



SMOKEY'S CORNER #4

Al Greaves

Riding Funeral Escort Service

In the fall of 1969, I got a call from a member of the Rockets, wanting to know if I was interested in riding escort for funerals in Vancouver (motorcycle supplied). I said "Sure, I'll give it a try!" I made arrangements to pick up the bike in Kerrisdale a few days later.

They had 3 new BSA's with two amber flashing lights facing forward and a tiny rotating light on the rear fender. They gave us Vancouver Police type helmets, safety vests and whistles. The bike that I got had such a stiff clutch that I had to use all of my strength to pull the lever in.

We arrived at the funeral home shortly before the service ended. The "Expert" told me that we had permission from Vancouver City Police to speed ahead and block intersections so that the procession could pass without a break. The first bike would stop vehicular and pedestrian cross traffic at the intersection. When the last funeral vehicle passed you would fire up your bike and ride to the front of the procession. The three bikes would leapfrog like this until we reached our destination.

So up Powell Street at 50MPH, along Hastings at 60MPH and down Boundary at 80MPH! The clutch cable either got stiffer or my hand got weaker. I ended up pulling the lever in with both hands to get going and shifting on the fly. I complained to the "Expert", who said "Yeah. They had a lot of trouble with the English cables breaking, so they (Deeley's) made them up out of Harley cable." So, I said "Did anyone think of oiling them?"

When we were having a coffee after the escort, the Expert said "My transmission is getting hard to shift, like the last time I rode it. I just got it back from Deeley's this morning." After coffee we went to start our bikes and the Expert's wouldn't get into gear. He phoned Deeley's for help while we returned our bikes to the office.

We headed along 12th Avenue, the other rider in the outer lane and me in the curb lane. When we caught up to a car in the curb lane, he stayed beside me instead of making room for me to move over and pass. I said to myself "I'll show him how to do this." I switch lanes with him. When we caught up to the next car, I moved to the left, he pulled in, we passed, and he moved back into the curb lane. Great.

Just past Oak Street, the car that we were approaching, saw a child wailing to cross. I pull over to the left, the driver of the car jammed his brakes on in a panic stop and my buddy ran right into the back of him. This bent the forks right back into the frame and my buddy slid up the tank as I watched in disbelief. No damage to the car. We dragged the BSA off the street. He got on behind me and we headed back to the office. The Boss says, "Where are the other bikes?"

He tells us that he has a \$250 deductible on the bikes because that's what it costs to fix the front end.

The next time I got called the Boss said that the "Expert" won't be there and that it will be a 2 bike escort. Would I mind picking up the bike at Deeley's since the transmission is fixed (We hope!). "No problem." When I picked it up I realized that it was a Spitfire, not a clunker like the other two. The funeral escort went off without a hitch.

The next time I got a call the Boss said "Uh, the other bike isn't repaired yet. Would you mind riding your bike! I'll pay you extra." I said "OK". So, there I am on my '67 Matchless doing 60MPH on Hastings and 80MPH on Boundary.

On my last time out, the other rider turns out to be Philip Funnel. His comment at the end of the ride is "Not very dignified, is it!" I decided that although it was interesting, the pay was lousy. I voiced my opinion on pay day and didn't get called again.

The other rider "Crash" said "wow, this is great, I just love it and I get paid too!"

Through a fellow Rocket Member, I heard that "Crash" was at a red light, decided that it was taking too long, turned on his lights and rode through. A Vancouver Cop saw him and gave him a ticket. Big laugh all around. Shortly after the service folded.