

My first Motorcycle – or to paraphrase it, where the trouble really started!!

I did write a story on this subject a very long time ago when I was Editor but never kept it, so here goes! I was not a good student, and one day during my High School period of detention a mate Allan Bailey revealed he knew the location of an old bike which could be for sale. It was beside a house in Sturt St, about where Townsville Honda stands today, and a sheet of corrugated iron was preserving its splendour from the elements, sadly the gloss had long departed and revealed a pre-war Ariel 600cc side valve in very run-down condition. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and by dropping Allan's name I purchased the bike for one Pound, \$2 in today's money (plus 62 years of inflation). I managed to subcontract the recovery to a much stronger person and my Dad probably had it going the next day, but school continued to interrupt my riding activities until I found a job and escaped! My mates and I idolized anyone racing motorbikes or even TQ's (speedway Midget cars) and we hounded them for parts which almost always were free, and the late Bryce Fenwick was very good to me, donating a camshaft and engine sprocket that fairly transformed the old beast! Where Castletown stands today was the largest mudflat in the town area, and armed with a gallon of standard petrol (4.45 litres and about 72 cents) a whole day of tearing around could be enjoyed. Safety gear was nil, and the clutch spring studs on the Ariel clutch, (exposed because chain covers were for wimps) caused grievous harm to my left ankle on occasion, but hey- our bikes (sort of) looked like ones ridden by Noel Walduck or Bobby Hourigan who were the stars of the Motorcycle Club! Reflecting back on the YEARS of abuse that old bike copped I am amazed that it never really had a major mechanical disaster, nor often did the WM20 army BSA's which were the mainstay of the local brigade who had tracks off Queen's Road near the Levee bank, today a soccer field. I lost contact with the old Ariel when it was stolen from a bloke I'd sold it to which bought end to a chapter of my life I fondly recall. I really believe that bikes like the 600 Ariel had a level of quality and reliability built into them that today's off road bikes rarely match, the new bikes may be fast but they are certainly fragile! I believe both Andy and Neville's Matchless' also support this theory, and I reckon there's a 600 Ariel in the Club that would easily go round Australia tomorrow!

Barry Graham.