

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



**JUNE 2023**

## **NO PLACE FOR AN OLD BLOKE?!**



This is **Harry Metcalfe**. I've mentioned him before in these epistles. Most famous these days for his YouTube channel [Harry's Garage](#). While that is predominantly a car show, he is into bikes too – in fact he began his motoring life with bikes. Well, he has recently returned from this year's **Sandraiders 2023** event; and has now posted videos of the event on his YouTube channel. (See link below).

Sandraiders is an event organised to give non-professional riders a chance to experience a motorcycling adventure through the toughest of terrain, around Morocco, tracing part of the route taken by the original Paris-Dakar rally. It is designed predominantly for classic bikes from the 1980s.



The event runs over about seven days, and covers a tortuous route of over 1500km. The ride for each day ranges from around 250 km to 280 km. Terrain includes everything from desert to mountain ranges; and all surfaces from occasional bitumen to powdery sand and rock-strewn tracks. Just to make it even tougher, daily temperatures vary from mid 30s to low 40s.

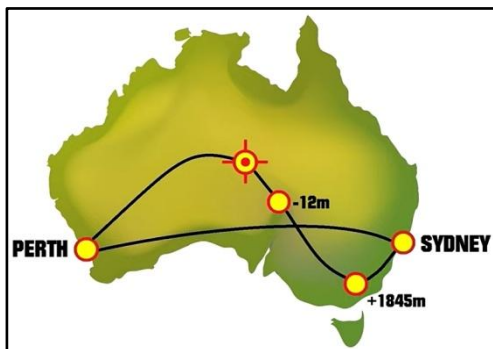
**Harry is 64 years old.** You might think that this event is no place for an old bloke. Well, it would be no place for *me!* (*I'd be giving up before we got to lunchtime on the first day!*). But some old blokes (including many of our readers!) are fit and capable. But **it is a tough event**; and riders younger than Harry gave up because it was too tough.

Preparation is key. Harry trained hard for several months before hand to get himself in the best possible shape to tackle the event.

The bike needs to be well prepared too. Harry chose a **Yamaha TT600**, which he had thoroughly rebuilt at a cost of around £7,000. He entered the event this year with his son, Charlie. Charlie was on a Honda XR600, which was thoroughly prepared too.

Okay, so here are links to the videos. There are three videos, each being about 25 minutes long. [Part 1](#). [Part 2](#). [Part 3](#).

## CRISS-CROSSING AUSTRALIA



And speaking of off-road adventures, this one isn't quite as extreme as the one above, but it's interesting and scenic, and a good watch.

**Kosta**, from the YouTube channel, [Moto Passport](#), has some interesting touring videos. Some are very short, others a bit longer. Well worth a look! The trips are usually divided into episodes of about 10 minutes each. Easy watching!

He is currently showing a series of videos on a trip he did a couple of months ago where the idea was to criss-cross the continent as per the map above. I don't know how many videos there are going to be, but at the time of writing this – late May – he is just closing in on Perth. As I said, well worth a look. Here is [a link to the first episode](#). You can follow it on from there.

## MOTORLIFE MUSEUM

Apologies to my overseas readers – or anyone not within reasonable distance of Wollongong – but this is a local item.



I recently visited the **Motorlife Museum at Dapto**. The occasion was the National Motoring Heritage Day – a day where there are various events on all over the country to pay honour to our motoring history. One display was held in the grounds of the **Motorlife Museum**. I was there in my classic car (I don't have a

historic bike). While I was there I went into the museum for a look – it's been a few years since I went through it. I was pleasantly surprised to see that there were **a lot of bikes there now!** More than there were previously. There was a wide variety on display, from very old (1920s), to more modern (1980s). Lots of different makes and models.

Here are a couple that particularly caught my eye.



1953 Adler 250. Made in Germany



1954 Vincent Black Shadow



## KEVIN CASS AND THE RECORD-BREAKING BANTAM



Also on display at the Motorlife Museum was this **BSA Bantam**, that was owned and raced by **Kevin Cass**.

Kevin Cass was an Australian Grand Prix racer. He is best known for his racing career in the 1960s in both Australia and Europe. He was Australian 125cc champion in both 1962 and 1963, racing this BSA Bantam. He raced in Europe at Brands Hatch, Isle of Man TT, and various European GPs, riding both Cotton and Bultaco bikes in the 125cc and 250cc classes. As a privateer (self-funded) he raced in World Championship races in Europe from 1965 to 1967, with admirable success.

His racing Bantam, pictured above, was of course substantially modified. Those modifications included an improved front brake, coil ignition, modified combustion chamber with higher compression ratio, and larger inlet and exhaust ports. It had a specially tuned exhaust, aluminium rims and petrol tank, a close-ratio gearbox, and a final drive set which could be swapped to suit whatever track he was competing on. This bike was timed down Conrod Straight at Bathurst at 123 mph (197 km/h), which was an Australian record for a BSA Bantam.

