

2008 TRIP TO THE ISLE OF MAN, IRELAND AND LONDON TOWN:

INTRODUCTION:

Following on from the trip to the Isle of Man in 2007 for the Centenary TT Motorcycle Celebrations, the decision was again made, with only weeks to go (of course), to once again visit the TT. Apparently the TT Bug is alive and well and catching said Bug ensures one will continue to attend the TT for ever more, hopefully! This year the intention was to visit the TT for Race Week only, followed by a week in the Emerald Isle and a short, but hopefully informative tour within the heart of London, security, restricted parking and whatever else they have dreamed up notwithstanding.

So, with trusty Laptop at hand, all possible 'on line' bookings made, batteries charged, mobile phone set for 'roaming' (according to '3' Australia, hmm) and a new 'light weight Panasonic Digital Camera' in lieu of the Nikon 'lead weight' of TT100 fame, the trip was on.....

DAY 1: Wednesday 28th May:

The initial flight from Queensland's Gold Coast to Sydney, with Virgin Blue was uneventful, surprisingly the link from Sydney's 'Domestic' Terminal to the 'International' Terminal cost \$5.00!! and the trip through Sydney traffic was to say the least uninspiring. On reaching the 'International', the British Airways Desk was located and the first mystery of the trip was answered, contrary to the British Airways website there was to be a 'stopover' between Sydney and Heathrow, no not Singapore, as suspected but wait for it, Bangkok, Thailand no less. There had to be a stopover 'somewhere', maybe the Boeing 777SP can make the Sydney/London in one go some day, unlike the 747's which require a pit stop.

The 'hop' from Sydney to Bangkok went quite quickly, however the 'stopover' at Bangkok Airport became somewhat of a drawn out affair, nominally three hours in the Terminal and what a Terminal, quite new but less than impressive internally for the weary traveller. The galvanised steel arches and stretched 'grey' sails offering a very bland appearance and the attempt at a Pergoda with imitation Palm Trees was ordinary. Oh, the public address system, quite hopeless. Eventually the 'hop' to Heathrow was underway and the trip, whilst once again giving the impression of incredibly slow going over the Continent of Europe, arrived at Heathrow only one hour late.

DAY 2: Thursday 29th May:

To be specific the Heathrow arrival point was 'Terminal 4'. However the next part of the trip was between Heathrow's 'Terminal 5' and Edinburgh. This meant enduring another Bus Trip, albeit free, (Sydney take note), of some eighteen minutes with Hand and Checked Luggage carried onto the Bus as best one was able after some twenty plus hours of travel to this point. The Bus trip included some tight turns, (read lurching from side to side) and underground tunnels, all very unwelcome thankyou.

'Terminal 5', somewhat troubled and clearly new, is one of those 'See Through Architectural Wonders' where one can examine the inner workings of the Lifts etc. However after traversing the powered entry doors the technological wonder was suffering from failed escalator syndrome, (of course it was the UP escalator, grrrrr. The flight to Edinburgh was uneventful with an arrival time just after lunch Edinburgh time, sadly no time was available to explore the City which looked gorgeous from the air.



EXIT DOOR + PLUSH CARPET!!

Be brave, be very brave!!, the final 'hop' from Edinburgh to the Isle of Man was by a Twin Prop 'skinny' LoganAir thingy, with the seating allocation aligning exactly with the propeller tips, eek. The trip was very quick and uneventful, thankfully, achieving a nominally 4pm arrival at the Isle of Man, Ronaldsway Airport.

Oh, nearly forgot, the Plane had an Emergency Exit, surely only Hand Luggage would fit through that door frame, certainly not the likes of me, I couldn't even stand up in the cabin! Mind you the Exit Door was 'partly' carpeted in an exquisite shade of blue!

The Bed and Breakfast hosts from Douglas were waiting at Ronaldsway and provided a welcome trip straight to their B&B Accommodation in Douglas, picked for its close proximity to the TT Grandstand and the Promenade. After some thirty hours of travel the bedroom looked and was extremely inviting.

