

RIDING WITH THE OLD BLOKE



DOING IT FOR CHARITY

We begin this month's 'Riding With The Old Bloke' by riding with an old bloke – but a different old bloke. John has turned 70, which makes him an “old bloke” (and I’m sure he won’t mind me saying that). And he’s been riding. Actually he has done a lot of long trip (*trips that would put this old bloke – me – to shame!*). He has always wanted to do “the big one” – the one everyone dreams of doing; the “lap” around Australia. And so having notched up “the big 7-0” he reckoned it was time to go. But he didn’t just go for a ride around the country, he did it to raise money for a charity. And – spoiler alert! – **he raised an incredible \$40,000 for his chosen charity!** What an incredible effort! Read all about his journey [here](#).

GREAT BIKE – BUT NOT RECOMMENDED



I recently watched an interesting video from MCN. It was their report on a long-term test of the **Triumph Speed Triple 1200RR**.

The tester is very honest. When asked by the assisting MCN staffer if he would buy one, his answer was, “No!” And would he recommend it to someone else to buy? “No!” Well, that was saying what he thought! That was interesting because most long-term tests are full of praise – because they’ve just spent a long period of time (5 months in this instance) riding one of the manufacturer’s loan bikes. However, despite the negative beginning, he does have a lot of praise for the bike. But there are a couple of issues that stop him from recommending it. Click [here](#) to read the report.

TOYS HE’S OWNED AND PLAYED WITH

Most people reading this would be familiar with **Guy Allen** – aka **Guido**. And if you’ve read any of his motorcycle writings you will know he is, and has been, a prolific collector and rider of two-wheeled machinery. In this special feature **he takes a look back over the bikes he has owned**. There are articles on almost every one, and videos of many. And it’s a lot of bikes! There are 33 covered in this lot! (*So settle in, this is going to take a while!!*). It’s not just a personal story though; it gives a great insight into each of the bikes, so you learn about the bikes as you read and watch the story of his owning them. Click [here](#) to go to the special feature.

SIX-POT SCREAMER!



We usually leave the nostalgia bits till the end, or towards the end, but I'll put this here as there are two links with this. It's a special feature really.

You can see the bike we're looking at – the iconic **Honda CBX1000** – the engine **Honda made that they built a bike around**. That's the way it was – that big 6-pot engine dominating what otherwise looks like a normal Honda from the 1970s. It could almost be a 250 twin, or a 400 four; but no – there is a huge 6-cylinder engine grabbing

the attention up front; the view of this shining silver monster unfettered by even the distraction of a frame in front of it. Yep, Honda made an engine! And yes, there was a bike to go with it.

One of the surprising things about the bike was that it was only marginally wider than the 750 4-cylinder. Honda achieved this by taking bits that usually hang off the side – like the alternator – and putting them behind the engine. Some clever engineering!

If you look past the impressive appearance, and check the facts and figures, it wasn't the rocket-ship you might have imagined. It was, as you might expect, pretty heavy – at 247 kg without the addition of oil and fuel. Power output was 67.5 kW. Not an especially huge power-to-weight ratio. And it wasn't that far ahead of the 750 – which developed 51 kW and weighed 30 kg less.

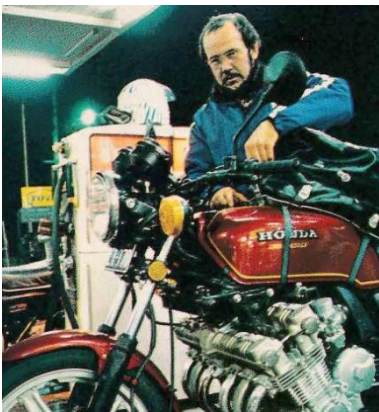
Harry's Garage



Harry's Garage is a YouTube channel predominantly featuring exotic cars. But Harry is into bikes as well, and has a fair collection of two-wheeled machinery. Recently he featured his **Honda CBX 1000**. He describes the bike in good detail and then takes it out on the road and gives us a good look – and sound! – of how it performs in the real world. Click [here](#) for the video.

His is a somewhat special version in that it has a 6-into-6 exhaust; and the benefit of that is sound! Revving it out it screams like a formula-1 car! *What a sound!*

Two Wheels with Kel Wearne



Those “of a certain age” would remember Two Wheels columnist and road-tester, **Kel Wearne**. His monthly column “Behind Bars” was always entertaining, even if his approach to riding (and perhaps to lifestyle) might have been questionable sometimes.

