BMW's BIG WEEK

Thirty years ago BMW put their R75/5 boxer twins firmly on the map in a seven-day endurance test on the Isle of Man Mountain course

STORY: **JOHN NUTTING**

At four in the morning, the news was grim. A rider had crashed badly coming down The Mountain. And BMW's attempt to win the Maudes Trophy for a demonstration of reliability in the Isle of Man looked doomed.

Keen to revive the reputation of its machines after a redesign, BMW's British importer ran two R75/5 boxer twins around the TT course for a week under the scrutiny of observers from the Auto Cycle Union, the governing body of UK motorcycle sport.

In 1973 it was a double anniversary – 50 years since the first BMW boxer twins had been produced in Germany, and 50 years since the Maudes Trophy first had been awarded.

And so two teams of riders took up the challenge of riding the bikes at an average speed of 50mph for seven days and nights over the Mountain circuit, regardless of conditions, on open roads. Because that average speed included fuel and servicing stops and adhering to 30mph speed limits (the Manx police's permission for the attempt had been given, but not to break the law), it meant that the riders had to keep up a tough pace.

Fastest was TT ace and BMW dealer Tony Jefferies, father of current lap record holder Dave Jefferies, who recalls that he could maintain a 90mph cruising speed over the Mountain.



1973 MAUDES TROPHY

Tony Jefferies with the Maudes Trophy is hoisted aloft by the BMW team riders on his first time out of hospital after his crash at Mallory Park. Pictured from left are Allan Robinson, Bruce Preston, John Nutting, Dai Davies, Alec Smith, Peter Kelly, Ken Heanes, John McDermott, mechanic Dave Houghton, and (in foreground) Alberto Criscuolo

"I was told I was going too fast," he remembers. "So on each lap I stopped at Governor's Bridge for a fag."

The riders were a mixed bag. Team manager Ken Heanes – another BMW dealer – was as tough as they come, having won ten gold and three silver medals in the International Six Days Trial. Deputy team manager was



MAUDES TROPHY BID

BSA motor

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Inspector Alec Smith, a bike copper with vast competition experience. It was their responsibility to keep the riders motivated at all hours of day and night for their four-lap stints.

Then there was Dai Davies; Charlie Deane, editor of *Motorcycle Mechanics* magazine; Mike Nicks, road racing reporter on *MotorCycle News*; Peter Kelly, who had worked on the *Northern Echo*; Allan 'Kipper' Killip, the chief TT travelling marshal; John McDermott, editor of *Motorcycle Illustrated*; big Dave Minskip, another top motorcycle cop who sadly died five years ago; freelancer writer and BMW club luminary Bruce Preston; racing commentator Allan Robinson; Dave Kewley; Dave Woods; and me, then a cub reporter on the weekly paper *Motor Cycle*.

It was a line-up sure to provide maximum publicity for BMW – if it succeeded in BMW being awarded the Maudes Trophy.

But in the early hours of Monday, May 7, after four days and 118 laps of trouble-free running, one of the riders arrived at the Grandstand with the grim news that Dai Davies had lost control at Brandish and hit the bank. ▶

◁Injured, he was taken to hospital. The attempt now looked hopeless.

Peter Kelly, who had been due to take over from Davies, went to the scene to investigate. "The BMW had been dragged into a field and the front end was a crumpled mess. Alone in the breaking dawn awaiting the arrival of the trailer I thought all was lost.

"But the bike looked alright from the engine backwards. It dawned on me that this was the Maudes Trophy which was about engine reliability. For something to do, I leant over the sorry BMW, found neutral and pressed the starter button. The engine started and settled into an even tickover. The attempt could go on."



Team BMW: the riders and support crew pose at the ferry terminal before their successful attempt to win the Maudes Trophy

Below: the two battered BMWs attract attention at the end of the week in which both machines covered more than 8000 miles

BMW service manager Alberto Criscuolo took the bike back under the eyes of the ACU observers John McNulty and Doug Pycraft, and by cannibalising another spare bike took three hours to get the BMW back in action. Meanwhile the other bike, machine A, had continued to circulate.

The 1973 Maudes Trophy attempt was the brainchild of Douglas Austin, BMW's motorcycle divisional manager at the time. "Part of my task was to create a new image for the BMW motorcycle," he recalls. "I wanted it to be accepted as more than just a quality machine with a famous name.

"It had to be proved to be reliable, enduring, comfortable – a touring machine par excellence, with no mean performance."



He'd toyed with a number of marketing ideas but it was Allan Robinson who reminded him that Honda had held the Maudes Trophy since 1962 when two 50cc Cubs completed an observed endurance test at Goodwood.

It was in the tradition of Maudes Trophy attempts that whatever the nature of the challenge, it had to be scrupulously observed by the ACU. In the days of motorcycling before WW1, manufacturers weren't satisfied that racing showed how reliable their machines were. So they engaged an ACU official to observe endurance tests, logging every item of work and replacement parts required.

In 1923, George Pettytt who ran Maudes Motor Mart in Great Portland Street, London, offered a challenge trophy for the ACU to award annually for the most meritorious observed test.

