



Northumbria Advanced Motorcyclists

Yorkshire



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Chairman's Remarks



It's spring and we are at the start of another biking season, unless of course yours has never stopped and you have been biking throughout the winter months. Whatever the case, the weather is improving, providing more opportunities for riding the brilliant roads of our area. Unfortunately, this is also the time of year that we begin to see reports of more motorcycle fatalities and injuries. The first weekend of April, saw two more deaths on our regions roads.

They are tragic reminders that we need to ease ourselves in gently at the start of the season and practice the skills we have learned as Advanced Riders.

However, many riders have not had the wish or opportunity to take further training and it's these people who are even more vulnerable at this time of year. As we all know riding to the "system", employing IPSGA, allows us to reflect on our riding and keep us safer. Perhaps then, this is the ideal opportunity for us all to make a little contribution to our charitable aim of "improving road safety in our region". Do you know someone who would benefit from further training? Could you do with a brush up on your skills? If the answer to either question is "possibly" or "Yes" then why not do something about it? If you know someone who would benefit, then why not suggest they have a free taster session with us? The idea is to introduce them to some of the riding skills that could one day save their life and certainly in the short term increase their enjoyment of riding.

If you want to brush up your skills then contact the training team and have a one to one session with an Observer. They will help you to reflect on your riding. Many in the Group have already done this and have given positive feedback. Observers and Committee members all commit to this and have already had one to one sessions.

In a similar vein, the NAM Marketing Team will be at Motorcycle dealers throughout the summer, promoting road safety and extolling the virtues of advanced riding. All these are just small steps for all of us to take, but you never know, they just might save someone's life. Ride safe.

Mick Goodwin

Training Team



Group riding is one of the corner stones of NAM membership. For some members the monthly ride outs are the very reason they join, for others the social aspect of the group ride outs are the highlight of their monthly calendar. There are not many clubs that can put as many bikes on the road for a ride out as NAM each and every month. With the advent of the associates ride outs that is now twice a month, and sometimes we are the victims of our own success with upwards of thirty bikes on some

rides. If you have never participated in the organisation of the monthly ride outs then just perhaps you have failed to appreciate the organisation that goes on behind the scenes. Organising the coffee stops and bathroom breaks, fuel stops must take into account every type of bike from the omnipresent BMW to proper bikes like the R1, and the ride out coordinator must have enough people on hand twice a month to ensure these days out can happen. Now I must admit that I still smile when I see a group of bikes flowing like poetry through the countryside, or the looks on people's faces whenever we enter a town and people stop and wonder who the fine looking bunch of riders are. However just once or twice all does not go as well as it should.

One of the little known aspects of life as a member of the Training Team is to look into riding incidents that occur either during a training run, or a social run such as a ride out, and make suggestions accordingly. Over the past three years we have looked at eight, all thankfully minor incidents. But each incident had one recurring theme, rider error. For each incident the rider had a contributory part to play even if they were not wholly to blame.

So pause just for a moment and have think about what goes on during a large group ride out. Now place yourself in your last group ride out and identify when you are guilty of the following:

- Riding too close.
- Not paying attention
- Blindly following the rider in front
- Being in a position when you cannot see past the rider in front of you
- Running an amber light so as not to be left behind
- Speeding just to keep up
- Crossing a solid white line
- Off siding, just to make progress
- Leaving a junction you were marking because you had been there a while
- Having a little feeling of panic because you have lost the bike in front

Ten points that were not chosen at random, ten points that will happen again, and ten points that need not happen. Group riding is all about friends riding with friends, and not friends riding for friends, do not allow someone else to make your decision for you.

New Observers: New observers will be recruited this year to train for the Local Observer qualification. The requirements are listed on the NAM website for all too see so if you fancy joining one of the most august volunteer bodies within the IAM then put your name forward. The assessment day will be held on the morning of the 20th of May at West Denton Community Centre. Following an initial presentation there will be a pass or fail written exam, followed by a riding assessment. Please register your intention via email to any member of the training team, any member of the committee, or to me at paddyjarvis10@gmail.com. Please remember that 2017 is the IAM's year of the observer, this is in recognition of the work and effort put in by our observers, each and every one a volunteer giving their time freely to train others and promote road safety. It is not always an easy job, when you're facing rain and cold, and would rather watch an old film than go out riding in inclement weather, then remember the observer.

