

## The Northern Ireland Bike Festival (Another Kettle Club first!)

It was at that moment, that Nick and I became aware of a presence at our side. On turning, our eyes fell upon a rather wild eyed apparition, who suddenly and loudly announced in a very pronounced, Belfast accent; “Aye yoozed to lev heer!” to which we jointly and rather meekly replied.....”pardon?” The stranger then obliged by raising his voice even further and repeating his outburst, and I could have sworn seeing a tiny trace of foam forming at the sides of his mouth, which by the way, was filled with what would be more accurately described as rusty church railings than teeth. “Ah....are you saying that *you used to live here?*” I said, prompting a vigorous nodding of the undergrowth that bedecked his head. “Um....inside, or out?” Nick gingerly enquired. “IN!” beamed the spectre, producing a grin that was unnerving to say the least and at which point he turned heel and strode off, no doubt to share this revelation with some other poor, unsuspecting souls. Most bazaar!

Perhaps now would be a good time to explain the relevance of this surreal event. You see, Dave Hewitson, myself and Nick Lowe were in the process of setting up the club stand at the Northern Ireland Bike Fest; Ireland’s premier bike show, held at the Eikon Exhibition Centre in Lisburn. The Eikon is situated on the grounds of what used to be the infamous Maze Prison and we dear reader, had apparently just encountered one of its former residents! Such was the start of what would prove to be a very enjoyable and fulfilling weekend for the club and for our members attending the show; an event that marked the club’s first official foray beyond the shores of mainland Britain. But how did the Kettle club come to be here?

Well, it all began at last year’s AGM and Rally, triggered by a suggestion from one of the tight knit Irish contingent who regularly attend our annual event, Pat Shine (Shiner). Pat put Dave Hewitson onto a chap called Clifford, who then put Dave onto the organiser of the event, a Guy called Billy Nutt. The matter was tabled at a later committee meeting and after weighing up the costs and the logistics, it was initially concluded that it would not happen on the basis that with the exception of Stafford, we could not warrant such potential expenditure of club funds on just a singular event. But Billy was very keen to have us and

following further negotiations, he eventually offered to cover half the costs of the ferry to the club and half the accommodation costs of the attending club representatives (funded from our own pockets). This was a major factor in our decision to make it happen and so the plan was hatched.

So on Wednesday 6 Feb, Dave and I loaded Shane Hill’s very special M model and Frank Nicholls’ freshly and fully restored K, into



the back of a hire van before setting off for the Super Sausage café on the A5, where most of the club's stand equipment is stored. After cramming in the necessities, the van (which should have been a *long* wheel-base.....but we'll say no more about that, shall we *Dave*?) was looking pretty full and so we decided to do the same with ourselves and tucked into a generously proportioned, SS lunch. Following our excellent repass, we then set forth to Nick's place in Burton on Trent where we would stay the night, en-route to the ferry port at Holyhead. That afternoon, we called in for a chinwag with Martin at M.E Motorcycles and a poke around his workshop and later that evening, we met up with Jason Sugden (who has recently purchased a very rare *Patroller*, more on that later) and went down the pub, which just so happened to have a curry house right next door!

The next morning, we awoke to a sky that was blacker than a Brexit forecast. It was blowing a hooly and tipping it down, so things didn't bode well for an easy crossing. The 3 of us piled into the van, cranked up the tunes and plunged into the storm hoping that we'd sufficiently secured everything in the back. As we progressed, the weather wasn't looking any better and Dave did well to keep the van on an even keel. After 2 ½ hours we reached the Welsh border, the sky suddenly cleared and the Sun popped out to greet us, bargain! An hour later and we were checking in at the ferry port, after first uploading some.....er.....'provisions'. The 3 hour ferry crossing was smooth as silk and passed quite quickly, as we each took the opportunity to catch some well needed zeds. After negotiating our way out of Dublin's rush hour traffic, we suffered the last hundred mile flog to the Premier Inn in Lisburn and were in the pub next door by 8pm. That was the 1<sup>st</sup> of several, 12 hour + days to follow.

After a hearty breakfast early in the AM, we ventured out to find the Eikon Centre, which to be fair was only a couple of miles down the road. As ever; Dave was keen to get in and set up, perhaps a little too keen because the security people weren't expecting any exhibitors until 9 and we were almost an hour early! None the less, they kindly let us in and we got down to setting up the stand. We were quite chuffed with our pitch location, as it was very near to the main entrance. Why so early on the Friday? Well unusually, the NI Bike Fest actually takes place over 3 days; opening its doors from 2pm to 9pm on the Friday and then



10 till 5 on Saturday and Sunday. Rab Hayes had already dropped off his beautiful Rizzla special the night before and we were expecting the other bikes from our Irish brethren to be pitching up as the morning progressed, giving us 7 bikes in total. We were also expecting a few more members from the mainland, arriving by air at about 10am; Shane and Julia Hill, Frank Nicholls and his missus and Ian (Brooksy) Brookes.