It was keenly sought and the ACU had to select from a number of manufacturers' applications. Norton was the first to win with a high-speed performance demonstration at Brooklands with a 500cc solo that averaged 64mph for 12 hours. The following year Norton won again with a 633cc Big Four sidecar outfit that clocked 4060 miles between Land's End and John O'Groats and back over 18 days.

Norton won the Maudes Trophy four years in a row. But as the years passed, the number of attempts declined and by 1939 only three had been made. After WW2, attempts were spasmodic. One of the more notable was BSA's successful 1953 attempt when three 500cc twins were ridden to the ISDT in Eastern Europe, where three gold medals were won, and back.

By the early Seventies bikes were accepted as being pretty reliable anyway, so why did BMW try in 1973?

"Honda dominated the scene and to sell a production machine for more than £1000 – the first £1000 machine on the UK market – needed something special," says Austin, who at 74 is now retired but keeps busy with his wife Joyce in Dorset in volunteer activities. "I determined to release Honda's grip on the trophy," he says.

After discounting the idea of riding two bikes "to Hell and back" – from Hell in Norway to the Sahara and back – as too complex, the Isle of Man was decided upon. "Timed for the run-up to the TT, it meant that the eyes and




BMW's Maudes team

Still in with a chance!

by Mike Nicks

ears of the two-wheeled world were focused on the Island," says Austin.

He pays tribute to BMW UK's managing director Tony Hille, "who gave me the green light," the Manx authorities, as well as the BMW factory, the ACU (and its German counterpart), Shell (all fuel and lubricants) and his in-house team, starting with service manager Alberto Criscuolo.

"Sponsors, including Damart and



Kett who provided clothing, helped with tyres and a caravan, which required a special dispensation to be taken onto the Island."

The two R75/5 twins were selected from the BMW production line by Hans Richter of OMK, the German federation. After running in, the cylinder heads and barrels were sealed to ensure they could not be changed without the observers knowing.

"Team selection was carefully planned," says Austin. He had a budget of £8000 but this did not stretch to professional riders. "We wanted not just to win the trophy, but to establish BMW in the minds of trade, press, public and corporate users. Having sold the first foreign machines to a British police force (Thames Valley), we wanted to sell more.

"So riders were chosen from the motorcycle press, who would write about it; the police, who would talk about it in their in-house magazine *The Job;* and the trade, who would talk about it to their customers and non-dealers. People all who knew biking."

Fitted with crash bars and auxiliary spotlights, the two BMWs were flagged off at noon Wednesday May 3 by former world champion and Isle of Man resident, Geoff Duke, and the Mayor of Douglas. After 100 laps the bikes were given a 4000 mile service.

The riding wasn't easy. Signed certificates presented to each after the event didn't need elaboration: "The weather throughout the test was almost continuously wet and cold with fog on the Mountain at night. At times, visibility was nil all the way from the Guthries Memorial to Creg by Baa. At one time, there was a river of water running across the road at Signpost Corner."

Recalls Bruce Preston, who now runs motorcycle touring holidays: "My abiding memory is of the rain. I suppose it must have stopped occasionally but it didn't seem like it.

"Once as I crossed the Mountain in thick cloud at 3am, there was a flash of light and the other BMW hurtled past me. It was Tony Jefferies. Back at the pits I asked him how he could see where he was going in those conditions. 'Eh lad,' said Jefferies, 'I can see as much in that fog at 70mph as I can see in broad daylight at 150mph.' "

As a TT rider, Jefferies found the idea of riding road bikes over the Mountain Course undemanding.

"It was a bit of a doddle because I knew where I was going. So I teamed up with Dave Minskip: he was a good rider. We liked riding at night rather than the day especially over the Mountain because there was no traf- ▶

End in sight: Ken Heanes (left) and Alec Smith finish the last lap of the Maudes Trophy attempt. At last the weather had improved. The team's progress was charted in contemporary MCN reports (far left)

◁fic. We even turned our headlights off because the beam would only pick out a part of the road. Without lights you could see more, especially when the moon was out. Then I could really whoop along – I got a bollocking for going too fast."

Some of the hairiest moments were in the early morning, when milk floats were out and the rabbits woke up. Says John Nutting: "As I was peeling off for the Black Hut a rabbit jumped out under the front wheel. It nearly had me off and was still dead in the road on my next lap so I picked it up and held it over the headlamp. The pit crew was horrified when I came in and wondered why I was covered in blood until I held up the rabbit as my trophy.

"I clocked up 39 laps in total, almost 1500 miles. It was an amazing experience in which I made friends that have stood the test of time."

Later on the Monday after machine A had crashed, Mike Nicks had to return to the Mainland. Mick Hemmings, then an ad salesman at *MCN*, took over but his first stint was short lived. On his first lap he hit a lorry barely a mile from the start.