Finally a reminder that NAM can now offer both F1rst and Masters mentoring within the club so if you fancy taking your riding up a level then get in touch with any member of the training team. Or even if you don't wish to follow the test route we still offer 1-2-1 sessions with some of the most highly qualified riders available, if they're not free then the training team will have to do.

Paddy Jarvis

Chief Observer

Notes from the Editor



Clive Rumbold from MotoScotland gave an excellent presentation of the off-road courses he delivers. I suspect that a number of members will be off to Inverary to sample the offered delights. A £100 training voucher was up for grabs but so far, we don't know who the lucky person is - remember if you weren't the one, IAM members receive 10% discount.

Remember the new venue for the Club Night is West Denton Community Fire Station - W Denton Way, Newcastle upon Tyne NE5 2RB

Some Bikes Wot I've Owned

When I listen to fellow club members reminiscing about the adventures they undertaken, the amazing bikes they have owned and the classics they have restored I'm almost tempted to go and stand in the corner. My bike history isn't sporting, or especially adventurous, and it didn't until recently include touring or IPSGA. What it was, and I think many of us will be in the same boat, was an inexpensive form of travel when the cost of buying and running a car was prohibitive.

Off Roothing

My entry to the world of petrol powered two-wheeling - I have always been a two leg powered two wheeler - came about as a result of two things. Firstly an aged uncle passed down to me his elderly workhorse of a **Zundapp Bella Scooter** and the second thing was that the same uncle lived adjacent to Chopwell Woods. The outcome was that an untrained, but self taught, young Wilkinson



careered around the roads, paths and tracks of Chopwell Woods visiting such exotic places as High Spenn and the River Derwent. Happy days, and with the good fortune which shines on young people doing ill-advised and probably illegal things, I got away with it unscathed.

On Roothing

When I look back I realise that I've had some quite boring bikes but the most boring of them all was the **Honda CD175**. As a young apprentice compositor earning a mere few pounds per week this was a decision made with a budget in mind. I should have opted for the quicker CB 175 or perhaps even the CB 250 but I thought 175cc would be powerful enough and the others were more expensive. Did I mention powerful? Perhaps that's the wrong word in the context of the CD 175 0-60 could be measured with a sundial!



If I was to attempt a quarter mile sprint on the CD !&%, the timekeeper would have gone home before I reached the finish line. I had to be careful not to be embarrassed as racing cyclists overtook on uphill sections of the road. The only way I could achieve decent speeds was to draft so close to lorries that I was constantly in danger of running into them. Not recommended and certainly not a riding plan that would be endorsed by the IAM. It was a truly uninspiring, awful bike. My dislike was compounded by the fact that having bought it on the 'never never' it seemed to take decades before the final payments was made. I seem to recollect making about 500 monthly trips to the Midland Bank in Gateshead to pay the necessary instalment.

Time passed, I grew up a little, became engaged and bought a house. Money was for more important things such as weddings, mortgages and hire purchase payments, remember them? A car was out of the question although I had a brief flirtation with four wheels courtesy of a pale blue Austin 1100 purchased from my bro. It gave me a few months of luxury before giving up the ghost and slowly rusting towards the scrapyard. I needed transport, inexpensive transport Mr Honda again came to my rescue courtesy of a second hand **Honda C70 Cub**. You know the sort of thing I mean - they can carry 200 chickens, 22 children, 10 bundles of sugar cane and as I discovered, me and his wife.



