

## Motorbikes and cars

**M**y first motorbike was a Francis Barnett two-stroke, which didn't like hills and tended to stop halfway up. Rod started with a very old Enfield, which was oiled by hand pump. When starting up, great clouds of smoke would come out because of some of the oil running down into the engine. It was okay once warmed up. His second bike was a Matchless 350cc. This was a good machine, but it had been in a crash and the frame was bent. This meant that to counter the tilt the rider had to sit sideways, which made it unstable in slippery conditions. Going through Catford on the roads which were paved with wooden blocks he came off. Petrol was spilling all over him and he was trapped underneath. I was on the pillion and helped him right the bike and no harm was done. A similar thing happened to Tom Okey, as the wood blocks were extremely slippery when wet, with all the oil spilt on them. Tom tried his back brake and skidded before trying his front brake and coming off smartly.

Our friend Ivor Smith had a bike which he hotted up and increased the top speed to 82 mph; fast for those days. He was very good at scrambling. Ivor used to disconnect his lights when scrambling. One night, driving along the road, the light socket came out by itself and he crashed, skidding along the road on one knee. This wore it away considerably and he had to go to hospital where they scrubbed it to remove the road grit. This is where he met Margaret, an Irish nurse, whom he later married.

My next bike was a Norton 16H, which had been used by a builder who carried slates on the petrol tank, and it was very old and scratched. When repairing this bike I fitted new valves. On starting, it caught fire because the inlet valve stuck and the ignited gases blew back. Rod rushed into the house to get the ancient Minimax fire extinguisher, which actually managed to put out the fire, which was just as well because there was a lot of paint in the building as we were in the process of repairing it. The extinguisher was the type which contained acid in a glass vial which broke when the end

was stamped on the ground. The acid then combined with powder and water to form a powerful jet containing carbon dioxide. The only snag was the effect it had on the aluminium parts of the bike which went terribly spotty.

I sold the old Norton and got a new one. This was 500cc, the same make, but in good condition. I towed another bike up Titsey Hill as it had broken down. The rider wasn't at all grateful as my exhaust was in his face all the time, which I hadn't realised.

The motorcycle club was allowed to hold scrambles on the rough land on the farm, including going through the mud by the ponds and up the hills in the beech wood. This was quite exciting as the gradients were quite steep and extra water was poured on to make the tracks more slippery.



*Eva and the Austin 8*

I had my motorbike until about 1945 when I bought my first car, a 1932 Austin 7. This was a great little car but not very speedy, which was just as well as the brakes were diabolical. We called this a 'flying Matchbox' because of its shape.

Someone at the young farmers club was asked what she thought of my car and she said "ghastly!" The car had a prop shaft with a Spicer-Hardy disk on one end, which would after time disintegrate and have to be replaced. Quite an easy job. Eva and I went all round Devon in this car on our honeymoon and it never let us down.

I taught Eva to drive in this car. Although people say never teach your girlfriend to drive, we didn't have any trouble and she soon

became very competent. After two lessons with a pro to polish up she passed first time. I never had to pass the test because there was such a backlog that anyone who had been driving during the war was automatically given a license, which covered all groups of vehicles. I had driven motorbikes, cars, a lorry, tractors and a tracklayer so my license covered me to drive everything except invalid carriages and motor mowers. Later I changed to an Austin 8.

When my father became ill in 1959 Rod came over for a few weeks to help and my stepmother Grace let him use Dad's car, which was an Austin A40. Dad had bought it new about five years before and it only had 7000 miles on the clock. I wasn't allowed to drive it, so there was clearly some favouritism going on! My van was on its last legs, so when Rod went back I either had to have a new engine or a new van, and so I chose a new van, because at the time we were doing quite well. This meant, of course, that Eva was left without a vehicle all the time I was away, and although she didn't complain it must have been hard.

Grace never did like us, so when she saw this new van she said to Mrs Kilner, "Look, he is already spending his father's money!" In fact, Dad didn't realise that there wasn't much money. He left the first £3000 to Grace, and the rest to his children. After all the debts were settled, she got her money and that was all there was.