

TREV'S TOUR OF TASSIE

March 2022

During March 2022 I had the pleasure of taking part in a tour of Tasmania with a group of other riders all on old bikes. I was talked into this project by Dave and Bill, who some TMRA members will have met at Southern Triples Rallies, Dave on his T150V and Bill on his R3 (but on his 1959 BSA A10 Super Rocket for this trip). Particular thanks go to Dave for sorting out several issue on my 1965 Thunderbird 6T before we headed off to Tassie, and for carting the bike over and back in his van.

During fettling and the previous week's annual VVCMCC rally in Canberra the old 650 suffered from an intermittent electrical issue, manifesting itself in there being no spark at all on occasions, generally at start-up but sometimes on the road, even though there was power to the lights and horn. After several attempts to detect and rectify the problem, in the days leading up to putting the bike in Dave's van for the trip the problem seemed to have disappeared—until we rolled it out of the van in Ulverstone, near Devonport, a couple of days later! But the issue was never a complete showstopper, the Thunderbird always starting eventually, so we looked forward to the tour with high hopes but some trepidation.

Our first outing was a short 100km round trip from Ulverstone to Sheffield to iron out any remaining bugs and get our minds attuned to riding some challenging roads while at the same time taking in the odd glance of the gorgeous Tasmanian countryside. The bike started okay but only lasted half an hour before conking out en route. Thankfully this was the last time it stopped while in motion; my fear had always been that I'd be stuck on the side of some twisty narrow road between a rock wall and armco. After jiggling some wires, playing with the fuse, wiggling the key and tapping the tyre with my boot—the usual sequence on these occasions—the T'bird came alive and we took off again. There were several more such occasions during the first week, the last of which was in Queenstown, but thereafter

the 6T generally started first kick (accidentally once, when I inadvertently gently rolled it off the compression with the key on!) and ran like an absolute train. I love my modern Triumphs and my '73 Trident, but you can't beat belting along on an old twin.



On Day 2 we headed west to Stanley, a 220 km round trip back to Ulverstone. If you're ever on that road, call into the old collectibles and cuppa shed at Sisters Creek—the best homemade vanilla slice I've ever had, made with Sao crackers as apparently Lattice biscuits aren't available

anymore! But I digress—Day 3 began gloomily with the prospect of a wet day. This was hardly unexpected, as we were heading to Strahan on the west coast, via Cradle Mountain, and both places experience rain most days of the year. We were lucky enough to have a merely quite damp trip up the mountain (though one rider on a Harley did end up over the edge, breaking a collarbone), but the rain set in during our lunch break. It was far too wet to go hiking in our riding gear, so the news wasn't all bad!

Before leaving for Tassie some of us had discussed whether we needed new tyres—thankfully we went ahead and got them as the conditions going down Cradle Mountain were far too bad to be caught out on old or worn tyres. Tyres, even 19", had become difficult to come by recently, and I particularly struggled to get a 3.25 or 3.50 x 18" for the 6T, eventually settling for and squeezing in an oversize-looking K81 4.10. I had some misgivings as Lorraine had told me that putting a narrow tyre on her Norton transformed its handling for the better, and I thought the 4.10 might have the opposite effect on the Triumph. However, the handling seemed to be fine and it was nice to know I had some good rubber underneath to compensate for the lack of skill of the rider on top!

After a very wet trip down Cradle Mountain with fogged up visors and glasses we had a damp but quick (for us!) run through sweeping bends and lush forests into Strahan. We generally sat on only 90-95 kph for the whole trip, conditions permitting, but we didn't feel we should flog the bikes too hard at the start of the trip, as we had a long way to go, and we didn't feel we should flog them too hard at the end of the trip, as we were almost home! My most exciting incident of the tour came as I was doing about 10kph around a right-angle corner only a few metres from the driveway to our accommodation in Strahan. There must have been oil on the road as for no apparent reason I did a huge fishtail one way and then the other—the nearest I've ever come to falling off! (Not counting the couple of times I've actually fallen off, that is!) It might have been amazing skill, some Einsteinian physics or just plain good luck that the bike righted itself as if nothing had happened—you can choose which one! Day 4 was a rest day, so Jen and I headed out on a Gordon River cruise—an interesting and pretty trip out through Hells Gate, the entrance to Macquarie Harbour from the Great Southern Ocean, and then back up the Gordon.

Day 5, and we turned east towards Queenstown—great roads and great scenery but we had to remain cautious on still wet roads. Those of you who have visited Queenstown in times past will recall the sulphur-burned hills around the town. Many of those hills have started to regenerate slightly since the cessation of mining in the area, and I recall some years ago that the locals were discussing whether to spray regrowth in an effort to retain the lunar landscape in the interests of tourism. That proposal was obviously not gone ahead with, and apparently the earth is too damaged for much regrowth anyway.