It served us well did the C70. Not fast by any means but seemingly willing to start (eventually) and work hard without any care lavished on it. No servicing and little in the way of POWDDERSS. I suppose I must have had it tested each year but I can't remember doing it. That scooter eventually found it's way into my brothers fleet and he, with the help of pop riveter and touch up paint, used it as a commuter for years after I had graduated onto a **Vespa P200**



I thought that I had it made - 200cc of Vespa power compared to a mere 70cc of Honda. The world was our oyster. Mr and Mrs Wilkinson could now explore the world. Not to be and not long after we bought the scooter we negotiated a gravelly and wet tight uphill right hander and well the fact is we didn't negotiate the bend. We came off. Not at any great speed, probably 20-25 but we skidded along the road leaving traces of skin from elbows and knees. My new parka with the mock fur around the hood was ruined. The scooter managed to grind off a good proportion of its innards as it too whizzed along the road in its side and that was the end of pillion riding for my significant other. The scooter was repaired by Mo-Tech at Byker, still operating but it was never the same. I lost confidence in it (and my self I guess) and eventually it was sold to assist with the purchase of a car. Sophistication at last. Well actually, not all that sophisticated. A Ford Escort Popular with the 1100 engine - unsophisticated and under powered but at least we didn't fall off it.

A Brief Eastern European Interlude

Unsophisticated. Agricultural. Even undesirable, all words which could be applied to my next bike. An **MZ 250** bought from a colleague along with his motorbike jacket, gloves and helmet. If ever there was a workhorse then the MZ was it. I don't think the words engineering tolerances would ever be



used in this context. It was rattly, smoky and noisy. It was such a simple engine that even I, who has virtually no mechanical skills, could take the head off, strip the gearbox and replace the oil seals (frequently) and 'service' it. I've probably never spent so much time working on a bike before or since but the budget demanded some DIY so I trusted Mr Haynes and surprised myself - another bike which my brother inherited from me if I recall correctly.

Japan Again ...

My exact memory is a little hazy but I think it was about then that my motorbike fleet became more sophisticated too. I bought a **Honda CX500**. A big bike in my eyes and a great bike. I was travelling from Wickham to Sunderland for work at the time and the CX made to journey, mostly dual carriageway, a pleasure. I can't say that I looked forward to work, but I did enjoy the journey to and from!



That was the first to be a 'real' bike, commuted happily

years, without mishap although I remember setting off for work one night and arriving minus a top box. I retraced my route but could find no sign of it. I hope someone enjoyed my sandwiches.

bike which I considered a big boys bike. We together for two or three

When I sold the CX to a colleague - who was more mechanically minded than me. He asked if I had ever changed the oil in the forks. I told him no and asked why. He told me that he had done it and he was sure that the oil he drained had been engine oil. That might explain the rather solid front end I'd experienced. Slightly more prosperous and we became a two car family. The economical need to travel by motorbike diminished and I spent some years as a non-biker.

A Born Again Biker

As happens to many of us, family grew up, pennies were a little less difficult to come by and I returned to biking. Having been away from the 'scene' for a long time I was puzzled

as to what I should buy. Not too expensive, not too fast, a certain practicality and not too costly to insure I thought I had found the perfect bike - wrong!



A **Honda Deauville**. a 650cc engine, some weather protection and some luggage capacity. It seemed to offer enjoyment and excitement with a little common sense thrown in. Let me tell you it did offer common sense. It offered reliability and economy but it certainly wasn't very exciting. I felt old before my time. I wasn't a courier but I was riding a courier's bike. The "Dullville" with less than 5000 miles on the clock gave way to a Yamaha FZ06 -



German Engineering ...

I enjoyed the Yamaha ... for a few thousand miles. Nothing too good, nothing too bad and certainly was little more engaging to ride than the Deauville ... but I had a hankering for a big bike. Initially it was the lure of a 750 which had been the bike of many imaginings. However, months of reading reviews and examining stats led me to a short list of much bigger engined bikes - the much respected trio of Honda Pan, Yamaha FJR and a BMW RT. After considering all the specifications and eventually tossing a coin the **BMW R1200RT SE** won as it had heated seats, heated grips, electric screen, cruise control, ABS, a full service history and 12 months BMW Extended Warranty. I like toys, and a warranty! I bought it in York.



