



SMOKEY'S CORNER #2

Al Greaves

Royal City Rockets Motorcycle Club and my AJ 250

Bill, a friend of mine, had a party where I was introduced to a member of the Royal City Rockets Motorcycle Club. We got talking and he told me that he and some other members were laying out the Ralph Pearson Memorial Run through the back roads of Surrey. Ralph Pearson was the only member and/or motorcycle rider ever to die while competing in a Field Meet! He fell on his head in such a way that an artery pulled out of his heart, and he bled to death.

I went with the Club members and helped lay out the run. I was invited to the Club meeting that Sunday evening. At the meeting I was told that if I wanted to join, I had to (1) be recommended by a Club Member. (2) Attend the Club meetings every Sunday evening for six months. (3) Be voted in by a unanimous vote of all members present. This I did and six months later I became a member of the Royal City Rockets Motorcycle Club

The Rockets started in 1938 and had their own clubhouse in New Westminster (near the 22nd St. Skytrain station). Ralph Wienstein was/is the perpetual Treasurer. When the club became inactive, the club property was sold and the money invested so the interest paid for two Banquets a year, FREE, forever!!!

Very few members were full time road riders like me, most road in field, scrambles and trails meets plus four or five road rides a year. You must understand that motorcycles of the time were multipurpose machines. It wasn't uncommon for a rider to ride his bike to the meet, compete in it, (less headlight, mirror & muffler) then ride home or to the club meeting afterwards. All this on a Sunday!

The club gravitated towards fewer and fewer "roadable" bikes and more smaller specialty bikes. Of course, the British lagged far behind, so the market was taken over by Yamaha, Bultaco, Ossa, Husquavama etc. (another few nails in the coffin of the British M.C. Industry).

I repainted my AJS white with a white rolled and pleated seat and rebuilt the engine. The centre main bearing needed 30 thou. taken off and the conrods 20 thou. This was unusual because these engines were notorious for breaking crankshafts if the mains were badly worn. Shortly after, I traded my A.J. for a later model 250cc. Matchless scrambles model. The engine was physically similar to the 500 singles of previous years appearing to be unit construction but the transmission was made in a cylindrical shape and clamped to the back of the engine so it could be rotated to tighten the primary chain.

Another so called improvement was the alternator. My battery kept going dead, so I took the cover off the alternator and lo and behold only three coils were on the stator instead of six. Two coils operate the lights, and one coil was supposed to charge the battery (what a laugh). This caused another problem at high revs the engine misfired. I cured this problem by installing a coil off a 200cc. Tiger Cub, this operated at two volts, so stuffing six volts through it gave me a hot spark. By charging the battery every night I was able to ride back and forth to work.

This, so called, light-weight had the same front end on it as the 500's had. Off-road high-speed riding, especially downhill, was hairy because the bike would swap ends with no warning and I'd fall off. Riding on the road I'd get the front end off the ground on a second gear shift. I always wondered what would happen if a Ceriani front end was on it. Hard usage caused the primary chain to stretch, hooking the sprockets and ruining a new chain in no time. To fix this I put a duplex sprocket set and chain of a 650 BSA.

Next problem. I hit a rock competing in a mud run. This broke the rear brake backing plate in half. I replaced this with a sprocket and drum off a 500c.c. model. This enabled me to run a 54 tooth cheater sprocket on the rear and still do 50 MPH! I rode this bike in a lot of runs for a few years and finally sold it about 1962. A few years passed before I got into motorcycles again. The reader of this and other articles I've written must bear in mind that motorcycling in these years was much different than now. For instance, you could ride all day and you were lucky if you saw another rider. Any you did, you probably knew. Helmets were not seen. Cars of the day were underpowered compared to cars of today, remember this when- you read my next installment entitled Stupid car tricks/stupid bike tricks.