When he “tested” the **CBX 1000** it was no ordinary test! It included a high-speed blast from Melbourne to Sydney and back. The report was titled “Touring In The Fast Lane”; and that set the scene for a legendary story. It also produced one of the most famous – *or infamous!* – photos ever included in a road-test. The photo of him **jumping the**

bike over a railway crossing at about 160 km/h! Amazing shot! Although I was told –

by a well-known motorcycle journo – that it wasn't as innocent as he made out. Kel said the jump happened when he missed seeing the advisory speed sign. (*And the photographer just happened to be on hand to capture the unintended moment?*). Well maybe it did happen like that, but the story I heard was that he had several runs at it – to get a good shot – and that the bike (all 260+ kg of it, plus rider, flying through the air) landed very heavily and did some damage. Perhaps significant is the quote under the photo that said, “It happened *first time* when the railway advisory speed signs were missed”. (My italics added). So perhaps it happened like that and then was repeated to get the photo? Anyway, I'm just repeating what I was once told. Click [here](#) to read this great road-test / interstate ride story.

BLINKIN' STRANGE?

What is it with **blinkers constantly glowing**? I hadn't noticed this before, but was out recently and noticed quite a few bikes with the front blinkers glowing amber. When I posed this question on my Facebook page I was told that this is a phenomenon on newer bikes where the blinkers act as running-lights and glow constantly. Looks a bit weird to me. I don't know why I hadn't noticed it before though, if it is a common thing on new bikes.

THE BEST AND THE WORST

At the end of 2008 I decided to do a kind of review of the year, and tell you what I thought was **the best and worst bike I'd tested during the year**. And I thought I'd kick it off by going back over the first two years of the site (I began the website in 2006) and listing my picks for those years as well. (I also included a couple of other review-type items, like most enjoyable ride, embarrassing moments and so on).

I thought it might be interesting to go back over those choices now, to see what I picked for each, and also to look back at the bikes from the perspective of the present, and the years since. Back then they were new, of course, but now they would be very much used bikes, so we can look at them in the light of a prospective used-bike purchase. So, a bit of nostalgia perhaps, but interesting too, I think.

Bear in mind that my choices come from bikes I tested during the year – they are not a reflection of the best and worst bikes on sale!

Okay, so let's get it started by looking at 2006.

Best Bike I Rode In 2006



I rode a few impressive bikes during that first year of the website, but by far the best was the **Suzuki Bandit**. Click [here](#) to read the test.

This was actually the first big bike that I'd had a decent ride on. As such it could have been a challenge – being bigger than I was used to, heavier than I was used to, and more powerful than I was used to. But it was the total opposite: **I was amazed at how easy it was to ride!** Right from the start of the test, trundling through traffic in Queanbeyan, to riding the glorious undulating road between there and Braidwood. It was easy to go fast on too!

This model was something of a hybrid. (*No, I don't mean it had an electric motor!*). It had new bodywork, but the mechanicals were a carry-over from the previous model. That meant an engine of 1,157 cc, air-cooled, with carburetors not fuel-injection. Gearbox was 5-speed. I concluded the test by saying that, “I would be quite happy to own this bike”. And in fact, sometime after my test, I phoned the dealer to see if they still had the bike: if they did I was considering buying it! But it had been sold.

If you're looking for one of these now, as good a bike as it was, it would be better to go for the 2007 model. The engine was enlarged to 1,255cc, it was liquid-cooled, and it had a 6-speed gearbox.

Worst Bike I Rode In 2006



This was an easy choice at the time – the **KTM 640 Supermoto**. Now, looking back on it, for a Motard type bike it might have been okay, but I hated it!

At this point it's pertinent to repeat this clarification I put in the original test, because it is **a good description of what the website was – and still is – all about**. *“Now I should begin by saying that this report probably says more about me and my riding style than it does about the actual bike. But then the whole purpose of these ‘road tests’ is to report on them exactly how I found them. And if you're anything like me (which many of you might be, to some degree at least) then your reaction to the bikes I ride would probably be similar to mine. So in that sense they're probably more accurate and informative than the ‘proper’ more objective reports you read in magazines.”* **It was that perspective – and honesty! – that made the website so popular.** Anyway, back to the bike.

A seat height of 910mm was awkward, even for a lanky old bloke like me. And the fact it felt like a log didn't help either. What also didn't help the experience was that I was in Canberra when I rode this, and **I got lost**, trying to keep up with the hard-charging group I'd left with. Within a kilometre of leaving I was seriously considering turning back – **it was horrible!** I stalled it three times. It needed plenty of revs and extreme slipping of the clutch to get it away. It did have a couple of redeeming features, but overall...! Click [here](#) for the original report. (By the way, the original report says I rode it in 2007, but I had it as my ‘Worst’ pick for 2006, so I think it may have been 2006 when I rode it). Okay, let's have a quick look at 2007.

Best Bike I Rode In 2007



I've already mentioned the **Triumph Sprint ST** in a previous edition, and it was an easy choice for “Best Bike” I rode in 2007. As I said at the time, if I'd had the money I would have bought one. I loved it!

