

# Riverstone Motor Bike Club

*Robbie Shepherd and Barry Crouch*

The year was 1957 and I waited with great anticipation for September 29<sup>th</sup> to come. On that day, I would be 16 years and 10 months old and could obtain my Learner's Permit to ride a motor bike and so be able to join the Rivo Motor Bike Club, which had been formed the year before, in 1956. My father had agreed, reluctantly, to me buying a motor bike, providing it was a small one, such as a BSA Bantam 250cc. Imagine his reaction when I arrived home with my "Pride and Joy", a 1955 model Thunderbird 650cc capable of doing 100 miles an hour.

Barry and I have tried to put together some details of the Club, its members, the activities we were involved in and some of the memorable events. As the years pass the details become a bit scratchy, but the memories linger on.

The Club had about 30 members and Club meetings were held weekly, in the hall behind the Olympia Picture Theatre. The President of the Club was "Tip" Davis, a man in his early 40s then, but to us young blokes he was 'Old Tip'. You could fill a book just on a story about 'Old Tip', but, to sum him up, he just loved motor bikes and he had a shed full of them. Most of these bikes were very old, such as the 1920 model Rudge, and were used for one of our favourite pastimes, 'Scramble Racing'. I remember starting out racing on one of these old Rudges. They were rigid framed and just riding tested every bone and muscle in your body.

The Club Secretary was Jackie Townsend and the Treasurer was Freddie Alcorn. Fred gave that job away in 1958, I think, and I landed it. Another very important position in the Club was that of Road Captain, which was held by Johnny 'Big Bear' Leach. Johnny was an excellent choice for this position because, as well as being a great bloke, he was also a very good and very safe rider and would always stay within the speed limits. The Club Rules were that the Road Captain led the group and nobody was allowed to overtake him.

Other Club Members I remember at the time were Charlie Bottles, Jack 'Hopalong' Cassidy, Bill Clarke, Tony Cousins, Barry and Eric Crouch, "Digger" and Ronnie Dillon, Tom Edwards, Leo and Peter Floyd, Alan Greentree, Tony Harris, John Hart, Bill Henning, Jimmy Jones, Ian and Ross Justice, David Keys, Eric Magennis, Alan Marshall, Harold Partridge, Norm Seget, Chris Spryn, Arthur Sullivan and Brian Thompson.

Our official Club Colours were black and pink and we all wore our club jumper, which was a black polo neck with two inch pink stripes, on outings. Mostly, in those days, the motor cycles were English made Triumphs, BSAs or Velocetts, Nortons, A.J.S.s and the odd Harley Davidson. Japanese bikes were not heard of and I think the first one on the market was a Honda Dream. Peter Floyd bought one and it 'blew up' in the first two weeks. The Japanese have come a long way since the 1950s.

Most of the racing events we competed in were on what was called 'Scramble Tracks' (similar to motor-cross tracks). Most of these were just tracks we made ourselves in back paddocks, up the sides of hills, down through creek beds and over mounds (jumps). We had our own track on a property at Maraylya and also used to ride with the Hawkesbury Club on their track at Bilpin. We also raced on dirt tracks at Blacktown, Penrith and also Moorebank, which was the Big Event of the year.

There was, in those days, a fairly large bitumen circuit at Mount Druitt and the Club was invited to race there on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1958. The Club's two riders were Bill Henning and John Leach. They trialled on the Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup> only to have both bike engines blow up. England's World Champion, Geoff Juke raced his 500cc Gilera at the same meeting, winning his race. He had three bikes each worth £16,000 (\$32,000). For the times this was the equivalent of about five years annual salary. Jack Townsend bought a racer and competed in these high-speed events for a while.

Apart from attending and competing in race meetings, another of our formal activities was Road Trips, a day's outing or a weekend away. Our favourite time of year was Easter as the Motor Cycle Races were held at Bathurst, with the trials on Good Friday and the races on Saturday. In 1958 and 1959 Riverstone District Motor Cycle Club was invited to the Easter Races at Bathurst to be road marshalls helping to control the races.

Each year we would leave from our favourite meeting place, the Aussie Café next to Conway's Newsagency on the Thursday night. Our destination that night would be Lithgow where we would all meet at one of the pubs. At closing time (10:00pm) we went to a Chinese Café for a meal and then off to the Pine Forest just out of Lithgow to 'sleep' the night. When we arrived there were always a few cars in the off-road parking area we stayed in but, for some reason, not long after we pulled in we had the place to ourselves. The next morning we would ride into Bathurst and set up camp on top of Mt. Panorama where we would stay Friday and Saturday nights until the Bike Races were over.

This event attracted Motor Cycle Clubs from all over NSW and Victoria so it was a pretty lively time. I remember one Saturday night every pub in town shutting its doors as the bike riders in their hundreds went from one pub to the next. I guess we must have seemed like a pretty wild bunch and, for those times, I guess we were. Sure, we had a fair bit to drink, rode too fast and got into fights, but, compared to today, we were pretty tame. I remember, in particular, one year in Bathurst the word got around that one of the "Beagle Boys" (a club from Victoria) was carrying a knife, but nobody saw it.

The Bike Races finished on Saturday and, after much partying on top of the mountain that night, we would leave on a road trip on the Sunday morning. Usually we would head off to Jenolan Caves and would stay at Tom Wilson's guesthouse known as the "Half Way House", which is still there. We would party again on Sunday night but there was never any trouble. (I guess we were a bit burnt out by then and the people who ran the place knew how to handle a group of young blokes.)

One of our longest, and most memorable road trips was at Christmas time in 1958. Five Club Members, Tony Cousins, Barry Crouch, John Leach, Norm Seget and Robbie Shepherd rode to Queensland for two weeks. It rained for ten of the fourteen days we were away!

Our involvement in the Riverstone Motor Bike club ended in 1962 but we believe it continued to function until 1974, with new and younger people coming in and some of the older ones carrying on.

There are so many stories that could be told, some that should and some that shouldn't, but time and space are running out and I will leave that to others who may want to continue.

Maybe some of these people would like to "pick up the ball", or should I say "kick the bike over" and ride on from here.