

Southampton & District MCC History

Club History

This long established club was inaugurated in 1944 at a time when World War Two was moving towards its close. As the allied armies moved successfully across Europe, a group of Southampton motorcyclists who had served their country locally as a Home Guard reconnaissance platoon began to realise that their period of voluntary military service was also about to end.



Now that the truth can be revealed, their military service had been quite entertaining. After a day's work in the armament factories they were able to ride their own motorcycles, fuelled by a special petrol ration supplied for training purposes by the Army. With this they contrived to cover a whole series of cross country excursions using lanes, byways and paths to establish a network of local connecting routes little used, but possible of providing direct and short communicating links between the local villages. If there had been time elements and penalties for footing on route these excursions could easily have been taken for observed trials or enduros. It was a small wonder that these part time soldiers decided that the best way to keep themselves together would be to form their own motorcycling club.

So the Southampton & District Club was born. With their established background it was not long after the cessation of hostilities that the embryo club was actively promoting sporting events. A solo machine scramble (today's motocross) was held at West Wallow just one month after Armistice. A trial in the same area followed in the autumn of 1945 and on Easter Monday 1946 the first grass track races in the south were organised at Hamble. Later, when reintroduction of petrol rationing curtailed sporting events, attention was switched to the newly introduced RAC/ACU rider training scheme. The club was, in fact, the 10th club to register with this scheme which eventually extended to many hundreds of groups country wide.



From this eventually developed the present day Ministry of Transport training centres. For 50 years the club has operated their scheme which today is known as the Flying Start Motor Cycle Training Centre where the embryo riders can learn from government approved instructors the basic skills legally necessary before taking a machine onto the road and can, in fact, take their CBT. Subsequently, training is also available up to the standard required to qualify for a full licence.

Another early club success was the creation of a road racing circuit in 1950 on the redundant wartime airfield at Thruxton. For 40 years the club was the sole organiser of motor cycle races on this circuit which was the venue for both International and National fixtures as well as the unique Thruxton 9 Hours Race, first held in 1955. This was introduced by the club to provide the British manufacturers with a shop window to demonstrate the quality and performance of their range of sporting models that were in demand, at the time, by worldwide markets. The prestige attached to the event was typified by the introduction of the top of the range Velocette Thruxton, a 500 cc single, following that company's successful single cylinder class win in the 1964 event.



Throughout a long period of sporting activities the club has developed a wide range of leisure functions which today caters for almost all riders interests. The sport in all its forms is still an important club activity but the development of the motorcycle as a more acceptable means of transport for both business and pleasure for both business and pleasure has brought many new interests into the club. Road riding excursions at weekends embrace many interesting venues and topics and prove very popular with the younger groups whilst those a little older have shown a great interest in the machines they once rode, resulting in a strong following of the Vintage and Veteran cult now firmly established in the club.

The club has never overlooked the need to provide the best possible social facilities for its members and as long ago as 1956 purchased a leasehold tennis club pavilion at Sholing in Southampton for this purpose. When the lease on these premises expired the demand for a bigger and better replacement was so intense that club leaders soon found themselves recruiting from amongst their members, architects, engineers, builders, carpenters, steel workers, electricians, painters and odd job labourers, who were prepared to give freely of their spare time to build what is probably the finest motorcycle club owned property in southern England. The land on which the Clubhouse is built is leased from Eastleigh Borough Council. It is here that the club's social activities take place throughout the year.



The Flying Start rider training scheme operates there every Sunday and on every Friday evening members and friends meet for a chat, a drink at the licensed bar or tea, coffee and a snack from the kitchen. The club strongly supports the current campaign to promote motorcycle usage as an economical and environmentally friendly form of transport which in addition can contribute substantially to the relief of traffic congestion in the larger conurbations. To actively pursue these objectives the club has successfully established its own direct representation in both Brussels and Strasbourg with the European Parliament and Commission lobbies. Internationally it has a voice at the Federation Internationale Motorcycle which boasts 81 member nations and is responsible for all the World Championship motorcycling events. To benefit the touring rider, the club has a voice in the Road Traffic Safety Working Party of the United Nations Organisation in Geneva.

Sporting History

The Club has a motorcycle sporting history of which it can be proud. Since its formation in 1944, it has organised over four hundred events, many of National and International status.

The regard that the Club enjoyed in sporting circles can be illustrated by the mention of one of its annual functions of a different nature, for its annual dinners held between the fifties and the eighties, the numbers of tickets had to be restricted because there simply was no venue in the Southampton area big enough to cater for the numbers wanting to attend. The functions were held on weekday evenings so that members of the motorcycle press, trade and the oil barons, could be present without upsetting their commitments to weekend sporting events.

After dinner speakers included Prof.A.M.Lowe, then Chairman of the AutoCycle Union, Jock West of AMC Motorcycles, manufacturers of Matchless and AJS bikes, Geoff Murdoch of Esso, Cyril Quantrill, sports editor of Motor Cycling (the green un), Harry Louis, editor of The Motor Cycle (the blue un), riders Ray Amm, Ken Kavanagh, Peter Williams, to mention a few. On one occasion, for light relief we enjoyed a discourse by Blaster Bates, whose business was blowing up unwanted buildings and chimney stacks.

Long time Club President was ex TT winner Alec Bennett who was followed by lifetime club member Syd Lawton. President now is Neville Goss MBE, who was one of the Founder members of the Club. It is largely due to Neville that the Club achieved the recognition it has enjoyed in ACU and FIM circles although it must be said that he had the backing throughout of a very strong and efficient team of dedicated enthusiasts.

The total number of sporting events organized was made up as follows:

- 28 Endurance Road Races which, for the first few years, were of National status then International, then full European Grand Prix status in the later years.
- 82 Road Races at Thruxton (one at Thorney Island Airfield), mostly of National but some of International status.
- 94 Scrambles (now Motocross).
- 49 Grass Track
- 22 Enduros
- 106 Trials
- 20 Road Trials