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~~Dear Pascal,~~

just a few lines to let you know
my new address — I can't remember when you
said you were coming over to England, but
if you are ever in this area, please contact
me and pay ~~me~~ a visit if you can.

I have included a photo-copy of
the magazine article I have written for one of
our magazines — "Motorcycle Enthusiast" —
you're in it too!

Since my holiday, I have sold the
Ducati — it has been exported to Japan!! Now
I have a Caverda 750 SF, a super bike.

If you do come over, please
get in touch — it would be good to see
you — thanks again, bye for now.

Andy Ward.

The hazzards of Dukes

by Andy Ward

Yes readers, the Editor has let another D*c*t based article slip through! To anyone who owns or has owned a Duke, certain aspects of this little story will no doubt, ring true. To anyone who hasn't owned a Duke, don't worry — your time will come!

It was John's idea really — I just agreed to go with him. It did seem like a good idea at the time. For about 2 years we'd both been talking about "doing the Bol". This time firm plans had to be made — 1983 would see us partaking of this glorious event. I think (I know!) now that our stumbling block was our own insistence to do it on a couple of Dukes. My own bike, a rebuilt 1962 250cc Daytona was not quite run in, prior to this momentous journey, with about 600 miles on the engine since it left Rick Walkers capable hands. John's bike, a recently acquired 450 Desmo, circa '70s had no seat the day before leaving and in the end sported a neat upholstered plank as a last ditch attempt to provide some comfort.

John first had to come down to Corby from Manchester and on arrival at my house the only problem encountered was a hole burnt in the luggage where it had been rubbing on the back tyre, promptly put right by

an extra bungee. A cup of tea was thrown down his throat and we set off South with me leading on the Daytona. It was a good ride down, running at a steady 55-60mph for most of the way. The ferry didn't sail until ten o'clock and we made the outskirts of Southampton just as it was getting dark and the rain started. We pulled in to a petrol station to top up the tanks, quite literally and as John's lights had been intermittent it was decided that he had better stick close behind me, but after losing each other once at a set of traffic lights, we managed to get to the P. & O. Terminal.

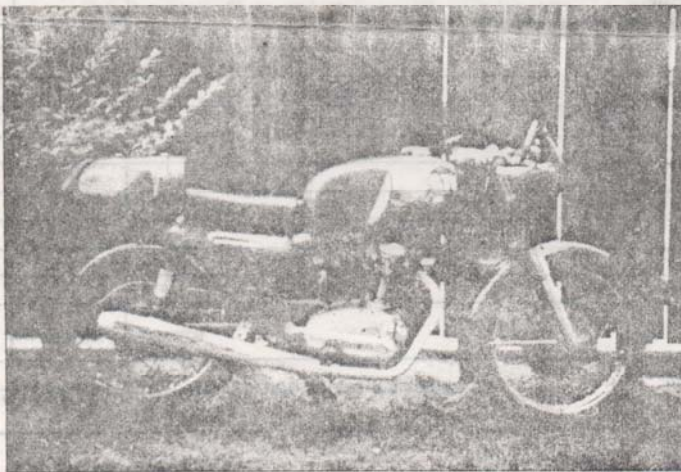
It's at this point, if the Editor will forgive me, that I think it's necessary to mention "B*K*" Magazine — after all, it was courtesy of them that we were sailing over to France so cheaply. An issue of theirs had carried a small piece on Rory Simson's "Simson Mechanique" Shop, down in the South of France at Beziers — not too far from where we were heading. He seemed to have a fondness for Dukes, and was quoted as saying he would provide a Pernod for anybody who turned up at his place on a Ducati — a double, if it was a single! Well, that absolutely clinched it — free drinks

for both of us!

After sorting out passports and tickets, John and I joined the queue — a brand new Yamaha 350, couple of Guzzi's, Honda "Battlestar Galactica" Goldwing, and at the head of the line — a Duke!! Its owner came wondering up the line of bikes — his eyes lit up when he saw our two Dukes. "Hey, you haven't got a spare crank, have you — mine bust near Oxford". It was Rory Simson and we were still in England! The trip over was spent socializing in the bar with Rory, the Yam rider and a couple of other bods, including Julian Ryder from B*K* Magazine. His parting words to John as we untied the bikes next morning at Le Havre, were "brave boys".

