

Wentworth Avenue the Motorcycle Shop Center of Sydney c1963

Whilst at the Discount Drug Store this morning stocking up on my supply of drugs (prescription of course) I dredged in my pocket for change and came up with a 6mm or ¼" washer.

This put me in mind of a pernicious racket that I was involved in during the early sixties around the precincts of the said "Avenue". For a short while I was employed by that well known and highly respected firm Ryan & Honey at 4 Hunt St, just off the "Avenue". Business was far from brisk in these times and any sale was a good one.

The first customer on my first day was a suit, complete with brief case and hat who requested a dozen parking tokens. As I had no idea what a parking token was I asked him to wait and went and sought the advice of the manager, Tibby Mitchell, a rogue's rogue if ever there was one. He immediately took over the sale and reaching around near the phone came up with a baked bean tin full of ¼" washers. The suit handed over the 2/- or twenty cents asked for, bid us Goodday and left clutching his 12 washers. Young William has always been a nosy so and so and asked what that was all about. Laurence (Tibby) explained that further down the Avenue was an automotive supply outlet that sold these washers for 2/- a gross (144). As you have already worked out dear reader this was a pre GST tax free profit of 1200%.

The washers were a perfect fit in the newly installed parking meters which were starting to infest the City of Sydney at the time. At two pence each they were a third the price of the sixpence required to operate said machines. A steady business was done in tokens for most of the time I worked there and I made at least one trip to the automotive supply outlet to restock the baked bean tin.

This I suppose is proof positive that "If you look after the pennies the pounds will look after themselves". There were no 20 year old clunkers driven by these token buying customers, all late model Holdens , Fords and Vanguards they were.

Some time after I left, the oversupply of washers, in meters in the vicinity of the Avenue, led to an investigation of sorts. This led the powers that be to the hallowed portals of Ryan and Honey and they were warned off as they say in the racing game.

Just another snippet from the days of uster.

The Old bloke on the 10 Horse Indian.

I read somewhere the other day that 5000 people had lost their jobs when British Leyland at Zetland (A Sydney Suburb) closed in 1975. I cannot believe that 5000 people could have been on site at Zetland but further research says that there were 7000 there at the peak of production.

What you ask has this got to do with old motorbikes? Look at the heading. When I was a young fella in the early to mid sixties riding Hazell and Moore's buntruck there were about half a dozen other buntrucks in use in Sydney and we all were at least on recognition, if not first name terms with one another. The exception was the "The Old bloke on the 10 Horse Indian."

This bloke could be seen around the Zetland area on various days of the week but never seemed to get far away from Zetland and the surrounding suburbs of Roseberry, Alexandria, and Kensington. He wore a black jacket, black pants a black cap and the 10 Horse was all black as was the sidecar.

As I have mentioned before I have always been a nosy bloke so one day I asked Jack Borradale (the font of all knowledge) who this bloke was. To my surprise he said he had never heard of him. As this was just a passing question of low interest I abandoned my enquiries.

Some 15 years later Jack and I were having a couple of beers at The Bankstown Trotting Club and yarning about the days of usta and the various characters who had been around "back then".

One by one we dealt with these people who were different enough to be classed as "characters". The bloke with no legs who walked on his hands and passed 2 pubs to drink at the Crown, because the beer was piss, at the two pubs he passed on the way. The bloke, who would be called homeless today, but was a derro then, who pushed a heavily reinforced pram around the town with a sense of purpose only matched by a dedicated poker machine player trying to get back enough of his wages to pay the rent. Long Albert who was buying bits to build the perfect Long Stroke Manx when TZ's were already the bike of choice. Then I brought up the subject of "The Old bloke on the 10 Horse Indian."

"Ah yes him" said Jack. When people got their wages in cash he used to deliver the payroll for Leyland, Bennet & Woods, Lucas Rotax, WD& HO Wills, and Moffat Virtue amongst others. I then asked Jack why he hadn't heard of this bloke way back then. He replied that he didn't want to put temptation in my way.

I suppose such cash amounts are still out and about these days but seriously doubt that they travel via unguarded motorbike and sidecar. Imagine the value of 5000 week's wages today. Somewhere between \$4 and 5 million on the conservative side.

One day, in the late sixties when convalescing from an accident, and hanging round the Avenue doing odd jobs for beer money, I was roped in as driver to take a bloke who had a beer at the Crown from time to time, but was not a regular, to a location close to the city. I was to drive around the block if a parking spot could not be found and was promised a schooner as well as the agreed remuneration if a parking spot was found.

As luck would have it a parking space was at hand and we walked round the corner and up a lane to a doorway which was opened after what was probably some sort of secret knock. Inside were about 12-15 suits and self in jeans and T shirt. A schooner was put up for me and my companion. It was a bit early for both of us so not much was drunk.

In due course a couple more suits arrived and were likewise fitted with a schooner . After a while the door was opened again and a derro came in. He was wearing a pair of pants a bit too long and was walking on the badly frayed cuffs. His unshaven face bore the signs of many summers and even more hard winters. A beanie of dark hue covered his head and brow. A pair of worn out slippers adorned his feet and the rattiest greatcoat I had seen in my 22 summers completed his attire.

He walked up to the bar and was fitted with a large port which he made very short work of. By this time I had worked out I was in an out of hours pub even though I hadn't worked out who the suits were, but I knew that this bloke wasn't one of them and I was waiting for him to be ejected. To my great surprise this didn't happen. Having downed his port he approached a suit, carried on a quick conversation, opened his greatcoat and withdrew a roll that would have choked a horse and handed it to the suit. The suit in turn handed back a slightly smaller looking roll and returned to his beer. One by one he visited all the other suits including the one I was with and carried out a similar transaction. Then he calmly swallowed another large port and left.

Me, being very young and green, got up to leave too. I was smartly told to sit down and then I noticed there was a fresh schooner for all hands on the bar. The elders seemed to have no trouble getting theirs down but did not hurry it. I had some difficulty putting mine away, I was a middy drinker in those days and never had one before 5 in the evening. A schooner at 8 am was a real challenge on an empty stomach.

The bloke I was with indicated that we could now leave and off we went, back to the Avenue. He thanked me for my help and went on his way. JB was now at work so I gave him a hand to push the bikes out and told him what had happened. "Ah yes" said Jack he's an SP bookie, you have just been to the settling meeting. It would probably be wise to forget all about it. It's nearly fifty years since this happened. I have never forgotten it but this is the first time I have mentioned it.

Funny place, the Avenue, in the old days. All sorts of different people frequented or passed through it.