That was the start of the 'BMW Career' which to date I have not retired from. The RT was an excellent bike which took me on my first continental tour to Germany's Harz Mountains. It didn't let me down but as it got closer to 40,000 miles I felt a change was needed and it was replaced after a couple of years by a **K1300GT Exclusive Edition** - the only BMW I've bought from the local dealers.

The Exclusive Edition was the model introduced as a sales incentive before the K1300 was delisted - it had every extra included as standard. Fast and comfortable, the 'EE' was distinguished by the name picked out in blue. Actually it didn't look particularly exclusive when in Germany one time, the front wheel bearing collapsed and the bike needed recovering to the nearest dealer on the back of a break-down truck - my Triumph riding pals who were with me still smile at the memory. Thank goodness for the BMW Extended Warranty is all I can say.

Many people say that if the K1300 was still available they wouldn't consider anything else. I think I would agree and say that all things considered it was better than the bike which replaced it.



There is always something else, something temptingly new to try and I found myself drawn toward the **BMW K1600** - not the least because others in the club were riding 1600s and reporting how good they were. I got one in blue, bought from Williams in Manchester, it was an excuse for a night away and the opportunity a decent test ride home.



I think the BMW K1600 GTSE is faultless. A bit heavy perhaps but as a bike for touring and long ride outs it is almost perfect. Actually, it is too perfect. It does everything so smoothly - gears are largely irrelevant as it can do just about any manoeuvre in any gear - so well and with so little effort. Do you know what, it became a little unexciting to ride. I would arrive home after a 200 mile ride out and be a little bored.

After a couple of years of saving pennies my thoughts and many conversations turned to a change of bike - I appreciate that when bikers get together talk almost always turns to a change of bike, but in my case, the whispering became increasingly, irresistibly loud I began to look at other women again - I tried turning to drink in an effort to resist but to no avail and after a couple of glasses of wine I began to search the BMW Motorrad website for suitable partners. Suffice to say, I fell for an altogether more rugged, adventurous sort of girl - let's say that if the K1600 is a Sophia Loren sort of bike then my next was a Russian shot-putter of questionable gender - a **BMW R1200GS Adventure TE** bought from BMW at Oxford. Certainly, the GSA cannot be described as pretty or sexy but, as Shakespeare always said, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I rode the 1600 to Oxford to collect the GSA and had a 200 miles journey to re-familiarise myself with the Boxer engine. It was a revelation. Obviously I had swapped 6 cylinders for 2 but the smoothness and flexibility of the liquid cooled 1200 was remarkable. I needed to change gear a little

more often than on the 1600 but that added to the enjoyment of the ride, plus the bike is fitted with gear shift assist which is a very useful gadget.



It's been over 12 months now and we are very happy. I'll say it quietly, but I think I may have found the perfect bike. More than fast enough, very comfortable, well equipped, stable - so easy to ride at slow speeds, fairly economical - 50mph is easily achievable - and very very enjoyable to ride. As I mentioned above, on the K1600 I arrived home after a ride yawning, on the GSA I am sad that I've arrived home as I want the ride to go on longer. I've been to Europe and Ireland on the Adventure and I ride several times each week. Love it!

Downsides? It's a dirty bike. Every bit of mud and water on the road seems to be thrown around the bike and rider. I find myself hosing, washing and polishing much more than has been

necessary in the past. I treated the bike to an ACF 50 'spa day' last Autumn so I can't wash it too thoroughly at the moment but a Spring clean is imminent. What's next? Nothing at the moment. I'm happy with my bike, but I know from experience that it's a temporary state of affairs. If I was forced to change I'd opt for another GS Adventure. They are just the job for me.

Michael Wilkinson

Buying a New Bike

I retired from the Metropolitan Police Service in the summer of 2012. I'd purchased a retirement present a few months before then, a Triumph Tiger Explorer, a new motorcycle to the market and Triumphs attempt to cash in on the 'Adventure bike' genre dominated by

BMW's ubiquitous GS. Today, there aren't many bike manufacturers who don't have a model within this competitive and lucrative category. If you are also a member of the 'retired ' demographic you may agree with my assertion that life in general takes on a less hurried, gentler format in which more time can be devoted to self, family and others. Since retiring I have been able to enjoy many benefits of this new way of life and now have more time to devote to leisure motorcycling.

