



SMOKEY'S CORNER #11

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The Cowbell Enduro and more stupid bike tricks.

One of the main reasons for selling my '58 A.J.S road bike was to get a 250cc Scrambler and ride off road events such as, The Cowbell Enduro which in the early 60's attracted lots of entries from the Bultaco, Ossa, Husquvama, Yamaha and Kawasaki dirt bikes that were becoming very popular. The only suitable machine made by A.J.S./Matchless was the newly designed M3 which already had a bad rep. for being unreliable. "Wild Bill" and "Crasher Coates" were fellow members who kept saying "Get a 250cc off road bike like we've got and let's go ride the Cowbell together!"

I had just repainted and done the engine on my AJ, so I thought now is the time to go deal, off to see Pete at British. All he had was a used 1960 M3, the price was right, and I rode it home, knobby tires and all. The first problem I had was that the battery wouldn't charge, on examination, lo and behold only one coil in the alternator to charge it! This bike had coil ignition, sooner or later you ran out of spark, when you ran the engine up tight, it would misfire, you cut back on the throttle and the engine would run smooth. As the battery slowly died you got less and less power until the engine quit altogether. I mostly solved this problem by charging the battery overnight and running the engine on a two-volt coil from a tiger cub. this arrangement was fairly reliable but now and then the engine would still play out before the day was over, so it was a good idea to ride with a buddy.

The Cowbell Enduro was run out of The Mount Baker M/C grounds where Hannigan Track is in Bellingham, on a Sunday in the Fall. This event was sanctioned by the A.M.A. and the point standings were kept by the P.N.W.M.A. I belonged to these organizations at that time. The event consisted of 100 miles of mostly logging roads around the Bellingham area, ending back at the track clubhouse, this of course took most all day to ride. The first year we rode, we all completed the run, tired but satisfied. The second year only "Crasher" and I rode, we got just about to the second checkpoint when my bike decided to act up. Crasher and I stood there sharing a mickey, deciding what to do when a "HARLEY RIDER" on a "TOPPER", yes, they made scooters, rode up.

We talked some, it turned out he rode this scooter because it had an automatic transmission of sorts (variable belt drive like a snowmobile!) he had a wooden leg! He volunteered to take us to the checkpoint. We finished the mickey, left my Matchless in the ditch and went with him. The checker was a friendly sort with his own bottle (which we shared). When he was done, he took us back to the Clubhouse. We got my truck and went back to pick up our bikes, at least I was able to find my way there, loaded the bikes and head back. Oh! look we said there's a bike parked at a pull-off, we'll do the owner a favour and take his bike to the Clubhouse too.

When we arrived, we unloaded the bike, had our chili, and headed home. When I went to the next P.N.W.M.A. meeting (they used to be held in the basement of Bills Tavern in Blaine), I walked in the door to be greeted with peals of laughter by the Bellingham members. I asked the cause of their merriment, they replied "That bike you brought to the Clubhouse wasn't in the run at all, the owner was in the bush relieving himself when you loaded his bike in your truck and took off." He reported his bike as stolen! It turned out O.K. they returned his bike to him, and everyone had a good laugh.

The third time we rode the Cowbell I had sold my Matchless and having no suitable bike, "Crasher" offered me his "Flying Flea". This consisted of a souped-up Tiger Cub in a stripped-down rigid frame, no lights, no muffler, no license plate, and worst of all no air cleaner! (in Bellingham the cops let you run like that!). The other problem was a very small gas tank off a Whizzer. I think no problem, we strapped a gas can on the back! Off to the track, we sign up, pay our money and take our chances, we're off!

Half mile down the road, what's this? RAILWAY TRACKS!! They never did that before! No problem, you just get going 30- 40-m.p.h. and your suspension irons out the bumps from the ties as you ride between the rails. Not on a rigid frame you don't! I have to make my way along the side of the tracks in the loose ballast rock, everyone including "Crasher" leaves me. I get to the first check, the checker says "I was just going to leave, "you're the last bike" "you're telling me?" I mutter as I head off following the arrows. When I arrive at the second check - no one there. Great, now what, continue on or go back?

Continue on says my stupid side, so there I am tearing along in the middle of nowhere, when I glance over my shoulder, my gas can has fallen off! Nothing to do but go back and find it, more time lost, there it is, pour the gas in my tank, on and on I ride. It dawns on me, I don't see any more arrows, but there's tire tracks. Suddenly my engine stops, no gas. There I am I know not where, I coast downhill, now I have to push the bike up hill - well lucky it's light. But wait. What do I hear, a motorcycle, the sound is getting nearer, there he is, what's this, a shocking PINK M/C? It's a B.S.A. Starlite, very similar to a 50cc. Honda step thru. Need gas, no problem, we just pick up his bike and pour some into mine! The rider tells me he borrowed this machine from a dealer friend in Seattle to ride the Enduro, also he doesn't know where we are either!