NOTE: Obviously the Hire Car/Steam Packet Ferry trip 'combo' was avoided this year, trying instead the more 'opulent' Fly, Fly, Fly, to the Isle of Man, hmmm. Both methods of 'getting to the Island' have their merits, both certainly have their drawbacks. Suffice to say TT2009, in the planning stages already, will revert to the former!!!

DAY 3: Friday 30th May:



SNAEFELL MONUMENT & THREATENING CLOUDS

With the first Race Day set for the 31st, non TT experiences were in order, so it was off to Snaefell, (Snow Mountain in Viking speak), via the Electric Rail to Laxey with Electric Rail to Snaefell.

Interestingly the Electric Rail system from Laxey to Ramsey was not possible due to the cost implications of replacing old rail sleepers along the line, hopefully that will be attended to soon. Buses being the order of the day from Laxey to Ramsey in the interim.

Whilst Snaefell was not as clear as last year, the ferocious wind was gone. The Restaurant food was sampled and a return to Douglas was necessitated for imminent TT RACES!!

DAY 4: Saturday 31st May:

The B&B location offered a five minute walk to the Grandstand, via Nobles Park and that just happened to be via the Ducati Exhibition commemorating Ducati's 50th Anniversary of TT Competition and much more importantly, the 30th Anniversary of Mike Hailwood's triumphant TT winning return win at the TT on a Ducati!



DUCATI 'EXHIBITION BUILDING'



SMB HAILWOOD DUCATI

A wonderful exhibit of Ducati's included machines ridden by Troy Bayliss (Three time WSBK Champion), Casey Stoner (MOTOGP Champion) and of course the SMBH machine pictured here.

Wonderful to witness the actual machine ridden by Mike to that marvellous win against more fancied competition from the Japanese Factories and current crop of 'competitive' TT Riders.

This was only my second TT visit and it soon became very obvious there were fewer spectators, exhibits and most importantly for me the Stars of Yesteryear, suffice to say the rear of the Grandstand and Paddock areas were a lot quieter as compared to the Centenary TT. Notwithstanding this fact rumours abounded of 'Ago' making various signing appearances, somewhere or other.



PAULINE, HAILWOOD MOTORCYCLE RESTORATIONS AND ME!!

I really didn't need to worry, there was a lady I so wanted to meet again and get my photo taken with, sure enough **Pauline Hailwood** was located at the Hailwood Motorcycle Restorations Display!!



HMR NORVIN, NORTON/VINCENT, GORGEOUS

Pauline, very approachable, told me about the Restoration Business, Spain and without too much pressure agreed to have her picture taken alongside me, yippeee!!

The Superbike Race of 6 Laps duration was the first event with all eyes firmly set on John McGuinness to again set the pace and maybe challenge his staggering 130.354 miles per hour 'average speed' set in last years Senior TT. However John was with Padgetts this year and one gained the impression Honda was not as supportive, further there was a strong southern hemisphere contingent in the form of Cameron Donald, (Victoria, Australia) and Bruce Anstey, (New Zealand).

Incredibly John McGuinness and Guy Martin, both Honda mounted, failed to finish. Cameron and Bruce taking the major placings, an amazing result for the Antipodies....

DAY 5: Sunday 1st June:

A non race day and once again the Steam Train's beckoned. A wonderful day really, with the Steamer departing from Douglas Station, travelling all the way to Port Erin, sadly at Port the tide was out, but.....



COAL FIRED SMOKE AT THE READY, DOUGLAS RAILWAY STATION



BEAUTIFUL 'H2' 750 KWAKA, AT PORT ERIN

the H1's and H2' were in. Kawasaki had a meeting there with some beautiful examples of H1,500's and H2,750's. They brought back memories of the White H1 'Widowmaker' and Warren Willing's amazing race efforts on the H2 at the Castrol 6 Hour so long ago.

The return trip to Douglas included a break at Castletown, of course, love the place. Once again there was a good gathering of quality machinery in the Castletown Square to peruse and photograph, luckily for all concerned, there was no Concourse De Elegance 'organised' (not) this year!