During 32 years service I worked at five police boroughs, three specialist departments and somehow persuaded my employers to promote me a couple of times. However, the only posting I chose to return to for a second time was the Metropolitan Police Motor Driving School, Hendon. 2002 – 2008 & 2010 – 2012. Eight years at this prestigious place of learning will remain as a highlight and I look back with pride at my time as an instructor and member of the Senior Management Team. I was in my element at Hendon; with reminders of the history of police driving everywhere, being part of a team of experts, with its worldwide reputation for excellence and best of all a large garage full of high performance cars and motorbikes. Being involved training the next generation of police officers in emergency response and pursuit driving or carrying out final ride assessments for standard response motorcyclists were rewarding ways to earn a living. Put simply it was petrol heads heaven!

Another advantage was the opportunity to compare different vehicles, a sort of supermarket for motors under one roof. Regular use of performance products from Audi, BMW, Ford, Honda, Saab, Suzuki, Vauxhall, Volvo & Yamaha enabled me to make personal conclusions on the merits or otherwise of these vehicles. Quite simply I was able to assess what I liked or didn't like from a police vehicle perspective or if I were spending my own money on a bike or car. You may argue that it is possible for anyone considering a purchase, to do similar and test lots of vehicles before choosing their favourite. I wouldn't necessarily disagree, but would counter that this would be time consuming; you'd have to put up with the high-pressured sales chat at each showroom and are limited to relatively short road tests, compared to my access to the Hendon vehicle fleet.

This brings me back to present day and retirement, which as I've said does allow for more leisure time. After 5 years in which we've enjoyed a mostly good relationship I am now ready to replace my 2012 Triumph Explorer. I did put in a phone call to Hendon to see if they would entertain my return for a few days, so that I could avail myself of their latest bikes to play with. But there must have been a problem with the phones that day as the line went dead before I'd finished asking! I suppose it would also be impractical, now that I'm based in the North East, 275 miles away. Otherwise I have no doubt they'd have welcomed me back!

So arranging my own test rides and relying on experience, negotiating skills and wit would have to suffice in helping me make the correct choice for this purchase. First thing to

decide, do I stick with adventure style bike or go for something else? Not a real toughie this one, at 55yrs old, 16 stone and a fitness level that Rab C Nesbit might recognise, my head down bottom up 'sportsbike' days are well behind me! I did the 'sports tourer' thing for nine great years on a Honda Blackbird, but similarly the riding position would not favour me now. Nor do I need the threat to my licence the speed and power these hyper-bikes bring. For past three years I have regularly ridden 'full tourers' with the Northumbria Bloodbikes and I do appreciate the riding position, refined progress and weather protection offered by FJR's, Trophies and Pan Europeans. However something holds me back from this particular genre of bike. Perhaps it would be an admission that I'm getting on a bit and closer to the end of my riding days than I am the start, but I don't feel ready to go down this route just yet. I owned a 'cruiser' back in 2010, a beautiful black and chrome Triumph Thunderbird 1600, a machine that provoked the most interest in non bikers whenever parked up.



I did like the T-bird a lot. However a lack of ground clearance and my failure to recognise its handling limitations led to a bike/armco interface in Spain that somewhat soured our relationship and led to a parting of the ways! The Thunderbird was replaced by the BMW GS looki liki Tiger Explorer. The 'Adventure bike' genre seems to fit and provides everything I need, plus I can dress up like Ewan McCharley and traverse the planet if I want to! Decision made then, I stick with an Adventure bike.

At the risk of repetition, it's true to say the BMW GS has spawned a number of copy cat bikes from pretty much every other manufacturer in a segment of motorcycling that continues to grow. The competition has kept BMW on their toes and they have responded with improvements and specification upgrades to the GS over recent years. Manufacturers of luggage, clothing, sat-navs and other accessories have also upped their games with ever improved products to tempt the Charley McGregor "wannabies", like me, to part with our cash.

