we arrived at the Bowling Green there was already a good assembly of bikes and riders. By the time everyone had signed on we had one Vintage machine, one Pre-War and eighteen dating from 1950 to 1972.

The route headed north from Lichfield through Longdon Green, Kings Bromley and on to Hoars Cross, with its notable church, and then on to the coffee stop at the Boars Head between Draycott in the Clay and Sudbury. We then continued on uneventfully past Sudbury Hall and Museum of Childhood, through Marston Montgomery, Snelston and Osmaston and on to Carsington. When we arrived it was to the welcome sight of nearly all the entrants safely parked in the sunshine. After lunch the route returned along more country lanes to Hatton and Tutbury, through Barton Under Needwood and on to Fradley Junction for very good ice creams. It was good to see that this year quite a few riders made it to this point. After that the final five mile leg ended back at the start in Lichfield.

I hope you all enjoyed the run. There was one disappointment for me; that ours was the only Vintage bike on a route ideally suited to the older bikes. No steep hills, very little main road, a moderate distance (85miles), a circular route and plenty of parking for cars and trailers. Have we, probably without realising it and almost certainly unintentionally, become a Classic and Modern Bike Section where Vintage Bikes are tolerated? I certainly notice that even if first away we are inevitably last to arrive (except for those that get lost!) and that I have to ride the bike flat out to remain part of the run. I know it is not very good for the bike but what is the alternative if, as the Club Magazine proclaims on the front cover, "we are to ensure that the pioneer machines are not preserved as lifeless exhibits in a museum but are brought to life on frequent occasions in order that a new generation can marvel... ..and an older generation view with nostalgia". Food for thought.

Brian Empsall



The Story Behind The Name "JAMES"

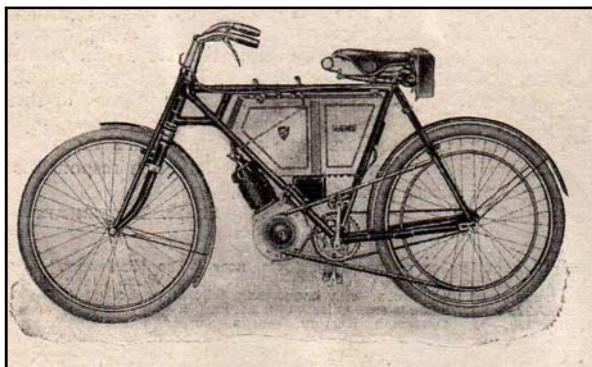
To uncover the beginnings of the James story it is necessary to go back to 1880. In that year a short curly haired midlander took a bold decision. He gave up his works managers job in a general engineering company and set up on his own to manufacture Penny Farthings. He was Harry James and set himself up in Constitution Hill Birmingham, and established the James Cycle Company in a one roomed office with a workshop at the back.

In 1945 the company published it's own history stating that the "Company is we believe the oldest in its industry operating under its original financial structure." This was not strictly true as James had merged the previous year with Associated Motor Cycles Ltd.

After 10 years of growth as a cycle builder Harry James moved to larger premises in Sampson Road North, Sparkbrook where he appointed Mr C.A.Hyde as manager, the man who produced in the James factory the Hyde patent free wheel mechanism, a component that is still used in cycles. The name James is most famous with motorcyclists, although Harry himself had nothing to do with powered propulsion. In 1897 the private company was turned into a public company, and Harry retired leaving Charles Hyde to carry on as managing director.

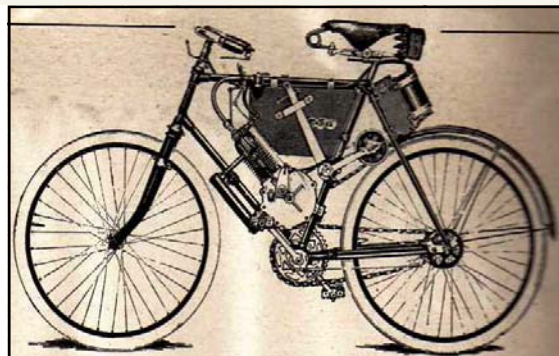
The first motorcycle emerged from the factory in 1902 at the same time as Fred A Kimberley the new assistant works manager. Harry James had by this time died and Charles Kimberley had relinquished the reigns and "young fred" soon found that he was in fact virtually the works manager. He had served his apprenticeship with the Premier Cycle Co and afterwards with Coventry-Eagle where he had some experience of motorcycles built using MMC engines. He did not take long in using his experience to James machines as he only joined the company in May 1902 and in the same year two James motorcycles were displayed in sales catalogues.