It wasn't perfect though (*no bike is!*), and despite my “falling in love with it”, there were a few niggles. Click [here](#) to read the original test.

Looking back at it now, there are a couple of things to mention. Firstly, the riding-position is fairly lean-forward – not to a sports-bike extent, but enough to notice and be uncomfortable if you prefer a more upright position. I've heard some riders complain of aching wrists after a long ride. The other thing is maintenance and reliability. I heard from owners that certain maintenance procedures – like changing the battery – could be a real pain, especially if you didn't have the proper tools. And there have been reports of problems occurring once a few years and a few km are accrued. But it is still a very good bike!

Worst Bike I Rode In 2007

In contrast to previous choices, this one was hard; because there weren't any stand-out bad ones. The [Triumph Speedmaster](#) got a mention as one of my least-enjoyable rides; but not because of the bike. In the test I said, “In cruiser land this is a class act!” However, the ergonomics of the riding-position, combined with typical

cruiser rear suspension, upset my dodgy old back. After the test I remember going to a chemist to buy some anti-inflammatory cream! The [Ducati ST3](#) got a mention too, mainly because I didn't like its low-speed handling. But my pick finally went to the **Yamaha FZ6S**.



Calling this the “Worst” bike I rode that year is doing it a disservice; it wasn't really a *bad* bike. I'll call it the “least impressive” – which was actually the term I used in the articles on my “Best and Worst” picks.

There were **two things I didn't like – both related to performance**. Surprising really, since the mechanicals were adapted from the R6! The first thing was that the power was developed quite high in the revs, and it felt a bit sluggish at lower revs. (*A LAMS Hyosung 650 felt better!*). That was compounded by the fact that it didn't really feel happy at high revs. (Yamaha later realised this characteristic was turning potential buyers away, and released the XJ6, which had a detuned, but more tractable, version of this engine). The other thing was the gearing, which, resulting in 110 km/h pulling almost 6,000 rpm, I complained was too low. Now, this was the first “modern” (at the time) mid-size 4-cylinder bike I'd ridden, and I was yet to learn that mid-size 4-cylinder bikes were then – *and still are!* – mostly geared like that. My 10-year-old Yamaha XJ600 was more comfortably (higher) geared!

So this bike disappointed me. Click [here](#) for the test. In fairness, I should mention that when I tested a naked version of the same bike about a year later, the engine felt better. (But the low gearing was the same).

Well, that was longer than I intended! I'll do a couple more next month – and try to keep the summary shorter!

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANIA

Our world traveler, Geoff, who has written great stories of his travels for the website (*I always enjoy reading them!*), is presently on another overseas jaunt. In various parts of Europe. He's been posting lots of fabulous photos to his Facebook page, and I thought I'd include these two here. They are mountain passes in Romania. That one on the left I reckon would make me dizzy! ☺



TOGETHER AGAIN!

I went for a ride recently with a friend I haven't ridden with for ages – almost three years in fact. There were three of us who used to ride together, but I dropped out when I had a flare-up of my back trouble a few years ago. Then there was COVID and lockdowns, and then I had problems with my neck. All of this didn't stop me riding, but I was unable to do the sort of distances I used to. Over the past couple of years especially, my riding seemed to be progressing in ever-diminishing circles.

But my neck problems have improved a bit, so my mate and I went for a ride. A short ride. To a favourite eatery (of mine) about 60km away. **It was so good to go for a ride with him again!** And it was a beautiful sunny day to enjoy as well!

R.I.P. QUEEN ELIZABETH II

I feel it only appropriate that I include a few words on the late **Queen Elizabeth**. *What an amazing woman!* Plenty has been written and spoken about her, so I won't try to recreate some form of extra tribute here. But, as a motorcycling publication, perhaps a few words on **her motoring achievements**.

Elizabeth liked driving; and was often seen at the wheel of a Land Rover heading up into the hills somewhere. She also drove Land Rovers in the army. In 1945, while still a Princess, she joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service, becoming the first female member of the Royal Family to join the Armed Forces as a full-time active member. She drove Land Rovers and trucks. She also received some mechanical training; learning how to do mechanical repairs and maintenance to some vehicles.

She also rode a motorbike, and trained as a dispatch rider. The photo on the left below shows her riding a BSA, in her training as a dispatch rider. On the right she is fettling something at the front of a similar machine.



I don't know if she rode after becoming Queen. But I doubt it.

As a member of the Royal Family she wasn't required to have a driving license. It was only in 2019, at the age of 93, that she decided to give up driving on public roads.

She really was an amazing woman!

Well that's it for another month. A long one this time! Anyway, I hope you enjoyed the read.

Stay safe, and enjoy the ride!

Elwyn
(The Old Bloke)