

## 5. Men of Substance – 1

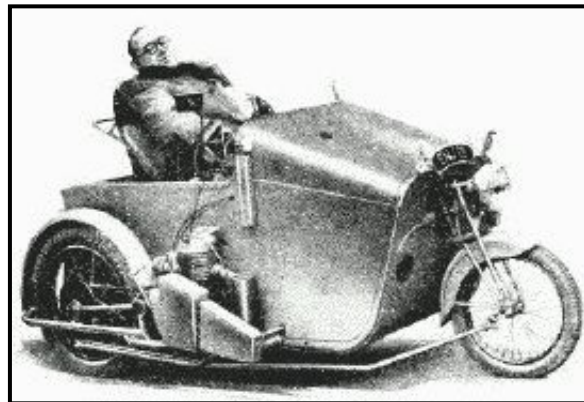
When we are young and in the prime of our youth our lives pass so fast that events come and go quickly like today's daily News. No sooner one event passes, another leaps up to replace it. Only the more dramatic or the humorous for the most part will stick with us. I recently discovered and read an old magazine article written in March 1992 to commemorate the anniversary of the tragic loss of Mike Hailwood. It triggered in me an old memory that I thought I had completely forgotten with the passage of time.

Back around 1964/5 I was a member of a UK motorcycle club called The Southend & District MCC. Although I never met them, Bill Ivy and Dave Bickers were also registered members of the same club in compliance with an official UK ACU racing license ruling at that time. The ACU (Auto Cycle Union) was similar to the US. AMA (American Motorcycle Association) in governing all forms of motorcycle sport. We were treated to many a fascinating Club Talk by some quite prominent people of the day such as Charles Mortimer Sr. and Wal Phillips, (a veteran cinder-track speedway rider who was one of the first to develop aftermarket fuel injectors for motorcycles in the UK.), to name but a couple. An Avon Tire representative once came and gave a full presentation on the then newly developing technology of 'Avon Cling' High Hysteresis Tire Compounds.

Bert Greeves, founder and owner of Greeves Motorcycles, was also a highly prominent figure along with his long-time friend and business associate, Derry Preston-Cobb, who ran the Greeves subsidiary of Invacar, an independent invalid vehicle factory located next door to the main Greeves factory on One Tree Hill, in Thundersley, Essex. Derry appeared one evening to give a talk about his invalid carriage that he warned, "Was rather special". (See photo below)

Below I am inserting a fascinating insight from an old and dear friend, Geoff Barr, who was a highly successful 'privateer' motorcycle racer aboard his home brewed Crescent-engined special and Yamaha TZ350. He worked for several years with Greeves Motorcycles in their development group at the Thundersley, Essex facility and competed on the Isle of Man several times:

*Here's a couple of interesting things about Greeves and Derry Preston Cobb you may know already but here goes anyway. Bert and Derry were buddies in the early '50's and Bert made a one off invalid carriage for Derry. This developed into the Invacar Company. When I worked at Greeves in 1969 to 1972, Greeves were making their own motors - the Silverstone picture you have shows the RAS Silverstone with the Villiers engine. Later ones first had a Greeves alloy barrel on the Villiers bottom end and then the RDS (1967 which I have similar to Griffon but with a different bore and stroke) had the complete engine designed and built by Greeves.*



**Photo of Derry Preston-Cobb in his early Invacar - He was paralyzed himself**

*Charles Mortimer Jr. was actually sponsored by Greeves about this time together with Dave Bickers. Reg Orpin was sponsored on the 350 Greeves "Oulton". Any road up, Greeves started making the Griffon motocross bikes in '68 or '69 with a new motor, and when I was there, Derry bugged Bert to install a full blown 380 Griffon motor into his invalid chair - he had the old type with real motorcycle wheels - didn't want anything to do with the "plastic pigs" with the Steyre Daimler Puch motor. This was quite a powerful monster with about 42 to 45 BHP and Bert resisted. Finally Bert gave in and had a 250 Griffon engine installed "only" 32 BHP. Anyway, Derry became known to the local 'fuzz' for blasting down the Southend arterial in his contraption at 100mph plus with a cloud of Castrol R smoke following him and pulling wheelies as he started off. Remember, Derry was a Quadriplegic and control was a bit of a problem, and so the cops several times found Derry upside*

down unhurt in a ditch at the side of the road laughing his head off.

