

Article by John K Barkley (2006)

My Motorcycling Career

My motorcycling interest started in 1956 – Dunlaoghaire, – on a grass strip at the entrance of the West Pier – My friends Reggie Kidd & George Dixon who were both the envy of all the lads as they had Motor Bikes – Reggie had a 125cc BSA Bantham & George a 98cc Moto Guzzi. On the day in question George had Roger Percival as a passenger & Reggie had me – What happened was that the chain came off George's Bike and Reggie stopped to help, When I was left alone on the BSA I 'naturally' sat in the riders position and when Reggie came back he sat on the pillion seat and said lets go!

At the time Reggie did not know that I had never ridden a motor bike before but my memory of the occasion was that all went well. When I got home I told my father about the experience and I don't think he knew that I could be so persuasive as I kept harping on and would not give him any peace until he got me a 98cc Moto Guzzi (I thought the sound of George's bike which had a whine in the gearbox sounded fabulous)

When I think of it, it must have been a big decision to let me have a bike as Dad broke his leg very badly down in Athy off a 600cc Panther Sloper and was the first person in Ireland to have pins in his leg and had traction (Thanks to his Brother in Law Dr Alex McKay who insisted on this treatment against loosing his leg at the knee) Dad used to loosen the screws, which were keeping the tension on the break, to relieve the pain and this left his leg about $\frac{3}{4}$ " short and he never rode a bike again nor collected his Panther from Athy, The only damage to the bike was the front forks and with only a little work it would have been back on the road.

Dad got me a Red Moto Guzzi from Stanley Woods & Burnley of Pierce Street and it looked fabulous (but did not have the same sound as George's bike a bit disappointing until I found out that it was a fault in his gearbox) I was given a helmet which I painted in the John Surtees

design and with all the gear I was independent and could go and come as I wished.

The Motor Enthusiasts Club had formed a few years previous and as they were located just down the road I joined them and helped at many an event – When they decided to run a Clubman's Trial for Standard Road Bikes I entered on the Moto Guzzi and won my class but that only made me want a competition bike I traded the Moto Guzzi into Stanley Woods and got an ex Freddy Dixon 197cc Sun, in trials trim, my first outing was a Leinster MCC trial which was held behind Lamb Doyles, I managed one lap but could not get the hang of it at all so I rode the bike home all discouraged.

It was about 1956 when I joined the D&D, encouraged to do so by my Cousin Stuart Hamilton, who was a committee member of the D&D and I have been a member ever since. Stuart got married and immigrated to Canada early in 1957 and it was around the same time as a few of the D&D committee did the same including Charlie Sommerville, quite a loss to the club, but Charlie Returned



After my fiasco at Trials riding I talked to Stanley Woods and he suggested that I should try Scrambles – he converted the bike to that discipline and I entered my first Scramble which was the 1957 D&D Dunlop Scramble held at the Curragh, Kildare & being my first speed event I remember it well, even falling off in the handicap race right in front of Reggie Kidd (who was a spectator at the event) At that point I would have given up as the handlebars were bent but Reggie told me that I was in first place and physically placed me back on the bike I stayed in first place to the finish with Billy Russell second. The Graded scratch race went nearly as well for me in which I finished second – this win led me to my first sponsorship – Stanley prepared my bike for me each week and in return I had to cut grass at his house in Foxrock.

I had considerable success on the Sun despite numerous frame breaks but after a season I found it difficult to be without daily transport. I sold the Sun and bought a second hand 350cc BSA B51 Road bike which kept me happy for a few years until the competition bug got at me again. So in 1959 I sold the BSA and purchased a 197cc Dot scrambler which led me into the company of Brian & Gerry Scarlett who opened a motorcycle agency by the name of Dot Vivi (Eire) Ltd., Importing the Dot road and competition models along with Vivi Mopeds from Italy, I joined them in 1960 as Manager of their workshop off St. Stephen's Green and later in their shop in Pearse Street.

This union with the Scarlett Brothers brought me into contact with Vivienne their younger sister, who came to me in Dot Vivi having run into the back of a car on her way to college on her DKR Capella scooter, she hoped I could repair it before she had to tell her parents!!! I started dating her after that and we got married in 1965.