By 12, everyone was there, all the bikes were in place and the stand was looking resplendent! We had a couple of A's, a B, a J, K and an M (and Rab's Rizzla) with Nick's now famous sectioned engine taking centre stage. We had a couple of hours to kill until kick off, so Dave ferried some of our group to the *Titanic Experience* in nearby Belfast which by all accounts, is a 'must see' if you're ever in the area. The rest of us got some lunch down us and then attended to a little, last minute polishing and tweaking. To be honest, we were not expecting very much footfall at 2 o'clock on a Friday afternoon.....how wrong could we have been! Dave had only just got back from one of his shuttles and came in to report that there were traffic queues. The doors opened and in came a steady stream of punters, which by 6pm had turned into a flood. It very soon became apparent that there was a discernibly different vibe to the crowd that stood out from that which we are used to at similar events on the mainland. It seemed to be very much a family affair; husbands and wives with kids of all ages, in fact people of all ages. One of the local members later explained that a good many people attending this event were not actually motorcyclists, perhaps never having owned or ridden a bike in their lives. But here in Ireland, they were united by one thing; a passion for Road Racing and no doubt an adoration of the Dunlop lineage and so by association, they loved motorcycles. One thing was for certain, they were enthusiastic and very genuinely friendly. By 9pm, we had all been on our feet for pretty much 14 hours and by the time we got back to the hotel, that first Guinness didn't touch the sides I can tell you!

The following morning, we all met for breakfast, some looking slightly woolly to say the least. Poor old Brooksy was sat there with a thousand yard stare, having shared a room with Nick, who has something of a reputation for being able to rearrange furniture with his snoring! By 9 we were on the starting blocks and braced for the tidal wave that was about to befall us, and befall us it did. The stand was mobbed, with the sectioned engine's drone and coloured lights drawing in the punters like flies around the proverbial. As friendly and inquisitive as these people were, such was the strength and peculiarity of their dialect that to a man, we were initially struggling to make either head or tail out of what anyone was saying! This was made all the worse by their boundless enthusiasm for the Kettles and the fact that we were located next to a Kawasaki main dealer's stand, with blaring music and adverts playing on a constant loop! I can recall one chap approaching me with his wife or partner by his side, uttering something like; "oye luv da ol booket!" to which I responded with my fall back smile and nod of the head. Clearly seeing that I had either not heard or understood him, he persisted and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> attempt, I was able to discern that he was actually saying that *he loved the old bucket!* I then asked him if he should talk about the wife in such a way, with her being so adjacent. He blinked blankly for a few moments and then burst into laughter and jabbing a digit in the direction of the Kettle we were stood next to, said; "No, no. Da booket. We cal deez de booket, as in *Warter Booket!*" Just one of many delightful characters encountered over the weekend.

Meanwhile, we found ourselves graced at one point by the Mayor of Lisburn and Dave had his 15 seconds of fame, being interviewed by a local radio crew. Billy Nutt paid us a few visits as well, and he looked suitably impressed with our set up and seeing the popularity of our stand, he appeared to be very pleased with his 'investment'. The vast majority of punters breezing through the stand commented how good it was to see some 'proper' bikes at the show, mixed in with the anodyne ensemble of modern machines and we even got invites from organisers, to attend some other Irish shows.

Sunday was pretty much a repeat of the Saturday and before we knew it it was 5pm and silence descended, sort of like the aftermath of a storm or an artillery barrage. It only took us an hour and a half to re-load the van and we bid farewell to the Irish lads, knowing full well that we'd be seeing them again this July. As the ferry sailing was not until 1430 the next day, Nick, Dave and I could afford to let our hair down a little that night, what little of it we had left at least! Monday's journey back to Nicks was the same as that that had brought us



to the emerald isle, except in reverse. Like I said, all in all we declared the whole venture a complete success and it might well become a fixture on the club calendar again in the future, we'll see. Special thanks to the Irish crew; Rab Hayes, Freddie Douglas, Sam Eccles, Brian Guyett and Geoff McMullan for bringing their bikes along and of course to Billy Nutt, without whom this would not have happened.

### Epilogue



Before leaving Nick's place, we all called in to see Jason Sugden's *Patroller*. Let me tell you right now, that Jason is one very lucky chap because; he's probably acquired one of the finest examples of these rare beasts, not only in Europe but probably in the world! It really is in astounding condition and he's only dissembled it to give it a detail clean and he's having Martin at M. E Motorcycles, check the engine over – although with only 400 recorded miles on the clock(!) I can't see that

he's going to find much wrong! Jason will be compiling an article about his journey of ownership, in a future Flier and I can guarantee that the bike will be gracing our stand at Stafford this year; lights, siren and all!

**Skid B**