They were like their counterparts strengthened versions of the current cycle frames with "clipped-on" power units. The model "A" had a Minerva engine mounted below the front down tube, a twisted leather belt driving direct from the engine pulley to a dummy rim on the rear wheel.



Model A from the 1902 catalogue

The model "B" had a derby motor mounted within the frame and a short chain drive turned a friction roller, held by a spring loaded lever in contact with the rear tyre. Moving the lever forward freed the drive. No horsepower figures were quoted but the sales price for each machine was £55.



Model B from the 1902 catalogue

The Pioneer of James Power?

Although Fred Kimberley was responsible for manufacturing the first James on the market he was not the first person in the company to have thought about powered propulsion. Evidence was found whilst clearing out an old derelict shed in the old factory of wooden patterns for casting air cooled cylinders, maybe it was Harry James himself. A shame this was not pursued as James might have been able to claim the honour of building the first British motorcycle power unit.

In 1903 only one motorcycle was catalogued, the model "T" a 2 1/2hp Minerva unit with direct belt drive and a frame specially trussed at the steering head for sale at £50 or £45 for a 2hp unit.

Just before Fred Kimberley joined the company the Arter family who had through their joint interest with Harry James in the Speedwell Bicycle Club, been interested in the founders products. The late John Arter had been Harry's accountant for the old company and auditor when the public flotation was made. His son Selby and his nephew Douglas exercised a great influence in the lists of reliability trials successes. Another James character was T.W.Badgery a great cycle racer in his day. He was a director and chairman from 1903 until his retirement, at the age of 82, when the A.M.C. Merger took place. From his home in Worcester to the factory he used at one time regularly to ride a 1914 two-stroke James, and this machine is still running about the James works. Mr. Kimberley's son, Arthur, is always prepared to give a demonstration to callers.

Except for the continuation of a few patent James cycle features, such as straight tangential wheel spokes and ingenious stirrup brakes, there was nothing unorthodox about the first James motorcycles, but in 1904 the company made real history by introducing to Britain the first loop frame—a departure that was instantly and universally copied. This machine was powered by a Belgian F.N. Unit, notable in having a cast iron crankcase and a float chamber-type carburettor.

Times were hard, then, for motorcycle makers; the current productions, now the novelty was wearing off, were not so easy to sell. Furthermore, little progress was being made in design. So the James people decided to do something entirely unorthodox. A well-known inventor-engineer, P.L. Renouf entered into

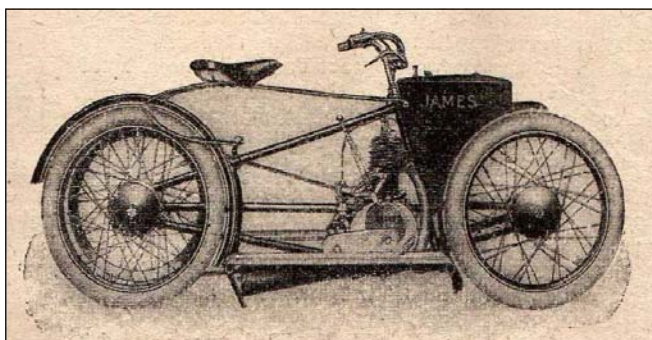
Collaboration with the James Company and produced a really new type of motorcycle.

Revolutionary Design.

As a result, in 1908, the year that the present premises at Greet, Birmingham, were first occupied, James startled the motorcycling world with the "safety" model. Built entirely in the factory, this amazing, years-before-its-time machine had, in one bold sweep, thrown overboard all the traditional ideas of motorcycle construction. Long and low, it had running boards instead of pedals. Its saddle was carried on long, leaf springs. The frame, constructed entirely of straight tubes, was one-sided affair inasmuch that both wheels were carried on outrigger spindles and were, therefore, as with cars, quickly detachable and interchangeable. In their hubs—another startling innovation—were internal expanding brakes, phosphor-bronze "shoes" bearing against steel drums.