During these 5 years Dot was the machine to have as Gerry was winning nearly all the Grass Track & Scramble events on 197, 250 and 325 Dots, we all wanted to follow suit. I spent 6 months with the Dot Factory in Manchester and learnt many skills like tuning, wheel building etc. but the bonus while away from home was I brought my 197 Dot over to Manchester where I could work on it in the evenings fitting "special" parts and accompanying one of Dot's works rider Pat Lamper to many Scrambles in the UK.

My return to Ireland from Manchester with my machines all "ready to go" I received quite a blow when travelling to a Grass Track in North Dublin with my 3 machines on the home made trailer, a car, coming towards me had a blow out, swerved across the road, just missed my car but hit the trailer wheel, pulling the trailer apart and all I could see in the mirror was the three bikes tumbling up the road behind me, what a mess! Leaving home with what was in reality 3 brand new bikes they were now in bits. I can't quite remember how I got them home but I remember a lot of midnight oil was burnt repairing them and having a new trailer built to my specification (the type that had only the front wheels in slots and

the bike resting on the sump plate) – thus the start of the short trailer fad.

Of the three revamped bikes, the 197cc was the most successful in grass track trim. We used to change the front forks from the Dot leading link suspension to the lightweight Metal Profile telescopic type which were very light and flexed when under strain when cornering but the lighter machine was a winner. My next favourite was the 325cc Twin which you could slide in corners like a speedway machine under full throttle and in full control.

With three bikes to prepare each week it was almost a full time job. It took a full nights work to prepare a bike and when we converted them to run on methanol it was even more work as the cylinders had to be removed each week to check if the rings were intact, the points on each bike had to be cleaned, the timing checked and for the different type of events - Scramble or Grass Track - the gearbox had to be opened, a different set of gears fitted and the forks to be changed etc. etc. etc. a lot of effort but enjoyable none the less. Vivienne spent many weeknights sitting in the workshop keeping me company.

The normal event would consist of 4 capacity races, 200/250/350/500, then three graded scratch races and three heats of a handicap with a handicap final to round off the event. I would be out in the first three capacity races, all the graded scratch races, all the heats of the handicap and invariably the handicap final. At this period of my life I reckon I was at my fittest.

Then 1960 saw me having a go at Trials again during the winter season and again I found it much more difficult to master (working my way up to grade A, but only winning 2 events outright – but was never a natural) The camaraderie of the trials riders fraternity is wonderful, so different from other disciplines, I remember it being said to me that 'if I persevered at trials the experience gained would help me in any other motor sport discipline, especially in bad conditions: Time and time again this proved correct. Dot machines were just as successful at Trials as at Scrambles and during the next 3 years I became one of the D&D junior team members in the Inter Centre Club Trials Competition. There were

many good weekends both in the South and North and during this time and the D&D won both the Senior & Junior "Stars." It's a pity that this event is no longer held as the most memorable days I can recall were at these team events.

In 1964 things got easier in Scrambles when regulations changed making it unnecessary to have different capacity machines. We were down to one bike at events and as the Dot period passed, it was Greeves motorcycles that took their place with the 250cc Square Barrel Greeves and this make took over both in Trials and Scrambles for another four years.

Trials riding was fast becoming my favourite, all my family became involved and were out at most events Vivienne, Sandra & Melinda all observed and the girls often brought their friends to help out with observing. It was quite a Family outing each weekend throughout the winter months. In 1971 and another change of bike, Bultaco, supplied by Lindsay Motorcycles of Ship Street (who were a fantastic supporter of Motorcycling), which I used in Trials, Moto Cross, Grasstrack, The International Six Day Enduro (IOM) etc. (not all the same model) and I stayed with it to the end of my competition years in 1980 when I decided to quit riding but not to depart from the sport but to involve myself in organising events for the D&D.

My involvement in organising evolved and is now greater than ever with drawing up regulations, obtaining permits, posting regulations, receiving entries, computing results, keeping a record of the D&D, the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland and Motorcycling-Ireland Trials championships, designing and updating our club website (www.d-dmcc.com). I think riding was less work and it is just as well I am now part retired but still interested. In the year 2007 I will have been involved with the D&D for 50 years.