Off we go, find some arrows and arrive on a paved road, down which we find a store, but no gas. The storekeeper tells us gas is available out on the highway.

I opt for gas, my savior decides to follow the arrows. I had noticed my throttle getting harder and harder to turn, now it got much worse. I needed both hands to turn it! Presently I arrived at the gas station located on old "99" south of Bellingham on the flat section just before Mount Vernon. I took the carb off, the slide is jammed with fine mud, remember? no air cleaner! Carb cleaned, tank of gas, damn it's almost dark, remember? no lights! Oh well, clutch in, into gear, I open the throttle, the slide sticks, shut it off and free the slide, restart, now what? lots of slack in the cable??? Oh no! the throttle stop fell out when the slide stuck open!! Stop the engine, look for the lost stop, no luck, adjust the cable, the best I can get is about half throttle. Nothing left to do but head back to the clubhouse. Luckily for me the new highway (I-5) had just been put through the area, again luckily for me it wasn't open yet, so I had the dubious honour of christening the road through to the north side of Bellingham, in the dark, no lights, no muffler, no license plate.

When I got to the road that led to the clubhouse luck was with me again, no traffic. When I reached the Clubhouse, I was greeted by NO ONE! Even my truck was gone! Gee! maybe they're out searching for me. What now? There's a house across the road, the lights are on, so over I went, knocked on the door, told the occupant my story, to which he replied, "Come on in I know who to call, you hungry? have some supper!" I eat, he phones, someone will be over shortly. Back at the Clubhouse, someone arrives opens up, are they looking for me? No, everyone went home! No sooner do I say my trucks gone, in the driveway it comes with "Crasher" at the wheel. "I just carne back



to see if you were bere before I went out looking some more." Aside from him having to hotwire it (I had the keys), he also pried off my locking gas cap! Oh well, load the bikes and head for home.

The fourth time I rode the Cowbell, I brought a 1947 Harley 74 Panhead engine and trans mounted in a B.S.A. frame complete with the footshift conversion! Fellow Club member Gary and his Triumph accompany me. We sign up, Wow! 132 riders, biggest year so far. Gary's disappeared, then he's back "My brother took my bike for a ride and lost the footshift lever, we can't find it so you're on your own.

"Well here I go again", riding last because of the delay. Out the Clubhouse gate and up the road half a mile, what the hell?? there's the arrow pointing for a right turn?? into a three-foot-deep ditch and up a six-foot embankment on the other side!! NO way man, not on this bike. I hear another bike coming, its Gary, with a pair of vicegrips for a shift lever. I said, "look at this", 132 bikes have churned this trail into mud a foot deep, not only that, but the trail disappeared up a steep slope after crossing 40-50 ft of flat area strewn with boulders 4- 5 ft in diameter. But look! there's a lone motorcycle standing upright in the mud, no rider in sight, we should check this out, the rider may be injured. "What do you mean?" scoffs Gary "a half mile ride, down into a three ft. ditch and up a six ft. embankment then maybe ten ft. farther, how can a person hurt himself doing that?" "Well," I reply, "let's look anyway" Across the ditch and up the bank we scramble, no sign of anyone, all is quiet, I call out "Anyone here?" A voice replies-"Yeah I'm here" I say "Where?" "Over here" comes the weak reply About eight ft. from the bike behind a large rock lay a young lad flat on his back spread-eagled in the mud!!! "You OK?" I ask. He replies "Yeah I'm OK, I'm just resting!!"

He assures us he's OK, so we leave him "resting". "Now what?" Asks Gary. I reply "I know my way around here pretty well, why don't we go to some of the checkpoints to see what's happening?" Off we go, I make a shift, open the throttle engine goes, bike doesn't, "now what?" Stop and look, the main link on the rear chain has come apart. Oh great! no spare, its Sunday, what to do? "Simple" says I, "I will just go to that house over there (the only one in sight) and ask them if they have one."

Gary gives me a strange look but says nothing. I knock on the door, an older guy answers, I tell him what I need - he says, "Just a minute" and reappears with a main link in his hand, "Will this fit?" "Yes" said I. "I had a B.S.A. years ago and that's all I have left; you can have it." I thank him, we return to our bikes- and we're off. Smokey sez "Ask and ye shall receive!"