Charles Mortimer Sr., a famed TT Rider and Champion, founded and ran the Brands Hatch Motorcycle Racing School in Kent. (He had a son, Charles Jr. who also raced motorcycles with great success during the '70's) Charles Sr. came to our club one evening as a celebrity guest speaker and he



Typical Greeves Silverstone Racer

recounted how he had first come to meet Bill Ivy, who at that time had become a local legend himself riding a Geoff Monty/Dudley Ward Triumph 500cc Twin called appropriately, a 'Monard'. It was prepared by Dudley Ward (a famous Triumph engine builder and tuner) and a special frame designed by them to meet the physical size requirements of the diminutive Bill. It was I believe, on this machine that Bill Ivy first contested for the British 500cc National Championship. Most of the club members were like me, just regular working guys who loved motorcycles, dreamed of racing them, but never

had the finances to fulfill these dreams. To attend the Brands Hatch Racing School was not a cheap thing to

do, although they provided Greeves Silverstone racers to ride, there was still the question of providing all the racing gear, leathers, boots etc., and then of course there was the fee for the tuition. Rex Butcher I believe was the head race Instructor at that time.

After forty years I cannot quote Charles Mortimer Sr. verbatim but the gist of his story is as follows, I hope I can succeed in at least recapturing the essence of it. (I'm sure someone out there will put me right if I go too far astray, at least I hope they will.) He was not specific about what year it happened but I would surmise that it must have been somewhere between the mid to late fifties.

He (Charles Sr.) was driving his car (A Jaguar I believe) around the twisting roads near Maidstone, Kent when suddenly he was overtaken, just before a sharp bend in the road, by 'some crazy young kid on a rather shabby looking Triumph twin'. He barely made the cut in front of Charles Sr. before squeezing back in to miss an oncoming car, cranked it over into the bend and disappeared out of sight at a high rate of knots. Enraged, Charles Sr. said he figured that 'the kid' was probably headed for a famous biker hang-out cafe a few more miles up the road (I cannot remember the name of it, maybe it was Johnsons) where the local motorcycle lads used to meet. Pulling into the motorcycle-filled parking lot of the cafe he hunted down the bike, searching for the warmest engine and found it. Taking note of its number plate, he went into the cafe and loudly asked who the owner of the motorcycle bearing that plate number was. After a brief silence, a little fellow in a leather jacket rose slowly to his feet and with a cocky swagger replied, "I am! What's it to you and why are you asking? Who are you anyway?" Still angry, Charles Sr. introduced himself and underlined that he was the head of the local Brands Hatch Racing School.

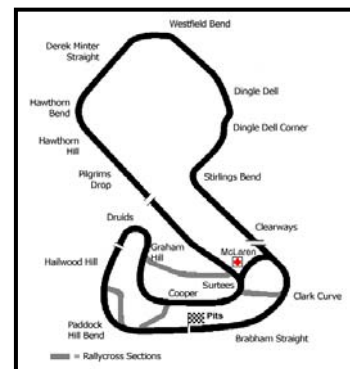


Lil' Bill - - - Bill Ivy

He went on to reprimand the young man

for his reckless behavior on the road and told him that if he wanted to ride like that he should come join his Racing School and restrict his riding habits to the racetrack instead of killing himself or others on public roads. He also charged the young fellow with giving motorcyclists in general a bad name. "Assuming of course you have balls to match the size of your mouth", he added, - - - or words to that effect.

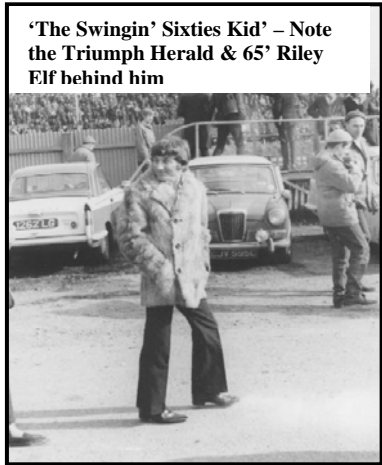
Publicly embarrassed in front of his motorcycle peers, the young man



Bill's Favorite Circuit - Brands

was unrepentant and fired right back. He defended his overtaking action stating that he knew exactly what he was doing and that there was more than adequate distance to justify it. As for the Racing School challenge, he protested that this was only for the rich kids and was right out of his financial capability. His anger subsiding, Charles Sr. said that there was something about 'the kid's' demeanor that he could not help but admire. He went on to tell him that if he could put his body where his mouth was and just show up at the Racing School that he would take care of the rest for gratis: he also told him not to worry about the cost or the equipment and to bring what he could.