I currently ride with a few groups and am fortunate to tour in the UK and on the continent with friends and ex-colleagues a few times a year. But most weeks I enjoy rideouts with a chapter from Northumbria Advanced Motorcyclists otherwise known as 'the Wednesday Riders'. I believe so called because they can only manage it one day of the week and need the other six to recover! Anyway, moving on, a benefit of membership of such groups is the variety of motorcycles and the ownership experiences shared between us. I have friends with many years motorcycling behind them and whose opinions I value, riding the GS1200, Explorers, Honda Crosstourers, KTMs and Ducati Multistrada amongst others. I ruled out the Ducati and KTM because of their chain drives and in KTMs case they also appear more off road focused than I will ever need. If I end up 'off road', it suggests a mistake has occurred during a ride and I've run out of talent dealing with a particular hazard! So a short list of the GS, Explorer and Crosstourer evolved and a plan to ride the latest model of all three was hatched. All I needed was some decent weather for the assessment rides and to brush up on my negotiating skills for the inevitable financial sparring that would come.

Organising the finances is a major factor in this process and ensuring there is enough money left afterwards to put food on the table can't be ignored. I'm not the best when it comes to the 'haggle,' especially when pitted against a professional sales person. Wearing down my adversary and getting to grips with the 'art of the deal' doesn't come naturally. It's probably just paranoia but I'm sure the sales guy, shortly after waving me off from the showroom on my shiny new purchase, gets straight on the phone to their travel agent and books a luxury holiday on the commission I've just handed over. They nearly always have an expensive looking sun tan a few months later when I take the bike back for its first service!

During a sunny spell at the beginning of March I organised the first test and chose the BMW GS. It was a black TE model, fairly high up the range with good specification as standard. Adjustable rider modes governing engine power and suspension settings and a gear shift assist system were present on this model. Such rider aids are *de rigueur* nowadays and have been for a few years. But as my Explorer is 5 yrs old and lacking a majority of these fancy electronics, they are fairly new to me. After I'd signed their insurance form the sales chap at Coopers ran through the various handlebar controls and dashboard buttons in a pre-ride briefing. But I was a little distracted as he spoke. Although trying to pay attention to the detail, my concentration broke shortly after the engine fired into life and the GS ticked-over quietly on its sidestand. As the salesman continued his briefing I was mostly gawping at the boxer engine astonished at how quiet it was. Where were the vibration and gruffness on tickover I usually associate with this configuration of engine? I had not ridden a GS before, but I have 000's of miles riding boxer twins under my belt, a legacy from the R850, RT1100 1150 & 1200 bikes at Hendon. It's fair to say that every few years, with each new incarnation of the boxer engine; BMW achieved improvements in refinement, power output and smoothness. But I'd finished work long

before the air/water-cooled boxer was released and had yet to experience the progress



this engine promised.

Heading away from Coopers and carefully toward Testos roundabout I got the second surprise of the day! The gears were engaging slickly with just the gentlest of persuasion

and very little effort required. Mr Sales had extolled the virtues of the gearshift assist pro system, but as you now appreciate, I only took half of it in at the time, and in any case, all the sales patter counts for very little until you throw a leg over and actually experience these things on the road. Silky smooth progress, albeit fairly gently with only 100 miles displayed on the digital dash odometer, would be the order of the day. Picking up speed on A184 and joining the A194M & A1M south, I started to settle into the ride under motorway conditions. The steady pace and quiet traffic flow enabled the opportunity to assess some of the electronics in relative safety. The adjustable heated grips, although not strictly necessary on such an unseasonably warm day, were powerful and worked well enough. I liked the cruise control buttons which were ergonomically well placed on left side of handlebars, finding them easier to use than the Triumph. The fuel flow cutting in and out when required to maintain the selected speed was also smoother than my Explorer. A good clear attractive looking dash, which was only partially obscured by fitment of OE sat nav holder. So far so very good, and I looked forward to leaving the A1M on my predetermined route to enjoy the GSs performance on 'B' and unclassified roads.