Leaving Queenstown we headed to Tarraleah, an old once-deserted Hydro town but a very well set up and presented accommodation facility now. Jen and I were late booking here so had to book at The Lodge, a lovely old accommodation building where Hydro execs and engineers lived. Cost us a mint for the night (too embarrassed to say how much!) but we still didn't

get any motel bikkies in our cupboard! They seem few and far between in Tassie.

Glorious weather conditions set in on Day 6 as we followed the Derwent River into Hobart and fine days were to remain with us for the rest of the trip. Our rest day in Hobart was spent doing the usual touristy things like the Salamanca Markets, Battery Point and the Botanic Gardens, where we spent quite some time discussing the intricate differences between melting moments and yo-yos—a topic of keen debate for much of the trip. But my apologies; I've digressed again.

Richmond and the obligatory photo in front of the old 1825 bridge was the first destination on Day 8, and we then experienced the glorious ocean views on the lovely coastal road up to Bicheno—probably our most enjoyable ride (of many great rides) so far. On our spare day in Bicheno we



drove to Coles Bay and hiked up to the Wineglass Bay lookout and then took the 1,000 steps down to the Bay itself.

Unfortunately the thousand steps weren't just down, but back up to the lookout as well. Jen, as usual, set a hectic pace and I'm glad I wasn't trying to keep up in riding gear!

Things got pretty interesting for me in Bicheno. I awoke on our spare day to find a nice puddle of oil under the Thunderbird, and a bit of investigation with Dave and Bill indicated a cracked oil tank probably around a third of the way up judging by the 'tide mark' of splashed oil on the rear mudguard and nearby hoses. There was also a broken top oil tank bracket, though that was easily fixed with a cable tie from the tool kit. At this stage there wasn't too much oil, if any, on the tyre, so we headed off on Day 10 with high hopes.

Bicheno to St Helens yet again spoiled us with great sea then bay scenery, but a lunchtime inspection showed a smattering of oil on the right hand side of the rear tyre. Not too bad, though, and I determined to push on and continue to take it very easy around right-hand corners, as I had been all day. At least we were, in theory, doing one big left-hand corner around the island!

Heading inland from St Helens towards Scottsdale, we had some very challenging but fun twisty bits and also several kays of freshly sealed road covered in that little marbly bluemetal stuff we all—



even riders way more experienced than me, from what I heard—felt rather uncomfortable on. Sometimes you just had to let the bike take you where it wanted without correcting too dramatically. Between Scottsdale and Launceston we stopped at a lookout for a squiz and a bike check. Oil all over the right-hand side of the rear tyre now, and I was seriously thinking that this second-last day of the tour was going to be my last day on the



poor old Trumpy that had been running so strongly. The rest of the wonderful winding road to Launceston was taken pretty carefully and now even more cautiously turning to the right. The red line on the left-hand side of my new rear tyre had well and truly been worn off over the last day or so of dry

riding but the green line on the right side still shone brightly especially with a sheen of oil over it! Looking at the state of the bike, it seemed like safety was going to win out over desire.

By the morning of our 11th and final day, having eventually reached our Launceston accommodation only with the aid of Bill's Quadmounted GPS, I'd come to my senses—there had to be a way to complete the job. A week ago, I'd kept a motel Scotchbrite foam pad for some undetermined reason, and it turned out that the pad, wrapped in a bit of old windcheater



from the tool kit rag supply, could be jammed between the bottom of the rear mudguard and the swinging arm pivot, the aim being to soak up some excess oil and/or divert it away from the rear wheel. A can of degreaser later (thanks Bill) and a wipe of the tyre, and we were away on our final jaunt back to Ulverstone.

As a sop to good sense, we did decide going on the spectacular but very twisty up- and downhill route planned through Mole Creek and Wilmot was a bit silly for a bike possibly dropping oil on the rear tyre—though in hindsight the dishwashing pad worked amazingly well—so we headed to Deloraine with the group and then took the quiet, lovely, sweeping roads north through farmland back up to Sheffield then Ulverstone. It was a pity to cut a bit off the last day's trip, but I was grateful to complete the tour nevertheless with such a beaut ride.

Back at base the 6T got another bath of degreaser and the oil tank was drained so the remaining oil didn't end up on the floor of Dave's van. All in all we had a fantastic tour, apart from my slight complications and Dave's clutch pull-rod snapping in Tarraleah—which just shows, as we all know, it doesn't matter how well you prepare an old bike things can still go wrong. Bill's 1959 Beeza hummed along very nicely, just getting a little tappet

adjustment midway, and thanks go to him for trailing me the whole trip in case my electrics failed completely! We also rode with Steve Davey, on his BSA Thunderbolt, who some of you might meet or will have met at Yass STR, and without doubt the best rides of the tour were when the three of us could get out by ourselves and cruise at our own speed. (see photo below) Thanks also to Jen and Deb for driving the back-up cars—it meant we could carry heaps more clothing than we needed, more spare riding gear than we needed, more tools than we needed and more spare parts than we needed! And of course it was great just to have them around too.

Ride safe!

Trev