The very next weekend, the young man did show up on his tatty looking bike at the Brands Hatch Racing School. Somehow, they fixed him up with some ill-fitting leathers (Bill was only 5ft 3 inches tall) and out he went with the other race students under the tutelage of the Racing School's instructor, Rex

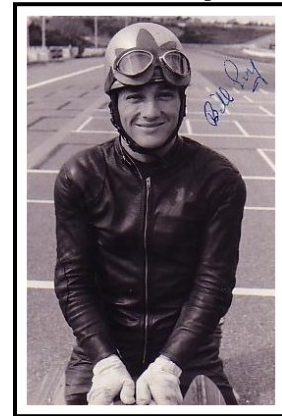


**'The Swingin' Sixties Kid' – Note the Triumph Herald & 65' Riley Elf behind him**

Butcher. Charles Sr. went on to recall that after several laps, where the group of 'student riders' followed the instructor and were explained racing lines, braking markers and track ethics etc., the instructor pulled out and left the 'pack' to carry on under their own steam.

The stopwatches were started to monitor their progress. As they gained confidence, they were lapping faster lap by lap until predictably, it turned into a road race. At the head of it rode this tiny little fellow, the smallest guy out there. Then he started to pull away from the rest, turning lap times close to the Racing School lap records. Charles S. decided to pull them in before someone crashed. It was from this beginning that Charles Mortimer Sr. said he introduced Bill Ivy, at his own expense, to the world of motorcycle road-racing. Bill went on to become sponsored by the Chisholm's,

which later led to the relationship with Geoff Monty and Dudley Ward. We watched 'Little Bill's' progress every chance we could at Brands, dicing with the likes of Derek Minter, John Cooper, Dave Degens, Dave Croxford and the rest of the great scratch riders of that day. He eventually won his first 500cc British National Championship aboard Tom Kirby's Matchless G50. His numerous victories finally led to his being spotted and signed up by Yamaha where he joined Phil Read. His unforgettable dices with Phil Read aboard their works Yamahas became legendary. We could not afford to follow them across the world but listened in to radio broadcasts whenever possible and waited for the weekly Motorcycle News reports.



**'The Mighty Atom'**

Bill went on to win his first (and only) world 125cc Championship in 1967 riding a works-entered Yamaha. He had a memorable win on 'The Island' in the 1968 250cc Lightweight race after severely



injuring his foot when it became trapped between the bike and the road during cornering. His premature death in practice for the East German Grand Prix at the Sachsenring circuit aboard a 4 cylinder 2 cycle Jawa in 1969 was a terrible and sad tragedy. As was common in two stroke engines at that period in time, it seized. (I also recall speculation at the time by many that it was not the engine that had seized, it was the gearbox.) At only 27 years old, thus ended the life and career of 'Little Bill' Ivy, a small man with a big, big heart, whose full potential could be not be fully recognized or achieved in such a short lifetime.

**This photo from 1967 on the left was kindly provided by Elizabeth McCarthy. (Believed to have been taken in the paddock at Assen, Dutch Grand Prix)**

**From left to right: Mike Hailwood, Bill Ivy and Phil Read**



**Note:**

*With the benefit of hindsight, I have been informed by a friend living in Holland with considerable racing involvement that had Bill Ivy been wearing a modern day crash helmet with extended protection and padding that he almost certainly would have survived his fatal crash. Rob*

**Thank you Rob van der Vegt.**

The photo to the right is of Bill Ivy's Type 273 350cc Jawa 2 Cycle 4 Cylinder and the photo was found on a Dutch website.

Once again, with the benefit of hindsight I am further informed by Rob van der Vegt that as suspected, the Jawa engine did not seize, it was the gearbox.



I must now leave 'Memory Lane' and make my return to 'Reality Drive', hoping that I may not have lost my way during the trip. One other thing I'm bringing back with me from my trip is the now full realization that these things are once again again memorable only because they are about what history now testifies as being, 'Men of Substance'.

Special thanks to the following people:

Elizabeth McCarthy, Geoff Barr, Tony Cox, Rob van der Vegt, Nigel Wynne and Jerry Matson

(2,134 words)