

# ***RIDING WITH THE OLD BLOKE***



**JULY 2023**

## **CHECKING OUT THE NEW ROAD**

Well, not a new road, but a new road surface. Part of the Illawarra Highway between Albion Park and Macquarie Pass has been resurfaced. The new surface runs from North Macquarie Rd to the bottom of the Pass; roughly about two-thirds the distance of Albion Park to the Pass. It wasn't too bad before (apart from a couple of places where the rain had broken up the surface, although the really bad bits had been repaired), but there were bumps in a few of the corners and the usual uneven surfaces in other places. **The new surface is great.** Maybe not quite billiard-table smooth, but almost. And the bumps in the corners I mentioned are gone.

Of course when I got to Macquarie Pass I kept going.



It was a beautiful sunny day, light wind, and a pleasant (for winter) 17 degrees. Until I got further towards the Highlands. On top of the mountains it was around 11 or 12, but dropped to 9 in a few places. **Brrr!** I called into the local Robertson bakery and had a sausage-roll to warm up the insides. Then back down the Pass and home. It was still good a good ride though; and that smooth road surface is great.

## **WHY NOT GO ON THE BIKE!**



I like to go for a cuppa at a favourite local café at least once a week. I have a couple of favourites. This is at one of them; with a nice view of the mountains in the distance.

I almost always go in the car; but with this one, which is about 20 km away, I've sometimes thought, 'why not go on the bike?' So I did. It's only a (*very!*) short ride, but it's worthwhile – it's still a ride!

## A BIG YEAR FOR BMW



This year marks **the centenary of BMW motorcycles**. Yep, BMW Motorrad (BMW's motorcycle division) was established and produced its **first motorbike in 1923**. And that's it on the left – the BMW R32.

The R32 wasn't a completely fresh-piece-of-paper new design though. BMW had inherited a bike called the Helios when it took over another company. The story goes that BMW assessed the bike, hated it, and set about scrapping the layout

and redesigning the basic bike. The result was the now iconic R32.

The R32 was powered by a side-valve 494cc engine with the now legendary flat-twin design. It produced just over 6 kW, and had a 3-speed gearbox. Somehow it managed to propel the bike to a top speed of 95 km/h.

I've always thought the R32 looked really good – especially for a bike in the 1920s. I have a photo of it (along with some others) on the back wall of my garage.

## A MILLION GS BIKES.



Coinciding with the centenary of the brand was the milestone of producing **1 million boxer-engined BMW GS models**.

It all began with the **R 80 G/S** which was introduced in 1980. It's probably no exaggeration to say that this bike really created the Dual-Purpose / Adventure Bike category that is so popular today. And today we have the R 1250 GS, which has been a

very popular bike – being used for off-road adventuring, but also for touring.

Back in 2012 I had a test-ride on a BMW R1200GS, and also looked back at the origins of the series; so it might be appropriate to check that out. Click [here](#) to go to the article / report.

## NEW MODEL COMING

A new model, the **BMW R 1300 GS** is waiting in the wings, ready for its release in September this year.

The engine grows by another 50cc (it seems each successive model grows by 50cc), and the styling has had an update.



This is the front of the bike. ***Please tell me this is a joke!! It looks like an angry bloke sticking his tongue out!***

BMW are renowned for their odd styling. On some models. I've often joked that there must be two design teams at BMW: one normal team that design bikes that look good; and one that has obviously been smoking something stronger than Gauloises Blondes! Odd shaped headlights, front ends that look like the engineers couldn't see straight, weird bits added on, or left out, .... and so on! But this??!! *They can't be serious!!*



## LATEST MOTOCAP RATINGS

Thanks to Rod for sending me the link to this. Yep, it's that time again, when Motocap publish the results of their most recent tests – as well as listing the results from previous tests of course.

As usual, there are some surprises. (*Can “surprises” be “usual”?*). Expensive items sometimes come in with low safety or comfort ratings. With jackets one thing to remember is the top brands are leather; which have a low “Breathability” rating. I've never owned leathers, but I've ridden with people who have – and watched them sweat!

[Here's the link](#) to the Motocap website.