During last few miles on motorway I considered altering the suspension to a 'sport' setting knowing that some challenging country lanes lay ahead. Then after giving it a bit more thought came up with a much better idea. Surely it would be more useful to ride the first half of the twisties with a 'road' configuration and then make the adjustment to give a back to back comparison on how the bike behaved in 'sport' mode. It sounded like a good plan and I congratulated myself on the cleverness of it as I left A1M at Barton Services. But as with all the best laid plans it didn't quite come to fruition. What I failed to take into account, perhaps blinded by self congratulation, was that over the next half an hour I would be so impressed with the BMW's handling, get so carried away with its composure and prowess during some eager riding, that I would forget to do anything with the suspension during all the excitement! The entire handling part of the route from Barton Services to the A19 via Northallerton was devoured in 'road' mode and I only realised my error as I joined the dual carriageway to head home. Oops never mind, what a great and capable bike, the GS was winning my affection to say the least!

As we joined the early part of rush hour traffic through Teeside, the return leg on A19 was much busier than the A1M had been, As a consequence I made more use of the acceleration to close gaps where appropriate and positioned the BMW defensively to discourage slower vehicles from moving into my lane. Plenty of power made these manoeuvres easy to achieve and the boxer engines well sorted fuel injection continued to impress. I found another bonus whilst accelerating firmly and that was the aural treat provided by an induction roar that appealed to the hooligan in me. Negatives discovered during the test? Well not much to report really. Wind buffeting at motorway speeds would require the replacement of standard screen with a touring version for my planned use of the bike. The engine compression didn't have quite the same effect as previous boxers I'd ridden and the GS would run on a bit on a closed throttle, making use of acceleration sense a bit trickier than I remember. Otherwise all good, very very good in fact. I handed the bike back to Coopers with a big smile and half a tank of unleaded consumed. A large part of me questioning "was this the one, have I discovered my new ride?" A feeling further enhanced when I got back on my well used but never abused 33500 mile Triumph for the ride home. The heavier clutch action, lumpier engine and gearbox, in comparison to the new GS, started to dwell on my mind. I almost turned around and headed back to Coopers, before coming to my senses and acknowledging it was only part one of the selection process.

One week later and the sun had made another welcomed appearance as I entered Scotswood road, Newcastle for prearranged tests on a 2017 Explorer and a Honda Crosstourer. I chatted to the Triumph sales agent telling him about my ride on the GS and how impressed I was. I voiced concern as to whether the Explorer would have received sufficient upgrades during past 5 years to compete with such an excellent motorbike. He listened, nodded wisely then gave me a 'knowing' smile, before leading us out to the parking area and introducing their metallic white and grey Explorer. Mmmm okay, initial thoughts, a new dash and a few physical changes; otherwise it looked very similar to my

bike parked a few feet away. The format was pretty much the same as it had been at Coopers, I signed my life away on their insurance form and received a briefing on the electronic wizardry that came as standard on this top of the range XRt model. This time I listened carefully, hoping not to repeat mistake of the GS test and fail to try the different riding modes. Triumph it would appear had completed a development programme to update the Explorer since my early bike had left the production line. I took it steady out of Newcastle and joined A1 North for the dual carriageway experience and an early opportunity to get used to the bike in a relatively unchallenging environment. Most noticeable at first were the light clutch and gear change which closely mirrored that of the GS. The screen adjustment, a touring version fitted as standard, was electric powered and effective in dealing with the wind buffeting on A1. Cruise control slightly improved on 2012 Explorer, but still not as smooth or intuitive as the GS. Further dual carriageway miles on A696 and then into the lanes and B roads surrounding Ponteland and Dinnington, whilst navigating my way northward as far as Kirkhale. Before finally returning to Newcastle with a brisk ride along the A696 and A1.