*A lot of bravery there!* I was restoring a Bantam at one time, and I sure wouldn't want to be doing anything like that speed on one!

Kevin Cass also established a motorbike dealership in Wollongong, and my first two new bikes were purchased from his business. I got to know Kevin a bit, partly through that and also through other connections.

## DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMAN'S RIDE

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May was the date for the **Distinguished Gentleman's Ride**. This event, which is for classic or retro-styled bikes, raises a lot of money for the nominated charity. Locally (to me), the Wollongong event has seen incredible success, even when compared to overseas events. It is organised by [City Coast Motorcycles](#), who do a fabulous job organising it. This dealership was once Kevin Cass Motorcycles. (*Bit of tie-in with the previous item!*).

The day was cold and very windy – not good conditions for riding at all! But a good number of people (*and not all gentlemen!*) turned up to participate. The photos below were taken by Keogh's Vision Photography.



Some of the hardy riders at the start



A great view out over Wollongong – but it was cold!

## LONG LIVE THE I.C.E.

'They' are all saying that the internal combustion engine is doomed; its days are numbered; the future is electric. "Not so!" Say the major motorcycle manufacturers.

The four big Japanese manufacturers – Honda, Yamaha, Kawasaki, and Suzuki – are all working on **hydrogen fuel** in an effort to prolong the life of internal combustion engines. Good luck to them! I think the resultant product will be more to our liking than battery-powered models. Although the availability (in this country at least) of fuel will be a hurdle to overcome.

## A GOOD DAY AND GOOD COMPANY



Due to my back and neck troubles, I don't go riding with the people I used to because I can't do the distances they do. But when a good friend was up for a shorter ride, and the weather looked great for being out, we arranged to have a catch-up and ride together.

The route (which I'd chosen) was mostly highway, apart from a short detour along what is now a back-road, but that was okay. It was a beautiful sunny day, the temperature was ideal, and there was little wind. This photo was taken at our lunch-stop.

It was good to go for a ride together again: we both said we must do it more often.

## THE SPEED OF LONELINESS



*“What in the world has come over you?  
What in Heaven's name have you done?  
You've broken the speed and the sound of loneliness,  
You're out there running just to be on the run”*

That's the start of the chorus to a song by John Prine called, “The Speed Of Loneliness”.

It occurred to me that these words are appropriate for **Yamaha in MotoGP** at the moment. There's no question that Yamaha has a very lonely presence in MotoGP this year – **only one team; two riders**. And as John Farnham used to sing, *“One is the loneliest number!”* There aren't even any satellite (non-factory) teams running. As we look at Yamaha we can't help wondering, what has come over them? What are they doing? (*Or not doing!*). With MotoGP it seems like they are (to misquote the last line above), *“out there racing just to be in the race.”*

**Fabio Quartararo** is fed-up with them. At the end of last year – which saw a pretty dismal performance from the blue team – he decided to stay on, believing that the factory would produce a better bike to go racing with this year. But it obviously didn't happen. The nice talk from Fabio has ended: he's giving them a real serve, saying the bike hasn't improved in four years! And it is going to take big changes to make it competitive. He said, “The things we have to change are much bigger than having an exhaust or one small thing on the bike.” He further stated that the bike is “years behind” in its development. In fact, while trying to come up with a solution to the present woes, they went back to the settings used on the (championship winning) 2021 bike.

Yamaha is a huge company; and they have vast experience in engineering in a wide range of products; from all types of bikes, to car engines, marine engines, and almost every type of musical instrument you can think of. So, **why can't they come up with a bike and engine that is competitive?** It boggles the mind!

One theory is that it's because they persist with an in-line 4-cylinder engine, whereas all of their competitors use V-4 engines. Could that be it? Quartararo doesn't know. He said he has never raced a V-4, so he doesn't know how it would compare; but

he also emphasised that the changes needed go much further than just the engine. And the word is that a V-4 is not something Yamaha are planning – yet, anyway. To be fair, (and perhaps despite what I’ve said above), Yamaha *is* trying – I read they even had an F1 engineer try to help them – but it’s hard to understand why they aren’t doing better.

### **What About The Riders?**

Strange things are happening – and being said – regarding the riders too. (*Cue more boggling of the mind!*). Yamaha has said that **Franco Morbidelli** needs to up his game or they’ll drop him. Okay, he’s not quite up to Fabio’s standard, but he’s not that bad. Obviously **the bike is the big reason why he’s not up the front of the grid!** The bike has to be ridden almost beyond its capabilities to be even vaguely competitive. Fabio is doing that this year more than ever; but he’s also crashing more than in the past too. I think Yamaha is being very harsh on Franco. Franco could argue, “Give me a decent bike and I *will* be competitive!”