## IT'S NOT ALL MULTI-LANE HIGHWAYS



It's funny the perceptions we have about countries. In Australia we often laugh about Americans who think there are kangaroos hopping down the main street of Sydney; but we in turn often think that America is all huge multi-lane highways linking concrete jungles of cities. But such is not the case. There are some great biking roads in America – like the one pictured.

This is part of the **Virginia Skyline Drive**. It's a tourist road through a national park. I recently read a story by a guy who had ridden it, and some other roads like it.

The road runs for roughly 170 km along the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Shenandoah National Park. It has plenty of curves, being described as a “snaking” road. It's also very scenic; which you will have plenty of time to admire, as the speed limit is just 35 mph (a bit over 55 km/h). This is partly to protect the wildlife. The website advises that there are deer, black bear, wild turkey, and a host of other woodland animals – all of which are likely to dart out in front of you at any moment. Because it's in a national park, there are no trucks allowed. And there aren't any towns either.

A road that I have read about before is the **Blue Ridge Parkway**. This runs from



the Shenandoah National Park down into North Carolina. It traverses rural landscapes (such as pictured on the left), and runs for around 750 km in total. It too has lots of nice flowing curves, no trucks, no towns, and unlike *our* national parks, the road surface is ultra smooth. Speed limit goes up to 45 mph for most of its length, with occasional sections down to

35 mph or even 25 mph. In the story I mentioned, the writer travelled both (they are connected), which he said gave, “925 km of excellent road surface with scarcely a bump or corrugation anywhere.”

The speed limits sound ridiculous, but **it's got to be a lot more interesting than cruising along a multi-lane interstate highway!**

## THE ANSWER, MY FRIEND, IS BLOWING IN THE AIR-BAG

How do they survive? Those MotoGP riders who crash at a zillion clicks, roll almost into the next postcode, and jump up and go racing for their bike – which usually lies in a mangled heap some distance back. Well, the answer, as you probably know, is that they are protected by **air bags** built into their racing suit. And you can have that too!

Riding gear – well, jackets in particular – with air-bags built into them have been around for a while. And I mentioned these a few months ago. Well, Dainese has just updated theirs, which they call the **Dainese Smart Jacket**. Here Damien Irwin from Dainese tells Riana Crehan all about it. Price (*which of course they never mention in these product videos!*) is around \$1300. That's a lot of money for a riding jacket; but if you're unlucky enough to be thrown onto the road at speed, it will seem like an excellent investment! [Click here](#) to watch the video.

## **TIME TO HANG UP THE HELMET?**



Speaking of MotoGP and protective racing suits, one bloke who must be getting them in wholesale lots is **Marc Marquez**. I know I'm not alone in thinking that **it's time he hung up the helmet**. Since his come-back after his injuries, he has constantly crashed. Often through over-aggressive mistakes. **At the German Grand Prix he had five crashes before he even got to the main race** – which he wisely pulled out of. Three of those crashes came in the space of 30 minutes! And this was on a track he has consistently won on every time he has started.

The following weekend at Assen, sporting bruises and cracked bones, he had another two crashes; one of which happened when he rear-ended another bike.

And that's the thing. If he was just crashing on his own, that would be bad enough, but many of his crashes involve other riders. (That's Zarco in the photo above left, being collected by a sliding Marquez as he exited the pits). Several riders have been calling for him to be banned, due to his overly aggressive riding.

Now, there is no doubt at all that he was a fabulously talented rider – his string of championships is testimony to that. But now.....? I think the talent is probably still there; *if* was in peak physical fitness, and *if* he had a bike that was capable of winning races. But he's not. And the Honda isn't.

Sure, the aggressive riding and crashes are happening because he is pushing hard, to try to get an inferior bike up amongst the front-runners. But there must be a point at which common sense prevails, and he accepts his fate; of what he can and can't do. Personally – and as I said, I know I'm not the only one – I think it's time he gave the game away. He is already carrying a long list of injuries: he should stop before he does himself even more damage – or causes even more injury to other riders.

## **VINTAGE BIKES AT WAGGA**

The **Council of Heritage Motor Clubs (CHMC)** held their annual rally at Wagga Wagga at the end of June. While this is probably known more as a classic car event, it is also for classic and vintage motorbikes of course. As you may know, I'm not involved with a classic bike club these days (I was once, for a few years), but I am an active member of a couple of local classic car clubs. So I knew of the event, and know a



couple of people who attended it – in cars. But they brought pictures of bikes as well as cars. The photos were supplied by the local Wagga Wagga car club.