DAY 6: Monday 2nd June:

Straight to the TT, the Super Stock Race beckoned, maybe Cam Donald could do it again, but this time fair and square over lap record holder John McGuinness, John having broken down in the Superbike Race.

Cam did just that, 'winning' from John with Guy Martin filling the minor placing, Cam achieved two wins in a row for Relentless Suzuki.

After that amazing win for Cam the Trade Outlets and Memorabilia Retailers were inspected, not for the last time either!!!

I love all things associated with the TT, especially items that reflect the earlier history, even before I was born, now that is very scary!!



JOHN 2ND PLACE FOR HONDA



CAM 1ST PLACE FOR SUZUKI



GUY 3RD PLACE FOR HONDA

DAY 7: Tuesday 3rd June:



HONDA CB400/4, THE ORIGINAL AND BEST



BMW 600 BOXER, BEAUTIFUL CONDITION

Again a non race day, so a trip to Ramsey beckoned, slightly different to last year, certainly so without a Hire Car. The trip necessitated Electric Rail to Laxey and a Bus (Double Decker no less) for the link between Laxey and Ramsey.

Ramsey's Shops once again did not disappoint with lovely collectables purchased for friends and colleagues in Australia. This time a trip to the foreshore of Ramsey was undertaken and a visit to the Ramsey Sprint, some form of Drag Racing!! A Concourse, (organised, unlike Castletown in 2007), was a delight with some beautiful Motorcycles on show. Of particular note were a gorgeous Honda CB400/4, a BMW 600, a Douglas and a 1908 Triumph.



DOUGLAS, BELT DRIVE



TRIUMPH TT, CIRCA 1908!!



Hang on, not more motorcycles, yes!, in the Car Park adjacent the Ramsey Sprint 'track' a brand new KTM 1000 V Twin was spotted, wow, one superbly sculptured machine, so unique in shape compared to the current crop of UJM4's.



THE KTM RC8

An entirely different machine was spotted adjacent a beautiful lake, a gorgeous example of a Honda Gold Wing GL1500, circa 1997, with everything done, superb presentation with Seat logos, gold trimming, gold radio knobs, ET Phone Home, etc etc.....



HONDA GL1500 c/w ET ACCESSORIES

DAY 8: Wednesday 4th June:

Whilst a gazetted 'race day' Peel also beckoned, so a Double Decker Bus trip ensued from Douglas Bus Station to Peel. The bus trip was amazing, seated at the front of the Upper Deck one could appreciate the scenery, the extremely tight road networks and unbelievable lack of clearance between the roof of the Bus, foliage and critically Electrical Aerial systems, eek.



Peel was basking in sunshine on arrival, with numerous families taking advantage of the sun on the sandy foreshore, no bathers were noted however! The Marina area was once again filled with a proliferation of different craft, some very old and some very tasty thankyou.



The Viking outside the House of Mannahan finally relented and allowed the writer to stand alongside his striking pose for a brief moment.



DAY 9: Thursday 5th June:

A rest day, caught up on some emails, this report, and attended the Douglas Cinema, a very old building, and yes, 'Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull' was on, so of course attendance was in order!!

DAY 10: Friday 6th June:

D Day in 1944, however, (with respect), in 2008 I hoped it was 'D' for Donald Day, (Cameron Donald no less). It was not to be, the lead changed repeatedly between John and Cam, then, the news, right near the end Cam's Suzuki struck trouble. A blown oil seal or gremlin in the gearbox was reported over the public address. John deserved the win, its all about the Rider and the machine, the lap record set by John in 2007 was not broken so that will remain a target for next year.



JOHN MCGUINNESS AND A HONDA FIREBLADE, JUST SUPERB



CAM DONALD, 2nd PLACE, SUZUKI



IAN HUTCHISON, 3rd PLACE, YAMAHA R1

The Senior TT really went the way I expected, John just so experienced at the TT. Cam came very close and led on many occasions, maybe next year. This was the end of my 2008 TT experience, the following morning, another flight, this time to George Best Airport, Northern Ireland!!