Meanwhile, in Superbikes Yamaha is doing okay. They seem to be slipping from what they were, but they’re still doing okay. **Toprak Razgotlioglu** is the gun rider there, of course. And what a rider he is! People have been saying that Yamaha should put him in MotoGP; and Toprak has an ambition to be there too. He has tested a MotoGP bike, and was pretty good on it. “Only a second behind the current riders.” one comment stated. But another said, “He couldn’t handle it; he was a second off the pace.” I’m no expert on MotoGP, but I reckon being within a second of the proper pace with his first decent ride on the thing was doing very well!

Fabio has said he doesn’t want him to come to MotoGP; but *not* (*as some headlines suggested!*) because he doesn’t want him as a team-mate. He said that Toprak is a rider always hungry for a win; and he’s not going to get a win in MotoGP on a Yamaha! That’s a fair comment I’d say.

Meanwhile Yamaha reportedly offered Toprak something like \$1.5 million to stay with their Superbike team. Reports I read stated that if he was paid that amount he’d be getting about four times the salary of the championship-winning, and currently championship-leading, Alvaro Bautista! But the latest news is that he is moving to BMW! (I wonder how much *they* are paying him?).

So, what is going on with Yamaha? What has come over them? When it comes to MotoGP, with just one team, that is dropping increasingly further back from the front, it seems they really have ***broken the speed of loneliness!***

### **BIGGEST EVER CROWD**

On the subject of MotoGP, the round held at Le Mans drew **the biggest crowd ever, at any venue, for a MotoGP race!** A total of 278,805 people came to watch the racing over the 2 or 3 days it was open to spectators. Just looking at the crowds in the stands – and the amazing number of bikes in the parking area! – was an indication of how big it was. Amazing number of people!

### **THE TEN BEST RETRO-BIKES**

Perhaps it’s nostalgia; perhaps it’s recognising the time when motorcycles didn’t look like something out of a ‘Transformers’ movie; perhaps it’s the practicalities; whatever it is, **retro-style bikes** are very popular around the world right now. Well, the people at **topspeed.com** have put together a list of what they consider the top 10 retro-style bikes available today. There are some interesting bikes on the list. Although I have to say that a couple – like the Indian FTR1200 for example – are not really retro-style. Yes, I know it is styled after an old flat-track racer, but to me it just isn’t retro style.



Anyway, [click here](#) for the article. Let me know what you think – are there others you would have put on the list? Some you'd leave out?

## **AGV K6 IMPRESSIVE**



Sometime last year I commented on the **AGV K6 helmet**. I had been impressed with this when it was shown to me at a local bike shop. I wasn't buying a helmet at the time, but got talking to the proprietor of the shop about helmets. I didn't try it on, but it was obviously a quality product; and what impressed me the most was the light weight. "Less than 1300g" I was told – and it sure felt light. As I've previously mentioned, having problems with my neck made a light-weight helmet a priority. But when I did come to buy a helmet, the \$800 price was a bit too much.

Recently I read a review on the helmet by Nigel Patterson in **Australian Road Rider**. He gave it high praise; and that after everything from normal street riding to hitting the track at speeds up to 250 km/h. Light weight was again mentioned; with the report claiming its weight was under 1300g. I would like to have compared it with the Arai I bought recently, but with a \$200 discount being offered on Arai – which has traditionally been my favourite brand of helmet – the AGV wasn't considered. And although slightly heavier, I'm happy with my Arai.

[Here is another review](#) I found that you might be interested in if you're in the market for a quality new helmet. It gets another good review here, but an important clarification is made with weight: **the weight given is for the smallest size**. For more average sizes the weight was quoted as 1400g. And the fact it is made in China as opposed to Japan (with Arai and Shoei) has some effect on quality that the other review didn't mention. (*Funny about that!*). Anyway, if you're interested, check out the review.

## **SAFER I.O.M?**



It's the beginning of June, and of course that means the **Isle Of Man** races are on again. We all know how crazy this is. Averaging over 130 mph (210 km/h) around a twisting mountain course through towns, and along tree-lined roads, and alongside rock walls, has got to be just plain crazy! But it's exciting to watch!

Last year a record-equaling six riders were killed at the event. That brought the total to 266 since the event began. This year there have been measures put in place to try to limit the casualties. Some of it is technology-based stuff – GPS tracking etc – while others are more organisational things; like arranging the grid to be set up according to qualifying times rather than bike number. ([Click here](#)).

Despite that, there is nothing they can do about the determination of the riders and the inherent dangers of the track. On day 1 of practice the paramedics were called in to air-lift an injured rider; and average speeds were already exceeding the 130 mph mark – something that even the riders were surprised at! But, as I said, it makes for good viewing – if you can find a decent telecast of the highlights.

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

*Elwyn*  
(The Old Bloke)