1921 Douglas



1930 BSA



1951 BSA & sidecar

### **“I’M STILL STANDING”**



*“I’m still standing, ... looking like a true survivor...”* In the April edition I used those words from the old Elton John song to begin a brief item on the **Yamaha FJR1300**, which I saw taking pride of place in a local Yamaha dealer. Well, I called into the same dealer recently for a browse and there it was – still standing there. A bit further back in the showroom, but still there.

Of course, these aren’t big sellers now. As I mentioned back in April, the Sports Tourer category has been in decline, or taking on a different form, in recent years; and there aren’t many left. Especially ones like this, which now costs \$34,000. I obviously looked surprised at the price. “That’s a lot of money for a design that’s basically 20 years old.” The salesman admitted. (*Although I reckon that’s selling it short – it’s had a lot of upgrades in that time!*). But then he added, “If I was going to go on a trip around Australia, I’d take that bike!”

I read a road-test on one a little while ago, and it still stands up well today – especially with the advantages of electronically adjustable suspension and all the other upgrades that have happened over recent years. [Here](#) is what I thought of it when I tested it way back in 2008.

### **“RIDING ALONG ON A PUSHBIKE, HONEY”**



*(Yep, another line from a song!).* When I was at the Yamaha dealer I mentioned above, I noticed they are now selling pushbikes! **Electric-assisted pushbikes**, to be specific.

Apparently Yamaha have been involved in e-bikes for about 30 years. In fact, they claim to have invented the concept when they put a “Power Assist System” into a pushbike way back in 1993.

They have e-bikes in three different categories; “Road”, “Mountain” and “Lifestyle”. The one featured on their website – and the one I saw in the shop – was the “Mountain” model. It boasts a twin frame, suspension, disc brakes, and a claimed best-in-class torque-to-weight ratio. And the price? **\$9,000**. Wow! *That’s a lot of money for something you’ve still got to pedal!* 😊

## ASIAN TRIUMPHS



**Two new models are on their way from Triumph.** In fact pre-release models have already arrived in Australia. Both are variations on the same bike; one a sports-bike, the other an Adventure bike. However they are both aimed at the beginner market, or those wanting the style of a bigger bike but with lower weight and power.

The bikes are the **Triumph Speed 400**, and the **Triumph Scrambler 400 X**.

As the name suggests, the engine is a 400cc (specifically 398 cc) unit. It's a single-cylinder, and produces 39 bhp (approximately 29 kW).

Despite the name, and the partial British flag on the tank, the bike is not made in Britain; it's **made in India**. Triumph has made an arrangement with **Bajaj Auto** in India to produce the bikes. Bajaj Auto is no small-time back-street operation though: they are a major automotive manufacturer in India, and the overall company has been in business since 1947. They are particularly well known for their production of small-capacity motorbikes. Exactly how good these bikes are I don't know. The company also has a stake in KTM; although they don't make them.

The bikes are being released in India first (by the time you read this they will have already hit the streets), and are scheduled to arrive in Australia at the end of this year; or early next year at latest. To get *a lot* more info click [here](#).

## DEALING WITH THE DANGER

Here is an interesting video on the **Isle Of Man races**. It's a behind-the-scenes look at the races and how the dangers – and deaths – affect the riders and spectators. As we know, the riders are aware of the dangers, and accept them; probably with the thought that it won't happen to them, although they admit they know it *could*. The interviewer speaks to a resident who watched a rider die after he had hit the gateway of her house. It looks at the dangers, but doesn't call for it to be stopped. It's called **Isle Of Man TT: Death And Glory**, which sums it up well. Click [here](#) to see the video.

## COUNTRY ROADS



I started this edition with an item on me riding, and I'll finish it with one. Just a fairly short ride, but a nice sunny day with light wind was a good opportunity to get out and enjoy some country roads. It was cool (temperature stayed on 17 degrees the whole way), but pleasant. Good to get out and enjoy country roads!

Well, that's it for now. I hope you enjoyed the read. Stay safe, and enjoy the ride!

*Elwyn*

(The Old Bloke)