Even the four-stroke engine—the first engine to be built in the factory—was unusual. The inlet valve was arranged concentrically within the tulip-shaped exhaust valve lift to be varied as a means of regulating the speed. The cylinder had square fins, staggered at 90 degrees to give that "pineapple" appearance which was a feature of the James engines for many years afterwards.

For 1910 an improved version of the "Safety" was produced. Not only did it have "parallel-ruler" link action front suspension but the saddle was fitted on a hinged pillar, spring loaded by a tie-rod and spring plunger box connecting saddle peak and steering head. In this edition the engine was an orthodox four-stroke with separate valves. Direct belt drive was still used and, incidentally, I think this mount must have been the first ever to have a saddle tank.

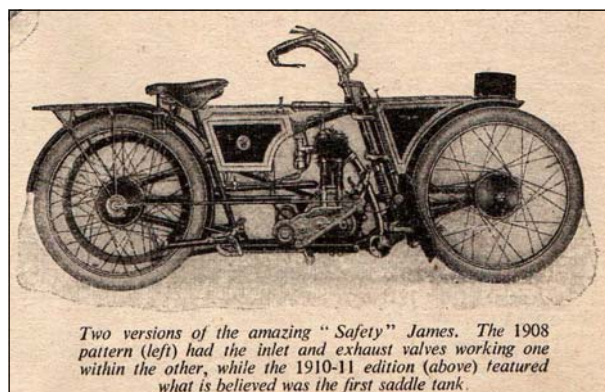


But British conservatism had not been overcome. The "Safety", despite its advanced ideas, won few supporters and 1911 saw James bowing to convention in the matter of frame and fork lay-out. In other respects, however, the marque was one of the most interesting at the Show of that year, for it represented what must have been the first, and closest, approach specification included all-enclosed chain drive, a two-speed countershaft gearbox, the shell of which was part of the frame, a multi-plate clutch (alternate steel and bronze discs), a kick starter and an all-metal segmental spring-type shock absorber in the rear hub.

I can find no record of any other motorcycle combining all these features at so early a date, and very few makers subsequently bettered the neat and practical James chain cases—cast aluminium for the primary drive and a tinned sheet steel fabrication for the rear, having a hinged after-end to allow easy wheel removal.

The engine of the 1911 model was a 3 1/2 h.p. "single", with the magneto mounted below the carburettor, and driven by a train of four pinions from the inlet cam wheel.

In the same year, James expanded by acquiring the Osmond concern which had been making good-looking two-strokes. Machines of this type, bearing the Osmond transfer, were turned out from the James works for some years afterwards.



Two versions of the amazing "Safety" James. The 1908 pattern (left) had the inlet and exhaust valves working one within the other, while the 1910-11 edition (above) featured what is believed was the first saddle tank.

Part two to be continued in the next issue

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Local Events / AOB

Six Ashes Vintage Show Nr Bobbington 1st July 10am – 5pm.

Vintage Vehicle Rally-Holbeach Farm-Trimpey-Nr Bewdley 29th July

F O R T H C O M I N G A T T R A C T I O N S F O R 2 0 0 7

	CLUB NIGHTS
JUNE 27th	Ride a Bike Night
JULY 25th	Fish and Chip Supper
AUGUST 29th	Arrive on Your Bike Night
SEPTEMBER 26th	A talk and slide show on “International trials riding” by Scott Ellis
OCTOBER 31st	Slide show by Stephen Mills on the History and development of Morgan, AJS, Austin 7, and the pocket watch.
NOVEMBER 28th	Bring and Buy evening
DECEMBER 26th	No Meeting

CLUB RUNS

DATE	RUN	ORGANISER	Tel No
June 27th	Ride A Bike Night	Frank Ashton	01902-372719
July 8th	Roger's Run	Roger Greening	01562-730464
July 29th	Long Mynd Run	Ian Harris	01952-299118
August 5th	Breakfast Run	Rob Pell	0121-624-7674
August 19th	Picnic / Concours Run	Peter Ashen	01562-882854
September 9th	Flight of Fantasy Run	Trevor Bull	01905-778917
September 16th	Levis Cup Road Trial		
September 30th	Clun Run	Paul Harris	01952-299118
October 14th	Autumn Run	Andy Briggs	0121-544-5938