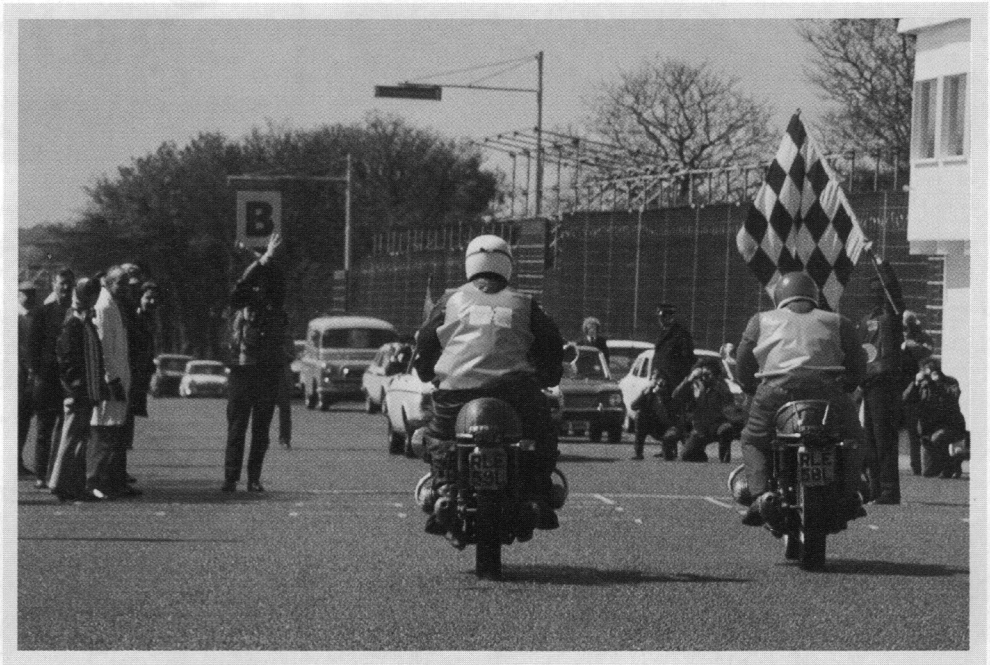
"I was going down towards Quarter Bridge when a council dustbin lorry came out from the road on the left," he recalls. "I really thought that was it. I hit the lorry and went over the bonnet. But although the bike was badly damaged I was OK. The police were alright about it. After that I went for the night sessions, which were much more fun. There were still scares though. A pigeon flew out of a tree right at me at the Sulby crossroads. I still remember it every time I pass there. Then there was the time I forgot about the tram at the Bungalow. It crossed just as I arrived. That was a fright."

Mick, now 59, left *MCN* in 1975 to start his own motorcycle business in Northampton. He's an acknowledged Norton expert and classic racer.

"I really had to do a lot of talking to get on the team," he recalls. "I was only there for half the week, but the experience really paid off. When I first rode in the Manx GP in 1991 I won the Newcomers race."


Clutch failure poses problem

BMW MAUDES TROPHY ATTEMPT —REPORT BY JERRY CLAYTON



Grandstand finish: Ken Heanes (left) and Alec Smith arrive at the TT grandstand on the final lap. By this late stage the clutch problems had been sorted (see MCN headline below)

Machine A, like the other, was rebuilt with a new front end and fuel tank, losing five hours running time. Because the Maudes Trophy attempt was a demonstration of reliability, accidents were not regarded as significant, even when further repairs were needed. This stretched to the replacement of a pushrod and an exhaust valve on machine A, which could have been over-revved after the impact.

But just 13 laps from the finish in the early hours of the final day, the clutch on the same bike burnt out and doubts began to circulate that the observers would allow it to continue. John McDermott limped the machine to the Glen Helen telephone point to pass on the grim news.

Again Alberto Criscuolo swung into action. Tony Jefferies drove him out to open up a pub to find some whisky that could be poured on the clutch plate so that some grip could be found. It worked enough to get the bike back to the Grandstand where the plate was replaced without breaking the seals. The observers thought, again, that the fault might have been a result of the earlier accident at Brandish.

Ken Heanes and Alec Smith took over the machines for the final lap. Machine A had completed almost 217 laps for a total of 8178 miles at an average speed of 48.7mph. Machine B had clocked almost 224 laps and 8480 miles at a speed of 50.5mph.

Then the celebrations started and, as ever, Tony Jefferies was at the centre of the fun. "We were getting paralytic on the champagne," he says. "I'd remembered there had been some road workers on the course going down to Ballacraine and they'd been helpful by timing the 'stop and go' boards so that we wouldn't have to stop the bikes.

"With Allan Robinson and John McDermott I loaded up a car with bottles and shot off to find them. When we got to the 'stop and go' sign I just went straight on into the roadworks. But when the workers saw who it was they saw the joke."

Doug Austin still relishes the memories of the event. "It was one of the most memorable weeks of my varied career, but it was also a tough assignment to arrange and see through. My efforts were well rewarded – and completely overshadowed – by what the team put in: manager, captain, riders, mechanics, observers, and the very tolerant hotel manager and staff. It was a wonderful, fraught, tiring period of great comradeship among like-minded people. But as always, the final tributes must be to the machines themselves."

Not long after, Tony Jefferies crashed at Mallory Park's hairpin and broke his back. He was paralysed from the waist down. His first time out from hospital in a wheelchair was to join the team to collect the Maudes Trophy. And the partying continued, just as it had during the attempt. ■