As unfortunately, we hadn't a spare crank to fix Rory's bike, he asked if we could tow him into Le Havre, where he with the bike could get the train to Paris, and then on his own continue south on the French Supertrain, for he was supposed to be riding an old Norton in one of the pre Bol races. Using a piece of lashing rope, John towed Rory and I followed to provide lights, as it was only 7.30 am and still dark. The roads were wet and varied from tarmac to cobbles, with rail lines thrown in here and there. As it was my first time abroad, I also had to contend with riding on the "wrong" side of the road.

After leaving Rory at the station, we set off, John leading, as he had been abroad before. It was light now and had stopped raining, but we still had those French drivers to contend with. After a while, I realised that the majority of them were mad and the only way to beat them was to join them. Once out of town the roads improved, good surfaces and comparatively empty, allowing a good pace to be kept up. We had chosen relatively minor roads, compared to most of the others going to the Bol, planning on taking 2 days or so to get down there, watch the race, then head back. Well, we'd both got Duke singles and they aren't exactly Motorway cruisers so the twistier the roads, the better. Out of Le Havre, we



The author's non standard 1962 250 Daytona

turned off at the Pont de Tancarville. There was no toll for motorcycles, so we nipped straight through and over the Bridge, high above the Seine wide and flat as it flows into the sea.

More rain made us stop and don the waterproofs, but it wasn't heavy and didn't spoil the riding — must have been the Dukes! A second stop to check on our route was the start of our problems. For some reason I stopped the engine and then tried to re-start, first by kicking (hot work in leathers and waterproofs), then by pushing (even hotter!). OK, what's the most obvious, plenty of petrol and it was getting through. Next, the plug, yes a spark, but it seemed a bit weak. Check all fuses, OK, John suspected the coil, it was as far as I know the original one, so that was a distinct possibility. I continued to try and trace the fault, while John scooted off down the road to try and find a garage or bike shop. I had no luck and neither did John, it was mid-day and everything seems to stop. He had found a shop in Brionne, which sold Mobylettes, but it was closed. We had stopped on a square in the middle of a small town, and the inevitable cafe was open, so we decided on a coffee and a chat on what to do next.

For the second time that day, John's Desmo played the role of tow-truck and we set off for Brionne, with the hope that the shop would be open by the time we got there and able to help. The sun was now out and we steadily plodded along, the Desmo's megga thumping out its

deep note. I had wrapped the rope around the bars a couple of times and held on to the end and as we rode through a small village the road gently curved left, I saw John put out his left hand to indicate, or so I assumed, and I naturally did the same thing. The rope snaked off the bars and disappeared before I realised what I had done. It followed John down the road as he leaned into a right hander and vanished from my view. It was then that I remembered the big Saviem truck that had been trailing us for a while, I didn't really want to become a bonnet mascot, so after a quick look in the mirror to confirm it was still there, I decided to do something. As luck would have it, some kind sole had seen fit to have a ramp set into the kerb at that point, obviously intended for access to his garage, I decided to use it for a quick exit, out of the path of that large (and getting larger) truck. I sat on the side, laughing, as John came thumping back — he hadn't realised I had gone until he was a couple of hundred yards down the road. The rest of the journey to Brionne was without further mishap and the shop was open and in rather basic French, John tried to make the woman in the shop understand that we wanted a coil, the Mobylettes in the shop appeared to have what we needed as the Duke was still 6 volt but unfortunately the shop carried no spares. She did, however, drag out a local newspaper and pointed out an advert for a shop a few kilometers down the road that dealt with Honda, Yamaha and Moto

Guzzi. That, we decided, seemed like a safe bet, so once again John set off to try and get something to cure the problem.