How did the Explorer manage its assessment and a comparison with the GS? Pretty well as it happens and I enjoyed my time with it, learning a lot about its development and appreciative of Triumph's efforts to make a good bike even better. The competence of the electronic rider aids, particularly suspension alterations on the Explorer took me a little by surprise. The cynic in me questions the worth of such devices and whether they would just prove gimmicks with hardly noticeable benefits in real world application. At least this time I remembered to use the different settings having put the GS *faux pas* behind me and yes I did notice a difference. It was easier to hold a line through bends with the sport suspension setting compared to its more relaxed comfort adjustment. The softening of the damping and increased fork travel in comfort mode caused the bike to run wider on corners when pushing hard. Though never dangerous, far from it, it did however affect progress as you were obliged to slow down to maintain decent accuracy through the bends.



The sport setting definitely allowed more progress on winding roads. Triumph has also developed ABS and traction control systems that will apparently work effectively mid bend if you have the Explorer leant over on its ear and decide you need firm brakes a bit sharpish! I decided to take their word for it and prefer to keep my progress at a maximum 8/10s trying to avoid getting into such a pickle in the first place! I've more experience of the

continual development of traction control and dynamic skid control programmes fitted to cars, so it's fair to assume similarly clever boffins are doing the same for bikes. But overall I found it difficult to separate the GS and Explorer. Both are extremely capable motorbikes and I could be happy with either taking pride of place in my garage. I handed back the Triumph knowing things were far from clear cut and the improvements developed since buying my bike had indeed made it the equal of the excellent BMW.

As I pulled up outside the Honda dealers I thought I was probably wasting their time and mine. I'd undertaken research on all three bikes prior to testing and things didn't bode well for the Crosstourer. No major developments since its launch several years ago, just a few updates and although fitted with a fly by wire throttle, the lack of cruise control and electronic rider aids just seemed to underline the distance between the Honda and its rivals. It didn't help when the demo bike, a 65 plate, was rolled out of the showroom and then straight back in to have its battery replaced! I appreciate these things can happen, but a flat battery, probably a lack of use, together with the demonstrator being a late 2015 or early 16 bike, led me to conclude that there was a lack of prospective buyers and I wasn't alone in questioning the point in taking it out! I've previously owned Hondas and enjoyed their undoubted qualities over a longer period than any other manufacturer. So in fairness I must outline the positives that became apparent as I followed the exact same test route I'd taken the Explorer along. The legendary V4 engine didn't disappoint and although a softer, bulkier feel than the others, the handling was still fun and the Crosstourer was capable of happily hustling along at advanced speeds. The build quality is right up there with the best and overall I can understand why my friends enjoy the Crosstourer experience. On a budget you could make a case for it, a fact Honda appears to acknowledge by offering some decent deals to move them out of the showroom. But it's not for me, the Crosstourers development is a couple of years behind the competition. A fact gracefully accepted by the salesman when I handed the bike back.



So there you have it, three very nice adventure motorcycles tested, then narrowed down to the best two in the final reckoning. I deliberately chose to conduct the tests on a mixed route of roads that I was familiar with so that I could concentrate as much as possible on the bikes without having to concern myself too much with which direction the road was taking me or surprises thrown up by double apex bends or other unknown hazards! The GS and Explorer were so very close in their current incarnations and I'm sure I would be happy owning and riding either. It was all going to come down to the deals being offered and then take 24 hours to consider the merits of each. I'll spare you the details of the haggling, after all it's rather vulgar to discuss money and I've already explained my inadequacies in this area.

In the end I went for another Explorer. In my view it was the Triumph that represented best value. Its list price was lower, specification higher, service intervals longer and a slightly better trade in price was offered for my bike. Together with aluminium Gregor McBoorman 'expedition' panniers thrown in, it was the seal on the deal. As I was leaving the Triumph showroom, ink barely dry on the sales contract, Kevin the salesman was busy on the telephone. "Hello, is that Thomas Cook? Hi its Kevin here, got any deals on last minute Caribbean cruises?"

Special Moments

Tim Fisher receiving his Masters (with distinction) Certificate from Mick Goodwin, Chairman. Tim got the hat trick - F1rst, Masters and RoSpa Gold - well done Tim.