While he was away, I decided another coffee was called for with something to eat as it was now early afternoon and besides, there was nothing else to do. Fortunately, the cafe was opposite the Market Square, so I could park the "dead Duke" in sight and relax for a while. During this time I started to wonder if it really was the coil, the spark was weak and once or twice it wasn't there at all, even when it was the bike wouldn't start. I had been warned about Ducati electrics, especially the early 6 volt stuff, but even though I'd had trouble initially, a replacement rectifier seemed to have cured things. Only the day before we left Southampton, I had been over to Wisbech to pick up a few necessary bits. Previous to that, I managed to attend the DOC rally at Quanton and in addition it had carried me to and from work for a couple of weeks. I was beginning to wonder if it was the rectifier, that mysterious little box that sits under the seat and "does things". Rick Walker had previously told me how to check the alternator output and that was OK. The battery was now flat but was new and the coil was actually pushing out a spark. New points, condenser and spark plug seemed to cover all potential areas, so it had to be the rectifier. It's the centre of the electrical system and could not be repaired or replaced, especially in France. Admittedly, if



The three "Dukes" at Le Havre station

all this had happened down South, I am sure Rory would have been able to sort things out, but we were only about 80 kilometers into France.

John returned, but had had no luck. We were both tired, fed up and as the weather didn't look too good it was decided not to camp that night. There was a small hotel across the road from where we stood, so I wheeled the Duke into the courtyard at the back. John followed and in yet more "basic" French, we booked in, washed, rested and devoured a fantastic meal. The next morning was spent methodically going through everything we could think of, but by mid-day we still had not managed to get the Duke running. We had to make a decision, John was not too keen on towing, thinking that the clutch might not stand up to the strain of two bikes, two blokes, plus all the luggage. I wasn't keen on the thought of being towed either and as the Desmo had only one "seat", we decided the best thing to do was for John to take the gear and me to hitch back. The owner of the hotel was a bike man himself, but wouldn't swap his Yamaha V twin for the Dukes, he did, however, offer to store my bike until I could return to collect it.

John set off for Le Havre on the Desmo and I set off on foot, getting my first lift after about a mile. Although my French was worse than John's and he had done most of the communicating until then, I still managed to strike up a conversation of sorts. My first lift was from a guy in his fifties, who managed to tell me, in basic English, that he had once owned a "Norton". After he dropped me off, I continued trudging along starting to wish I'd brought some plimsoles and not just my boots, when an MZ Supa 5 screeched to a halt. The rider had seen the helmet I was carrying and wondered if he could help. His English was good and I briefly explained the situation, he offered to take me to the bridge at Tancarville, probably half the total distance of the journey. I clambered onto his already overloaded bike and we set off, bouncing along in the true MZ fashion. On reaching the bridge he stopped for about 10 minutes explaining that any motorcyclist passing would stop to see if they could help. None actually came by in the time as we chatted, exchanging names and addresses. Thanks again. Pascal Lorridan — I'm in your debt.

After walking across the bridge, I managed to get a lift in the ubiquitous 2CV right into Le Havre. I didn't actually realise how far the P & O terminal was especially in motorcycle

boots! Half a dozen bikes sat in a row at the terminal gates, with as many various owners. The sight of John and his Desmo was both welcoming and reassuring, and we sat down to recount our respective journeys. When the ticket office opened, we explained why there was only one bike and we were five days early, but no one seemed to mind they just smiled.

Waiting in the queue for the ferry, we got talking to various riders who had been touring, two in particular, Andy and Rick from Oxford, on a Honda 550 FII and a Ducati Darmah. They had left a third rider in France with a broken leg and a bent Kawasaki, after a "slight" mishap. The journey back to Southampton was spent mostly in the bar, swapping stories and generally relaxing and after we had explained to Andy and Rick our little escapade, they offered to give me and my luggage a lift up to Oxford. No prizes for guessing which bike I went on, the Ducati Darmah. John continued to Manchester, while I caught various buses to Northampton and then on Corby. I arrived home on the Satur-

day, at about the same time the Bol would have started.

Although it may seem that our three day holiday had been a bit of a flop, neither John nor myself were totally disappointed. All the people we had met had been friendly, interesting and as far as I was concerned it had opened by eyes to touring abroad, but not on my Duke.

I now really need two seats, so it will probably have to make way for something a bit bigger. I've also learnt not to trust anything that has "Ducati Electronica" printed on it, so by the time you have read this a 12v conversion will probably have taken place.

As a post script to this little story, I went back in November armed with all the necessary components to by-pass the existing system and fetched the Duke home. Would you believe the damned thing started first kick! I even managed to make the mid-day ferry back with quite literally seconds to spare as they were about to raise the loading ramp.

John has suggested a weekend at the TT this year, not so far to push back.



A dead "Duke" in a French market square